

*Des Moines Register*

## Des Moines pledges to help minority male students



Christopher Pratt, cpratt2@dmreg.com 10:47 p.m. CDT July 21, 2014

The Des Moines school district joined 59 other urban districts Monday in a pledge to improve the social and academic futures of black and Hispanic male students.

The pledge was announced Monday by the [Council of the Great City Schools](#) at a White House event attended by President Barack Obama and educational leaders including Des Moines Superintendent Tom Ahart.

In a [news release](#), Ahart said Des Moines may see fewer obstacles for minority male students than other cities, but it's committed to helping each student succeed through challenges.

"Our pledge is a statement to the community and the nation that we will come alongside every student who needs our assistance," Ahart said.

Each of the 60 urban school systems made a commitment to carry out specific action items, including keeping data to monitor the progress of minority male students and intervening at the earliest warning signs of problems; reducing the disproportionate number of minority males who are placed inappropriately in special education classes; and working to increase the number of minority males who complete Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms for college aid.

In Des Moines, 17 percent of male students are black and 23 percent are Hispanic, district spokesman Phil Roeder said.

In addition, the districtwide graduation rate for the Class of 2013 was 79 percent. For African-American males the rate was 72 percent; the Hispanic male rate was 68 percent.

A new partnership to increase the number of minority males who participate and succeed in Advanced Placement courses was also announced by the Washington, D.C.-based council, which includes some of the country's largest school systems. The group said it plans to partner with the College Board to increase AP participation.

Roeder said Des Moines has already made strides in its commitment to improve achievement of minority males.

The pledge is "doubling down on some of the efforts that are currently under way, to make sure we're doing a better job," Roeder said.

School officials also have their sights on reducing disproportionate enrollment in AP courses and on outreach efforts to make families aware of all programs and classes.

Roeder said the details of the partnership with the College Board will need to be developed and defined.

He said joining the pledge could spur the Des Moines district to keep data and establish protocols to monitor progress. For example, Roeder said the district may look to increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA forms for college assistance.