



Students pitch their eco-friendly fashion business idea in the entrepreneur session



AFAMWOMENLEAD

STUDENT SUMMIT TO ADVANCE EDUCATIONAL
EXCELLENCE FOR BLACK GIRLS

U.S. Department of Education
December 9, 2016



Greetings,

Thank you for joining us for the AfAmWomenLead Student Summit to advance educational excellence for Black Girls. We joined together to create an empowering environment in which the voices of Black girls were centered. We allowed the recommendations of Black girls to inform the strategies caring and concerned adults gathered, both in person and virtually, will use to ensure that all Black girls are safe and supported in ways that allow them not only to survive, but to thrive in school and in life.

Among the things I am most proud of in my time as Assistant Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans are our efforts to center and celebrate students—the experts. Consistent with this focus, youth shared their unique perspectives during the AfAmWomenLead Student Summit, guiding decisions and informing discussion. Black girls stood with courage as they told their truths, making explicit what they need from caring and concerned adults to do well in school and in life. For example, Quincy talked about the joy of working with other girls and the importance of providing more spaces for women and girls. Jamie asked for adults to actively listen and provide safe spaces. Paige, an AfAmAmbassador who champions the needs of Black students with disabilities, asked adults to embrace student diversity—to ensure that all Black girls have opportunities to soar.

Through the AfAmWomenLead Summit we came together, some as strangers, and left as sisters committed to promoting leadership through education, fellowship and love. Together, we will accomplish so much as a network of change makers and trailblazers.

The report attached includes recommendations crafted by students for educators, researchers, policy makers and practitioners, memorable quotes from the panels, and next steps to sustain the work.

We hope that you will use the report to inform your work and sustain your efforts to support the learning and development of African American women and girls you know. Please do not hesitate to let us know how we can support you in this effort and to share your efforts via social media using the hashtag #AfAmWomenLead.

Thank you again for standing with us as we work to strengthen the country by supporting African American women and girls. We implore you to take care of yourselves as you continue this important work.

Sincerely,

Lauren Nims

Assistant Director

White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans

AfAmWomenLead

Student Summit to Advance Educational Excellence for Black Girls

On December 9, 2016, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans hosted the African American Women Lead (AfAmWomenLead) Summit to advance educational excellence for Black Girls. This Summit was a response to the need for intentional programming and investments in the learning and professional development of African American women and girls.

A NAACP Legal Defense and 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%).¹

The daylong summit provided a platform for Black women and girls to share recommendations for how caring and concerned adults can ensure they thrive. The summit is the second AfAmWomenLead summit and the fifth AfAmWomenLead Initiative event since AfAmWomenLead was launched in December 2015. Participants in the AfAmWomenLead student summit included more than 250 Black girls from across the country, with a significant concentration from the DC, Maryland, and Virginia area.

The student summit began with participants describing their goals for the future, what adults need to know about Black girls, and what students need to be safe, supported and engaged in school.

To feel safe, supported and engaged participants expressed the following needs:

1. Safe spaces to be heard and supported in discussing critical issues
2. Classrooms that are inclusive for both students and educators
3. Adults to know that students have a voice and need to be heard
4. Adults to know if students fully understand a subject in school
5. Adults to provide encouragement and support to identify and pursue their passions
6. Adults to understand students' perspectives
7. Adults to listen to what children have to say
8. Teachers to help nourish the curiosity and talents of talents
9. Adults to embrace the diversity and individuality of all students

¹ Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity (<https://nwlc.org/resources/unlocking-opportunity-african-american-girls-call-action-educational-equity/>)

“There is enough brilliance and beauty and power and talent to shut down the DC power grid” -
Tatyana Ali

Following the opening session, actress Tatyana Ali greeted participants saying, “there is enough brilliance and beauty and power and talent to shut down the DC power grid” Tatyana said, via video before continuing to encourage students to step out of their comfort zones to share their ideas and develop solutions to contemporary problems facing Black women and girls. She also discussed the importance of graduating from college and taking education seriously because “anything you can dream of is possible with an education.”

