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Three Long-Serving Urban Leaders Plan Departure

Carol Comeau leads a 49,900-student school system, while John Mackiel is the superintendent of a 50,000-student school district and Ronald Blocker heads a 179,000-student school district.

And next year all three will retire, after having served at the helm of their respective school systems for more than a decade. This is an accomplishment almost unheard of for a leader of an urban school district, where the average tenure is 3.64 years, according to a report by the Council of the Great City Schools.

A Tireless Communicator

As the superintendent of Alaska's Anchorage School District, Comeau, who describes herself as a people person, works hard to engage students, parents and staff as well as the local community, and her efforts have paid off. In a poll surveying residents, she was heralded as the most trusted public figure in the entire state of Alaska.

But after serving at the helm since December 2000, she recently announced she

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Anchorage Schools Superintendent Carol Comeau talks with a student.

Labor-Management Relations Focus Of National Town Hall Meeting



Carole Simpson

in urban schools at the Council of the Great City Schools' annual national town hall meeting Oct. 28 in Boston.

The town meeting, held in conjunction with the Council's 55th Annual Fall Conference, will be moderated by award-winning journalist Carole Simpson, who retired from ABC News in 2006 to become leader-in-residence in the School of Communications at Emerson College in Boston.

Many remember Simpson as the anchor of the weekend editions of ABC News *World News Tonight*. In her recent career memoirs, *NewsLady*, she recounts

A panel of urban school superintendents and teacher union leaders will discuss labor-management relations and collaboration for higher student achievement

her 40-year career as a pioneering African American woman in broadcast journalism.

The 90-minute town hall meeting at the Westin Copley Place Hotel in Boston will feature on the panel:

- Albuquerque Public Schools Superintendent Winston Brooks, chair of the Council Board of Directors, and Wilson Wilson, senior staff representative of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation;
- Baltimore City Public Schools CEO Andres Alonso;
- Hillsborough County Public Schools Superintendent MaryEllen Elia in Tampa, Fla., and Stephanie Baxter-Jenkins, executive director of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association; and
- Indianapolis Public Schools Superintendent Eugene White and Ann Wilkins, president of the Indianapolis Education Association.

Congressman Joins Council Advisory Board

Rep. Chaka Fattah, D-Pa., recently joined the Council of the Great City Schools' newly created National Black Male Achievement Advisory Board, established to help the organization identify possible solutions that will improve black male academic achievement in the nation.

The congressman joins academic researchers, national community and faith-based leaders, youth advocates and others on the board, which in September held its first meeting to begin responding to the Council's widely publicized report late last

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Former Supreme Court Justice Swears In Philly Student Council

Retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor celebrated Constitution Day recently by conducting a swearing in ceremony of the inaugural student council at Andrew Jackson Middle School in Philadelphia.

During her visit, O'Connor also announced the launch of a national civics contest, the Civic Impact Challenge,

for middle schools across the country. Sponsored by the Verizon Foundation, the contest aims to inspire students to get involved in the democratic process and become responsible and engaged citizens.

The contest is open to 5th through 12th grade classrooms. Teachers may enroll their class by visiting www.iCivics.org/Impact-Challenge-2011.

Minneapolis Launches First-Ever Citywide Reading Initiative

Minneapolis Public Schools graduate and National Public Radio host and author Michele Norris is giving Minneapolis residents something to read about.

Her memoir, *The Grace of Silence*, is the first book to be selected by *One Minneapolis, One Read*, the first-ever citywide reading initiative encouraging everyone to read the same book.

The initiative is a partnership among the school district, the City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County Library to promote literacy and public dialogue in libraries, book clubs and other public spaces in the community in an effort to explore important social challenges.

The Grace of Silence describes the experience of Norris and her family as the first black family in a south Minneapolis neighborhood in the 1960s.

As part of the initiative, Norris recently held a reading and book discussion in Minneapolis. This is the first of many public events for residents to read as a community and join in on the conversation.



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will leave the school district in June 2012.

“My main reason for leaving is to reconnect with my kids and grandkids [who live outside of Alaska],” said Comeau in an *Urban Educator* interview. “I have five grandkids and me and my husband have missed major events in their lives.”

She is leaving a district that is very different from the one she started working at in 1974 as a noon duty attendant. The minority student population has increased from 26 percent to 53 percent, an increase Comeau views as positive, but a view she realizes is not shared by everyone.

