BIPARTISANSHIP PROPELS SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BILL THROUGH SENATE

Mayors Now Pressing House to Take Action

By Kevin McCarty

After successful Senate action on a bipartisan surface transportation renewal plan (S. 1813), Senator Barbara Boxer (CA), Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee (EPW), a key leader in the bipartisanship effort on the legislation, said, “It is a great day when the Senate, in an overwhelmingly bipartisan way, votes to save 1.8 million jobs and create up to 1 million more jobs.” The Senate voted 74-22 to approve the legislation on March 14.

“I call on the House of Representa-tives to take our bill, pass it, and send it to the President’s desk so that we can give a needed boost to our economic recovery and our aging infrastructure,” Boxer said.

Echoing the Chairman’s challenge to House Members, Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa said, “The nation’s may-ors are now calling on both parties in the House to put politics aside and pass

See TRANSPORT on page 9

Nutter Receives Riley Urban Design Leadership Award

USCM Vice President Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter, second left, receives Riley Design Award from left to right, USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa, New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. See Story on Page 4.

Villaraigosa, Bloomberg, Emanuel Highlight Mayoral Leadership Needed on Education Reform

Left to right, NBC’s Andrea Mitchell, USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa, New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. See Story on Page 4.
Chicago Mayor Emanuel talked about Chicago’s decision to give principals report cards. Since the decision to go public, Chicago has experienced an increase in enrolment in training programs for principals.

Mayor Bloomberg came on strong defending the report cards. “We have a saying, ‘In God We Trust,’ everyone else has to bring data.” He pushed hard on this issue. “If the test is can you read, yes, you should find out if they can read by testing them.” He went further, saying, “I know of nobody in this room that doesn’t get tested. You go to American University, you get tested.” He looked over at Andrea Mitchell and said, “You get tested by something called ratings. We get tested at the polls and with the press every single day. This argument that we shouldn’t find out whether we are doing a good job is ridiculous.”

You had to be impressed by our three largest city mayors. There they were – alone, and then with their school chiefs talking about our most treasured resource, our children, our future.

This national conversation about our school children and public education is what we need in the current Presidential debates this year.

I continue to be amazed at the vivid contrast when I see and hear mayors talking about the national and local issues that so many Americans find challenging every day and we hear nothing in the current Presidential debates about the real people issues. Let’s hope it gets better. The American people want more of the Villaraigosa/Bloomberg/Emmanuel brand of discourse. It’s real. People get it. Thanks to our three mayors of the largest great American cities who continue to stand up, speak out, and even more important, act boldly as advocates for our school children.

**Mayor Nutter Honored with Riley Award**

It was a grand evening here in Washington at the splendid Mellon Auditorium at the American Architectural Foundation’s Accent on Architecture Black Tie Gala, at which Charleston Mayor Joe Riley, Ron Bogle of AAF and I presented the Riley Award for Leadership in Urban Design to Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter.

The award is well earned for Mayor Nutter’s leadership in the adoption and implementation of the comprehensive Philadelphia 2035 planning design, the Green Works Philadelphia 2009 initiative to make Philadelphia the greenest city in the USA, the Delaware River, Waterfront, the North Broad Street Project creating $500 million in new development by Philadelphia Ballet, Temple University and other developers, and the Philadelphia Best of Green Schools recognition in 2011.

Mayor Nutter is leading by the way through that design matters. We commend and salute Mayor Nutter for his vision and leadership. It was a proud moment for me to be part of recognizing our Vice President and our mayor of the great city of Philadelphia. We want to hear and learn more about Philadelphia, and believe me, the good news is you will because Mayor Nutter becomes our President at our 80th Annual Meeting in Orlando coming up in June.

### World Cultural Economic Forum New Orleans May 2 to 4, New Orleans

From May 2 to 4, all mayors are urged to be in New Orleans. Host Mayor Mitch Landrieu is hosting, in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors, the 2012 World Cultural Economic Forum. WCEF will bring together USA mayors as well as mayors from across the world as they come together for discussion and “takeaway” best practices for increasing the impact their individual city’s cultural economy. Topics in three unique sessions are: The Cultural Economy, An Engine for Prosperous Cities, Supporting a Creative Workforce and using culture as a tool for increased quality of life and quality of place.