“It is our duty to ensure our girls’ voices are heard.” - TyKiah Wright

TyKiah Wright, Commissioner for the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans, followed Tatyana Ali. TyKiah reminded the participants of their duty to ensure the voices of young girls are being heard. She highlighted the importance of forming meaningful relationships with other women and providing platforms that lift up the voices of young girls as critical elements of the work. She pushed every woman to ensure activities designed to support young girls are inclusive so that EVERY girl is supported in reaching their full potential. In closing, TyKiah challenged every woman to take a car full of girls to see Hidden Figures as a powerful way to discuss how African American women lead.



Commissioner TyKiah Wright highlights the importance of forming meaningful relationships with other women

Black Girl Change Maker

Following the opening remarks, the student summit featured an all-star panel of young Black girl leaders. Marley Dias, Founder of 1000 Black Girl Books and Editor In Residence for Elle.com, April Star, Print/Runway model, and Mikaela Ulmer, Founder of Me & The Bees Lemonade joined Assistant Director Lauren Mims for the Black Girl Change Maker panel. Panelists shared tips for starting a business, standing up to bullies and affirming the unique identities of Black Girls. Participants asked questions that allowed for conversation about advocating for diversity in literature and curriculum, overcoming adversity, and ways adults can support girls of color in achieving their goals.



Assistant Director Lauren Mims with Black Girl Change Makers Mikaela Ulmer, April Star & Marley Dias

Memorable Quotes:

“My advice that I would give to other girls who want to start their own business is to create a business you have a passion for because I think the more passion that you have about what you do, the more fun you will have while doing it.” -Mikaela Ulmer

“I have done a lot of things to make sure that not only black girls are able to see themselves but that people who are not black are able to understand the experiences of black people and our history and culture and the reasons why I might wear a bonnet on my head and you don't. Things like that.” -Marley Dias

“For me when somebody says that I can't follow my dreams or I can't get into this store or that I'm too young to be an entrepreneur, those comments make me -- they make me want to turn what they said into a goal and do just that. So basically in a way they help me keep going, they make me want to work even harder to prove that they're not right and they should have no right to underestimate my capabilities and everyone's capabilities and what we all can do.” -April Star

“So when I'm sad and I have a challenging day, I remember why I started my entire business in the first place or why I got into it and that was that the bees are dying and I need to save them. So using the bees out there, they need my help. I have to keep on saving them. So I kind of motivate myself like self-motivation to get myself back into the flow or get myself back into what I was working on. Because I don't want to let the bees down or my supporters down and I don't want to let young black girls down because we're all inspiring each other.” -Mikaela Ulmer



“I hate it when someone looks at themselves in the mirror and thinks they're not pretty. Everyone in this entire world is beautiful. No one in this world has the right to say you're not because everyone is. So at the end of the day I want everyone to know that you're beautiful no matter what anybody else thinks about it. That's my goal.”

April Star



Jordan West leading the author breakout session

Student Sessions

Following the Black Girl Change Maker panel, students and the caring and concerned adults supporting them participated in a series of interactive solutions seminars. Often, African American girls are not included at the table when school curriculum and policies are being made and the interactive sessions were designed to disrupt this practice. The sessions were also designed to encourage Black girls to see themselves in spaces where they are often rendered invisible.

Student sessions were modeled after six career tracks: author, media correspondent, scientist, entrepreneur, humanitarian and psychologist. Within each student session, students learned more about the field and then worked collaboratively to design innovative solutions to contemporary problems. Students attended two sessions of their choice facilitated by young Black girls and Black women who have led in the field. Summaries and student recommendations from each breakout session are below.

Author

The author session was facilitated by Jordan West, author of 'A Princess for a Day,' and Betty K. Bynum, author of 'I'm a Pretty Little Black Girl!'

Seven year old leader Jordan West shared how she hosts free princess parties for girls who are homeless or in foster care and then wrote a book about her experience. During the session, Jordan inspired other girls to publish their own stories as well as to be entrepreneurs and begin their own businesses. She also encouraged girls to find role models, hang out with people who inspire, and to read often.

Betty Bynum encouraged young girls to write their stories, emphasizing the importance of books that represent powerful and affirming images of Black women and girls. Betty talked about the process of fighting to publish her book and the importance of using literature to spread messages of hope and affirmation.