“There is an anti-immigrant, anti-refugee sentiment in the community that is growing,” she said, even though students must learn to compete in a global society.

Comeau believes one of her biggest successes as superintendent is adding language to the school district’s discrimination and harassment policy protecting lesbian and gay students. She is also proud of the district making strides in increasing its graduation rate, from 60 percent to 72 percent.

“I have stayed so long because I didn’t want to work anywhere else,” said Comeau of her 11-year tenure. “When I walk out the door the last time, it will be bittersweet.”

A Fighter for Equity

“John Mackiel might have the toughest job in Omaha,” stated an editorial in the *Omaha World-Herald* after Mackiel announced that he will retire in August 2012, after serving as the leader of Omaha Public Schools for 15 years. The editorial noted that improving the academic performance of so many economically disadvantaged students is a daunting challenge. But it’s a challenge that Mackiel has embraced.

Whether convincing voters to pass a \$254-million bond to improve schools or filing a lawsuit challenging the state’s school finance system, he has always led the fight to provide a quality education for all students.

A native Omahan, he began his career in the district in 1972 as a high school English teacher.

“I have spent 57 of my 61 Septembers in a classroom in Omaha, never leaving



Omaha Schools Superintendent John Mackiel reads to students during a Read Across America event.

school, never moving from Omaha—never wanting to,” wrote Mackiel in an e-mail to the *Urban Educator*.

When he looks back on his tenure as superintendent, he is most proud of meeting the challenges of equity and diversity in a changing urban environment and improving school facilities and resources.

Yet, he laments that despite research showing the need to address inequity, the media and politicians continue to prescribe more testing and increased sanctions.

And what advice would Mackiel give to his successor? “Always remember that public education is a miracle—it is the nation’s most successful democratic institution.”

The Effective Leader

Leading a big-city school district is difficult enough, but leading one with 179,000 students, 21,000 employees and a billion-dollar budget is a monumental task, but one that Ronald Blocker, the superintendent of Orange County Public Schools in Orlando, Fla., has done well.

During his 11-year tenure, the district has received an “A” grade by the Florida Department of Education for three con-



Orange County Schools Superintendent Ronald Blocker visits a school with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

secutive years, voters approved a \$2-billion referendum to improve facilities and Blocker was named the 2011 Florida Superintendent of the Year.

He began his career as a school psychologist in the Orlando school system in 1977 and 23 years later became the district’s first African-American superintendent.

In an e-mail to the *Urban Educator*, Blocker said he enjoys leading an organization that has made a difference in children’s lives.

“Public education requires no admissions criteria and your parents don’t have to be on the board of trustees in order to gain admission,” wrote Blocker. “We work with all types of learners, even those rejected by private institutions. That’s awesome!”

That work has been made more difficult by severe cuts in state funding. But Blocker is proud of the belt-tightening strategies put in place and notes that Orlando regularly ranks as a district in the state with one of the leanest administrative costs.

And when asked why he is leaving the district he has led since July 2000, Blocker writes, “I’m retiring simply because it’s time.”

Broward County District Names New Superintendent



Robert Runcie

A businessman turned educator, Robert Runcie was recently selected to lead the sixth largest school district in the nation.

Runcie brings his expertise as chief of staff to the board of education for Chicago Public Schools to his new role as superintendent of Florida’s Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale.

He has held several positions in the Chicago school system, including chief instructional officer.

He succeeds former superintendent Jim Notter, who resigned earlier this year.



Student Julius Smith of North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro speaks at a summit for black males while professional trainer Keith Funderburk looks on.

N.C. District Hosts Summit for Black Males

Guilford County Schools' annual African-American Male Leadership Summit recently attracted nearly 300 middle and high school male students to the campus of North Carolina A&T State University.

The students listened to inspired messages from educational leaders within Guilford County Schools and North Carolina A&T in Greensboro, as well as community leaders from the Center for Creative Leadership, the Nehemiah Group and Sigma Pi Phi fraternity. The summit

featured topics ranging from goal-setting, academic achievement and entrepreneurship to community involvement, healthy lifestyle choices and the importance of science, technology, engineering and math.

"This program provides our young men with the opportunity to be inspired and make personal connections with each other and with leaders in our community," says Monica Walker, Guilford County Schools diversity officer. "Our goal is for them to become role models when they return to their home schools."