This World Forum takes place at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in New Orleans during the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, known commonly to music lovers as “JazzFest.” Conference President Villaraigosa, Host Mayor Landrieu and I look forward to seeing you in New Orleans May 2 to 4. For registration information contact Sarah Robertson at wcef@nola.org.
"Black Men Are Killing Black Men. There, I Said It."

By USCM Vice President Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter

As I joined tens of thousands of my fellow Philadelphians to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in January, a striking thought entered my mind.

In Dr. King's time, the biggest threat to a black man was that a white man, wearing a hood, would snatch him up off the street and take him away to beat him, shoot him,lynch him or burn him. The black man was not safe to walk the streets in many of our nation's cities. Today, in 2012, black men are still being snatched from the streets, snatched from their families and their children by individuals wearing hoods. Only this time the hooded person is not white, but black. Of the 316 people who were murdered in Philadelphia last year nearly 75 percent of those killed were black men. Around 80 percent of those doing the killing...black men.

Now, you might expect me to talk about this issue. I'm a black man, proud of my race, my history and my heritage. And as mayor of Philadelphia, the largest American city with an African American mayor, I feel an obligation to step forward and talk about these issues. However, this is a problem in cities all throughout America and that's why mayors from across this country -- Black, White, Hispanic, Asian -- stand united and are putting this issue on the national agenda. In America's big cities the majority of homicide victims are African American men, the majority of whom are killed by other African American men. This is a national epidemic, and there needs to be a national conversation on this topic.

If the Ku Klux Klan came to Philadelphia and killed almost 300 black men in one year, my city would be on lockdown. The U.S. Justice Department would be called in. There would be a federal investigation. Congress would hold hearings. And yet I don't hear a serious, rational, non-hysterical conversation from anyone addressing this epidemic.

This merits a national level conversation because we face a problem that affects us all. Yes, it obviously has a particular impact on the black community, but the repercussions are felt across all sections of society. In Philadelphia, I spend one-third of my budget on the "criminal justice complex" on catching, trying and locking up thousands of black men every year. These are dollars that I can't spend on schools, recreation centers, libraries, after-school activities or job training programs. It's just a waste.

But more importantly, this violence is tearing at the fabric of our communities, pulling us apart at the seams, pok-
Mayors Applaud Duncan for Opening “Race to the Top” Competition to Large School Districts

By Megan Cardiff

Conference of Mayors President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa joined New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at American University in Washington, D.C. March 2 for a forum entitled “Education Now: Cities at the Forefront of Reform.”

At the forum, hosted by NBC’s Andrea Mitchell, the mayors engaged in a dialogue with Duncan regarding their successes and challenges in the education system in their respective cities. The leaders touched on important national education issues including school management, accountability, strengthening the teaching profession, and ways to expand access to a high-quality education and improve student outcomes — not only in cities, but across the nation.

“The three school districts represented here are bigger than most states,” said Villaraigosa. “In fact, if you took our collective students, I think they’re bigger than the number of students of some 44 states.” Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago—America’s three largest cities—are home to a combined 2.5 million schoolchildren, 77 percent of whom are poor and 88 percent of whom are minority.

Duncan announced that large school districts are now eligible to compete with states for Race to the Top grant funds, a decision supported by Villaraigosa, who also pushed for the ability of individual school districts to be freed from the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act during the forum.

“Education, fundamentally, is an investment; it’s not an expense,” Duncan said. “We can’t just invest in the status quo, we have to invest in reform. But anyone who thinks education is expensive, I would say: ‘Try ignorance.’”

During the second half of the event, the Superintendent from each city joined the mayors and the Secretary, and all forum participants stressed the importance of accountability and evaluation systems for teachers, principals, students and national and local leaders.

“In the end we really need accountability data for the parents. The arrogance of the bureaucrats that say parents shouldn’t have data to know what to do with their kids is just astounding. We’re fighting through that. Everybody talks about accountability and evaluation systems across this country. It’s getting the data to those who need it to make decisions,” stated Bloomberg.

Emanuel highlighted Chicago’s policy of publicizing the district principals’ report cards, pointing out that since this procedure was initiated the city has seen an increase in enrollment by principals in training programs. He announced that Chicago plans to pay a $25,000 signing bonus for up to 50 new principals to serve in low-performing schools. The city also plans to conduct a nationwide search for principals and provide a $5,000 bonus to any current Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Administration leader who recruits a high-performing principal. The money to support Emanuel’s effort will be raised privately.

