

Star-Telegram

Fort Worth school district joins national initiative for minority boys

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Fort Worth school Trustee Ashley Paz was among urban school district representatives present in Washington on Monday when President Barack Obama announced a major expansion of his initiative to improve the lives and educational opportunities of young men of color.

The educators, along with star athletes and officers of companies and foundations, announced commitments to Obama's My Brother's Keeper program, which was unveiled in February.

Leaders of 60 of the nation's largest school systems have pledged to expand minority boys' access to better preschools and advanced classes, and to try to prevent grade retention, suspensions and expulsions. The school districts are members of the Council of the Great City Schools, which adopted a pledge that includes 11 actions to prepare young men of color for college and careers and reduce the disproportionate number who drop out or are suspended.

The Fort Worth school board voted unanimously May 27 to adopt the pledge.

"We have have attached our names to a commitment to better serve males of color," Paz said. "I feel that this is a vital step that we need to truly shift the culture of our school system."

Interim school Superintendent Pat Linares said improving the well-being of boys and teenagers of color is a priority.

"We're very proud that Ashley is there," Linares said late Monday afternoon. "This is an extremely important issue that we, as educators, must address. We have a responsibility, actually a moral responsibility, to our children to really ensure that they are prepared for college and careers, and that they become productive members in society."

Members of the Council of the Great City Schools collectively educate a third or more of American black and Latino student and nearly 40 percent of low-income boys and young men of color, the council said in a statement.

Other organizations making commitments Monday are the National Basketball Association, which pledged to recruit 25,000 new mentors and work with at-risk students to increase

attendance and performance, and AT&T, which pledged \$18 million to support mentoring and other education programs.

The Emerson Collective and its partners are committing \$50 million to collaborate with school districts and educators on a competition to find and develop the best designs for next-generation high schools. The Emerson Collective was founded by Laurene Powell Jobs, wife of the late Apple founder Steve Jobs, along with partners from Silicon Valley.

The Council of the Great City Schools released a [report](#) in 2010 saying young black males in America are in “a state of crisis.” That led to a companion analysis of Hispanic students.

In August 2012, the Fort Worth school district opened the Paul Laurence Dunbar Young Men’s Leadership Academy to address some of the concerns in the report.

The academy enrolls 220 predominantly African-American and Hispanic males in grades six through eight.

Student test scores at the academy have improved in the short time the school has been open, state records say. The school met state standards in 2012-13. It also received state distinction designations — awarded for performing better on some tests than 40 similar public schools — in some subjects. Also, the academy was among the top 25 percent of similar state schools that improved test scores from one year to the next, state records show.

This report includes material from The Associated Press.