Advisory Board *continued from page 1*

year titled *A Call for Change: The Social and Educational Factors Contributing to the Outcomes of Black Males in Urban Schools*.

"This board will provide recommendations to address growing international competition and the national imperative to improve academic outcomes for young men and boys, particularly African Americans," Congressman Fattah stressed.

Co-chaired by Eileen Cooper-Reed, a board member of the Cincinnati Public Schools, and Council Executive Director Michael Casserly, the new black-male advisory panel met in Washington Sept. 14

to map out a course of action leading to a planned national stakeholders conference in Detroit next April.

The Council has also developed an internal advisory board of urban school leaders that will contribute to finding solutions that will help young black males succeed in life.

Providing strategic support for the Council's initiative on black male achievement is Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, a longtime member of the urban education group's Blue Ribbon Corporate Advisory Group.

Council Beefs Up Staff; Names New Leaders

Helping urban schools implement the new common core standards prompted the Council of the Great City Schools recently to appoint directors of mathematics and language arts, two subjects at the heart of the state-led academic standards.

Denise Walston joined the Council in early September to lay the groundwork for preparing and implementing the common core standards in mathematics. She had been the executive director of mathematics in Virginia's Norfolk Public Schools.

Robin Hall, executive director of literacy in the Atlanta Public Schools, became director of language arts and literacy in early October, leading efforts to prepare and implement common core standards in English-language arts in big-city schools.

Both educational leaders will work closely with the Council's director of academic achievement, Ricki Price-Baugh, and research director Sharon Lewis as part of a grant project to coordinate implementation of the new kindergarten through 12th-grade common core standards in urban public school systems nationwide.

The Council has also beefed up the ranks of its junior staff. Alejandra Barrio joined the Council this past summer as an ELL (English language learners) specialist. She graduated from George Washington University in May with a bachelor's degree in political science and interned at Education for Our Future in Alexandria, Va.

Moses Palacios is the new research specialist, earning a master's degree in education policy in August from the University of Pennsylvania. He was an education policy graduate assistant at Research for Action in Philadelphia.

Also last month, Amicar Guzman, a graduate student at the University of Maryland, became a Council research intern. He had worked as an education policy intern on Capitol Hill.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District Wins Big \$550,000 Prize

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina last month won the 2011 Broad Prize for Urban Education, the nation's largest education award for school districts.

The district received \$550,000 in college scholarships for its high school seniors from the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, which awards \$1 million annually to honor four large urban school systems that demonstrate the strongest student achievement, especially in narrowing achievement gaps.

"Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a model for innovation in urban education," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who joined education leaders at the Library of Congress for the announcement of the 2011 winner. "It has taken on the tough work of turning around low-performing schools, created a culture of using data to improve classroom instruction, and put a laser-like focus in preparing students for college and careers."

The three other finalists--Florida's Broward County Public Schools in Fort Lauderdale, Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Texas' Ysleta Independent School District in El Paso--will each receive \$150,000 in college scholarships.

All four districts had been previous finalists for the Broad Prize.

Judged by three former U.S. education secretaries and four other leaders, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools won the prize for narrowing ethnic achievement gaps at a quick pace and boosting the performance of students from low-income families among other factors.

More than half of the district's students are African American or Hispanic, and more than half are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Who Will be the Leading Urban School Board Member of 2011?



Richard R. Green

Like the Academy Awards, there's anticipation in the air. As urban educators clad in semi-formal evening attire listen to entertainment and dine on white linen table clothes, the moment nears for the announcement, "The envelope, please."

Who will win the top prize in urban education leadership?

For 2011, the nominees are school board members. They are, stand, please:

- Alan Duncan of North Carolina's Guilford County Schools in Greensboro;
- Jerrelle Francois of Baltimore City Public Schools;
- Gregory Groover of Boston Public Schools;
- Denise Link of the Cleveland

Metropolitan School District

- Candy Olson of Florida's Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa; and
- Eileen Cooper Reid of the Cincinnati Public Schools

With anticipation heightening, the banquet host finally tears open the envelope. And the winner is ...

It won't be revealed until the evening of Oct. 27 at the 22nd Annual Richard R. Green Award Banquet in Boston.

