

*A Black Alliance for Educational Options Publication*

# Our Voice, Our Choice

SPRING 2009

National Office Hires  
New Director

Two New Charters to  
Open in Fall

Board Members Rally  
for DC Opportunity  
Scholarships

McGriff joins NAPCS  
Board

500 Attend Community  
Dinner

GA BAEO holds  
Education Forum

Fuller Speaks at  
GA Charter School  
Conference

MCBAEO Names New  
President

Philly BAEO Hosts  
Training

LA BAEO Conducts  
Community Outreach

200 Parents attend  
Ohio BAEO School  
Expo to cover



Black Alliance for Educational Options



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**EDITOR**

Felice Green

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**

Eileen DeLoughery

**SUBMISSIONS BY**

Darlene Callands  
Tracie Craft  
Diona McLucas  
Ericka Murphy  
Gerard Robinson

**DESIGNER**

DeVigal Design

**SUBMISSIONS**

To submit articles or photos, contact  
Felice Green at (202) 429-2236 or  
felice@baeo.org

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888 16th Street NW, Suite 800  
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202.429.2236  
www.baeo.org

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Greetings BAEO members and allies,



On behalf of the board, staff and members of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), I am pleased to share our first newsletter of 2009.

The inauguration of the first Black President of the United States has changed the political landscape of America as well as broadened our national dialogue about school reform. President Obama's numerous references to using public charter schools as a tool to fix our nation's education system, and rewarding quality teachers who produce results, are heartwarming examples of his commitment to parental options. BAEO has supported charter schools since 2000, so it is refreshing to hear President Obama use his political capital to push this important issue. At the same time President Obama seeks the expansion of public school options, some members of Congress seek to put an end to private school options, most particularly the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program.

Congress created this program in 2003 to provide a much-needed opportunity scholarship in an amount up to \$7,500 to low-income and working-class families who live in Washington, DC. In 2009, approximately 1,715 low-income students—mostly Black and Latino/a—attend 49 private schools located in the District of Columbia. In fact, some scholarship students attend school with President Obama's two daughters as Sidwell Friends. Although President Obama has not come out publically in favor of vouchers as strongly as he has for charters, I was encouraged to hear U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan say that he has no desire to see the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program close. However, the battle for its survival rests with the elected officials of the legislative branch of government—as does the life-line for most parental options in America.

As the nation looks to its first Black President for hope and change in American education, I encourage you to remain relentless in our pursuit to put parental options above party affiliation or legislative gamesmanship. Because in the end, no matter what person or political party controls the White House we must not allow our children's education to take place in the Out House. Parental options—not politics as usual—remains our aim.

In Service to Families and Children,

Gerard Robinson  
*President*



**CHAIR'S MESSAGE**

Dear BAEO Family and Friends,

For years there has been discussion about the importance of developing bi-partisan support for the parent choice movement. Our friends in Florida recognized this need several years ago and have been extremely successful in bringing Black Democrats on board to support the corporate tax credit program. The continuing success in expanding the tax credit program in Pennsylvania is attributable to the fact, that from its inception, the program has benefitted from strong support from both parties.

The Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) in Washington, DC would not have been possible without the firm support of three key Democrats—the Mayor (Anthony Williams), the Chair of the Education Committee of the City Council (Kevin Chavous) and the President of the School Board (Peggy Cafritz)—along with Republican Secretary of Education (Rod Paige) and the bi-partisan support of the Congress.

So, progress is being made, but there is still much more work to be done. No place is this more apparent than Washington DC, because as of the writing of this message, the program is in grave jeopardy. Unfortunately, we do not today have the strong, unwavering support from the key Black elected officials such as the Mayor that existed when the program was authorized. This, coupled with the concerted effort of the Democratic leadership in the Congress to kill the program, has led to the very real possibility that the program will end after the 2009-2010 school year.

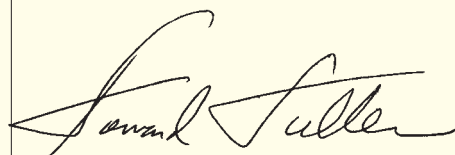
President Obama said he wants to keep programs that work and end programs that do not. This is an example of a program that works. It works on two levels: First, it provides a choice for low-income and working-class parents in Washington DC. It gives them a small measure of the kind of power that both the President and the Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are rightfully exercising for their own children. Second, there is evidence that there are children who are benefitting educationally because of the existence of these scholarships.

