

Big-City Districts Join Obama's Initiative to Support Black and Latino Boys

Education Week

By [Lesli A. Maxwell](#) on July 21, 2014 9:40 AM

UPDATED:

Sixty of the nation's big-city school districts have signed on to President Barack Obama's effort to improve educational outcomes for boys of color—a \$200 million initiative known as [My Brother's Keeper](#).

The president will be joined by dozens of district leaders, mayors, athletes, and business leaders as he [announces the expansion of the initiative](#) on Monday at a school in Washington. He first announced the \$200 million effort in February.

Districts that are part of the Washington-based Council of the Great City Schools are joining the initiative, which aims to improve outcomes for black and Latino boys through investing more in early-childhood education, driving down disproportionately high school discipline rates for boys of color, providing mentoring programs, and increasing such boys' access to rigorous college-preparatory courses.



Several nonprofit and private organizations, including the National Basketball Association, will be kicking in support for the effort, according to the White House. The Emerson Collective, founded by Laurene Powell Jobs, will provide \$50 million toward launching a competition to design new high schools that effectively serve disadvantaged youths. The College Board is creating a \$1.5

million "All In" program to ensure that more boys of color enroll in at least one Advanced Placement course.

On nearly every measure of educational success, black and Latino boys lag behind their white and Asian peers. Though graduation rates have steadily improved for boys of color over the past decade, they continue to trail far behind.

Some districts, such as California's Oakland Unified, have already been [aggressively working to improve outcomes for boys of color](#). Oakland a few years ago created an office of African-American male achievement with the explicit mission of "stopping the epidemic failure of African-American male students in OUSD."

Concerned about the intractable achievement gaps between black and Hispanic boys and their white peers, President Obama first announced My Brother's Keeper in February. Since then, some women and girls of color have criticized the effort for ignoring the challenges they face in and out of school and have argued that it [should be expanded to include their gender](#).

The 60 districts said they are agreeing to pursue several specific actions to support male students of color, including:

- Making early-education programs more amenable to their academic and social needs;
- Collecting data and establishing practices to monitor their progress and intervene when warning signs appear;
- Changing policies and practices to drive down their absences, suspensions, expulsions, and inappropriate special education placements; and
- Targeting efforts in elementary and middle school grades to boost their participation in honors, Advanced Placement, and gifted and talented programs.

At today's event, 54 of the 60 urban districts were represented by superintendents, school board members, or other high-level administrators, according to Henry Duvall, a spokesman for the Council of the Great City Schools. The Washington-based Council represents 67 of the nation's largest school systems. The seven districts not on the list of those that had signed onto the initiative include: Charleston County, S.C., the Hawaii state department of education, the New Orleans Public Schools, New York City, Santa Ana, Calif., St. Louis, and Wichita, Kan.

Photo: President Barack Obama shakes hands after being introduced by Los Angeles Clippers point guard Chris Paul, left, at an event on Monday at the Walker Jones Education Campus in Washington, to announce additional commitments for "My Brother's Keeper," Obama's initiative aimed at helping boys and young men of color. The commitments include an effort by the NBA to recruit 25,000 new mentors and work with at-risk students to increase attendance and performance.

--Susan Walsh/AP