

TIME

President Obama Plans to Act as Mentor in ‘My Brother’s Keeper’ Initiative



President Barack Obama speaks at an event at the Walker Jones Education Campus in Washington to announce additional commitments for "My Brother's Keeper," Obama's initiative aimed at helping boys and young men of color. Susan Walsh—AP

[Maya Rhodan](#) July 21, 2014

Said he'd help connect with as many young men of color as he could, in an event to mark a new round of private sector investment in his signature program

President Barack Obama will be spreading himself awfully thin if he takes on a commitment he announced Monday at a town hall for his “[My Brother’s Keeper](#)” initiative. Instead of just taking on one mentee as a part of the effort to connect more young men of color with good role models, Obama said Monday he plans to connect with as many as he can.

“The problem with just taking one is all the other guys would be like, ‘Man, how’d you get the President?’” Obama said.

After applauding a new round of private sector investments in “My Brother’s Keeper,” President Obama got his feet wet in offering advice to young men during a candid question and answer session during the event at the Walker Jones Education Center in Washington, DC.

The questions were wide-ranging—from how he learned to become a good father without having had one around, to his stance on D.C. statehood (to which Obama responded, “I’m for it”)—but the message was clear. President Obama is working hard to be a role model for young men of color in the United States.

When asked about if he set goals for himself as a teen, he said at times his goals were “misplaced;” he was too focused on basketball and having fun to think about the future. When questioned about how he learned to be a good father even though his wasn’t around, he said the fact that he didn’t experience it he wanted to make sure his kids did. And when asked what

advice he had for young men, Obama noted three things: working hard, finding your passion, and building your network.

“Everything that’s worthwhile requires work,” Obama said. “For some reason, young men think [that] doesn’t apply to school. No reason why you think you will be a good reader if you don’t read a lot.”

Before taking questions from the gathered crowd, Obama announced more businesses and organizations are jumping on board with the “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative.” Calling the program a “team effort,” Obama said business leaders, faith leaders, educators and community organizers are “all working together to give boys and young men of color the tools the need to succeed.”

Obama was joined by mayors, business leaders and—to his evident delight—the National Basketball Association, to announce new commitments to the program. The NBA has signed on to a five-year commitment in partnership with the Council for Greater City Schools to recruit 25,000 mentors for at-risk kids.

AT&T is pledging \$18 million to support mentorship programs and 60 of the nation’s largest school systems are vowing to better educate young black and brown men from early childhood through high school graduation.

“I want to be able to look back and say we were a part of something that reversed the trends we don’t like to see,” Obama said Monday. “We want everybody to have a chance in America.”

It has been six months since Obama [launched](#) the initiative aimed at widening opportunities for young men of color in the U.S., and today’s commitments are another instance of Obama relying on the private sector to boost his second-term agenda while his efforts to work with Congress fail.

Earlier in [May](#), a report released by the My Brother’s Keeper Task force used daunting statistics from minority communities to present targeted suggestions for combating the issue, ranging from poor educational preparedness to high rates of incarceration.