

# Portland schools join national effort to improve school results for black and Latino boys

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on July 21, 2014 at 2:49 PM, updated July 21, 2014 at 2:51 PM

**Portland Public Schools** is one of 60 urban districts nationwide that signed on today to **President Obama's effort to improve educational outcomes for black and Latino boys**, an initiative known as My Brother's Keeper.

Participating districts agree to spend more more on early-childhood education, reduce disproportionately high school discipline rates for boys of color, provide mentoring and improve black and Latino males' access to college-prep courses.

Pam Knowles, co-chair of the Portland school board, and Superintendent Carole Smith traveled to D.C. for the White House announcement.

"It was great to spend time with the president to send a message that we are not going to allow the historic disparities in public education go on any longer," Knowles said. She called Portland Public Schools a national leader on the topic.

Interestingly, in 1997, Portland Public Schools provided free preschool to about 650 4-year-olds, primarily at elementary schools in North and Northeast Portland. More than 40 percent of students who benefitted were black and Latino boys and girls.

Last year, Portland offered just five preK classes split among five of its elementary schools, to a total of just 99 students. The district has said it **plans to open an early childhood center in North Portland next year** to serve about 120 youngsters.

In Portland's class of 2013, the on-time graduation rate for black students was 53 percent and for Latino students, it was 57 percent. In the case of African American students, Portland's graduation rate was 6 percentage points lower than in the rest of the state. Among Latinos, Portland's graduation rate was 4 percentage points worse than the rest of the state.

Smith and the school board have made eliminating unequal discipline for boys of color one of her top priorities for the next three years, spokeswoman Christine Miles said.

Obama announced in February he would launch the My Brother's Keeper program. Since then, some have criticized the effort for excluding black and Latino girls, who also experience less success in school, college and careers than their white counterparts.

-- Betsy Hammond