Secretary Duncan is on record supporting keeping the program alive for the current students. I think he is a friend of the children we are committed to saving. I thank him for his support for maintaining the kids who are currently in the program. But I strongly disagree with his contention that “vouchers are not the answer for the long term.” I strongly disagree with his Department’s assessment of the results of the Longitudinal Study of the OSP. I strongly disagree with his view that no new students should be allowed to enroll in the program.

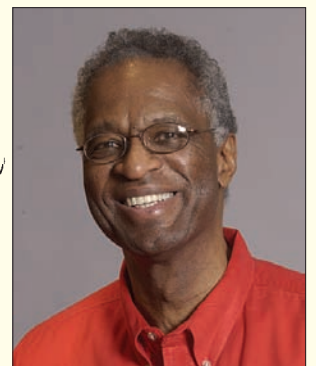
The Secretary and the President have both used the power of their economic status to exercise choice in making the decisions where to send their own children to school. I do not believe that either are hypocrites. But, by being unwilling to support continuing the program they open themselves up to be put in exactly that category. It pains me to see them being attacked in this way. But, to be truthful, it pains me more to see children in the District being denied the educational opportunity that the Opportunity Scholarship Program affords them.

This battle is not about ideology and philosophy. It is an issue of social justice. There comes a time when we all have to stand for something, no matter what the consequences. This is one of those times. We understand that in the end Congress may kill this program, but it is critical for the Secretary and the President to be on record as having taken the side of the disenfranchised. They need to stand with us for the right thing—**Giving low-income and working-class families the power to choose the best educational options for their children.**

The Struggle Continues,



Howard Fuller  
*Chair*



## NATIONAL NEWS



Jacqueline Cooper  
Director of Strategic  
Initiatives

## National Office Hires New Director

Jacqueline Cooper, a lifetime member and longtime volunteer, has been named the new Director of Strategic Initiatives. Cooper will report directly to the President. She will be responsible for the design and implementation of a management system that clarifies strategy, optimizes data, and supports the organization's overall strategy. Cooper has 19 years of experience as a banker and business owner with expertise in strategic planning, business development, business administration and marketing. Cooper also worked 11 years in the banking industry at JPMorgan Chase. In 2003, the Hudson County Chamber of Commerce presented Cooper with its Gateway County Award, which recognizes new businesses for contributing to economic growth. For the past six months, she has worked for BAEO as a consultant in the role of Special Assistant to the President. She earned a BA in economics from Bryn Mawr College and an MBA in finance and accounting from New York University's Stern School of Business.

## Two New Charters to Open in Fall

The Gates Small High School Project team succeeded in getting two charter school applications approved for the 2009-2010 school year. This fall Eastern University in Philadelphia, PA and Madison Preparatory in Baton Rouge, LA will enroll high school students.

Team members also partnered with the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and The Big Picture Company to conduct a Critical Friends Group and Coaching for Educational Equity training for Eastern University staff.

### School updates

The Boys' Latin of Philadelphia basketball team made it to the championship invitational, but could not pull off a win. Two students from the school came in Second and Third place in the Moore College of Art and Design Youth Art Contest, and six students were selected to the National Black MBA Association's youth program.

The High School for the Recording Arts-New York (HSRA-NY) worked on its charter application for resubmission to open a charter school in 2010.

## Board Members Rally for DC Opportunity Scholarships

Board members **Kevin Chavous** and **Virginia Walden Ford** have been in trenches in the District urging Congress to save the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program. The program was enacted in 2004 and provides scholarships for low-income children to schools their parents' choose. This school year, 1,715 children are enrolled in the program. Chavous and Walden Ford have appeared on local and national networks and published op-eds in major daily newspapers about the benefits of quality educational options for low-income children.

## McGriff joins NAPCS Board

Deborah McGriff, National Board Member and Symposium Planning Committee Chair, was voted unanimously to the Board of Directors for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. McGriff is a partner at NewSchools Venture Fund, where she focuses on investment strategy, quality teaching, and management assistance to the firm's portfolio ventures. She has been committed to transforming the lives of underserved urban school students for almost four decades.



