

Partners Unlimited Bulletin Board

A Public Education Legal Services Project
of the Washington Lawyers' Committee
for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

Spring 2006

Education Charter Amendment Approved by D.C. Council

June 20th will be a critical day for the education of our city's children. That is when the D.C. Council will decide whether to approve an amendment to the D.C. Charter that guarantees the right of every child to a high-quality system of education. In the meantime, the Washington Lawyers' Committee as well as education and civil rights advocates will be working to ensure that the following amendment is approved without any changes that would very likely weaken it.

The fundamental right to free educational opportunities is a basic value of our society and serves as a foundation of our democratic system of government. Accordingly, the District of Columbia is hereby obligated to provide a system of free high-quality public schools to every child.

(Continued on page 10)



Geoplunge Tournament Finals: Randle Highlands on the left and Lasalle on the right. Observing intently are (L/R) Robin Hayutin, Arent Fox; Paula Jones, Washington Lawyers Committee; Oliver Thomas, Heath Right; Travis Mock, Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld; Leonard Massie, Principal, La Salle Elementary School; and a teacher from Tyler Elementary School.

GeoPlunge Geography Tournament Creates March Madness

The first annual GeoPlunge Geography Tournament created "March Madness" among D.C. elementary school students on March 29 at the Charles Sumner School in Washington, D.C. Alan Fishel, a partner at **Arent Fox** who invented the set of geography games called GeoPlunge, and the Washington Lawyers' Committee's School Partnership Project coordinated the tournament for 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students. The event was sponsored by eight law firms that have partnerships with D.C. public elementary schools.

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IRIS'

INTRO



IRIS J. TOYER

Project Director, Public Education Legal Services Project, Washington Lawyers' Committee

As the school year begins to wind down, we have the opportunity to look back and take stock of all that has been accomplished in our school partnerships this year.

This issue is full of new and exciting opportunities and experiences that firms are providing for students at their partner schools.

I am pleased to join our guest columnist Dr. Clifford B. Janey, Superintendent of the D.C. Public School System and Chief State School Officer, in thanking this city's law firms for their outstanding service to children.

Dr. Janey recognizes the critical support that firms are contributing and understands the difference this support makes as he works to reform our schools.

We were all very excited about the success of our first GeoPlunge Geography Tournament. Our page 1 story describes the March Madness competition complete with a playoff series. We can still feel the excitement in the room and, along with students, look forward to next year's tournament!

Page 8 offers a glimpse of what it was like for students from the School Without Walls and their partners from Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson to stand on the Gettysburg battlefields and bring history to life during a tour of historical sites.

Our story on Bracewell & Giuliani's bilingual Big Book Party at Brightwood Elementary included a Latin theme to address the diverse student population. I had a great time!

I am sure that the 6th grade girls at Malcolm X Elementary School adored the attention they received during their weekend trip to Cornell University provided by the Greater Washington Area Chapter of the National Bar Association.

We hope the D.C. Education Rights Charter Amendment will bring a new and brighter day for students in the District of Columbia. The Committee, Parents United, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, DCPTA and a host of law firms are working on this important initiative. Please read on because there is so much more to talk about and not enough space!

Iris

Iris J. Toyer, Director
Public Education Legal Services Project

FROM THE

SUPERINTENDENT



*Dr. Clifford B. Janey
Superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools*

I am pleased to know about the reading project that **Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld** has undertaken at Tyler Elementary School. I know the interaction between our students and the law firm volunteers will help stimulate curiosity and build confidence in these young learners. I also appreciate the tutoring and reading programs that other law firms have been so faithfully conducting in our schools. You are all part of an essential process of reclaiming the hopes, the desires, and the aspirations of our youth. If we do not provide constructive and engaging opportunities for our children, we leave them vulnerable to a myriad of negative exposures that can be both dangerous and destructive to their young lives. A child's circumstances should not define his or her destiny.

I want all law firm volunteers to know how much I value the partnerships you and your law firms have formed with our public schools to help enrich the education of our young people. I am proud that my undergraduate alma mater has a solid partnership with the Boston public schools. This strong town/gown relationship grew out of the demands a group of students - of which I was a part - made in the late 1960s when we temporarily took over the Office of the President of Northeastern University.

A few years after I graduated and began working for the university, I volunteered as a reading teacher in the state prison at Concord. On my first day there, I discovered that 60% of the inmates in my class were people I knew from the housing project where I grew up. This astonishing discovery convinced me then, that my career would be focused on bringing educational opportunities to young people whose life circumstances put them at risk of being labeled intellectually inferior.

