

PSC-ED-OUS

**Moderator: Khalilah Harris
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4:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you all for standing by. At this time, all participants are in a listen only mode. After the presentation, we will conduct a question and answer session. To ask a question, you may press star and then 1. Today's call is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

I'll now turn the meeting over to your host, Ms. Khalilah Harris. Ma'am, you may now begin.

Khalilah Harris: Thank you, (Jessie). Good evening, everyone. Again, I'm Khalilah Harris, Deputy Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African American. And I want to thank you for joining us on this Thanksgiving Tuesday for the next installment in our national webinar series entitled "Supporting African Americans First Generation Students."

This month we are focusing on ways to support African Americans First Generation Students which is a historically unsupported community. We are committing our efforts to provide an array of resources that will help students considered to be first generation and the educators, families and communities who are committed to their success.

It is our hope that through this webinar, you'll be inspired and gain some meaningful dialogue and joint efforts of those invested in the progress of African American first gen students and all students to insure we all have access to high quality educational opportunities. And with that said, we have an amazing panel.

We are going to hear for both students professional school counselor, members of the Higher Ed community and from the federal government about the ways that first gen students experience school, the supports that they need and ways that you can invest in students of all ages who might be first generation attending a post-secondary institution.

With that said, we're going to start with our most important and critical demographic. And that will be with (Trevor Ebbert). (Trevor Ebbert) is a junior at the University of Baltimore. I am going to hand slides over to him and give it away to Trevor. Trevor, you can begin.

(Trevor Ebbert): Okay. Hello. Like Ms. Harris said, my name is (Trevor Ebbert). I attend University of Baltimore. And if everyone can see the top of my slide, it's called "Overcoming Adversity." And the reason that is is because growing up in Baltimore City and being biracial, I've battled a lot going through public schools.

So I guess I can talk about growing up in a home with a biracial family. It was often hard because of having identity crisis with myself and trying to figure out who I am. There's always the attending high school and trying balance education as well as coming home and leaning about myself more. Therefore, throughout high school I wasn't really that involved in education.

So I suffered. And I ended up graduating high school with a 2.0 GPA. However, I didn't let that stop me there because senior year, I ended up having to turn that around because I realized through my mother as she's always pushed us, me and my brothers, to do well in school. I ended up applying to University of Baltimore being the only school that I got accepted into.

And through them - well, through me even meeting Khalilah Harris through the Summer Bridge Program, I realized that I needed to get my act together with education. So going to University of Baltimore, a non-traditional school, I faced a lot of difficulties. It is a commuter school. So it made it hard. I recently moved out to Harford County.

So the commute is about an hour away. We do have dorms on our campus. However, those come - those do not come out of financial aid. They come out-of-pocket. So, it was often hard to pay or to try to pay to stay on campus. So that's why I commute. There is not a freshman experience or a traditional college experience as when they think of going to a more traditional school if everyone's familiar with University of Maryland, College Park.

However, there is a few good things about University of Baltimore. It is a primarily - its hands on academics. And they really strive to have a better connection with the students. I know our campus - well, our student/teacher ratio is I believe 15 to 1. So it proves - it makes it easier for professors to interact with students and vice-versa.

However, our university is also predominantly white faculty school which brings up a lot of problems with how professors may interact with students in different micro aggressions that happen on campus. I have had a few happen to myself. I actually remember last week in my philosophy class I walked and

on the board read “Baltimore City’s Homicide Rate” which I believe is no 310.

And below it was, the victims were criminals. And that made me feel uncomfortable right away being as that my philosophy class - well, my professor is white. And the majority of my class mates are white as well. So I didn’t - I felt uncomfortable about that. But they didn’t see the problem with it as well as another micro aggression that happened with a librarian of making comments about my hairstyle made me feel uncomfortable.

He said that if he stuck his hand into an electric socket, he felt as though he would get the same natural hairstyle that I have which made me feel really uncomfortable. But the personal contributions I’m trying to make on campus now is advocating and changing how these faculty members interact with their students.

So, similar to University of Missouri and (Hopkins) University, a group of members from the Black Student Union, Women of Color on Campus, different organizations where it’s - majority people of color, we have come together and we have written a proposal to the President of the University of Baltimore advocating for a more diverse - more diverse faculty and more cultural sensitivity training for student - well, for faculty members interacting with students.

Can everyone hear me?

Khalilah Harris: We can hear you.

(Trevor Ebbert): Okay. I saw something in the chat that said “Can’t hear anything. No sound.” Just wanted to know what the problem was with that. But, so through this,

we're waiting to hear back from the university president next year - I'm sorry, next week with that. Is there anything else you would like to touch on, Ms. Harris?

Khalilah Harris: No. Thank you. So I think what we heard from Trevor are a series of ways he has experienced with a series of things that he needs to navigate and needed to navigate to both access college and to remain at college. We know there are a number of campuses managing issues of supporting students through racial harassment.