Deborah McGriff  
Symposium Chair

## 500 attend Community Dinner

The DC Parents for School Choice (DCPSC) and the DC BAEO Mobilization team members jointly hosted the 7th annual School Choice Community Dinner in February. More than 500 parents, children and parental choice supporters attended the dinner to honor DC parents and children.

**CHAPTER AND MOBILIZATION NEWS**

## GA BAEO holds Education Forum

Georgia BAEO participated in a community education forum at Morehouse College in Atlanta. David Morgan, GA BAEO Mobilization Site Coordinator, organized the meeting. "Education Choice in Georgia," was the forum's theme. Kevin Chavous, Democrats for Education Reform Chair and National BAEO Treasurer, and Wisconsin State Rep. Jason Fields (D) were the keynote speakers.

Chavous emphasized that real educational change comes with a price. "When I was a city council member in Washington, DC, I put the interests of our babies' future above adult politics," Chavous said. "This resulted in the creation of a three-sector initiative: a stronger public school system, a growing charter school sector, and the first federally-funded low-income voucher program for DC families." Fields echoed a similar message. "I live in Milwaukee, a city with the nation's oldest and largest urban-based state tax funded program, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, that serves nearly 20,000 students in 127 schools. Despite all the wonderful things this program has provided for thousands of Milwaukee children since 1991, many elected officials are still too scared to support what works for fear of retaliation from 'the establishment.'" These comments sparked a lively two-hour discussion about education politics in GA and the role of parents in the process.

The event was attended by 40 people, including parents of students enrolled in Georgia public and private schools. Nine Georgia state elected officials attended the event, including the House Majority Whip Jan Jones (R-46), House Education Committee member Alisha Thomas Morgan (D-39), and House Subcommittee Chair on School Choice Melvin Everson (R-106). BAEO President Gerard Robinson, a resident of Atlanta, attended the event. "It is rare to have a meeting attended by blacks, whites, republicans, democrats, parents, and high school students who talked (and listened) to 'choice' topics and ideas," said Robinson. "I left the meeting very encouraged about the future of choice in Georgia."



Christopher Boston  
MCBAEO President

## Fuller Speaks at GA Charter School Conference

The Georgia Charter School Association held its 7th Annual Statewide Conference in Marietta, GA. The conference theme, "Our Time to Shine," was attended by approximately 400 participants. BAEO Founder and Board Chair Howard Fuller gave the opening general session address. He talked about the benefits of charter schools, as well as the challenges they face. "If we do not create quality charter schools for our children, then we have failed them," said Fuller. "The charter movement has to hold our schools, our leaders, and our students accountable if we want to make their lives better in the future."

Andrew Lewis, Chief Programming Officer for the Georgia Charter School Association, said Fuller's speech was one of the highlights of the conference.



Dr. Fuller with Tony Roberts, CEO of the association

## MCBAEO Names New President

The Milwaukee Chapter of BAEO's Board of Directors unanimously named Christopher Boston its new President. Boston was formerly the Executive Director and Lead Organizer of the Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAHA), an ecumenical organization with 41 member congregations throughout Greater Milwaukee. Boston, a native Milwaukeean worked at MICAHA for seven years and was the youngest executive director in the organization's 18 year history.

He attended the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, and in 2006 the Congressional Black Caucus honored him as an up and coming "Emerging Leader" at its Annual Legislative Conference.



## CHAPTER AND MOBILIZATION NEWS

# Philly BAEO Hosts Training

The Philadelphia Chapter of BAEO hosted its annual Parent Educator Training (PET) in January at the Imani Charter School. The six-hour training was attended by 45 parents which earned them a certificate as BAEO Parent Ambassadors. Parents learned how to effectively communicate with the media; better understand the “truth” about charter and cyber schools and home schooling; how to access private schools and scholarships; and how to educate and empower other parent advocates.

Ambassadors learned the essential tools to return to their community and empower other parents to become advocates for quality educational options. “Being a BAEO Ambassador allows me to be a informed parent and learn professionalism,” said Cynthia Armstrong.



Forty-five parents earned certificates as BAEO Parent Ambassadors.