I thank all of you for your literacy efforts, Saturday Academies, power lunches and field trips, which provide opportunities for our youth to look beyond their local environments and see a world of new possibilities. I want to thank you also for the creative ways that you bring joy to learning. The students at Birney Elementary School love the course that environmental lawyers from **Beveridge and Diamond** teach every spring. And I look forward to many more successful events like the Geoplunge Geography Tournament that **Arent Fox** and the Washington Lawyers' Committee recently organized for students at our elementary schools.

The firm/school partnerships are exactly the kinds of relationships our schools must continue to build with this community. You are a valuable resource that will benefit our schools and students for years to come.

MARCH

A D V E N T U R E



Marcia Durkin from Arent Fox explains a GeoPlunge game to Marie Reed students.

Students Compete for GeoPlunge Championship (cont'd)

Participating schools and law firms included Bruce Monroe/**DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary**; Randle Highlands/**Arent Fox**; Gage-Eckington/**Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw**; Marie Reed Learning Center/**Fannie Mae's Corporate Legal Department**; Tyler/**Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld**); J.O. Wilson/**U.S. Courts for the D.C. Circuit**; Adams/**Swidler, Berlin Shereff Friedman**); and LaSalle/**Health Right, Inc.**

Attendees included teachers, volunteers and monitors from participating schools and firms, D.C. Public School System guests and other observers.

The tournament included three different games that combine geography education and fun. *Guess the State*

encourages students to learn the names of the 50 states. Playing *Race for the Borders* teaches participants where states are located geographically. When students *Play the Ranks*, they learn how the states rank in size, population and order of entry into the Union.

The competition peaked with the final round between teams from LaSalle and Randle Elementary Schools. The winning team, from Randle Elementary, prevailed to win the Championship Cup. Project Director Iris Toyer also presented all participating students with a gift of an inflatable globe and a certificate for outstanding participation and gamesmanship in the tournament.

Students and Teachers React to Tournament

At the end of the tournament, students and teachers completed evaluation forms.

The students all said “yes” to the first question asking whether they had fun. One boy explained that he had fun “because you had the chance to use your mind.” To the second question about what students like best, the answer was usually one of the three games. But many students answered, “competition.” Several students cited the opportunity to meet people. When asked, “do you have anything else you want to say,” most of those who responded spoke of their hopes for a repeat tournament. One boy said, “I liked how organized it was.” A girl declared, “I love geography.”

According to one 6th grade teacher, “The game was very interesting, competitive, and engaging. It brought out critical thinking skills, socialization, and interpersonal listening skills. It was a very fun game.” After observing the team from his school compete and take second place, Leonard Massie, principal of La Salle Elementary School, sent tournament coordinator Alan Fishel the following message: “On behalf of the four scholars from LaSalle, I just want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the GeoPlunge tournament. It was exciting, entertaining and educational. It did wonders for the self-esteem of our students. Thank you.”



Marie Reed students study their GeoPlunge card.



Nancy Adams (partially visible on the left) with tournament participants.

Geoplunge Experience According to Tutor From DLA Piper

The tournament team from Bruce Monroe represented a group of students regularly tutored by volunteers from **DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary**. After Nancy Adams, who coordinates the firm’s tutoring program, informed the students from Bruce Monroe about the tournament, she taught them how to play the three games. She also explained that only four people could participate in the final rounds at Sumner and that the four would be students who could identify the most states. The four who qualified were very proud and very excited when Nancy gave them a deck of GeoPlunge cards so they could practice.

When she returned the next week, they asked for time during the tutoring session to be quizzed on states and borders and ranks. As she quizzed them, she could tell that they had been practicing on their own. The room that volunteers from DLA Piper use for tutoring has a big rug that shows a map of the United States. When the students played *Race for the Borders*, they would actually go to the rug and stand on the states themselves.

“The students who participated in the tournament had a great time. They cannot wait to do it again,” reports Nancy. “Their knowledge of geography has certainly improved, and so has their confidence and interest in learning.”

BOOKS MATTER

BOOK PARTIES



Bracewell & Giuliani attorneys Dan Watkiss and John Bartus read to students during the firm's Big Book Party at Brightwood Elementary School.

