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*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."  
- Nelson Mandela*

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### **MIAMI-DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS AWARDED THE BROAD PRIZE FOR URBAN EDUCATION**

The Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Florida was awarded the Broad Prize for Urban Education on Tuesday, in part, for its efforts to close the achievement gap among low-income and minority students. In the district, Hispanic students outperform their peers in other urban districts at all levels and graduation rates have risen among black and Hispanic students. Finalists include the Corona-Norco Unified district in California, Houston Independent district in Texas and the School District of Palm Beach County, Florida.

### **20 ADDITIONAL STATES CONSIDER STEPPING UP TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Officials in 20 states are considering modeling their teacher-education programs after a rigorous one adopted in Tennessee. Under the model, teacher candidates are required to pass an evaluation, called edTPA, which is similar to the national boards. "It's

sometimes called the junior national board because it requires high-level thinking, analyzing, synthesizing. You must truly demonstrate you have the knowledge and skills to be an effective teacher," said Jennifer Nelson, of the University of Memphis.

### **STANDARDIZED TESTING COSTS STATES \$1.7 BILLION A YEAR**

Standardized-testing regimens cost states some \$1.7 billion a year overall, or a quarter of 1 percent of total K-12 spending in the United States, according to a new report on assessment finances. The report released November 29 by the Washington-based Brown Center on Education

Policy, at the Brookings Institution, calculates that the test spending by 44 states and the District of Columbia amounted to \$65 per student on average in grades 3-9 based on the most recent test-cost data the researchers could gather. (The Brown Center report was not able to gather that data from Connecticut, Iowa, Oklahoma, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming.)

According to the report, the District of Columbia spends the most on its assessments per student -- \$114 -- followed by Hawaii, Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, and Massachusetts. New York, where test scoring is a local responsibility, spent the least -- \$7 -- per student.

### **NEW i3 GRANTS AWARDED**

Twenty winners are slated to share \$150 million in prize money from the third round of the Investing in Innovation competition, the U.S. Department of Education just announced. Eight of those won "validation" awards of up to \$15 million, and the remaining 12 won "development" awards of up to \$3 million.

Interestingly, the department chose not to award any grants in the largest "scale up" category, where the grants were worth up to \$25 million. In a FAQ document explaining the awards, the department says it wanted a larger portfolio of grantees, and awarding a large \$25 million grant would have eaten up a lot of the award money.

The i3 contest, which was born out of the 2009 economic-stimulus package passed by Congress, is designed to find innovative ideas and bring them to scale. School districts, groups of schools and their nonprofit partners competed in the three categories, which varied based on how much evidence of past success an idea had. The scale up category requires the strongest track record of success, where as the development category requires much less evidence but a lot of promise.

Now the only thing standing between the winners and their money is securing matching funds. Development award winners must secure a 15 percent match, and validation winners a 10 percent match. Securing matching grants—and keeping that money—has proven quite challenging for some past i3 winners.

Applicants have until Dec. 7 to secure their matching funds, after which they will get their grant.

The validation winners are: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, Jobs for the Future, LEED Sacramento, National Writing Project, New Leaders, Inc., New Teacher Center, Texas A&M University, and WestEd. WestEd also won a

development grant, along with AVID Center, California Association for Bilingual Education, California League of Middle Schools, Central Falls School District, Citizen Schools, Inc., Clark County School District, Columbia College Chicago, Intercultural Development Research Association, Internationals Network For Public Schools, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and Virginia Advanced Study Strategies, Inc.

### **FINALISTS ANNOUNCED IN DISTRICT-LEVEL RACE TO THE TOP COMPETITION**

The U.S. Department of Education recently announced 61 finalists in the \$400 million federal Race to the Top-District competition, which will fund district-wide efforts to close the achievement gap and raise teacher effectiveness. The list of finalists represents more than 200 school districts, including some of the nation's largest. According to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, "These finalists are setting the curve for the rest of the country. No matter who wins, children across the country will benefit from the clear vision and track records of success demonstrated by these finalists."

A total of 372 applicants, including several charter-school networks, competed in the district competition. The Department of Education will choose 15-20 winners from among the finalists to receive between \$5 million and \$40 million each (depending on the district size) by December 31st. See the press release for a link to a list of the 61 finalists. <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-announces-61-applications-finalists-400-million-race-top>

### **COMMON METRICS, DISPARATE RESULTS**

The U.S. Department of Education has released four-year high school graduation rates for 2010-11 that for the first time reflect a common method of calculation for all states except Kentucky, Idaho, and Oklahoma, reports Michele McNeil in Education Week. State-by-state data show graduation rates ranging from 59 percent in the District of Columbia to 88 percent in Iowa. The new method requires states to track individual students and report how many first-time 9th graders graduate with a standard diploma within four years. According to the department, the new common metric "can be used by states, districts, and schools to promote greater accountability and to develop strategies that will reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates in schools nationwide." The data show glaring achievement gaps: In Minnesota, for instance, the graduation rate for black students was 49 percent; for white students, 84 percent. In Ohio, the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students was 65 percent; for all students, 80 percent. The release of these data comes as advocacy groups are calling on the department to strengthen graduation-rate accountability in waivers issued under NCLB. These groups are criticizing U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan for allowing states to violate the spirit -- if not the letter -- of the 2008 regulations that mandated a common graduation rate.