“The system was set up for adults – kids were never in mind,” Emanuel said. “We need to have a truly accountable principal, a motivated teacher, and a parent who believes and is involved in their child’s education in and out of school.”

All three mayors are at the forefront of education reform in the United States and have pursued similar avenues to improve student learning, reducing bureaucracy, and providing parents with increased information to make better informed decisions when it comes to their child’s education.

Philadelphia Mayor Nutter Receives Riley Urban Design Leadership Award

By Tom McClaron

“Design Matters, Cities Matter” was the mantra of Conference of Mayors Vice President Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter in receiving the Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Award for Leadership in Urban Design, co-sponsored by The American Architectural Foundation (AAF) and The United States Conference of Mayors, the award was presented to Nutter at the 23rd Annual Accent on Architecture Gala on March 9 in Washington (DC).

Presenting the award to Nutter were past Conference of Mayors President Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., (for whom the award is named), Conference of Mayors CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran, and AAF President and CEO Ron Bogle. The Riley Award was first presented to former Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley. Nutter is the second recipient of the award. A video highlighting Nutter’s accomplishments was produced and is available for viewing at the Conference of Mayors’ website: usmayors.org.

In selecting Nutter for the award, AAF and the Conference of Mayors emphasized the design leadership that the mayor has demonstrated in transforming Philadelphia into a city focused on smart design and sustainability. Highlights of the mayor’s accomplishments include the newly adopted Philadelphia 2035 Comprehensive Plan, GreenWorks Philadelphia, the Delaware River Waterfront project, and the transformation of North Broad Street.

Approximately 400 guests attended the black-tie gala. In addition to Nutter, other honorees included the U.S. Green Building Council, the architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and the office work space design firm, Haworth.
Mayors Landrieu, Villaraigosa Invite You to Join Them for World Cultural Economic Forum

May 2–4 in New Orleans

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa, President  
New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu

Registration: Visit the World Cultural Economic Forum website at: wcefneworleans.com

For additional registration information, contact Sarah Robertson at wcef@nola.org.

For meeting information, contact Tom McClimon at mcclimon@usmayors.org or Jocelyn Bogen at jbogen@usmayors.org.
National League of Cities: Nutter Calls for National Violence Reduction Strategy, Job Creation

By Laura DeKoven Waxman and Ed Somers

Conference of Mayors Vice President Philadelphia Mayor Michael A. Nutter was an active participant in the National League of Cities (NLC) Washington (DC) meeting March 10-12, stressing the shared priorities of the two national organizations.

Led by Bluffton (IN) Mayor Ted Ellis, NLC has made its top priorities protecting the Community Development Block Grant, passing a surface transportation bill, enacting legislation to allow for the collection of online sales taxes, and workforce training and education.

Rounding out the NLC leadership are First Vice President Avondale (AZ) Mayor Marie Lopez Rogers and Second Vice President Saint Paul Mayor Chris Coleman.

Cities United

At a special session to discuss the high incidence of violent deaths among African American males and ways to reduce it, Nutter called for national level attention to this issue and suggested it provides an opportunity for municipal leaders to share in the solution to a common problem occurring in cities across the nation. Entitled Cities United: Building Communities to Reduce Violent Deaths Among Black Men and Boys Convening, the session was held March 10-11 in conjunction with the NLC meeting.

Nutter decried how little attention the deaths of African American males receives, commenting that if it were any other group more would be done about the problem. “This is a serious issue which requires serious attention, and we have to get real,” he commented. “What is the nation’s violence reduction strategy?” he asked.

Joining Nutter at this session were Jackson (MS) Mayor Harvey Johnson and Selma Mayor George Evans, council members and key staff from several cities, federal officials, experts in the field, foundation executives, and young people.

Much attention was paid to treating violence as a public health issue and employing public health procedures to reduce it. Ceasefire Executive Director Dr. Gary Slutkin commented that violence behaves like any other infectious disease and should be treated in the same way. This, Slutkin explained, involves: 1) identifying and detecting the problem; 2) interrupting, intervening and reducing risk; and 3) changing behavior and norms. Dr. Linda Degutis, Director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, described the various activities her agency supports with its $15 million appropriation for youth violence prevention.

CDBG, Transportation, Jobs

Nutter was also invited by NLC to bring greetings to its opening plenary session, and to address a morning breakfast celebrating diversity.