But even at a more gross root level as opposed to grass tops, we know that there are many things that happen on lots of college campuses that cause first generations to just either feel isolated or feel like they don't have the necessary support from the institution to be able to not only make it on campus, but to persist through completion of their degree.

And so with that said, we're going to hear a little bit more from Ms. Felicia Meadows. And Felicia is a professional school counselor among other things. And she's going to talk a bit about what families can do to prepare for college. And Felicia, you are up next. Thank you for joining us.

Felicia Meadows: Thank you so very much for having me. So just listening to some of the things that (Trevor) shared, I'll be going over and talking about some things that we can do at the school level to help parents and students be successful as they make the transition. And how do we support first generation college students. Well, I always - I'm a quote person.

I love quotes. So as you can see, I share Nelson Mandela's quote that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can give to change the

world.” Because education is very important. Not only the learning piece, but to be a lifelong learner. That’s why education is very important for everyone.

On the first slide, I shared a couple of stats that are relevant for first generation college students. The first one being about the number of students - at the top there. The number of students who end up changing their major while in college on average, average at least three times over the course of their college career.

Eighty percent of students change at least three times. And that’s a lot. And that adds to the college retention rate. We look at the bottom. I share about community college students. Sixty percent of those students enroll in developmental courses. And that goes to rigor - which I’ll speak on a little bit later.

And at the 4-year college level, about 20% of freshman have to take remedial classes which is concerning across the board. And the last thing that I shared is according to Higher Ed, the first generation college students earn a degree at the rate of 27.4% after 4 years compared to their counterpart who have parents with a college degree and that’s 42.1%.

So they’re already at a disadvantage. Okay. I’m trying to advance my slide. Okay. There we go. Alright. I don’t know what’s happen. Okay. So how do we prepare first generation college students? When we look at the school level we look at what administrators can do. Administrators can be assistant principals, vice principals, academic deans.

What can we do at the school level to support our babies as they’re making their transition to their first year of college - first generation college students? So one thing that administrators can do is support students in their post-

secondary pursuits. Whatever it is they need post-secondary, be very supportive. This is a new venture not only for students but parents as well.

The next what can teachers do? So teachers can engage students by providing rigorous course work that will actually prepare them for college. That goes back to my earlier stats about remedial courses. They're student in courses that are not rigorous. And when we say rigor, it provides a level of instruction that they need to be successful at the college level.

That's why so many students leave high school and go into college having to take remedial courses. Not one, but sometimes one or two which are no credit-bearing courses. So teachers need to insure that they're providing rigorous coursework to help students prepare for beyond high school. Assist with writing college essays.

That would come through the English or Language Arts teachers. Insuring that essays are complete. That they meet the requirements for the college application. On average, I usually suggest that students - children do maybe 3 standard essays, generic essays that they can use not only for college applications but for scholarship as well.

And writing recommendations. These are for all teachers. Now of course we do need to include - in these recommendations, you should always include where a student has a little weakness or where they fall short. But make sure that the student's accomplishments and their strengths and abilities are highlighted.

We want them to put their best foot forward. We want them to shine. So teachers need to make sure that the recommendations highlight all of the accomplishments of the students. Their strengths. Their abilities. What they

have done to not only show that they're phenomenal students, but a well-rounded individual.

Now, we look at what school counselors can do. You see that list is very extensive. That's why we're so important - instrumental in this process. So what can school counselors do? One thing that we can do is insure that graduation requirements are aligned with college admissions criteria. I'm just going to share one of my own personal stories.

When I was in high school, I took - I didn't realize - because my school counselor wasn't instrumental in my college process that if I took two foreign languages, it had to be two years of the same foreign language. That is the - that's the criteria for most 4-year institutions. You have to have two years of a foreign language.

And it has to be the same foreign language. So counselors need to insure that the graduation requirements meet the college admission criteria. Also providing information to qualified students regarding dual enrollment. Now dual enrollment is - it used to be called concurring enrollment. But it's not called dual enrollment.

And students can enroll in college courses while still in high school. So they will actually earn college credit. And now with dual enrollment, it's twofold. Students earn both the high school credit for the course they take at the college level and college courses. So that in turn prepares them for the college experience.

Make sure the qualifying students are in honors and AP courses, Advanced Placement courses. Those honors is usually 9th and 10th grade depending on the program. Some programs start students in AP courses in 10th and up. But

AP's usually the 11th and 12th when those advanced placement courses which in turn if students are successful in the AP courses and earn the AP credit, they can also get college credit for those AP courses if they - when they fit to take the AP test, the AP exam.

Insure the students have taken the SAT and ACT. Those are two very different tests. I'll get into that a little later. Provide information on scholarships. There are scholarships out here for everything. Everything. You name it, there's a scholarship for it. Insure that FAFSA forms are completed.

That's the financial aid form. Every parent needs to complete a FAFSA form. Every parent needs to complete a FAFSA. Even if you don't think you qualify for financial aid, a FAFSA must be completed. Additionally, career assessment. Complete career assessments with students to insure that they're aligned with their college major. Why are they going to college?