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- Students need books with main characters, settings and scenarios that affirm their lived experiences
- Students are never too young to be authors or otherwise tell their own stories
- Books read in school should include diverse perspectives
- Students want more books that include empowering messages that celebrate the unique aspects of being a Black girl

Media Correspondent

The media correspondent session was led by Kimberly Foster, Founder of For Harriet, and Melissa Kimble, Senior Social Media Manager of EBONY Magazine. Girls discussed popular images of Black women and girls in the media and the importance of being critical consumers. Girls discussed their displeasure with the images of Black women on social media, on television, in magazines and on movie screens, talking specifically about how the images make them feel and shaped how others treat them.

Kimberly and Melissa emphasized the importance of recognizing damaging media and negative narratives and provided tips on how to respond. They emphasized that negative narratives are not true and encouraged girls to create and find their own.

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- A lot of mainstream media is not created by Black women
- The perspectives of Black women and girls are important in the media
- There are a lot of negative narratives of women and girls, especially women and girls of color, in the media but you do not have to believe them
- You can and must create your own narratives

Scientist

The scientist session was led by Dr. Stephanie Rodriguez, American Association for the Advancement of Sciences Foundation Fellow. The session began with students introducing themselves by telling their science story—how they came to love or find an interests in science. Stephanie then discussed her career as a scientist and the lack of Black women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) courses of study and industries. She shared that she is often the only Black woman in the spaces she occupies and talked about the need to increase the number of women in STEM programs and careers.

Assistant Director Lauren Mims challenged participants to work together to develop solutions to increase the number of women and girls in STEM. Specifically, the girls worked in groups to: identify ways that educators can build interest in STEM among Black girls, including by creating a cool new science or

technology class or extra curricular activity or supporting Black girls in the design of an app. Student projects included a water filter backpack for youth in Flint to have clean water at school, an app to find stores that sell hair products for Black girls, and curriculum that let them experiment.

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- Students need more opportunities to get involved in STEM programs
- Students want to learn more about Black women scientists in school
- All students need to be reminded that they are already scientists
- Skills like coding learned in after school programs should be used in the classroom too



Students working in groups to design apps, classes and activities. The youngest student was three years old.

Humanitarian

The Humanitarian session was led by Gabrielle Hickmon, graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania. Participants began the session by discussing what it means to be a humanitarian before talking about ways to support women and girls internationally. Girls worked in groups to design social action projects they could implement in their school or community, such as clothing drives, mission trips, or awareness campaigns. Adult mentors discussed their experiences traveling, studying abroad, and engaging in social action projects designed to support and empower women and girls around the world. Students also discussed the Peace Corps and the Let Girls Learn Initiative to ensure adolescent girls get the education they deserve.

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- It is important to travel abroad to broaden your perspective
- Girls in the United States can support girls in other countries as well as girls in their own communities & you do not have to travel or have a lot of money to make an impact
- In studying abroad, you learn more about your own culture and identity
- Curriculum should include stories of girls around the world

Entrepreneur

The entrepreneur session was led by Mikaila Ulmer, CEO of Me and the Bees Lemonade. It was co-facilitated by Walker's Legacy, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting entrepreneurship among Black women.

Mikaila began the session by sharing her story of beginning her business Me & The Bees Lemonade and pitching to the sharks on Shark Tank. She described the process of "how to be a boss," which includes developing a "brilliant idea," creating a budget, and pitching an idea.

Participants were supported in thinking through businesses they may wish to establish. Ideas included: a sustainable eco-friendly clothing business, a gymnastics company that would provide free lessons for students who were unable to afford it, a publishing company for books written by Black girls, a locally sourced delivery service for families with disabilities, and a fashion business of jean jackets with patches that spread awareness of and solutions to police brutality against Black and Latino people. Students also developed budgets that accounted for the cost of materials, shipping, advertising and web management and presented their pitches.

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- There is more to creating a business than simply having an idea
- Creating a business plan is fun and girls can do it with the proper support
- You can use your talents and passion to make a business
- You have to work really hard as an entrepreneur
- To be a good business owner you should know a lot of math

Psychologist

The psychologist session was led by Dr. Kimberlyn Leary, Associate Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Harvard, who previously served as Senior Advisor to the White House Council of Women and Girls and Cierra Kaler-Jones, who served as a graduate fellow with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans & is a Graduate Student at George Washington University and Former Miss New Jersey. Dr. Leary and Cierra began the session by working with students to define mental health. Students defined mental health as "the way a person reacts to their circumstances." Dr. Leary supplemented the definition by explaining that mental health was "being able to do what you want to do, and resist doing what you do not want to do."