In his plenary remarks, Nutter again stressed the need for a national discussion and federal response to the problem of violent deaths among black youth. Nutter also quoted New York Times columnist and author Thomas Friedman, who spoke at the recent Conference of Mayors Winter Meeting, and said, “What ails Americans today, fundamentally, is that we’ve lost our ability to act collectively, and all the problems we face require collective action.”

Nutter said, “Maintaining the Community Development Block Grant program will require collective action, especially since it seems to be the victim of a slow death by a thousand cuts.”

He also called on Congress to act collectively to pass a surface transportation bill, and to focus on all issues related to job creation, including prisoner reentry.

Nutter thanked the gathered city leaders for their work on behalf of America’s cities, and pledged to continue the strong partnership between the Conference of Mayors and NLC.

Register Now!

MAYORS FOOD POLICY TASK FORCE MEETING

April 18-19, 2012 • Boston

Discussion Topics Include:
• Mayoral Best Practices
• 2012 Farm Bill
• Effective Strategies in food retail and job creation to revitalize communities/neighborhood

Registration Information:
usmayors.org/foodpolicy

For more information, contact Assistant Executive Director Crystal Swann at cswann@usmayors.org or 202-861-6707
Bayview Hunters Point area citizens, youth groups and community volunteers restored and refreshed the Quesada Gardens median strip during the March 14 local dedication event. The Quesada Gardens Initiative will expand an existing community building project to create a new gardening education area and a public gathering space for food swapping, distribution, and vending.

This grant program is the result of a partnership between the Conference of Mayors and the American Beverage Association with the goal supporting and/or enhancing mayors’ ongoing childhood obesity prevention programs in their cities. The partnership with the Conference of Mayors builds upon long-standing work by the non-alcoholic beverage industry to support nutrition education for children, strengthen communities and empower consumers. It is another public-private partnership dedicated to making a real difference.
A group of national organizations, including the Conference of Mayors, are urging Congressional members to sign letters that would increase funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the HOME Investment Partnerships programs in fiscal year 2013. The group, called the CDBG Coalition, is requesting Congress to approve at least $3.3 billion in formula funding for CDBG and $1.6 billion for HOME.

Efforts of the CDBG Coalition are presently focused on getting congressional members to sign three “Dear Colleague” letters, two (one each in the House and Senate) in support of CDBG, and one in the House in support of HOME. Representative Robert Brady (PA) is circulating a letter calling for CDBG to be funded at $3.466 billion in formula funding, which is what the House approved last year at the subcommittee level. The letter is now closed for signatures, but more than 130 House representatives signed the letter, which is 50 more representatives than signed a similar letter last year. Senator Patrick Leahy (VT) is circulating a letter calling for $3.3 billion in formula funding for CDBG. The deadline for signatures is Monday, March 19. Representative Marcia Fudge (OH) is circulating a letter requesting that HOME be funded at $1.6 billion in FY 2013, equal with its FY 2011 funding level. The deadline for House members to sign the HOME letter was extended to March 15. Conference of Mayors CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran sent an alert to all mayors requesting that they contact their Congressional delegations to sign the letters of support.

In order to fund CDBG, HOME, and a number of other housing programs at increased levels in FY 2013, it will be necessary for the House and Senate subcommittees responsible for approving funding levels to have more money or an increased allocation. To achieve this goal, the CDBG Coalition has also been working on a letter that more than 170 organizations have signed, including the Conference of Mayors, that calls on the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to increase the 302(b) allocation to the House and Senate committees responsible for funding community development, housing, and transportation programs to the highest possible level in fiscal year 2013.

As the activity continues in Congress, it is vital that as much as possible be done at the local level to focus attention on CDBG and HOME. Cities are encouraged to participate in this year’s National Community Development Week, April 9-14. Activities highlighting CDBG and HOME projects, with tours and groundbreaking ceremonies for Congressional delegations are suggested activities during National CD Week. Cities are encouraged to develop YouTube videos of projects, beneficiaries assisted by the programs, and Congressional visits to CDBG and HOME projects.
a job-creating transportation bill that includes America Fast Forward."

Villaraigosa praised the bipartisan cooperation that underpinned the Senate’s successful action on the $109 billion, two-year renewal plan, called “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (MAP-21).

“The bipartisan effort to create jobs and speed expansion of our transportation systems took a major step forward today with Senate passage of a surface transportation bill that includes America Fast Forward,” he said. “Sen. Barbara Boxer and Sen. James Inhofe showed remarkable bipartisan leadership on this bill.”