Sponsored by the Council, ARAMARK Education and Cambium Learning Group/Voyager, the Green Award honors the first African-American chancellor of the New York City school system and superintendent of the Minneapolis school district.

The award recognizes the urban education leader of the year, and is presented to a superintendent and board member in alternative years. The winner receives a \$10,000 scholarship to present to a student.



Philly Grad Receives Richard Green Scholarship

Arlene Ackerman, recently the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, selected Emilio Garcia, a 2011 graduate of the district, to receive a \$10,000 college scholarship. As the winner of the Richard R. Green Award in 2010 at the Council of the Great City Schools' 54th Annual Fall Conference, Ackerman received the \$10,000 college scholarship to give to a student. Garcia attends a community college and eventually intends to get a bachelor's degree and work to advance the cause of animal welfare as a lawyer or veterinarian.

Blue Ribbon Schools Named

Peralta Elementary in Oakland, Calif., has created the Intergenerational Project in which students teach art to seniors in a local adult day care facility. The school also has implemented a fourth-grade project called Miraculous Fungi, in which students study how fungi can be used to clean toxins on the Earth. These two projects are examples of how Peralta integrates community learning into the classroom to boost student achievement, and one of the reasons the school was recently honored by the U.S. Department of Education.

Peralta Elementary was one of 304 public and private schools in the nation to receive a 2011 National Blue Ribbon Award. The honor was awarded based on overall academic excellence or for

success in closing achievement gaps among disadvantaged and minority students.

“America’s long-term economic prosperity and civic engagement depends on our children receiving a world-class education,” U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in a press release. “National Blue Ribbon Schools are committed to accelerating student achievement and preparing students for success in college and

careers. Their success is an example for others to follow.”

In addition to Peralta Elementary in Oakland, big-city schools in Anchorage, Long Beach, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Boston, Albuquerque, Charlotte, Oklahoma City, Philadelphia, Nashville, New York City, Dallas, Shreveport, Richmond, Seattle, Milwaukee, Miami, Chicago, Houston, Las Vegas and Greensboro, N.C., were named Blue Ribbon Schools. Chicago and Las Vegas each had two schools recognized, while Houston had three, Miami and Dallas had four and New York had five schools awarded.

Schools were selected for Blue Ribbon distinction based on one of two criteria: Schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged back-

grounds that greatly improved student performance to high levels on state tests and schools whose students achieve in the top 10 percent of their state assessment test regardless of their background.

To celebrate their achievement, each school will be honored Nov. 14-15 in Washington, D.C., at an awards ceremony. Schools will receive the Blue Ribbon School flag and an engraved plaque to mark their distinction.



Atlanta Financial Chief Wins Council Award

Chuck Burbridge, the chief financial officer for Atlanta Public Schools, was recently presented the Bill Wise Award at the Council of Great City Schools’ Chief Financial Officers Conference in Indianapolis.

The annual award recognizes a school business official who exhibits professionalism, integrity and outstanding service to urban education. The award and dinner were sponsored by Chartwells School Dining Services.

Burbridge has served as chief financial officer for Atlanta Public Schools since 2007. Prior to his position in Atlanta, he served as chief financial officer for the Los Angeles Unified School District and was also deputy chief financial officer at Chicago Public Schools.

The Bill Wise Award was established in 2000 and is named for an outstanding financial leader in urban education for the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.

Six Urban Districts Awarded U.S. Grants To Boost Student Access to AP Courses

Six big-city school districts recently were awarded grants from the U.S. Department of Education to expand their Advanced Placement (AP) programs. New York City, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Charleston, St. Louis and Florida’s Palm Beach County school districts will receive \$3.5 million this year through the Advanced Placement Incentives Program.

“Research shows that students who take challenging classes are more likely to earn a college degree,” said U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. “This program will help give more low-income students the opportunity to take advanced courses and prepare them to succeed in college and careers.”

In Milwaukee, funds will be used to help overhaul the AP programs in six schools, and create new AP programs at two schools. “This grant increases our capacity to give [Milwaukee] students access to college-level courses,” said Milwaukee Schools Superintendent Gregory Thornton. He added that the “higher rigor and expectations” of AP classes will help students “succeed in college and beyond.”