The session focused on the importance of mental as well as physical health, highlighting many of the unique challenges that Black women and girls face in the pursuit of success. Participants discussed the

importance of stress and the utility of coping mechanisms. Students were supported in identifying what parents need to know about the mental health concerns of young Black girls.

The session concluded with an intimate exercise where students demonstrated trust and vulnerability by writing their deepest insecurities on Post- It Notes. The group then worked to disprove the stigmas that are too often projected onto them by writing and reciting positive affirmations. Cierra stressed that in order to be mentally healthy, each and every girl needs some alone time doing something that she enjoys.

In support of continuing this important work before the session ended each student responded to the following prompt: "Tomorrow, I will do ____ to take care of myself."

Student Takeaways & Recommendations:

- Adults need to know that everyone is different and just because someone thinks or behaves differently doesn't mean there's a problem
- Adults need to know that many students struggle with confidence
- Adults need to know that children are not too young to experience stress and they can feel overwhelmed like adults. It is important for adults to know that the stress that can come from managing school, friends and extracurricular activities can be overwhelming.



Students brainstormed social action projects they can launch in their communities

Adult Session

While students worked in breakout sessions, space was created for caring and concerned adults to share more about their work, reflect, and discuss advancing educational excellence for Black girls. The session led by Monique Toussaint, Senior Advisor to the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, served as a forum for adults to discuss what they heard and learned from the youth participants throughout the day. They were then supported in identifying ways to leverage their time, talent, treasures and collective networks to respond to the request made by younger participants in meaningful and measurable ways.

The women participating in this session emphasized the importance of being intentional in empowering young girls—being mindful of the power of media and popular images of women and girls that are often circulated and the role they can play as mentors who disrupt negative narratives while offering possibility and hope. The women participating in this session made a commitment to remain connected to one another and to share best practices and encourage one another as they serve as advocates for and mentors to other Black women and girls.

The women participating in this session discussed the following commitments to sustain the energy and efforts of the summit:

1. Listen to girls
2. Increase the number of positive and healthy images of Black women and girls
3. Nurture and cultivate the desire of young Black girls to pursue entrepreneurship
4. Remain positive and intentional in supporting young Black girls
5. Mentor—Provide internships, take girls on trips and otherwise facilitate opportunities for girls to identify their passion and to learn and grow
6. Center the voices of girls
7. Celebrate inclusion and ensure every girls knows that she matters
8. Love our girls

Twitter Chat



At 1:00 pm EST, U.S. Secretary of Education John King, Brittany Packnett, Teach for America Vice President of National Community Alliances, and Lauren Mims facilitated an #AfAmEdChat Twitter Chat on supporting leadership for African American women and girls. For the storify of the conversation as well as full day of tweets from the event, visit: <https://storify.com/AfAmEducation/afamwomenlead>



Black Woman Trailblazers

The AfAmWomenLead summit ended with a Black Woman Trailblazer panel featuring Brittany Packnett, Teach for America Vice President of National Community Alliances; Symone D. Sanders, CNN Political Commentator; Dr. Kimberlyn Leary, Associate Professor in the Department of Health Policy and Management at Harvard, and Cierra Kaler-Jones, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans graduate fellow and student at George Washington University. Panelists shared personal stories and provided tips to ensure that all Black Women are supported in their ability to lead.

Memorable Quotes:

“We need to get comfortable with ourselves and a lot of times it's hard. I just became comfortable with myself over the last three years. It's a constant struggle to continuously be comfortable. That's what we have to do. When you're comfortable and confident with what you're talking about and what you're doing, I think it empowers you to bring your authentic self to the conversation. So I don't have to pretend to sound like anybody else. I know on TV I come out and sound like Symone.” Symone Sanders

“People are going to be afraid of your brilliance because you're going to shine so much. You're going to shine so much that it's going to get in their eyes. And it's going to bother them. And that's okay. That's a them problem, not a you problem.” Cierra Kaler-Jones

“Because every single one of you has a purpose. It might be to be a powerful scientist. It might be to go to Harvard medical school. It might be to make history. Right? It might be to be a doctor or lawyer, a teacher, the President.... Every single one of you has a different purpose. So I wish that I had decided earlier to just stop listening to other people and remain focused on the purpose that God had for me, instead of trying to measure myself up against other people.” Brittany Packnett

