

The New York Times

Obama to Report Widening of Initiative for Black and Latino Boys

My Brother's Keeper Program Grows to Include More Impoverished Minorities



President Obama delivering remarks at the White House in February on his My Brother's Keeper initiative to help black and Latino boys succeed.

Gabriella Demczuk / The New York Times

By **MOTOKO RICH**

July 20, 2014

President Obama will announce on Monday that 60 of the nation's largest school districts are joining his initiative to improve the educational futures of young African-American and Hispanic boys, beginning in preschool and extending through high school graduation.

The districts, which represent about 40 percent of all African-American and Hispanic boys living below the poverty line, have committed to expand quality preschool access; track data on black and Hispanic boys so educators can intervene as soon as signs of struggle emerge; increase the number of boys of color who take gifted, honors or Advanced Placement courses and exams;

work to reduce the number of minority boys who are suspended or expelled; and increase graduation rates among African-American and Hispanic boys.

President Obama announced in February a five-year, \$200 million initiative, known as My Brother's Keeper, to help black and Latino youths.

No new federal spending is attached to the initiative. The new efforts, which will also seek support from the nonprofit and private sectors, are being coordinated by the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents large urban school districts. Michael Casserly, executive director of the organization, said that while a handful of districts had already made some progress in helping black and Latino boys improve their academic performance, "we need to move these numbers and improve these futures as a collective if the nation as a whole is to make any progress on this front. It's not enough for us to do well in a small number of cities."

"The 50-year anniversary of the 1964 Civil Rights Act reminded us that those great battles of the past were not fought over access to mediocrity," Mr. Casserly added. "They were fought over access to excellence."

Black and Latino students have long experienced a pattern of inequality along racial lines in American schools. According to data from the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, black and Latino students are suspended and expelled at much higher rates than white students and attend schools with less-experienced teachers. Many also attend schools that do not offer advanced math and science courses.

Boys in particular are at a disadvantage. Black and Latino boys are less likely to graduate from high school than white boys, but also less likely than African-American or Latino girls. And in elementary school, they already fall far behind their white counterparts in reading skills: According to the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#), a series of standardized tests administered to a random sampling of American children, only 14 percent of black boys and 18 percent of Hispanic boys scored proficient or above on the fourth-grade reading tests in 2013, compared with 42 percent of white boys and 21 percent of both black and Hispanic girls.

The My Brother's Keeper initiative will also address the needs of Asian-American and Native American boys.

John E. Deasy, superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, said he was eager to share some successful tactics with other school systems. In Los Angeles, he said the district reduced its annual suspensions from 50,000 in the 2009-2010 school year to 8,000 this past school year, in part because of a new policy eliminating "willful defiance" as a reason for suspension. He said he regarded efforts to improve academic and social outcomes for young black and Latino men as "a deep moral commitment issue."

The president will also announce on Monday that various organizations have committed funds to develop mentoring programs for young black and Latino youths or to design new school models for disadvantaged communities.

These include the National Basketball Association, AT&T and the Emerson Collective — founded by Laurene Powell Jobs, widow of Apple’s founder Steve Jobs — to make grants and investments in education initiatives. The College Board, which administers the SAT and [Advanced Placement exams](#), is also announcing a partnership with the Council of the Great City Schools to increase the number of black and Latino boys who show promise on Preliminary SAT exams to take A.P. courses.