### **REPORT: INSEPARABLE IMPERATIVES: EQUITY IN EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMY**

A new report from the Alliance for Excellent Education argues that as students of color and diverse ethnicities become the leading population of public school systems in

numerous states, closing achievement gaps can secure the country's future prosperity. Given that two-thirds of our economy is driven by consumer spending, the report makes the case that raising individual education levels will boost purchasing power and by extension, the national economy. Students of color make up more than half of the K–12 population in 12 states and between 40 and 50 percent of students in an additional ten states. Yet the high school graduation rates of students of color trail whites' by an average of 20 percentage points. Disparities continue into higher education where in 2011, 31 percent of whites age 25 and older held at least a bachelor's degree, compared to just 20 percent of blacks and 14 percent of Hispanics. The latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show dropouts more than three times as likely to be unemployed, and when employed and at the peak of earning capacity averaging only \$9 per hour compared to high school graduates and those with bachelor's degrees, who earn \$13 and \$25 per hour, respectively. The report notes that if every state had graduated 90 percent of its students for just the Class of 2011, America would have more than 750,000 additional high school graduates -- many of whom would have pursued postsecondary education – who would have earned an additional \$9 billion each year. See the report: <http://www.all4ed.org/>

#### **REPORT: CLOSING THE EXPECTATIONS GAP**

The seventh annual "Closing the Expectations Gap" report by Achieve analyzes how all states are aligning college- and career-ready (CCR) standards in English and mathematics with policies that send clear signals about what it means to be academically prepared for college and careers after high school graduation. The report also details states' policy progress on the college- and career-ready agenda, as well as efforts to implement those policies. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have adopted standards aligned to the expectations of college and careers. Forty-six states and DC have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), while four have state-developed CCR standards. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia have adopted college- and career-ready graduation requirements that require students to meet the full set of expectations defined in the CCSS. Eighteen states administer college- and career-ready assessments that give a readiness score to postsecondary institutions for placement decisions. A majority of states (32) have now incorporated at least one of four accountability indicators that Achieve has identified as critical to promoting college and career readiness. Only Texas uses all of Achieve's indicators in its college- and career-ready accountability system. Four states -- Florida, Georgia, Indiana, and Kentucky -- have included use of multiple college- and career-ready indicators in their accountability systems in multiple ways. See the report at <http://www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2012>

#### **REPORT: FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION**

A new report from Public Agenda investigates why some schools in high-poverty communities produce remarkable success where others fail. The report examines how principals, teachers, parents, and students define the keys to success, and highlights specific strategies and decisions in these high-achieving schools. It also looks at how schools sustain effective practices and what helps them weather reductions in funding. The schools in the study are all in Ohio and are a mix of traditional public schools,

magnet schools, and a charter school, and face common challenges: tightening budgets, restrictive regulatory policies and labor agreements, parents whose socioeconomic situation makes it difficult for them to participate in their child's education, and a high proportion of students ill-prepared for school. Successful schools in the study have principals who lead with a strong and clear vision, engage staff in problem-solving and decision-making, and remain focused on goals and outcomes. Leaders provide genuine opportunities and incentives for teachers to collaborate and share best practices, and teachers regard student data as clarifying and helpful, using it to inform instruction. Principals and teachers have high expectations for all students and reject excuses, and set high expectations for school discipline and student behavior. Schools offer nontraditional incentives for academic success and good behavior, and students feel valued, loved, and challenged. Principals and teachers do not view lack of parent and community support as an insurmountable barrier to student achievement. Finally, school leaders and teachers seek continuous improvement on many levels. Even in the face of serious challenges, these schools demonstrated that success can still be found from within.

A number of practices and qualities consistently stood out across the nine schools we spoke to. We heard again and again that a well-concerted interplay between these attributes contributes to high academic achievement in these schools.

Here, in brief, is what Public Agenda heard from administrators, teachers, parents and students in these nine successful schools:

1. Principals lead with a strong and clear vision for their school, engage staff in problem solving and decision making, and never lose sight of their school's goals and outcomes.
2. Teachers and administrators are dedicated to their school's success and committed to making a difference in their students' lives.
3. School leaders provide genuine opportunities and incentives for teachers to collaborate and share best practices.
4. Teachers regard student data as clarifying and helpful. They use it to inform instruction.
5. Principals and teachers have high expectations for all students and reject any excuses for academic failure.
6. School leaders and teachers set high expectations for school discipline and student behavior.
7. Schools offer students nontraditional incentives for academic success and good behavior.
8. Students feel valued, loved and challenged. They are confident that their teachers will help them succeed and be at their side if they hit a rough patch.
9. Principals and teachers do not see the lack of parent and community support as an insurmountable barrier to student achievement and learning.
10. School leaders and teachers seek continuous improvement for both their practices and student achievement. Today's success is tomorrow's starting point.
11. Each school has its own story of change and improvement, yet some commonalities exist. [http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/FailureIsNotAnOption\\_PublicAgenda\\_2012.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/FailureIsNotAnOption_PublicAgenda_2012.pdf)

## RESOURCE FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

### **iCivics.org's Drafting Board-a New Tool for Students to Craft Argumentative Essays**

iCivics.org, an organization founded by Justice O'Connor, just launched a new tool, Drafting Board. Drafting Board is a free online tool that helps students meet Common Core Standards for English Language Arts in History and the Social Studies. It engages students in a clear, step-by-step process of crafting a polished argumentative essay while providing teachers with tools to assess their students' progress. <http://www.icivics.org/draftingboard>.