



African American Women Civic Leaders Education Policy Briefing December 14, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans (Initiative) held its inaugural African American Women Civic Leaders Education Policy Briefing (AfAmWomenLead) on Monday, December 14, 2015 at the Lyndon B. Johnson Building of the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of AfAmWomenLead was to engage civic organizations in action-oriented, commitment-focused and evidence-based efforts to ensure Black women and girls acquire the knowledge, experiences and credentials needed to be prepared for college, productive careers and satisfying lives.

More than 200 Black women and girls made history at the first AfAmWomenLead Policy Briefing. AfAmWomenLead is the first time a federal agency convened African American stakeholders specifically to support and accelerate the learning and development of Black women and girls.

The AfAmWomenLead Policy Briefing began with an interactive, multi-generational Youth Leadership Forum. The Youth Leadership Forum was designed to promote sisterhood and highlight critical steps toward ensuring success by engaging youth in student-led conversations about strategies to address the most pressing challenges Black girls face at home, in schools and within their communities. Like many events produced by the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, the AfAmWomenLead Policy Forum celebrated the importance of youth voice and established a foundation upon which the experiences and desires of youth participants can be mobilized for meaningful change.



A Leadership Roundtable followed the Youth Leadership Forum. During the Leadership Roundtable, senior leaders from the Obama Administration briefed leaders of the nation’s largest civic organizations on investments and priorities impacting Black women and girls.

Collectively, participating civil organizations committed to perform at least 1 million service hours over the next 12-months to accelerate opportunities for Black women and girls.

Streamed live, the discussion drew millions of unique impressions on social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat.

The event hashtag **#AfAmWomenLead** trended nationally.

A Storify summary of the event is [here](#).

Ebony Magazine featured the day’s events in an online [article](#).

For a full breakdown of the reach of #AfAmWomenLead, please view the report [here](#).

Photos of the day <https://www.flickr.com/photos/afameducation/albums/72157662408310731>

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YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

“Nothing will work unless you do”

~Maya Angelou

The above quote was shared by President’s Advisory Commission on Education Excellence for African Americans (PACEEAA) Commissioner Tiffany Dena Loftin, who opened the Policy Briefing by underscoring the importance of graduating from college and using skills and experiences to advance opportunities for Black women and girls. Commissioner Loftin underscored the importance of civic engagement for Black girls.

Following Commissioner Loftin’s remarks, Deputy Director Khalilah M. Harris moderated a panel of young Black women featuring: Miaja Jawara, a high school advocate with the Urban Youth Collaborative; Cierra Kaler-Jones, George Washington University graduate student and second African American Miss New Jersey in history; Jeanni Simpson, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities HBCU All-Star and Howard university doctoral candidate; Monae White, White House Liaison’s Office, and Lauren Mims, doctoral student at the University of Virginia and White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans Fellow.



Significant Themes Discussed

- *Supporting African American Mental Health:* Panelists discussed the “Strong Black Woman Syndrome,” a concept developed to counteract negative characterizations of Black womanhood by emphasizing that Black women and girls can do all things. This discussion was complemented by a longer conversation about the importance of mental health and the need for caring and concerned adults to support Black girls as they experience stress, street harassment and/or microaggressions.ⁱ Panelists also discussed the

disproportionate amount of stress Black women and girls experienced and encouraged young women to engage in self-care and to ensure health and well-being including by addressing mental health through counseling and professional support.

- *Redefining Narratives:* Panelists discussed the importance of language and how Black girls are portrayed in the media and the impact that societal images and stereotypes of Black women and girls have upon Black girls in school. Participants discussed the need for Black girls to develop tools



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and to build networks of support to counteract negative stereotypes and attempts to denigrate or disempower them.

- *Cultivating Leadership Skills*: Panelists discussed the need for Black women and girls to have more opportunities to lead. A NAACP Legal Defense and the National Women’s Law Center Report found that African American girls aspire to be leaders more than girls of any other race (53%), are most likely to consider themselves to be leaders (75%) and are most likely to have leadership skills (78%).ⁱⁱ During the Youth Forum, panelists highlighted ways for youth to “lead where you are with what you have.” In addition, the Leadership Roundtable provided opportunities for civic leaders to discuss ways to mobilize and empower Black women and girls.
- *Safe Spaces for Women and Girls*: Panelists emphasized the importance of building strong mentor and peer relationships, including through affinity groups, clubs or organizations specifically tailored to address or acknowledge the needs and unique lived experiences of Black woman and girls. This conversation was anchored by a discussion about the need to ensure that home, school, and communal spaces provide opportunities for Black girls to feel safe, supported and engaged. During the Leadership Roundtable Office for Civil Rights (OCR), Assistant Secretary Catherine Lhamon described the Office’s efforts to ensure safety and address campus violence and sexual assault, describing the *It’s On Us* campaign as well as reports released on disproportionate suspension and the school-to-prison pipeline.

