

From Harlem to National Policy: Geoffrey Canada Receives Education Commission of the States' Highest Education Honor

For Immediate Release

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – July 8, 2026 — Education Commission of the States today announced that Geoffrey Canada, President of Harlem Children's Zone, will receive the 2026 James Bryant Conant Award, the organization's highest honor recognizing individuals whose work has had a lasting and transformative impact on American education.

The award will be presented during the 2026 ECS National Forum on Education Policy in Washington, D.C.

For more than three decades, Canada has helped reshape the national conversation around education, poverty and opportunity. Under his leadership, Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) became a nationally recognized model for place-based, cradle-to-career support, serving more than 34,000 children and families across a 97-block area of Central Harlem through integrated education, health and family services. HCZ's success directly inspired the federal Promise Neighborhoods initiative launched under President Barack Obama.

*"Geoffrey Canada fundamentally changed the national conversation about what it takes for children and communities to thrive," said **José Muñoz, President of Education Commission of the States**. "His leadership challenged the nation to think bigger about opportunity, align systems around children and families, and pursue lasting change with both urgency and compassion. His influence can be seen in communities and policies across the country, and we are honored to recognize his extraordinary contributions with the James Bryant Conant Award."*

Canada's emphasis on continuous improvement, data and long-term community investment helped establish a new framework for addressing educational opportunity gaps nationwide. Under his leadership, students at HCZ demonstrated significant gains in achievement, particularly in mathematics, along with increased college enrollment and persistence. His groundbreaking work has earned national recognition, including being named one of Time magazine's most influential people and one of Fortune's 50 Greatest Leaders. Canada and HCZ have also



been featured in numerous national outlets, including *Waiting for Superman*, *60 Minutes* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

*"I am honored to receive the James Bryant Conant Award from Education Commission of the States," said **Geoffrey Canada**. "This recognition reflects the work of countless educators, families, community leaders and young people who believed in what is possible. Real change happens when we invest in the full potential of every child and work together to build systems that support them from cradle to career."*

The James Bryant Conant Award has been presented annually since 1977 and is considered one of the nation's most prestigious honors in education policy and leadership. Named for ECS co-founder and former Harvard University president James Bryant Conant, the award recognizes leaders whose vision, service and influence have shaped the national education landscape. Past recipients include Thurgood Marshall, Fred Rogers and Linda Darling-Hammond.

About Education Commission of the States

Education Commission of the States is a trusted source for comprehensive knowledge and resources on hundreds of education policy issues from early learning through postsecondary education. The organization partners with state leaders by providing unbiased information, research, customized support and opportunities for collaboration.

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