“This work is very hard. It's very demanding and we haven't talked about it yet, but there will be failures. How we manage failures and how we manage setbacks is usually a function of whether or not we can find sanctuary. Sanctuary can be in the arts. It can be in religious spiritual meditation and sometimes might be in counseling and psychotherapy. Set a place you can replenish yourself and where you can discover your own talent and purpose. This is so important to cultivate.” Dr. Kimberlyn Leary

Noteworthy & Next Steps

Following the Summit, the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans will:

- Publish a report that outlines opportunities to support Black women and girls, as well as outlines the recommendations made by girls during the Summit
- Work collaboratively to identify and champion the contributions of Black women and girls
- Develop a Slack group and joint calendar with events and conference calls for stakeholders interested in sustaining the work
- Work with partner organizations to continue to host summits and listening sessions across the Nation

Organizations in attendance committed to taking young girls to see Hidden Figures in theaters as well as host their own teach-in uplifting the voices of Black women and girls.



Measurable outcomes:

Registration

- More than 250 guests registered to attend the conference
- The event was also live streamed for the general public to view expanding the audience into homes of citizens across the Nation. The full summit can be watched at: <http://edstream.ed.gov/webcast/Play/5479cf4ac74c4fc08bc6d881ac088fd11d>

Social Media Metrics

- Social media was integrated into the event merging in-person & national audience dialogue
- The event hashtag #AfAmWomenLead trended nationally the entire day, reaching over 4 million timelines with over 500 tweets, retweets, and replies during the summit. For a recap of the tweets visit: <https://storify.com/AfAmEducation/afamwomenlead>

Media

- For Harriet. The White House Will Bring Together Over 250 Black Girls for a Day of Empowerment. <http://www.forharriet.com/2016/12/the-white-house-will-bring-together.html#ixzz4TJhnjbj>
- U.S. Department of Education. #AfAmWomenLead Student Summit Focuses on Educational Excellence and Leadership Opportunities for African American Girls <http://www.ed.gov/news/media-advisories/afamwomenlead-student-summit-focuses-educational-excellence-and-leadership-opportunities-african-american-girls>
- Walker's Legacy. White House Holds Black Girls Lead Summit to Advance Educational Excellence <http://www.walkerslegacy.com/recap-the-white-house-initiative-african-american-women-lead-student-summit/>
- Eliot-Hine Middle School Student Coverage of #AfAmWomenLead Student Summit to Advance Educational Excellence for Black Girls <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/93148103>

Photos

- Photos by 10 year old photographer and Black girl change maker Madison Harrison and Maples Media Group are available for download on our flickr at: <https://flic.kr/s/aHskQPA5YU>. Make sure to tag your photos using the hashtag #AfAmWomenLead



#AfAmWomenLead



The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans

On July 26, 2012, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to establish the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans to restore the United States as a global leader in education. President Obama, through his vision and use of his presidential authority, sought to strengthen the nation by improving educational outcomes for African Americans of all ages and to help ensure that this population would receive an education that prepares them for college and productive careers to contribute to the well-being of society.

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans (Initiative) works with individuals and organizations throughout the country to highlight and share effective national and local programs, policies, and practices that support the development and success of African American students. Specifically, the Initiative highlights and mobilizes youth voices by providing platforms for African American youths to make recommendations for actions that can be taken to ensure all students feel and are safe, supported and engaged in schools, in communities, and in life. Additionally, the Initiative leverages relationships with media partners, new and traditional, to shape positive and affirming narratives of African American students, highlight and disseminate promising and proven practices, as well as provide recommendations to accelerate African American educational excellence essential to the success of African American students, from birth through college completion and career entry.

- To date, the Initiative has focused on the following three guiding principles:
- To provide platforms for youth (and other impacted populations) to make recommendations regarding the policies, practices and programs designed to accelerate learning and development;
- To highlight people, programs and practices facilitating the learning and development of African American students; and
- To serve as a liaison between and among communities supporting African American students of all ages.

For more information about the Initiative, visit us at sites.ed.gov/afameducation.

Be sure to follow us on social media at:

Twitter: @AfAmEducation | Instagram: OfficialAfAmEd | Facebook: OfficialAfAmEd