What are they going to college for? You know they can't get there and say, "Why am I here?" Align the career options with the college major and the college best suited for that major. Make sure that parent nights are hosted to help parents with the process and conference with parents and students regarding the college selection process.

Now the importance of family engagement. From the school piece, I shared the school piece with teachers, administrators and school counselors can do. But what can parents do as first generation parents because they're technically first generation parents as well going through this experience. So the important - it's very important. Family engagement is very, very important.

Make sure that you support your child in their academic success. Learn about the process. Now let me say this too. It's not just overwhelming for first time

college students and parents. The process is overwhelming for everyone. Whether you've been to college before, you never had the experience. It is a very overwhelming process.

And you need to understand what it entails. So learn the process. Attend college fairs, financial aid workshops. Many high schools have college application signing nights where students and parents come and sign applications. Go through the FAFSA form. Learn about different programs. Adhere to all important timelines.

Make sure you're reading those deadlines. The journey can be very stressful. It is very stressful for everyone. So try to be supportive and understand what your child is experiencing because they're stressing as well. Make sure to set up a meeting with your child's school counselor. I shared all the ways that the school counselors are very instrumental in this process.

So make sure that you set up an appointment with your child's counselor to make sure they're on target and on track. And I'd say - you know I tell parent this all the time. Meet with your child's teacher at least twice a year. You know set up a parent-teacher conference. Some teachers like via email. Some do phone just to see where your child stands academically.

If they need a little bit more support than that. And maybe once a quarter. But at least two times a year check in with the teachers to see how your child is doing. And remember, this is a learning experience for both, both parents and child. This is a learning experience. So please, please, please be patient with each other.

So, how can communities, families and schools engage in student's success? So I've shared some things here. You can go back. And I'm not going to read

everything because it's a lot of information. But service learning. You can do service learning. Internships, mentoring, job shadowing, extracurricular activities.

All these are tied into not only what happens at the school level, but in the community as well. You need to connect to those people that can make these things happen. And the school counselor again is very instrumental in this. And remember again, I said I'm a quote person. "We make a living by what we get. But we make a life by what we give." That's Winston Churchill.

So the last thing that I wanted to share are resources for first generation college students. Upward Bound is a phenomenal program. Phenomenal. Phenomenal. You have to reach out to your child's high school to find out whether or not they participate in Upward Bound. It's a year around program for low income students and students who are first generation.

So that program is there. The college board, the SAT, the ACT. That's the other exam students need to take. And the difference between the two is that the SAT is a reasoning based test. And ACT is content based. So you need to determine which of the two is the best for your child to have. The FAFSA, That's the federal student aid form that every parent - I'm going to reiterate every parent should fill out.

United Negro College Fund gives phenomenal information, scholarship money for students as well. And this is - this is not specific to the State of Maryland. But Way to Go, Maryland is a great, great, great resource for parents and students and educators to help you with the timeline. And Way to Go, Maryland, it doesn't start at the high school level.

They start with 6th grade. What you need to do in sixth all the way to 12 and all the timelines that are included. And the last thing I want to share again remember to connect with your school counselor. School counselors are very, very, very instrumental in this process. Thank you.

Khalilah Harris: Thanks so much, Ms. Meadows. That was a wealth of information. It's always great to hear from people who are actually in the school house working with our scholars. We want to make sure that we comment to the point that Ms. Meadows made about beginning the process as early as possible.

And we found around the country that a premise and practice is to begin the process from the cradle. Even if you have not attended college, you can find a neighbor, someone at your church, someone in a local community organization who had gone to college and start exposing your students to college as early as possible because we know you want your child to have the best education possible.

And that goes for our students as well. If you know a neighbor or a cousin or someone on an athletic league or in your music class who has a sibling that went to college, see if you can visit their annual homecoming or an athletic event, sporting event that's happening on campus. We know that there is a hidden curriculum behind what it takes to not only attain college, but to persist through college.

For those of us who have been to college, our children experience that hidden curriculum on an everyday basis simply by having a t-shirt in their drawer from our university. Or by going to homecomings or alumni events with us. And so those are some of the opportunities we also want to provide for our students to be able to see themselves in college and to disrupt the narrative that African American students don't go to college or aren't success there.

With that said, we want to hear from our college who is in an institution of higher education, Dr. Toya Corbett is the Executive Director of Student Support (unintelligible) at the North Carolina Central University. And I'm going to turn the presentation over to Dr. Corbett. And you ready, Dr. Corbett?

Toya Corbett: Yes. Thanks, Ms. Harris. Thank you. As a student affairs administrator on a college campus, it is my responsibility that all and in particularly first generation college students are engaged in some type of activity whether it be a student organization, student government association, a leadership program, being involved in campus recreation or attending athletic events.