Young Readers Inspired By Bracewell & Giuliani's Big Book Party

Bracewell & Giuliani celebrated Cinco de Mayo with a Big Book Party for children in grades 1 through 3 at Brightwood Elementary School. Because many of the children at the school speak Spanish at home, the party had a Latin theme. Firm volunteers read *Ferdinand the Bull* to students in English and Spanish.

Washington Wizard Mascot G-Wiz, a big hit at the firm's Big Book Party last year, again entertained the students and participated in skits that emphasized the importance of reading. Each student got a book goody bag with half a dozen books to take home and start a personal library.

The bag also included educational materials, including information about the D.C. Public Library and instructions on getting a library card.

As in previous years, the firm's Big Book Party was preceded by considerable effort on the part of law firm volunteers. They purchased new books, collected gently used books, secured give-away items, and handled numerous logistical details.

The Cinco de Mayo event was Bracewell & Giuliani's third annual Big Book Party in D.C. The firm looks forward to holding the book party again next year.

Students, Young Author Brought Together By Fulbright & Jaworski

Macfarland Middle School students recently joined their mentors at **Fulbright & Jaworski** to hear AWG Coleman, a young African-American fantasy writer read from and discuss his first published book, *Quest of the Seal Bearers*. The book was the result of an effort by Mr. Coleman and his friends to script a video game. Characters in the book are based on characters for the game.

After Mr. Coleman read from his favorite chapter, there was a lively discussion since the students and the Fulbright & Jaworski attorneys had previously read the book. The students asked what it took to get the book published, and where the author got the inspiration for his characters. Mr. Coleman explained that his characters were based on his friends and that one was loosely based on the author.

Mr. Coleman, who is 24 years old and a resident of Highland Springs, Virginia, works as a network administrator for a local nonprofit. He received his B.S. degree in Information Technology in 2002. Arrangements for him to come to the firm were made through Barnes & Noble by Fulbright & Jaworski attorney Gozie Onyema.

The young author program was part of the partnership's year-long emphasis on literature.

Earlier in the year, both students and their mentors recited original and favorite poems.



Stacey Muscarella, Yerania Rivera, and Shelby Kelley from Bracewell & Giuliani hand out goody bags filled with books to students at Brightwood Elementary School.



Young readers at Noyes Elementary School enjoy the holiday book fair sponsored by Weil Gotshal & Manges.

Weil, Gotshal & Manges Brings Holiday Book Fair To Noyes Elementary

Reading is the focus of a newly formed partnership between **Weil, Gotshal, & Manges** and Noyes Elementary School. Last December, the firm sponsored a holiday book fair for the entire school. This activity involved selecting and purchasing appropriate books for children as young as three and as old as eleven. The price discounts provided by Scholastic Books made it possible to buy enough books for every child and to have books left over donated to the library.

Noyes students came to the fair one class at a time to pick out their books and enjoy them for a while. Older children read their books. The youngest worked on their coloring books. Law firm volunteers read books to the children in between these two age groups.

Every month, Weil Gotshal & Manges buys about 20 copies of the school's Book of the Month. This makes it possible for each class to have the actual book instead of a photocopy of it.

WIDER

OR L D S



Attorney volunteer Larry Blosser with students from Bruce Monroe Elementary School enjoy a special tour of the National Zoo.

DLA Piper Arranges Special Zoo Trip For Bruce Monroe Students

Fifth and sixth graders at Bruce Monroe were among the Very Important People in Washington who had the privilege of getting an early look at Tai Shan, the National Zoo's new panda cub. They saw the panda cub on a special tour of the zoo arranged by one of the volunteers from **DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary** who regularly tutors at the school. The tour, which took place during the holidays, was the firm's Christmas treat for the students at Bruce Monroe.

The students also had an opportunity to see the elephants being fed and bathed. They learned how the zoo prepares special diets for each kind of animal. Other highlights included panda post cards given to

each student and a special treat of hot chocolate and cookies.

Fried Frank, Walls Students Enjoy Historical Trips

By sponsoring trips to historical sites, **Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson** helped bring history alive for 10th graders at the School Without Walls. Sites visited included Gettysburg, Philadelphia, and Colonial Williamsburg. Firm partnership coordinator Joe DeSantis reports that the Gettysburg trip included a bus tour of the battlefield, where students and chaperones got out and stood at strategic locations, giving them an understanding of the battle that they never had before.

