

Urban Advocate

CUBE CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

Michelle Healy

The September weather was spectacular, and the energy was electric as a sold-out crowd of school board members and other education leaders gathered in Chicago for the 2023 CUBE (Council of Urban Boards of Education) Annual Conference.

Legendary rapper, actor, and author Ice-T, who delivered a frank and moving closing keynote, described the 55th CUBE event as “the largest and strongest in-person conference for school board members focused on urban trends in the country.” This year’s convening continued CUBE’s mission to highlight the evolving strategies that school leaders are implementing to address the unique challenges in urban education.

In her opening keynote presentation, Rosa Rivera-McCutchen, a professor of administration and supervision at New York’s CUNY Hunter College, challenged school leaders to use their “power, position, and access” to disrupt existing inequalities and provide students with the “radical care” needed so that they can be academically successful.

NSBA’s Equity Councils—NHC (National Hispanic Council), NBC (National Black Council), and AIAN (American Indian and Alaska Native Council)—were featured during the conference’s memorable Stories from the Field session.

During his State of Urban Education address, CUBE Steering Committee Chair Gill Garrett urged school board members to own their role as “the leaders of leaders” and stand in the gap to fight for children. “Don’t leave another student behind,” he said. “Find a way.”

PHOTOS BY ILIAN RIVERA



NSBA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CEO VERJEANA MCCOTTER-JACOBS WELCOMED ATTENDEES TO CUBE ANNUAL 2023.



CUBE ANNUAL 2023 BEGAN WITH A STOP AT THE BUSY REGISTRATION DESK.



ATTENDEES WERE IN GREAT SPIRITS AS THEY BOARDED AN EARLY MORNING BUS TO THIS YEAR'S EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SITE VISIT THAT FOCUSED ON A STEAM EQUITY INITIATIVE.



CUBE CHAIR GILL GARRETT AND NSBA PRESIDENT KRISTI SWETT WERE AMONG THE GUESTS WELCOMED BY DOLTON WEST SCHOOL DISTRICT 148 BOARD PRESIDENT LARRY LAWRENCE.



JR. ROTC MEMBERS FROM RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL, DISTRICT 227, IN MATTESON, ILLINOIS, PREPARED FOR THE PRESENTATION OF COLORS.



AFTER DELIVERING HIS STATE OF URBAN EDUCATION ADDRESS, GARRETT SAT DOWN FOR A ONE-ON-ONE DISCUSSION WITH McCOTTER-JACOBS.



CUBE ANNUAL PRESENTS A VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR NETWORKING WITH COLLEAGUES DEDICATED TO IMPROVING URBAN EDUCATION.



THE SOUTHLAND COLLEGE PREP CHOIR FROM RICHTON PARK, ILLINOIS, ENCHANTED THE AUDIENCE.



A STUDENT BOARD MEMBER ATTENDED A SESSION FOR FIRST-TIME CONFERENCE ATTENDEES.



THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE, ATTENDEES VISITED WITH A HOST OF EXHIBITORS.



THE MIGHTY MARCHING MACHINE FROM RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227 PUT ON A ROUSING SHOW.



STUDENT PARTICIPANTS IN PDK INTERNATIONAL'S EDUCATORS RISING PROGRAM SHARED INSIGHTS ON STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH.



STEPHANIE THOMPSON, THE FIRST NAVAHO FEMALE PRESIDENT OF NEW MEXICO'S FARMINGTON MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION, DISCUSSED HER PATH TO EDUCATION ADVOCACY.



CUBE CONFERENCE HOST MICAH ALI INTRODUCED U.S. ARMY BRIGADIER GENERAL AMANDA I. AZUBUIKE.



AN ILLINOIS-AREA STUDENT WAS PRESENTED WITH A \$152,000 ROTC SCHOLARSHIP.



DR. JONATHAN HODGES OF NEW JERSEY'S PATERSON SCHOOL BOARD, RECEIVED THE BENJAMIN ELIJAH MAYS AWARD.



EDUCATOR BRENDA LIZ CEPEDA, AND HER HUSBAND, DRUMMER SAUL PEÑALOSA, DISCUSSED TEACHING STUDENTS IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS ABOUT FOLKLORE MÚSICA BOMBA AND AFRO-PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE.