But not only do I assist students, but I devote quite a bit of time in assisting parents because it's tough enough being financially supportive to a - for a child going to college. But it's even more demanding to be a parent who understands all the challenging associated with college life. I want to start out with some advice for parents.

And the slide is not going. But I'll keep moving. I want parents first to understand an important acronym. And that is FERPA. F-E-R-P-A. The Family Education of Rights and Privacy. It's a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. And just because you are paying your child's tuition, unfortunately you're not just able to call and get their grades or find out information about them while they are attending school.

Their rights are protected by the federal government. However, it is important that when they first arrive on campus for orientation that you have your student or your child sign a waiver saying that you can get that information

just in case you need to call and conduct business on their behalf. Secondly, as the previously speaker said prior to me is file your FAFSA on time.

The perfect time to file is after completing your income taxes. Third, do not force your child into a major that they do not like. Just because you may be an accountant or in a particular profession doesn't mean that your child's going to have the same interest. They should be engaged in something that they like and they're going to have a passion or because you're spending a whole lot of money to send them to college.

So they should be engaged in a topic that they like. One of the things that I do stress to parents is if your child calls home every day, you should worry. If they call home only once a week, they are adjusting just fine. If they're calling home every day, there's something going on and you should really check about what's happening.

Are they having roommate issues? Are they having classroom issues? Are they failing the course and they just don't want to tell you? But make sure you check on your child at least once a week. If they call you within a week's time, you should contact the university to find out where they are. Also support your child, your college student emotionally.

Too many young children are suffering from depression and other mental illnesses. Suicide is actually the second leading cause of death among 20 to 24 years-olds. More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from medical illnesses combined. And the suicide rates peaks among young adults from ages 20 to 24.

And one in 12 US college students make a suicide plan. So it's very important that somethings - parents don't want to hear or ever want to think about their

child doing. But it's very prevalent around college campuses. Do not dismiss it. If you feel like your child is going through something, it is important.

There are resources on each college campus. They have counseling centers that provide a service that your child should use. And if your child keeps expressing it over and over that they do not want to attend college, listen to them. There may be an alternative. We want them to go to college. But if it's - is it time? Should they take a year off and explore some other options?

But just be sure that they actually want to be there and that you're not wasting a lot of money. Sending them to college and they're not going to class. They're not engaged. They're spending time in their room. Or they're hanging out, they just don't want to be there. For the students who are listening on the line, learn to be independent.

Try not to call you parents every time you need something or something goes wrong. Try to figure it out yourself. This is the time to grow up and be an adult. Definitely try not to call your parents. If you know that something is missing from your FAFSA. Or don't call your mom to have her call the financial aid officer.

If you're going to be late turning in the paper, do not call your mother to call your professor. Learn to be independent. One of the biggest things - advice that I have for first generation college students is to get involved. Join a student organization. And over - my over 10 years of experience as a college administrator, I have found students who participate in at least one activity their first year in college tend to perform much better academically.

And they socially adjust to college life much soon than those who tend to just go to class. Go to the cafeteria and back to their rooms. I recommend joining a

few organizations that is connected to your major. So if you're a biology major, you join the biology club. If you're an accounting major, you join the accounting club.

So get involved in that one academic club first to get you acclimated to other things socially going on in campus and this way you will learn more people in your major. You can have study groups. You can find out more career options in your major. But definitely get involved in something. Go to a lecture series that is being held on campus.

If there's a movie night. There's a game night. There's intermural if you played basketball in high school. You wanted to be you own (unintelligible), you can do all those things right there on your campus instead of sitting in your room and not being engaged. Seek internships. My advice to is to seek internships during your freshman year so that (unintelligible) after your first two semesters of college you have an internship.

A lot of people say "Wait until your sophomore year." I see no harm in trying to get one your freshman year. Did you have it your sophomore year? Your junior year. And then more than likely you're going to be guaranteed a job after you graduate from college. Definitely if you cannot get an internship, try to shadow someone in the field that you desire.

Ask them could you shadow for two or three days as that would be helpful as well. Students that have a learning disability in high school, do not be embarrassed. A lot of people do. There are resources on campus to help you. Register with the Office of Disabilities to receive special accommodations. And what that means is that you will get longer time to take the test.

You would get tutoring. You can even have someone go to your class with you that will take notes for you. So don't be embarrassed. There are resources on campus to help you to succeed. And lastly, be mindful of the cost of a college degree. It is okay to change your major. It is even okay to enter college being undecided on what you want to study.

But at least by your third semester, you should have some idea of what you want to get a degree in. I know students who changed their major two to three and four times. That's okay for the most part because college is time to explore what you want to do. But be mindful again of the money that you are investing in those extra semesters that you are there trying to figure out what you want to do.

And you also want to be sure that the courses that you are taking will be counted towards your degree in the make that you gain. And one of the last things I want to say is be sure to be able to create relationships with your professors and administrators on campus. Those are the people that are going to be there to provide you with hands on guidance and cultivate you into an amazing scholar.

Thank you, Ms. Harris.