Field Trip To Cornell Sponsored by GWAC

In April, the Greater Washington Area Chapter of the National Bar Association's Women Lawyers Division (GWAC) sponsored the most ambitious field trip in the 12-year school partnership between GWAC and Malcolm X Elementary School. GWAC took 22 5th and 6th grade girls on a weekend trip to Cornell University, the alma mater of Elizabeth Thomas, GWAC's partnership coordinator and the trip organizer.

They traveled to the campus on a bus chartered by GWAC and enjoyed a weekend arranged by the Ujamaa Residential College at Cornell University. The girls slept in a dorm and ate in the university cafeteria, and their weekend was a mixture of fun and seriousness. The fun included bowling in the student union, a tour of the campus, which boasts waterfalls and other beautiful scenery, and a visit to the campus store. The serious parts of the trip were the discussions throughout the weekend with college students.

The GWAC chaperones agreed the weekend was a success. It pleased them how quickly the Malcolm X girls bonded with the college students. They were also impressed with the perceptive comments made by Malcolm X students at the campus wrap-up session. One said, "College is so much responsibility, and all the work really starts in elementary school." Another said, "To succeed in college, you have to put school and grades ahead of boys." Other indications of the weekend's sustained impact are the Cornell T-shirts, sweat shirts and accessories that the students now wear to their weekly sessions with GWAC tutors.

Cornell Trip a Success

The weekend was also a success from Cornell's perspective. GWAC and the Malcolm X girls have been invited back, and Elizabeth Thomas has received several boxes of school supplies for students at Malcolm X.



Malcolm X students enjoy a waterfall on the Cornell campus.

More GWAC Malcolm X Field Trips

The trip to Cornell was one of several field trips provided during the 2005-06 school year for Malcolm X girls by GWAC tutors and mentors. Other trips included a play at the Kennedy Center and snow tubing in Pennsylvania. Another special field trip was a combination of observing a bar association meeting and playing a jeopardy-like game with history content. GWAC arranged for a staff person from the Newseum to set up the game in a room near the meeting so that the field trip would be both educational and fun. Annually, GWAC also takes the girls from Malcolm X to a senior center near the school for year-end holiday caroling.

The GWAC program is very popular at Malcolm X. The school's assistant principal selects approximately 20 girls to participate in the annual program. If a girl moves out of the Malcolm X Elementary School area and has to drop out of the program, her place will be filled by one of 40 other girls on the waiting list.

Education Amendment Advances (cont'd)

If the amendment is approved on the 20th and again in a required second vote in early July, D.C. voters will have the opportunity to approve the amendment during the November election and make it part of the District's Charter, which is comparable to the constitutions of the 50 states.

The D.C. Council's action follows a May 22 hearing during which strong support for the amendment was voiced by nearly 20 public witnesses, D.C. Board of Education President Peggy Cooper Cafritz and D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams' administration.

The first public witness was Iris Toyer, who heads Parents United and the Committee's school partnership program. She said, "Parents United believes that all children should have a state-granted right to a high-quality public education, just as they do in every other state across the country."

Ben Wilson, former Co-chair of the Washington Lawyers' Committee and a partner at **Beveridge & Diamond**, said: "To everything, there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven... Now is the time to build up our schools here in the District of Columbia.... We will all be entering into a compact that will bind the Mayor, the City Council, the School Board, our principals—everyone to ensure that our children have a quality education. ... I urge you to take this challenge. We must decide that we are going to begin again with the strongest possible statement of a high-quality education for our children that will hold our city accountable."

Patrick Linehan, **Sidley Austin** attorney and a member of the team that crafted the amendment, addressed the issue of litigation: "It has always been our intent and our sincere hope that the creation of this right for the young people of the District would lead to the strong and courageous political leadership that is always necessary to reforming urban education, and not to litigation. After all, the expertise required for such reform lies with our Council, our Board of Education, our Superintendent, and our principals and teachers, and not with judges. However, the right we seek to create with



March 30 press conference to launch the Right to Education Amendment. L/R Darlene Allen, President, D.C. Congress of PTAs; Wade Henderson, Executive Director, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; Iris Toyer, Chair, Parents United and director of the Committee's school partnership program.

this Amendment will be without teeth if it cannot be enforced in court. Of course, the risk of lawsuits is no risk at all if the District government meets this new obligation to its young people. More importantly, however, this right is too important to withhold from our children just because of fears of lawsuits."

Charlotte Frazier, a seventh grader at Deal Junior High School, presented the student perspective: "I think that this amendment will be an important part of the teamwork that we need to make our schools better."

