

The Center for Partnerships to Improve Education hosted its first annual conference, March 17-18, in Charleston, South Carolina. *Critical Issues in PK-12 Urban Education* offered a comprehensive array of sessions in Curriculum and Instruction, School Improvement, Community Involvement, Research, and Policy. In addition, keynote presentation highlights included:

Anne W. Smith

Integrating the Arts

Dr. Anne W. Smith, Distinguished Visiting Professor at the School of Education, College of Charleston, brings more than 35 years of experience to her role with the Center for Partnerships to Improve Education.

Dr. Smith's involvement in community, national, and international arts policy spans the entire range of arts management, education and performance, and brings new perspectives to theater, dance, music, cross-cultural art policy relationships, artistic diversity, research and history. She has an extensive background in writing, speaking about and teaching the arts and management in secondary, undergraduate and graduate education. As an arts professional, she managed and served as an organizational development consultant for performing arts and visual arts organizations as well as municipal and state agencies.

Dr. Smith received a B.A. in English, Theatre Arts, and Education from the State University of New York, Albany, and also completed graduate studies in English Literature and Education for Permanent Certification in Secondary Education. She holds a D.P.A. in Public Policy and Administration from Golden Gate University and an M.A. in Contemporary Humanities, Curriculum and Teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University.

She is also Vice President of Arts Consulting Group, a national firm focusing on the management, education and development needs of arts-related organizations and projects.

Dr. Smith serves on the editorial and advisory boards of the International Journal of Arts Management, the Institute for Non-Profit Management, and the scientific committee of the International Association of Arts and Culture Management Conference. She is a member of the National Task Force for the Arts Education Partnership of the US Department of Education and the National Endowment for the Arts, and a founding board member of California Arts Advocates. Her current nonprofit service includes work on the San Francisco Girls Chorus and Theatre Bay Area Board of Directors.

Belinda Williams

Closing the Achievement Gap

Belinda Williams is a psychologist with 35 years of experience studying the academic achievement patterns of culturally different and socio-economically disadvantaged students. She held administrative positions in Head Start and urban education for nearly 20 years, and senior research and development positions at the University of

Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement regional laboratories at Brown University and Research for Better Schools. Dr. Williams received her doctorate in psychology from Rutgers University.

The central focus of Dr. Williams' work identifies theory and evidence that *reject a deficit* interpretation of low-performing, socio-economically disadvantaged, culturally diverse children to support the shift to an *asset* based framework. Building on the strengths of children recognizes their cultural diversity, developed abilities, interests, and resilience as opportunities to guide *teaching and learning* and reform. Her research, recent work, and publications focus on the impact of cultural environments on cognitive development and student engagement and the implications for practice and reform in: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; professional development, community, parent, and school engagement; and school leadership.

In addition to her recent work with the National Education Association's *Priority Schools Initiative*, state departments of education, universities, national associations, and school districts, she is the editor of the ASCD publications, *Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices* (1996, 2003), co-author of *Effort and Excellence in Urban Classrooms: Expecting – and Getting – Success from All Students* (Teachers College Press/NEA, 2002), and author of *Closing the Achievement Gap* (Pierce, M. & Stapleton, D.L., Eds.), *The 21st Century Principal: Current Issues in Leadership and Policy*, Harvard Education Press, 2002).

Kay Francis Toliver

Engaging Students in Instruction

Born and raised in East Harlem and the South Bronx, Ms. Toliver is a proud product of the New York City public school system. She graduated from Harriet Beecher Stowe Junior High, Walton High School and Hunter College (AB 1967, MA 1971) and completed graduate work at the City College of New York in mathematics. Becoming a teacher was the fulfillment of a childhood dream. Her parents always stressed that education was the key to a better life. By becoming a teacher, Ms. Toliver hoped to inspire African-American and Hispanic youths to realize their own dreams. She wanted to give something back to the communities she grew up in.

For more than 30 years, Ms. Toliver taught mathematics and communication arts at P.S. 72/ East Harlem Tech in Community School District 4. Prior to instructing seventh- and eighth- grade students, she taught grades one through six for 15 years.

Ms. Toliver's educational philosophy is simple: All students can achieve at high levels. It is a teacher's job to expand minds and take children from the known to unknown. Her classroom is a place where students can talk without fear, write, manipulate ideas, and listen. There is a strong focus upon integrating math with other curriculum areas, so that students begin to see that mathematics goes beyond numbers and computation.

At East Harlem Tech, with the support of her principal, Kay established the "Challenger" program. Challengers are students who can face any problem in life. The program, for grades 4 - 8, presents the basics of geometry and algebra in an integrated curriculum. This is a program for "gifted" students, but following her belief that all children can learn, Ms. Toliver accepted students from all ability levels.

Following the debut of the Peabody award winning documentary “Good Morning Miss Toliver”, Kay also presented workshops and keynote presentations at educational conferences, school districts and individual schools all over the U.S. and in Canada.

To show teachers throughout the country how she creates enthusiasm for mathematics among her students, Ms. Toliver worked with the Foundation for Advancements in Science and Education (FASE) to create a series of educational video products for students and teachers. These materials include the classroom series “The Eddie Files” and the professional development series “The Kay Toliver Files” and “Teacher Talk.”

In the late 1990s, Ms. Toliver began to present professional development institutes and parent engagement events at schools and districts throughout the country. In 2001, she officially retired from the classroom, but she has continued her work in professional development, presenting workshops and keynote presentations to over 100,000 educators in the past 4 years.