Attention Shifts to House Leaders

As Senators gave final approval to S. 1813, as amended, their House counterparts were in recess for a district work period. House leaders have not provided details on their path forward on the legislation, following numerous attempts to reach consensus within the majority caucus on a renewal strategy. There are staff reports that House leaders are still hoping to pass a 5-year bill, with a target of mid-April as the earliest date for unveiling a proposal.

As such, another extension of the current transportation law is being prepared as the March 31 expiration deadline approaches. While an extension is certain, the duration of the extension is not, as Senators press House leaders to embrace their bipartisan proposal and House leaders seek more time to find votes for an alternative package.

Senate Leaders Deny Begich Opportunity to Offer His Local Amendment

In working toward consensus on floor amendments, Senate leaders barred Senator Mark Begich (AK) from offering his amendment to restore the local area surface transportation law for two fiscal years (through Fiscal Year 2013), providing inflation-adjusted funding for highway, transit and safety programs. In contrast to an earlier version of the House bill (H.R. 7), S. 1813 preserves the 30-year commitment to highway and transit program funding, ensuring that all surface transportation needs rise and fall together, an important commitment for many reasons, especially now as communities brace for another run-up in gasoline prices.

TIFIA Receives Large Funding Boost

The Senate legislation raises funding commitments to the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA), from about $122 million to $1 billion annually. This significant TIFIA expansion has been a top priority of Conference President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa.

Under S. 1813, larger metropolitan areas (serving one million or more people) will have more certainty over funds provided to them, with formula distributed funds under the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program and a revamped Transportation Enhancements program. Increasing the share of funds that are distributed by formula directly to local areas (i.e., suballocated) has been a top priority of the Conference of Mayors for more than a decade (explaining why the Conference pressed so hard for adoption of the Begich amendment).

In a separate action, the Senate adopted an amendment that directs states to ensure that “off-system” bridge repair needs receive an annual investment level equal to what was apportioned in Fiscal Year 2009 for off-system bridges under the federal Bridge Program, which was first established in 1978 and is slated for elimination under S. 1813.

In addition to providing for the extension of federal transportation excise taxes and other provisions to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent through the end of the next fiscal year, other provisions were included as part of the tax title of S. 1813. For example, the legislation restores parity between parking and commute benefits, which lapsed December 31, 2011. Currently, employees can exclude only $125 monthly for public transit and vanpool benefits, although $240 per month can be excluded for parking. As of December 31, 2011, both were capped at $250 per month. S. 1813 reinstates parity at $240 per month for transit and parking benefits through December 31, 2012.

In another action to promote increased infrastructure investment, as the Conference of Mayors has urged for many years, tax-exempt private activity tax bonds issued after the date of enactment and before January 1, 2018 for wastewater and water facility projects are exempt state private activity bond volume caps.

S. 1813 also changes the rules pertaining to the depreciation and amortization of highways subject to long-term leases, provisions that will change the current environment for highway leasebacks, such as those previously undertaken by Chicago and Indiana.
80TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

Orlando
June 13-16

Registration is now open at usmayors.org.
Preview the draft agenda online.

Resolutions submission deadline for member mayors:
May 14 at 5:00 pm EDT

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa, President
Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Host

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SIEMENS
Villaraigosa Featured at POLITICO Forum

At right, USCM President Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa speaks with POLITICO's Mike Allen during a wide-ranging interview on topics including transportation and his new role as Chair of the Democratic National Convention. The POLITICO Playbook Breakfast took place in Washington (DC) March 7.

This Week Online...

• View the latest information from the Mayors Climate Protection Center.
• Read how mayors are making news around the nation in the "Mayors in the Media" section.

... and so much more!

USCM on the WEB

usmayors.org

Calendar of Events

(Updated 03/14/12)

April 11-12

April 18-19
Mayors Food Policy Task Force Meeting, Boston. Contact: Crystal Swann (202-861-6707)

May 2-4
World Cultural Economic Forum (WCEF), New Orleans. Contact: Jocelyn Bogen (202-861-6727)

June 13-16
80th Annual Conference of Mayors, Orlando. Contact: Carol Edwards (202-293-7330)

For updates or changes, check our web site at usmayors.org

MAYORS BUSINESS COUNCIL

Member Profile

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For more Business Council profiles, visit the Conference of Mayors website at usmayors.org/buscouncil

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Best Practices

Richmond City Youth Learn Through Their Own Voices

By Richmond (VA) Mayor Dwight C. Jones

The challenges of Richmond’s urban school system are all too common around the country. A mix of outdated buildings, crowded classrooms and retreating budgets erects barriers to the quality of experience we all desire for our public students and teachers alike. One burden decreed by cities nationwide is the decline in writing and writing training in public schools.