Representatives of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, both the local and National NAACP, and the National Council of La Raza presented strong, supportive statements on behalf of these organizations.

The campaign for the Right to Education amendment was launched on March 30 with a press conference hosted by Parents United. The press conference featured presentations by Iris Toyer of Parents United, Darlene Allen, president of the D.C. Congress of PTAs; Ron Flagg from Sidley Austin; Wade Henderson, Executive Director of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; and Jamin Raskin, constitutional law scholar and Professor of Law at American University's Washington College of Law. Less than a week after the press conference, nine members of the D.C. Council introduced the proposed amendment at the Council's April legislative session.

PARTNERSHIPS

Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld

Tyler Elementary School

Arent Fox

Randle Highlands Elementary School

Arnold & Porter

Garrison Elementary School

Baker & McKenzie

Payne Elementary School

Beveridge & Diamond

Birney Elementary School

Bingham McCutchen

Adams Elementary School

Bracewell & Giuliani

Van Ness Elementary School

Covington & Burling

Cardozo Senior High School

Dickstein Shapiro Morin & Oshinsky

Ellington School of the Arts

DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary

Bruce Monroe Elementary School;

Law Scout Program

Eastern, Dunbar and

Ellington Senior High Schools

Fannie Mae's Corporate Legal Dept.

Marie H. Reed Learning Center

Foley & Lardner

Wilkinson Elementary School

Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson

School Without Walls

Fulbright & Jaworski

Macfarland Middle School

Greater Washington Area Chapter -

Women Lawyers Division -

National Bar Association

Malcolm X Elementary School

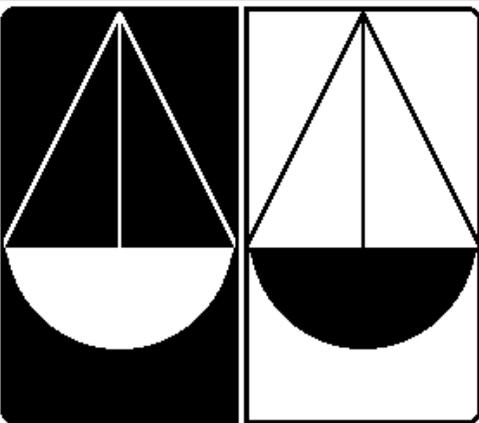
Health Right Inc.

H.D. Cooke Elementary School

Ferebee-Hope Elementary School

LaSalle Elementary School

Lincoln Middle School



F I R M S C H O O L S

Holland & Knight

Banneker Senior High School

Cleveland Elementary School

Howrey

Bancroft Elementary School

Kilpatrick Stockton

Sousa Middle School

McDermott, Will & Emery

Bowen Elementary School

McKenna Long & Aldridge

Stevens Elementary School

Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw

Gage-Eckington Elementary School

The Office of the Attorney General,

District of Columbia

R.H. Terrell Junior High School

Patton Boggs

Francis Junior High School

Pepper Hamilton

Stanton Elementary School

Reed Smith

Park View Elementary School

Sidley Austin

Thomson Elementary School

Spriggs & Hollingsworth

Backus Middle School

Stephoe & Johnson

Montgomery Elementary School

Sutherland Asbill & Brennan

Bell Multicultural Senior High School

U.S. Attorney's Office for the

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Amidon Elementary School

U.S. Courts for the D.C. Circuit

J.O. Wilson Elementary School

Verizon

Adams Elementary School

Washington Bar Association -

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Verizon Renovates, Stocks Adams Elementary Library

By Maggie Mansourkia*

Shortly after **Verizon** launched our new partnership with Adams Elementary School, we discovered that the library had been closed for years due to a lack of funds. So, we decided to give students at the school a new library.

We thought that we could complete the project in just a couple of weekends. But when we looked at the facility, it was a mess. The drywall was peeling as a result of a plumbing leak from the floor above. We decided that it did not make sense to put the books in a room where there was water damage. We held a meeting about the matter with D.C. Schools Superintendent Clifford Janey, who was instrumental in obtaining the funds needed to repair the room.

In the end, we convinced our corporate relations department to give us the staff and money to fix the room, put in furniture, and add the books. We also set up a computer lab in the library and provided needed equipment. We are very proud of the result.

* Maggie Mansourkia is Chief Privacy Counsel at Verizon Communications.

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