“I can’t express to you the magnitude of the impact that yesterday’s panel discussion had on Chavez Schools students and staff...I’ve been informed that students discussed issues over lunch and some profound and informative information was shared. Sincere thanks in providing these enriching opportunities for the growth and development of our students.”

*~ Ruby Sherman, Director of Resource Development
Chavez Schools (Program Participant)*

LEADERSHIP ROUNDTABLE

Goals of the Leadership Roundtable were as follows:

- 1) Call for organizations’ commitment to one million collective service hours over the next 12 months;
- 2) Brief participants on the federal governments’ investments in increasing opportunities for Black women and girls;
- 3) Highlight best practices, map and identify resources to optimize collaboration and collective impact; and
- 4) Leverage a national network of individuals and organizations committed to accelerating the learning and development of Black women and girls.

Organizations with leadership represented included:

- Advancement Project
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated
- Black Lives Matter New York City
- Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Incorporated
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated
- Dignity in Schools Campaign
- Mocha Moms
- Ms. Foundation for Women
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund
- National Black Child Development Institute
- National Congress of Black Women
- National Council of Negro Women, Incorporated
- National Women’s Law Center
- Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated
- Urban Youth Collaborative
- Young Women’s Christian Association

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Brief remarks were provided by Dr. Kimberlyn Leary, Advisor to the White House Council on Women and Girls;ⁱⁱⁱ Catherine Lhamon, Office of Civil Rights Assistant Secretary; Stephanie Sprow, Reach Higher Initiative Deputy Director; Tykiah Wright, PACEEAA Commissioner; and Makeba Clay, the Smithsonian Chief Diversity Officer.

Consistent with the goal of committing at least one million service hours, the following engagement opportunities were discussed:

- *Museum Day Live! 2016*: On Saturday, March 12, 2016, the Smithsonian magazine, which offers free admission to its Smithsonian venues for fifth graders, will partner with museums across the country to allow free, ticketed admission for an individual and a guest to participating museums. All organizations vowed to collaboratively organize a day of service designed to accompany young women and girls to participating museum venues nationwide to celebrate the humanities and engage in cultural experiences together.

For more information, visit <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/museum-day-live-march-2016/>

- *Stand Against Racism*: The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)'s Stand Against Racism campaign is a national strategy to eliminate racism. Its annual racial justice awareness campaign *YWCA*

National Day of Commitment to Eliminate Racism occurs Thursday, April 28 through Sunday, May 1, 2016. Organizations and groups can take a "stand" by hosting a public, private or community event to take part in workshops, panel discussions, public policy advocacy and other opportunities during this time. For more information, visit: www.standagainstracism.org

- *National College Signing Day 2016*: The First Lady's Reach Higher Initiative, through its Better Make Room Campaign, encourages students to apply for and attend college.



Organizations are encouraged to host a College Signing Day in late April/early May 2016 to support educational excellence and college completion, helping advance the President's 2020 college completion goal.

For more information, visit: www.bettermakeroom.org and www.reachhigher.org

- *Parks and Recreation Centennial 2016*: On August 25, 2016, the National Park Service will celebrate its century anniversary by engaging communities to find their national parks and programs to visit. The day will highlight the unique opportunity to take advantage of the nation's recreation, conservation, and historic preservation programs.

To learn more, visit: www.nps.gov.

NEXT STEPS

- ❖ The Initiative highlighted continued opportunities for engagement including hosting an #AfAmTeachIn to provide a platform for youth to speak truth to power as well as raise awareness of the importance of investing

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in African American youth.

The #AfAmTeachIn Tool-Kit is available online at: <http://sites.ed.gov/whiteaa/files/2013/03/WHIEEAA-toolkit.pdf>

- ❖ Leadership Roundtable participants will receive a briefing document that solidifies service commitments, reaffirms the AfAmWomenLead collective impact and shares an events calendar to identify future opportunities to collaborate and support the work
- ❖ All participants will receive an invitation to Individuals with Disabilities Policy Briefing to be held July 2016.

ⁱ Superwoman Schema: African American Women’s Views on Stress, Strength, and Health:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3072704/>

ⁱⁱ Unlicking Opportunity got African American Girls:

http://www.naacpldf.org/files/publications/Unlocking%20Opportunity%20for%20African%20American%20Girls_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Advancing Equity for Women and Girls of Color:

https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/documents/advancing_equity_for_women_and_girls_of_color_report.pdf