Khalilah Harris: Thank you so much, Dr. Corbett. You touched on some excellent practical points. We also want to make sure to amplify a couple of points you made around completing the FAFSA. We want to make sure that all families and students are aware and those supporting students are aware that in the coming year, you will be able to file your FAFSA in 2016.

You will be able to file your FAFSA on October 1. And you'll be able to use taxes from the previous year. So you may have heard of the term called "Prior

Prior.” And what that means is you are able to file your FAFSA as early as October 1. The deadline won’t change. The department is simply giving you additional time to get it in and earlier start.

And you will be able to use going forward the prior year’s taxes. So instead of waiting and waiting and waiting for your parents to file their taxes until April 15 or if you need to somehow process yourself as an independent student detached from a guardian, a legal guardian, you will have more time to do that in the years going forward.

So beginning October 1, 2016, you will be able to file your FAFSA for the next year. And you will be able to use the prior year’s taxes. With that said, that’s an excellent Segway into our next panelist who is Ms. Stephanie Sprow. Stephanie is the Deputy Director for the First Lady’s Reach Higher initiative. And she’s going to talk about the efforts of federal government and the investments being made to insure we become the first in the world’s graduates by the year 2020.

So I’m going to turn it over to Stephanie Sprow.

Stephanie Sprow: Thank you and good afternoon. Thank you to the White House initiative for allowing me to join you to talk about First Lady Michelle Obama’s Reach Higher initiative. The First Lady started Reach Higher because she wants to inspire every student to complete a post-secondary degree which means a traditional 4-year college or university, a two-year school, a community college or a through what we call an industry recognized certificate.

Basically, she wants you to finish and to graduate. Reach Higher focuses on four main elements that fit together like a jig saw puzzle towards the goal of helping students throughout the country to again become first in the world in

college completion. The US used to be ranked first. But now we're ranked about 12th based on OECD data.

So we know that a recognized credential is extremely important. The first element is exposing students to college and career opportunities as Dr. Harris mentioned earlier on the call. Get your students on a college campus and get them thinking about what that means. We encourage all students to learn more about college, but also about their passions.

What gets your students excited? What do you like in school? And how can that lead to a desirable career? Because we know that the vast majority of jobs in the 21st Century require skills that students will not receive in high school. So high school is simply not enough. They need specialized training and instruction.

And the earlier that students learn about college and careers, the sooner they can make good choices. So that flows into our second element inspiring and supporting academic and summer planning. Students and families need to understand early the importance of college preparation. Remediation is a big problem on college campuses.

And students need to be more aware of what classes they should take while in high school in order to succeed after high school. So that means greater access to AP classes and courses in your school, support for test preparation and using summers and out of school time wisely. And we know that regardless of family income, black students and Latino students take AP or advanced placement and IB, International Baccalaureate classes at a much lower rate than that of their white counterparts.

It means using your summer breaks wisely to get caught up on material or to get an internship or a job to learn new skills or as we mentioned earlier, to visit a nearby college campus. It doesn't cost anything to visit a school that may be near you. Get on a campus and see what college is like. Our third element is make financial aid and college affordability a reality.

No money is the No. 1 reason that students cite for not attending school. But it should not be a total deterrent. Reach Higher works closely with the Office of Federal Student Aid here at the Department of Education. And you've already heard from the other speakers about the importance of completing the FAFSA or the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

The FAFSA is the only way to apply for federal money and is often used to grant state and private funds. Let me repeat myself. The FAFSA is the only way to apply for federal money. There are lots of scam artists out there. But know that you can go to FAFSA.gov - F-A-F-S-A.gov to learn more about the form.

We want to help demystify financial aid by exposing students and their parents to the financial aid process early before it's time to complete the forms. We recommend that students and parents go to studentaid.gov or FAFSA.gov to learn more about the forms and even complete a practice form to become familiar with the information that is required.

Mrs. Obama knows firsthand that college is truly an investment is quite possibly the best investment you can make. And when your parents and friends and families don't have the answers or the help to give to a student, we want them to turn to school counselors like Mrs. Meadows who spoke earlier on the call.

Supporting high school counselors has always been key to the success of Reach Higher. And like Mrs. Meadows just demonstrated, they know the students. They know the colleges and the career tech schools and the programs that will benefit the students. And they know how to make the two come together.

We are working with counselors to raise awareness about their expertise and college and career readiness and to shine a bright spotlight on the role that they play each and every day in schools across the country. So obviously students are key to Reach Higher. And to speak to them better, we launched “Better Make Room” in October to help students find the resources to get to and through college.

I encourage you to share Better Make Room with the 14 to 18 year old students in your life. Better Make Room says that all of us need to give a space for this next generation, generation Z. They are ready and willing to join the conversation about the future. And they want to create stuff. And they think differently about solving problems than we do.

And they want to do that with each other. They realize on average that college is a way to make their dreams a reality and not just an impediment. So, you and your students can log onto www.bettermakerroom.org to learn more about it and to get involved. And lastly, I want to let you know about an opportunity for all of you to get involved with the Reach Higher initiative.

