



Expansion of My Brother's Keeper initiative aims to end 'schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline'

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GWEN IFILL: Next: a major expansion of a national program aimed at improving the lives of disadvantaged young men, known as My Brother's Keeper.

Greater access to early education, reducing school suspensions, and recruiting mentors, 25,000 of them, around the country, those steps are part of the expansion of the president's effort to improve life chances for young men of color, often more likely to be expelled from school than to succeed.

Sixty of the country's largest public school systems, who educate nearly three million boys of color, joined the effort today, as well as mayors, corporations like AT&T, nonprofits like the Emerson Collective, and the national Basketball Association.

Los Angeles Clippers point guard Chris Paul:

CHRIS PAUL, Point Guard, Los Angeles Clippers: With the My Brother's Keeper initiative, this is our opportunity to stand together as athletes, as parents, as mentors, and as leaders in our communities to show our young men and boys of color with our action that we are behind them and that their success matters.

GWEN IFILL: No federal money is involved in the expanded multiyear effort, but the companies and foundations have pledged an additional \$100 million to the effort. That follows \$200 million pledged when the program was announced last winter.

Two participants in the expanded initiative join us now. John Deasy is the superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, which enrolls nearly 650,000 students at over 900 schools. And David Williams is the CEO of Deloitte Financial Advisory Services. He's working closely on the private sector portion of the plan.

Thank you, gentlemen, for joining me. I'm glad you're both in town for this. Let's just talk about the graduation rates piece of this. How would a program like this improve graduation rates, which I know is a big concern of yours?

JOHN DEASY, Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District: Absolutely.

Youth can't graduate if they don't stay in school. And the focus we put on suspension, where the district is sending students out of school, was a huge part of this. When our administration began four years ago, we realized that there was an enormous disproportionality in terms of the students who were being suspended, meaning mostly black young men, Latino young men.

And so we began to look at policies and the work of the district, and took our suspension rate, nearly 49,000 incidents of suspension, to below 9,000 incidents of suspension. And we ended using willful defiance as a reason for which you could suspend a child.

GWEN IFILL: Now, you're talking about something you have already done. So, what difference does it make really if the administration, if the White House is doing something like this?

JOHN DEASY: So we begin thinking through this as quite an amazing example of collective action.

So, more than 60 superintendents from across the country signed pledges and we delivered to the president today that we would all begin to do this and more, access to early education, mentor in our districts, health, physical health in terms of clinics. And the power of that across the system and across the country I think is what made today so special.

GWEN IFILL: David Williams, what is the corporate piece of this, and why sometimes the government and the private sector don't necessarily see the same goals?

DAVID WILLIAMS, Deloitte: We absolutely see the same goals in this case, Gwen.

It's about productivity. It's about the ability to use all of the resources, the human capital resources that are available to us. And this group of people are extremely important to us. Young men of color are an important part of what we need to do going forward in order to make the U.S. work force more productive.

GWEN IFILL: So, you're saying you're trying to build on the supply, because it would help serve your demand.

DAVID WILLIAMS: Absolutely.

And also these are communities that we live in and that work in. And so there is a philanthropic part of this for us as well. It's a citizenship portion of it for us as well.

GWEN IFILL: John Deasy, I heard you give a speech about educational apartheid. How would this close the gap that you see that exists in our public schools now?

JOHN DEASY: In a number of ways. And was a very powerful day when you take a look at what some of the students have and what some students do not have.

One of the things we did as we have been building up to this is instituted a student-weighted funding formula. Schools and communities who historically have had the least amount of investment now in Los Angeles get the most amount of investment, so that schools and communities where students have struggled, historically struggled, for resources, are the places that, with our funding formula, the ones who are getting the most resources, as we begin to build back.

And the second thing has been to invest in their families. At least one of our unions, SEIU, the majority of those workers, more than 30,000, are parents. And we just signed our contract which brings the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and it's the highest in the country in doing this, so that we're trying to deal with the growth and support of homes, schools so that — and these are resources that we have — it's just how we're distributing them.

GWEN IFILL: David Williams, what's the convening council? That sounds like one of those bureaucratic terms someone comes up with in which you guys maybe meet twice a year, and talk and then go your separate ways. How is this different?

DAVID WILLIAMS: Well, if that's what happened, that's a real problem for us.

What we really want to do with a convening council is to being to spread the message, to take the message into the community, into the places where these young men live and hopefully where they work, in order to drive the messages that the president talked about today into those communities, because that's where the services that are going to impact their lives are going to be performed.

GWEN IFILL: Now, you must be familiar, both of you, with the fact that since this was announced in February, one of the big conversations has been, why only boys? Why not girls? What is special or specially disadvantaged about young men?

DAVID WILLIAMS: Well, there's two things.

First, this is an intractable problem for young men of color. And it hits that demographic much more significantly than it does most others. That's the first point. But the second point is, lots of things that we're trying to get done with the initiative in cities around the country are things that are going to benefit young women and other people besides young men of color.

So a rising tide floats all boats. And we're trying to do as much as we can for everybody, but we're recognizing that this demographic, young men and boys of color, is unique.

(CROSSTALK)

JOHN DEASY: And the most stunning disproportionality in schools occurs when we take a look at achievement and attendance and discipline with young men of color very early on.

Special education identification rates — I mean, one of the powers of this is, we just need to start talking the truth about these issues and doing something about that, from who's being identified in special education, who is being suspended, who is not getting into AP courses.

And in all those cases, the greatest disproportionality is young men of color.

GWEN IFILL: In the Los Angeles school system, there has been a lot of discussion lately about teachers kind of resisting some of the changes you would like to implement, which involve changing tenure rules. Is this something that could get in the way of what it is you hope to accomplish, that dispute?

JOHN DEASY: No, I don't think so at all.

Actually, the teachers in L.A. are amazing individuals. The tenure rule issue came from a judge's decision around students getting access to the best teachers and are there laws that are preventing that from happening. He ruled that there were. And that's now taking his legal approach.

But, by and large, our teachers work in very impacted situations and are getting amazing results. This focus on this actually thinks honors the work that they're doing.

GWEN IFILL: There are some who argue \$300 million is still in the end a drop in the bucket.

But the bigger question and threat might be that, after this president, who has taken this personally, leaves, it leaves. What's to stop that from happening?

DAVID WILLIAMS: This certainly can't be a shiny thing, something that we admire for the time that President Obama is in office and then we let die.

And there are lots of things in place designed to drive it forward. And that's one of the reasons that the convening council is in place, to make this lasting. And it has got to be a generational thing in order to make it have any impact at all?

GWEN IFILL: How? How? How?

DAVID WILLIAMS: Very simply, we're trying to make sure that the programs that we put in place structurally have their own life, have their own momentum.

So we're doing it in places, place-based, so that, in fact, they're not governmental programs, but they're programs that take place in the communities where these kids live, hopefully where they work, and ultimately drive some continuation, some lasting impact.

JOHN DEASY: The moral obligation to end a schoolhouse-to-jailhouse pipeline goes way beyond the presidential initiative. That's why this is embedded in our communities.

GWEN IFILL: John Deasy of the Los Angeles Unified Schools, David Williams of Deloitte, thank you both so much.

JOHN DEASY: Thank you, Gwen.

DAVID WILLIAMS: Thank you.