

Big-City Districts Buoyed by Obama's Extension of 'My Brother's Keeper'

By Denisa R. Superville on May 1, 2015 4:24 PM

The announcement that President Barack Obama's work on improving education and career opportunities for young men of color will likely continue beyond his time in the White House was welcomed Friday by the Council of the Great City Schools, which has partnered with the president on his signature **My Brother's Keeper** initiative.

"I am delighted to see that he is going to stay with this priority," said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the organization, which represents 67 school districts, the vast majority of them urban.

The president is expected to announce Monday the creation of the My Brother's Keeper Alliance, a new nonprofit foundation, which is expected to carry on the program's work after Obama leaves office in 2017. The president's role in the new organization remains unclear.

Since My Brother's Keeper's launched last year, more than \$300 million has been pledged to finance programs aimed at helping young men color. More than 200 mayors, tribal chiefs, and county executives across the country have also signed on to the program, according to the **one-year report** released in March.

As one of the partners in the My Brother's Keeper initiative, the council's member **districts pledged to take concrete steps** to reduce barriers that keep students of color from achieving the highest successes in and out of school. The districts pledged to: reduce chronic absenteeism; cut disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates for boys of color; increase participation rates in Advanced Placement, honors and gifted

programs; improve graduation rates for boys of color; increase financial aid application completions; and more.

Casserly said that the council had already committed to keeping its emphasis on young men of color beyond the Obama presidency, but a new foundation dedicated to those same concerns will help sustain the council's programs. (The council's efforts to drill down on the challenges boys of color face and ways to address them predate the president's My Brother's Keeper initiative.)

"We had committed, as a coalition, to retain this priority well beyond the administration, and this new mechanism is going to make it easier for us to sustain this priority going forward," he said. "It will be a big help to us."

Casserly said he was not surprised that the president was likely to continue to work on issues of equity in his post-White House life.

In March, council representatives, including superintendents and school board members, met with the president to discuss their legislative priorities and the progress the districts had made in implementing the pledges. Some of the chiefs left the meeting with the strong impression that the boys of color work was going to be part of the president's focus after leaving the White House.

"It was very clear that this was a deep, personal priority for him," Casserly said. "He didn't say anything in the meeting about what he was going to do, but it was very clear that it meant something very important and profound to him; so, in some ways, it doesn't surprise me that he'd want to continue this work well beyond his presidency."