Partnering with the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, we launched the Career App challenge to promote the development of an mobile app solution that will help students to navigate education and career pathways and increase career counselors’ and school counselors’ ability to assist

learners in preparing for the high skill, highway, high demand jobs and occupations that our students need and want.

The app should include integrated tools to assess students' skills and interests and offer information, occupation, education and career seeking skills. And the winners of the challenge will compete for a share of \$225,000 prize. You can find more information about the Reach Higher career app challenge on challenge.gov or ed.gov and enter the challenge at ReachHigherChallenge.com.

So thank you again so much for joining. And I'm looking forward to your questions.

Khalilah Harris: Thanks so much, Stephanie. We hope that you guys will use the slides which we will send to everyone. You will have the slides and transcript emailed to everyone who was registered and post it on our website at www.ed.gov/afameducation. So all of the slides that you're seeing today will be made available to you.

These were amazing resources. And last but not least, we want to turn over and close out again with a scholar. And so now you're going to hear from (Lamar Butler) who is a junior at Alabama State University and it is also a National HBCU All-Star selected by the White House initiative on historically black colleges and universities.

So with that said, I'm going to turn the presentation over to (Lamar). And you can take it away when you're ready.

(Lamar Butler): Hey, everyone. So mentioned, my name is (Lamar Butler). I'm a junior forensics chemistry major here at Alabama State University. And I was

selected as the HBCU All-Star for Alabama State which serves - I serve as the ambassador for the White House on White House initiatives and also sustainability, innovation and success here at HBCU.

So the title of my slide show is “Your Past Does Not Determine Your Future.” I haven’t had the easiest life. But I also haven’t had the worst. So, I don’t want my past to determine where I’m going to go and where I’ll end up going. I was born July 17, 1995. My mom was only 16 years old. And unfortunately, she did not finish high school.

My father, he was incarcerated most of my life. So I did not really meet him anytime soon. And so I went through most of my life without a true father figure in my life outside of my uncles who did the best they could. My father - I ended up finding out later that he got some college education. But he never finished.

My grandmother, she was my biggest supporter. When I was born, she pretty much took me and helped raise me for the most part because my mom was so young. And so most of my life, I was living with my grandmother. She has two Bachelor’s Degrees and a Masters. Her Bachelors are in Sociality and Theology. Her Masters is in Theology.

And this is when my grandmother began to kind of motivate and always told me to go to college. So that’s when it became something for me at a very early age. But at the same time, because of other life issues, I was kind of a troubled youth. I wanted attention. So I would cause problems in the classroom. I would always act out. I would fight.

I would get in so much trouble that they would call my grandmother to the school constantly or call my mom constantly to kind of get me out of - to keep

from having to write me up and kick me out of school. But try to get a parent to handle the situation. After a while, having four siblings, I began to feel the pressure to actually do good.

I had to realize other people were watching me. They were expecting me to go to college, graduate college. Get a good job. Help take care of the family. Do great things. And I had to realize that at some point, I had to stop acting out. I was always naturally gifted in school. I never really studied too much. But at the same time, when I got to high school and got to the harder courses, it kind of cause a problem because when my friends would be studying or working on papers, I would kind of be outside doing whatever it was I was doing and not really focusing on school.

When I was 16 years old, I finally met my father. So that was kind of a shift in my life from being very troubled to coming into myself and finding some piece knowing who my father was, talking to him and building a relationship. So it took away a lot of issues that I was previously dealing with and allowed me to focus more on the future.

So going to college was always the plan for me. But I never really took it too seriously. Again, when it came to high school and being active academically, I did the bare minimum. I went to class. I wrote some notes. Most of the time, I would sleep in class or read a book. So it caused problems with my teachers.

And they tried to help. They tried to tell me I have to pay attention. They tried to tell me to focus. But I thought I could just do whatever it was I wanted. I said, "Hey, I'm passing the test. So it shouldn't be much of a problem." When it came down to my junior and senior year when I was looking at colleges and starting to try to look for money, I didn't know where to go.

I didn't know where to look. I wasn't really too familiar with going to the guidance counselor's office at all. For myself I said, "You know I can do it on my own." But I had - I didn't know where to go. So money wise, it was really hard to find the scholarships to pay for college knowing it was a very expensive ordeal.

I was denied so many programs. Many, many programs denied me when I tried to go prior to going to college to enter and get a feel for what college would be like. I don't know if it was based upon my writing skills or my grades in school. I don't really understand. But I was denied. And so it kind of set me back.

And I kind of used to think "Maybe I shouldn't go to college. Maybe I should just find a trade and you know stick it out." And it didn't help that some of my peers were actually talking down on me. I remember one instance where a student that was in a higher grade than me did not get accepted into a certain college.