The six Great City School districts will receive the following amounts in 2011:

- \$650,000 – Milwaukee Public Schools
- \$642,185 – Charleston County School District
- \$630,062 – School District of Palm Beach County
- \$588,975 – St. Louis Missouri School District
- \$584,195 – Los Angeles Unified School District
- \$446,295 – New York City Board of Education

Healthier Meals Greet St. Louis Students

Students at Lexington Elementary School in St. Louis were excited when offered fresh peaches. Many of them had never seen or tasted the fruit.

Fried foods, pork products, donuts and pastries are off the menu in St. Louis Public Schools.

Students are now offered whole grain items, vegetables, fruits and low-fat dairy products to meet U.S. Department of Agriculture recommendations and state eat-smart guidelines.

Students at five St. Louis elementary schools, including Lexington, were greeted to new menus to open the school year this fall as the school system has expanded its school kitchens to prepare nutritious meals.

New kitchen equipment was installed at the schools over the summer allowing for the preparation of healthier meals, expanding the number of St. Louis public schools with full-production kitchens to 32. Money from a bond issue that voters approved last year paid for the new equipment.

Beginning in 2008, the St. Louis school system has worked to improve menus to provide healthier meals for its students. Local farmers within 100 miles of the city support the school system's effort by growing and harvesting fresh fruits and vegetables for delivery to the schools.



St. Louis students line up to receive a healthy meal.

The principal of Lexington Elementary School sees her students eating the nutritious foods and not wasting or throwing away the processed foods such as hot dogs and chicken nuggets that were once served.

"There was always food on the floor. Now the floors are clean," says Principal Barbara Anderson in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "They're eating the food. It's not on the floor; it's in their tummies."

Milwaukee Receives \$100,000 Automotive Grant

The U.S. Department of Transportation recently awarded Milwaukee Public Schools a \$100,000 grant to improve access to careers in hybrid and electric vehicles for female and minority students.

The grant will go toward improving and modernizing the automotive curriculum at Pulaski High School. The new program, called *Automotive Urban Technology in Action*, will give students hands-on experience, and train them in skills oriented toward the next generation of automotive technology.

Joining Pulaski High School in this effort will be organizations from the automotive industry such as the Auto and Truck Dealers Foundation as well as groups from the post-secondary field.

"This grant will help [Milwaukee] students keep pace with changing technology in the automotive industry," said Milwaukee Superintendent Gregory Thornton. "As vehicles move toward hybrid and electric power, the curriculum has to change in order to help students be competitive in careers after high school."

Five Des Moines Students in Same School Earn Perfect ACT

Five students, all enrolled at Roosevelt High School in Iowa's Des Moines Public Schools, have earned a perfect composite score of 36 on the ACT college entrance examination.

For one student at a school to earn the highest possible score on the ACT is no small feat, but five students at one school is a rarity.

As a high school junior, Luke Sheeley is in good company with seniors Jack Bequeath, Corey Grief, Matthew MacKay and Megan Mansfield, who all achieved the highest possible composite scores.

Each student also takes Advanced Placement (AP) courses at Central Academy. The academy is home to one of the nation's top AP programs and is the only school in Iowa to offer the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. A part of the Des Moines school district, Central Academy is attended by students from 36 different schools across Iowa.

The college-bound students have expressed interest in pursuing math or science-related fields in their futures.

"Anyone who thinks Des Moines does not offer the best educational opportunities to students does not know Des Moines," said Crista Carlile, the supervisor of Central Academy. "Our students, like Jack and Luke, are not only preparing to compete in the world but to help lead the world. It is exciting to watch them learn, grow and succeed as they get ready for their next steps in life."

Each year, less than one-tenth of one percent of students earn a perfect composite score of 36 on the ACT college entrance examination. Over the past five years, between six to eight Iowa students a year received a perfect composite score.

In Iowa, nearly 23,000 students in the Class of 2011 took the ACT exam.



At Forest Heights Academy in East Baton Rouge, drama teacher Elizabeth Foos leads her dramatic arts class in expressing the emotion "excited" with the help of her third-grade students as Louisiana Lt. Gov. Jay Dardenne looks on.

Arts Schools in Baton Rouge and Jackson, Miss., Receive Kennedy Center Award For Excellence

Schools in East Baton Rouge, La., and Jackson, Miss., recently won the National Schools of Distinction in Arts Education Award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Four schools nationwide received the award for their comprehensive arts programs and for integrating arts education into other subject areas.