KYRON LOGGINS AND DESMOND PARÉ INTRODUCED THE HIDDEN GENIUS PROJECT, A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM.



MISSOURI'S FERGUSON-FLORISSANT SCHOOL BOARD WAS RECOGNIZED AS THE 2023 CUBE DISTRICT OF THE YEAR.



DURING A CONVERSATION WITH NSBA'S MCCOTTER-JACOBS, RAPPER, ACTOR, AND AUTHOR ICE-T DISCUSSED THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING TRANSPARENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WHEN DISCUSSING THE LIFE HE LIVED "ON THE STREETS" AND WHAT HE HAS LEARNED.

We are the leaders of leaders

Gill Garrett



STUDENT AMBASSADORS AT THE LINCOLN SCHOOL, DOLTON WEST SCHOOL DISTRICT 148, ILLINOIS.

PHOTO BY ILIAN RIVERA



Gill Garrett

CUBE Steering Committee Chair and the president of Michigan's Pontiac School District Board of Education

After a Thursday morning visit to Illinois' Dolton West School District 148, site of September's 2023 CUBE Annual Conference experiential learning visit, I knew I had to change the remarks I had planned to deliver later in the day during my State of Urban Education address.

Students at the K-8 district's Lincoln School, who escorted their CUBE guests on tour, proudly wore

shirts that identified them as Student Ambassadors. They confidently bridged the gap and welcomed us into their home.

An ambassador led me down a hallway, pointing out a first-grade classroom here, a second-grade classroom there, and so on. At the end of one hallway, she guided me to the food services staff and introduced the people who prepare her school meals. It struck me that the student ambassadors were not omitting any-

one as they highlighted who made their school community work. That left me thinking: Why are school boards still leaving out people who are a part of their communities? And why are we still leaving children behind?

To discuss the state of urban education, we must start talking about us: We're the state; we are the policymakers. We are the people who say we are going to approve this budget to make sure that this or that program is included. How did we forget that we are in communities to take care of each other? When will we stop coming to conferences and saying the problem is "them"?

This summer, I listened to author Stephen Covey speak at the NSBA Summer Leadership Seminar, and his words resonated with me: "You are leaders of leaders. You are the leader of the leaders—the administrators, the superintendents, the people who run the schools."

As board members, we're used to getting blamed for every unpopular decision. No matter where the decision came from or who said it, ultimately, the responsibility falls on the board.

Well, I need you to start putting your chest back and your shoulders up, and as the professionals that you are, say, "Yes, that's the decision we as a board made." I want you to "say it with your chest," as my grandfather used to say. "Yes, this is the position we adopted. Yes, I'm the leader." As school board members, you are inspired, inspirational, and trustworthy leaders. You are the leaders of the leaders. You're it. And we collectively must run things together.

I know that you are working hard, attending all the state representative meetings, participating on a dozen or more community committees, in addition to the school board. All that work and involvement does not stop community members from coming to you for the resources and information that they need. And why should it? We are the leaders of leaders.

Our most important job is to ensure that every child, regardless of where he or she lives, has access to a quality education. These are all our babies, no matter how they come to our schools.

I don't care if I can't speak their language. That's my baby.

I don't care if they stutter. That's my baby.

I don't care if they walk with a limp. That's my baby.

I don't care if their mother didn't teach them how to read. That's my baby.

When are we going to take responsibility for all the babies who walk into our schools? Do you think that's just the superintendent's job? Newsflash: As leaders of leaders, that's our job.

No matter how our babies are coming to us, they are coming to us. No matter the conditions that you must send them back to, you have to give them more than the condition that they are in.

Take advantage of the situation. Negotiate the terms. But don't leave another student behind. Don't let another student come to your district and be without. Find a way. Let today be your start in finding that way.

(This article is adapted from Garrett's CUBE Annual State of Urban Education address.)

Gill Garrett (gill.garrett@pontiacschools.org) is the 2023-25 chair of the CUBE Steering Committee and president of Michigan's Pontiac School District Board of Education.



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About CUBE

The Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) is an integral NSBA program whose mission is to champion educational equity for ALL children, while recognizing that historically underserved, underrepresented, and economically disadvantaged children require the added attention and support of policymakers.