And so I had told him was going to apply eventually. And he told me I would never get in. Fortunately for me when it came time for college acceptance letters, I had - that school actually accepted me and gave me a little scholarship money. But compared to the price, I wasn't able to go. And so when it came down to selecting college, I put all my offers on the table.

I gained a lump sum of money through the colleges offering me scholarships to attend. Alabama State University which is a HBCU offered me a full ride scholarship. And (unintelligible) presidential scholarship. So I came to school on a full ride based upon academics and test scores. I was blessed and fortunate enough to score highly on both the SAT and the ACT.

And I had a little bit above average GPA which allowed me to excel. And coming to Alabama State University was the best decision I've ever made because it kept my family from being burdened financially from expensive college tuition and the all the fees associated with it because everything was paid for.

And it actually allowed me for flourish. My problem was that I needed a little more attention to kind of mold me and shape me into the individual who I am becoming. And Alabama State offered that. It's not a large school. But it's not a super small one. We have about roughly 5,000 students with a roughly 25 to 1 student ratio, student/teacher ratio.

So teachers kind of get intimate with the students. And you can kind of go to the office and talk to them. Get extra help. And that really helped me. That really helped me excel. And it actually helped me find myself because everyone was willing to help someone else. And I came to Alabama State University and gained many, many mentors who have helped push me along the way.

And I didn't feel isolated from my peers when I arrived here as an HBCU. So, I felt comfortable in the environment. And everybody has a similar story or similar background. So I didn't - I was not ashamed to say you know, "Hey, my dad was in jail." Or, "You know my mom was a teenage mother" because there are other people here on campus that have the similar story.

So, you aren't ashamed of who you really are. And because of that, it increases the sense of community that we feel here in HBCU campus. And for first generation students going to get to college that makes a world of difference because you know you have other people who are willing to help you.

Other people who are going to be by your side studying with you. Making study groups. Being your friend. Kind of helping you navigate the social and academic avenues of college. And the best thing about it is that you're not just a number. Like I said earlier, the student to teacher ratio is 25 to 1. And it really allows the students to become familiar with their professors.

And the professors to become familiar with their students. So you don't get - when you go for a letter of recommendation, it's not a generic letter. But it's actually a letter that is tailored specifically to the student because the professor knows who the student is and they know a little bit more about the student because they took that time.

On campus, I'm involved in many organizations. I'm a Brother of (unintelligible) Incorporated. I'm part of the United Mentoring Incorporated. I also serve as (NCA) Vice President along with being involved with the Beta Kappa Chi National Scientific Honor Society with many other organizations. Those are my highlights.

But the biggest highlight I have is becoming a HBCU All-Star which is an honor and privilege to actually serve as an ambassador to the White House for my university. And it's opened many doors for other opportunities to network. Other opportunities to meet people and actually surround myself with other students who are aspiring for success.

It created another family for me. We all communicate almost on a daily basis. And it makes me confident knowing I'm not alone. And even when I go to a different state that I'm unfamiliar with, there's someone there that I can reach out to that can say, "Hey. Well, I could show you around." Or "I could tell

you the best places to get something to eat” or where to go for professional purposes.

HBCU also hasn't just helped me. But it's also helped those around me and especially my family. It's motivated everyone to reach higher despite your background, despite the past where you may come from because I feel like I was kind of a born statistic in a way. But I overcome - I have overcome that adversity of that situation.

And I'm getting recognized nationally. And I'm receiving so many accomplishments. And it has helped my peers and motivated them to say, “You know, I don't have to worry about where I've come from. I just need to know where I'm going.” And you can go anywhere you put mind to if you are willing to do the work.

And it showed by siblings that they can do anything as well. They tell me know that I have motivated them to look up to me. And I'm kind of their role model. And it kind of warms my heart to know “Hey, I'm doing the right thing. People are noticing and people do care.” And I'm helping other people achieve something for themselves.

And with HBCU All-Star, I've helped connect many students with many opportunities that were given to me or started with me through the White House initiative with my fellow peers. And at the end of the day, hard work does pay off. So if you're willing to do the work. If you're willing to grind, put in long study hours, work - rewrite papers 3-4 times, you will be rewarded for that success.

Life lessons I've learned going through my life and experiences I've had here on campus is that you don't allow your past to predict your future. You should

- once you leave your comfort zone that's when life truly begins. Moving from South Carolina to Alabama by myself seven hours away really allowed me to focus on (Lamar) and become someone I can be proud and that my family could be proud of.

So that - leaving that comfort zone in South Carolina to come here by myself really opened some more doors and brought some more challenges that help mold me. And then finally, you want to surround yourself with people who push you to go further than you ever imagined. At the end of the day, birds of a feather flock together.

So those who you surround yourself with will kind of steer you in a certain way. I surround myself with other students who are reaching for success. Other students who have dreams and goals and ambitions. And we all motivate each other in one way or another. So my advice to anyone going into college, anyone in college or even just in life in general, you want to surround yourself with people who will help push you and that you can push them.

And that is my presentation.