Forest Heights Academy of Excellence in East Baton Rouge is an arts magnet elementary school, where a majority of the students are from economically disad-

vantaged families. The school has already earned distinctions such as the National Blue Ribbon Award, and has been designated a High Performance-High Poverty School for three consecutive years.

In Jackson, the Power Academic and Performing Arts Complex is a magnet school that serves grades 4-12. In 2010, it received the Mississippi Alliance for Arts School of Excellence Award.

Both schools will receive a \$2,000 grant to support their arts education programs.

Clark County Principal Wins National Award



Linda Archambault

Linda Archambault, principal of R.O. Gibson Middle School in Las Vegas, Nev., was recently named the National Middle Level Principal of the Year by MetLife and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The award recognizes principals who "go above and beyond to make their schools the best they can be for students, teachers and communities."

Since becoming principal five years ago,

Archambault has led a number of initiatives to improve school culture, support non-English speaking students and parents, and improve teacher quality. She has implemented a character education program and redesigned the curriculum to align it more closely with state standards.

In 2009, R.O. Gibson made adequately yearly progress for the first time under the *No Child Left Behind* Act.

As the national award winner, Archambault will receive grants worth \$5,000, which she will use to establish a mentoring program at her school for at-risk students.

Pittsburgh Program Demonstrating 'Promise'

In 2007, Pittsburgh Public Schools created *The Pittsburgh Promise*, in which students who graduate from the district with a grade-point average of 2.5 and a 90 percent attendance record can earn up to a \$40,000 college scholarship to attend any post-secondary institution in Pennsylvania.

Three years later, the program is meeting its goals, according to its third annual report, which was recently released.

During the past year, the RAND Corporation studied the effects of *The Pittsburgh Promise* and found that the scholarship program is motivating students to achieve a GPA of 2.5 or higher and attend school regularly. In addition, the study found that the program is encouraging parents to enroll their children in the district's schools.

Researchers also found that since *The Pittsburgh Promise* began there has been a steady increase in college enrollment among district graduates eligible for a college scholarship.

The RAND Report recommended that to ensure continued improvements, the scholarship program should communicate to younger students as well as create a mentoring program to pair *Promise* scholars with high school students.

Pittsburgh Schools Superintendent Linda Lane said the study captured the essence of what has taken place since the program began. "*The Promise*, is no doubt, a central focus of many of our education reform efforts in the city schools," said Lane. "We are in the process of designing a mentoring initiative that engages *Promise* scholars with our high school students for the purpose of helping them to become college-ready."

Since the inception of *The Pittsburgh Promise*, approximately \$16 million in scholarships funds have been awarded to 2,500 high school graduates who have enrolled in 80 post-secondary institutions across the state. According to district officials, approximately 78 percent of the grad-

Pittsburgh Promise continued on page 9

Math Leaders Meet At Council Retreat

Math instructional leaders from more than 15 big-city school districts nationwide convened in Albany, N.Y., last month to discuss implementation of the common core standards.

The meeting was facilitated by Jason Zimba, one of the lead writers of the new standards, at the Council of the Great City Schools' Common Core State Standards Mathematics Retreat Sept. 21-22 as part of the organization's initiative to help urban schools in the implementation process.

The retreat was designed for math curriculum leaders to get a better understanding of the common core standards, so they can explain them to district officials and school staff. They reviewed the nuts and bolts of the math requirements within the common core standards, exploring the implications for curriculum development, rollout, classroom instruction and assessment.

The math leaders discussed the two major design principles of the common core standards in mathematics -- focus and coherence. Focus allows time for math reasoning, practice and integration. "Coherence is necessary because mathematics instruction must not/should not just be a checklist of topics to cover, but rather a set of interrelated and powerful ideas," explained Denise Walston, the Council's new director of mathematics.

"Undergirding the standards are conceptual understanding, procedural skill and applications," she added. "The standards 'speak' to all three as critical components."

Pittsburgh Promise *continued from page 8*

uating class of 2010 who were eligible used Promise funds, compared with 72 percent of the class of 2009 and 58 percent of the class of 2008.

The RAND Report on *The Pittsburgh Promise* is available at www.rand.org.

Council, USA TODAY Plan Second Forum; Release White Paper



solutions in advancing urban education in America.

Under the banner "Unite to Make a Difference," the first-ever education forum hosted by the Council of the Great City Schools and "The Nation's Newspaper" was such an overwhelming success according to program evaluations that a second forum is planned for the new year on March 16.