This breach caught the attention of several Richmond residents. In answer, they formed a non-profit organization geared to providing programs to support writing and writing instruction in Richmond high schools. Their story exemplifies how a small group of citizens can band together to help an urban community redirect its schools towards a better future.

Since 2008, The Podium Foundation has launched several literacy initiatives to directly influence how our public school students prepare for this competitive world. Prior to Podium’s founding four years ago, Richmond’s nine high schools provided its 4,500 students with no student-run newspapers, literary journals, or websites for students to share their writing and art. Yet, in every surrounding county and several local private schools, these programs for extracurricular communication were and remain ubiquitous. When local author, David L. Robbins, and then Special Programs Director for the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office, Lindy Bumgarner, approached the City of Richmond and Richmond Public Schools (RPS) about starting a school-system wide program to publish an annual literary journal, Podium came into being. Initially, Podium launched in four city high schools.

Embraced by the city and RPS, this public-private partnership has given the

young people in our public school system a true podium from which to share their voices and creative spirits. And what we’ve further discovered through this effort is that there is nothing that can inspire young people to grow and learn more than the positive example of their own contemporaries. Further, helping young people to develop and exercise their skills in communication are irreducible elements for success in our modern culture and can help in addressing any number of social challenges that young people face; who, in many instances just need a way to effectively express themselves.

In its inaugural year, Podium developed after-school writing programs to produce the first annual Podium Journal. Structured on the practice of critical thinking, artful communication, and teamwork, the programs simulated a professional environment. Student Podium Clubs were tasked with promoting the journal, gathering submissions from their teachers and peers, and then selecting the pieces they best felt represented their schools. Also, design students participated in the final graphic design of the journal, plus selected all artwork to be published from hundreds of submissions. These design students worked with college student mentors and publishing professionals to receive hands-on training and guidance.

The first Podium Journal was a creative and educational breakthrough, promoting an expansion the following year to all of our nine city high schools. After 450 submissions were collected in year one, Podium received over 1200 pieces of poetry, short-fiction, non-fiction memoirs, opinion, and visual arts for each of the following two editions.

As it gained traction among students and teachers, Podium’s programs and reach expanded each year. Set to launch in early 2012, Podium Online is a quarterly e-journal featuring creative and persuasive writing, multimedia, poetry, and art created by RPS students. With both the print journal and Podium Online, more publishing slots are available, increasing the opportunities for students to see their work widely displayed, and to receive the thrill, notoriety, and confidence that comes with being published.

In 2010, Podium expanded its programs to directly include educators. The promotion of writing in and outside the classroom was rendered more difficult when in the hands of teachers who were themselves less than comfortable with their own written voices. Podium addressed this need by conducting the first T3 (Teaching the Teachers) Academy, a midsummer weeklong professional development conference for middle and high school teachers. The T3 allows 30 local educators per session the opportunity to focus on their own creative communication skills. Endorsed by RPS, the conference invited a range of journalists, authors, and university professors to inspire and guide teachers on tactics and techniques for writing in the classroom. After the second T3 session in 2011, the conference received rave feedback from participating teachers. The upcoming T3 for 2012 already has a waiting list.

Another highly promising initiative of Podium is Inspiration², where the literary journal as produced by the students is used by teachers inside their classrooms in a myriad of ways, including resource material, supplemental texts, even as quizzes and exam material. Lessons in art, poetry, story telling, and non-fiction are taught through the minds and works of the students’ peers in their own schools and communities. Inspiration² elevates the work of young artists to the realm of academic study, putting them on the same level as the traditional literary canon.

I’m so proud that Richmond is home to this innovative public-private partnership that is focusing on how to promote creativity and literacy in urban school systems. Judging by Podium’s effectiveness with students and teachers alike, we believe this is an approach that can work for any similarly challenged public school system. Engaged citizens working with dedicated education professionals can roll back many of the disadvantages to our youth visited by budget cuts and the decline in arts and writing education. I’m confident in suggesting that The Podium Foundation has provided Richmond high school students with the finest system-wide literary journal in the nation.