## Philadelphia Superintendant talks with Parents

In February, Philly BAEO hosted a Round Table Discussion with Superintendant of the Philadelphia School District Arlene C. Ackerman. More than 50 parents had the chance to talk with the superintendant about education reform opportunities in the city. Discussions also included the importance of parents getting more involved in education reform.

Thanks to Sonia Devan-Lake, a Philadelphia Chapter Board Member, the event was recorded by Ch. 6 News.

The Chapter also held its Parents With POWER session on “Effective Study Techniques” at the West Oak Lane Charter School. Robert Gallagher, CSP, an educational entertainer, shared helpful tips on the “Ten Minute Plan to an A.”

## 2009-2010 Scholarship Applications Available

More than 105 new parents attended the Philadelphia Chapter of BAEO 2009-2010 Scholarship Orientation Open House at the Germantown Friends School.

“The open house provides parents with the opportunity to learn how to apply for a BAEO Philly scholarship and what the criteria involves,” Darlene Callands, President and CEO of Philadelphia BAEO said. A representative from Private School Aid Service also spoke and answered parents’ questions on how to complete financial aid packages for the first time.

“There are a lot of parents seeking assistance during these tough economic times,” Callands said. “We are here to try and assist families with scholarships for their children to attend quality schools.”

# LA BAEO Conducts Community Outreach



Tracey Anderson, Rachael Jordon, Rachnique McCann, Regina Wheat, Senator Sen. Ann Duplessis, Valerie Evans, Cherynita Breaux, Jovana Mason, Laquetta Zeno and Rep. Austin Badon

The LA BAEO Mobilization Team organized their second community-wide public awareness campaign to educate parents about the Student Scholarships for Excellence Program for the 2009-2010 school year. The Team held more than a dozen community meetings, spoke at seven local churches, and held eight private school tours for parents and legislators. In addition, staff distributed flyers at churches, retail stores, barber and beauty salons and at various community events. During the first week of sign-up, more than 350 new parents enrolled. LA BAEO also ran radio ads on urban radio stations and had more than 9,000 robo calls go to parents.

## LA Elected Officials Honored for their Support

National BAEO, LA BAEO and the Alliance for School Choice held a *Thank You Luncheon* for State Sen. Ann Duplessis and State Rep. Austin Badon, both Democrats from New Orleans, LA, for supporting the Student Scholarships for Excellence Program (SSEP), a publicly financed program that debuted during the 2008-09 school year. The SSEP has helped more than 600 low-income New Orleans elementary school children attend private and parochial schools.

**CHAPTER AND MOBILIZATION NEWS**

# 200 Parents attend Ohio BAEO School Expo



Ohio BAEO Mobilization staff with parents at Archbishop Alter H.S. in Dayton, Ohio, one of the schools visited during the school tour visits.



Parents look over material at the Annual Parent-School Expo in Columbus, Ohio.

The Ohio BAEO mobilization team held its 4th Annual Parent-School Expo in Columbus, Ohio. The event provided 200 Columbus area parents with the opportunity to “Shop for Education.” Participants included: charter and private schools, Supplemental Education Service (SES) providers and community organizations.

Parents and children enjoyed the food, fun and festivities. Attendees talked with administrators and school leaders about various topics including school uniforms and curriculum. In addition, parents received valuable resources and helpful information about parental choice options.

## Dayton School Tour

From January through April, Ohio BAEO sponsored 5 school tours at EdChoice participating private schools in Dayton. During each visit, parents were presented with a brief overview of the school, its academics, extra curricular activities and the overall school mission.

Participants were given a complete tour of the facilities and had the opportunity to ask questions and witness first-hand what a typical school day for their child would entail. Parents were also encouraged to ask questions to better understand how each school operated and to obtain more specific information on how to select the best school.

## Ohio BAEO holds 11 parent meetings

During the first quarter of 2009, Ohio BAEO hosted 11 Educational Choice Scholarship (EdChoice) parent meetings in Dayton, Columbus and Springfield. Approximately 250 parents attended. The meetings were held to give parents a thorough understanding of the EdChoice Scholarship Program. Parents were educated on the process of applying for the scholarship, what the school and Department of Education's responsibilities are as well as tools to assist parents in selecting a school that best fits their child.

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Black Alliance for Educational Options



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*Anniversary*

**March 4-6, 2010**

Hilton Milwaukee City Center  
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