"The forum opened the door to ideas that will contribute to building a strong platform for improving public education

More than 200 urban educators, business leaders, news executives, students and others converged at USA TODAY headquarters last March to explore the challenges and possible

in America, especially in the nation's major cities where challenges are often more acute," says a recently released white paper summarizing the inaugural forum.

Like this past March, the "Unite to Make a Difference" Education Forum will be held the day before the Council's Legislative/Policy Conference. The March 16, 2012 forum



is intended to build on the information exchanged at the initial forum and gathered in the white paper, which is available on the Council's web site at www.cgcs.org.

Boston District Gets Help to Support Scholar-Athletes

Scholar-athletes in Boston will have more resources to prepare themselves for college this school year as a result of a new College Readiness Initiative.

The program is sponsored by the Boston Scholar Athlete Program, a collaboration among Boston Schools Superintendent Carol R. Johnson, Mayor Thomas M. Menino and charitable donors.

Approximately 375 student athletes will be offered test-taking help from The Princeton Review, a partner of the initiative, as well as college application and admissions support.

The program identified 25 juniors from each of the participating high schools, specifically targeting scholar-athletes who had taken advantage of the resource centers already available to them. Students will be

able to attend the courses during the school day to accommodate their schedules.

Since its creation in 2009, the Boston Scholar Athlete Program has worked to improve the achievement of student athletes.

"Our student athletes are responding beyond our expectations because of the help they are receiving from our great partners," said Superintendent Johnson, "and we expect this additional support to help even more students cross the high school graduation finish line."

The college-preparatory courses began this fall with a focus on fundamental skills in studying and test-taking. In the winter, students will prepare specifically for the spring SAT exam.

A Flurry of Education Initiatives Out of Washington

By Jeff Simering, *Director of Legislation*

There has been a flurry of education initiatives from Capitol Hill and the Obama Administration in the period since Labor Day. From school facility modernization and teacher jobs initiatives, to the long-awaited *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) waiver package, to previously stalled legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) from key Democratic and Republican legislators, and annual education appropriations bills, substantive education issues are finally getting off the ground in Washington.



President Obama's proposed \$447 billion American Jobs Act includes new funding for two major education programs: save teacher jobs (\$30 billion) and modernize 35,000 schools (\$25 billion). The Great City Schools would be in line for an estimated \$5.5 billion under the Teacher Jobs Program and at least \$7.8 billion under the School Modernization Program, which targets large high-need school districts.

On the heels of this jobs and infrastructure proposal, the Administration unveiled its NCLB flexibility initiative. Waivers of 10 specific requirements of NCLB, including the federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) system, the 100 percent proficiency mandate, and the 20 percent expenditure requirement for supplemental services and choice would be available for states and, in turn, all of their school districts.

This flexibility would be in exchange for implementing certain statewide education reform measures, including a new statewide accountability system, teacher and principal evaluation guidelines, and interventions in the current 5 percent persistently lowest achieving schools in the state, while also requiring action in another 10 percent of schools with significant achievement gaps. States would apply in two waves in mid-November or mid-February for school year 2012-2013 flexibility. Other options for LEAs would be available if states do not apply.

The overdue ESEA reauthorization legislation has picked up steam in the past month as well. A Senate Education Committee mark-up session is scheduled for mid-October.

Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) has prepared a committee draft of the reauthorization, and Committee members Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Richard Burr (R-NC) and Johnny Isakson (R-GA) have offered their own versions of the main ESEA programs.

The House Education and Workforce Committee continues to proceed on its topic-by-topic approach to the reauthorization, with additional bills to be considered beyond the three ESEA bills already reported by the Committee.

While the reliance in the major reauthorization proposals on state departments of education as the primary mover for school reform may improve the prospect of a bipartisan Congressional consensus for the reauthorization, the limited instructional expertise of most state agencies portends a lesser likelihood of improved education outcomes among poor and minority students.

Finally, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees have released their proposed education funding levels for the upcoming year. The Senate Committee has frozen most education programs, with limited exceptions, at current funding levels. House Education Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Denny Rehberg (R-MT) has proposed to increase ESEA's Title I and IDEA's Part B by \$1 billion and \$1.2 billion, respectively, but would cut or eliminate a number of other smaller programs, including the Administration's signature Race To The Top, Investing in Innovation, and School Improvement Grant programs.

The renewed attention to the nation's education agenda over the last month is a positive development. The Council of the Great City Schools has supported the Administration's Teacher Jobs, School Modernization and NCLB Waiver initiatives. The Council has formally encouraged key Democratic and Republican lawmakers in their bills to reauthorize ESEA. Unfortunately, there is still a long way to go between proposing and enacting or implementing these initiatives. Yet, just breaking the "inertia" on these national education issues is progress worth noting.

Partnership in San Diego Aims to Help Students Attend College

The City Heights Education Collaborative is an educational initiative that partners three San Diego Unified School District schools with San Diego State University, the district's teachers union and a local nonprofit organization.

As a result of the partnership, 44 students recently began their freshman year at San Diego State University (SDSU).

The students are the first graduates of the collaborative, which was created to directly improve student achievement at three schools, Rosa Parks Elementary, Monroe Clark Middle and Hoover High.

"The idea was to have a strong university presence in the schools," said Tim Allen, executive director of the collaborative, in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*. "It was to create a place for research to occur."

University professors meet with teachers from the three schools to provide training and guidance and assist with English and math instruction. University faculty also work with school counseling staff.

In addition, the three schools also operate as "community schools" providing comprehensive health and social services to students and their families.

One of the major initiatives of the partnership is the College Avenue Compact, which aims to establish a college-going culture in all three collaborative schools. Under the compact, students at Hoover High are guaranteed admission to SDSU if they meet certain criteria such as maintaining a 3.0 grade-point average and completing certain course requirements.

Elementary and middle school students learn about higher education by taking field trips to the university and participating in college-related activities. The compact also involves parents by holding workshops, where they learn about higher education.

Program officials believe the collaborative is working and note that 84 Hoover

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Surprise Birthday Wish for Wichita Student

Joshua Clark, a second-grade student at Pleasant Valley Elementary in Wichita Public Schools in Kansas, had a special guest visit his classroom recently. While the class was studying about citizenship, the American flag and the U.S. Constitution, Joshua's father, U.S. Army Sergeant Joshua Clark, walked into the classroom. Home early after serving four months in Afghanistan, Sgt. Clark wanted to surprise his son on his eighth birthday. After giving his father a big hug, Joshua said that having his father home is exactly what he wanted for his birthday.

An Education Family in Denver

Each month, a graduate of Denver Public Schools is highlighted at a board meeting for their accomplishments. But at the board's recent September meeting, an entire family was featured.

Keith Roybal was a teacher, student adviser and principal in the district in a career that spanned 36 years. His three children are all graduates of the Denver school system. Inspired by their father, they have followed in his footsteps.

His son, also named Keith, is an earth science teacher at the district's Abraham Lincoln High School and his daughter, Kim Roybal, teaches sixth-grade at Henry World School. Another daughter, Michelle, teaches at a nearby

school district. And keeping it a family affair, the younger Keith Roybal's wife is a principal at the district's Gust Elementary.



Siblings Keith Roybal, Kim Roybal, Michelle Mangrum and their father Keith Roybal were honored at a recent Denver Public Schools board meeting.



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Palm Beach Educator Honored

Beth Bobay, a math teacher in the School District of Palm Beach County in Florida, recently became a recipient of the 2011 Yale Educator Award.

The award honors exemplary educators from across the world who have inspired students to achieve at high levels.



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graduates were accepted at SDSU this fall, compared to 41 last year.

One of those students is Christian Castro, who came to the United States from Mexico when he was around 11 and had difficulty with English. Castro, who aims to become a psychologist, credits the education initiative with helping him navigate the college application process.

“When I got to high school, I found the College Avenue Compact and I found a group of people that really helped me make my dream of going to college a reality,” said Castro in the *Union-Tribune*. “They motivated me to do better, to move forward.”

Bobay teaches at Suncoast Community High School where she sponsors the National Math Honor Society, which has won many state and regional math competitions. A 30-year veteran, she is a recipient of the Siemens Award for her students’ achievement in Advanced Placement Calculus.

Matriculating Yale students can nominate high school teachers for the award, with the winners selected by a committee composed of Yale admissions officers. This year, 228 nominations were received and 50 teachers and 30 counselors were selected to receive the award.

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