Khalilah Harris: Thanks so much, (Lamar). That's really powerful and we're also proud of you for all you've been able to accomplish and the ways in which you represent Alabama State University. Your president, Gwen Boyd is a member of the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans. And so we work with her closely.

And I look forward to telling her how well you represented Alabama State University in addition to your family. So thank you. At this time, we're going to open up for questions. (Jessie) - so (Jessie) will give instructions for that.

But I also want to highlight again more of that hidden curriculum we've been talking about across this panel.

First and foremost, (Lamar) talked about having a study group. Often times, young people who are persisting through adversity feel like they have to do things on their own. And if they just put their head down and show grit and resilience that they can make. But the fact is, students who are excellent students who come from lots of resources understand the power of community and are clear in the need to form study groups and be connected again with their campus community so that they can rely on their resources including their fellow classmates (unintelligible).

Also I want to note that last week was International Education Week. It is critical. It is critical. It is critical for our students to both learn more than one language and to take advantage of study abroad experiences. We live in a global world, in a global economy. And it is critical for us to build bridges and learn about other cultures.

Even cultures of people who look like us but don't sound like us are important for us to learn about so that we don't have misperceptions about what it means to live on the continent for example and that people aren't living in huts or something. And so that they don't have misperceptions based on the popular narrative shown through media about black Americans and our ability to thrive and be successful and be contributors to the global economy.

So, we hope that you share the message. If you're a student, share the message with your guardian. If you're a guardian or caring a concerned adult, make sure that you are supporting your student and exploring study abroad opportunities. African Americans are 15% of the college population. But, we are less than 1% of the study abroad population.

So we need to change those numbers. And so (Jessie), will you open up for questions.

Coordinator: We will now begin the question and answer session. If you would like to ask a question, you may press star and then 1. Please unmute your phone and record your name clearly when prompted. And to withdraw your request, you may press star 2. Let's wait a moment for the first question. I'm seeing here one question on queue, ma'am. One moment please.

Our first question comes from the line of (Ms. Vanessa Sparks). Ma'am, your line is now open.

(Vanessa Sparks): Hello. Good evening. Happy holidays to everyone. I'm a financial - student financial aid mentor here in New York City. I assist families and students to understand the entire financial aid process. So, it's not - we of course talk about FAFSA. But what I do is actually provide term key training to students and their families on understanding this process whether their first year or a fourth year student or even going into graduate school.

Here in New York City, we have a lot of public high schools that do not have regular guidance counselors. So we have many students who by their senior year, the family has never spoken with anyone. The student is not getting any real guidance in this process. And many community-based organizations have stepped up to attempt to fill the void.

So I want to know from you what can community-based organizations and what more can community-based organization do to assist students, first generation students and their families with this process?

Khalilah Harris: Thank you for that question. So first and foremost, I want to direct your attention to two sites. One you heard about already on this call with Ms. Brown which is reachhigher.gov. The other is studentaid.ed.gov. That's a website of the - excuse the Federal Student Aid Office of the US Department of Education.

It's studentaid.ed.gov. And what's important about that is it provides ton of resources for any person whether you're a student, parent, caring, concerned adult to be able to share that information with students. We also implore any adults who know better to do better. It sounds like you're doing that with student financial aid mentors.

So if you know more information to fill the gaps for students and families to help them cross that bridge and learn a lot of the hidden curriculum we were talking about this evening. Do any of the other panelists want to offer advice to (Ms. Sparks)?

Felicia Meadows: Yes. I'll jump in. This is Ms. Meadows. So, with the dilemma. And this is so unfortunate. Many schools do not have school counselors which is a travesty for the babies. But one site that I suggest parents go to and it doesn't necessarily have to be through a school counselor. The College Board site provides - they provide career assessments, college planning, financial aid planning, course work that the babies need each year to - that are in line with their future goals.

So it provides everything for free on the College Board. They just need to sign up to - when they go to the College Board, I think its My Big Future or Big Future. One of those two.

(Vanessa Sparks): Yes.

Felicia Meadows: But from the site, they can go there and all the information is free. And it does everything - not everything that you know we do because we are very valuable. But it's somewhere to start. It's a starting point.

(Vanessa Sparks): Thank you.

Felicia Meadows: You're welcome.

Khalilah Harris: (Jessie), do we have another question?

Coordinator: At this time, ma'am, there's no further questions. Thank you.

Khalilah Harris: Well, we are going to hold for one minute. Do we have any other questions on the line? If not, we are going to close.

(Lamar Butler): Hello.

Khalilah Harris: Yes.

(Lamar Butler): There was a question. One question came into the Q&A online and it's from (Abigail Goldblatt). She just wants to know is there a standard definition for first generation because she's heard so many different versions. So she just wants to know is there a standard generic definition.

Khalilah Harris: There is not a standard generic definition of first generation. Typically, university and Toya, I'll actually let you jump in here with what the field says. But at different universities from our experience around the country, they account for first gen students differently. And sometimes even a student who has a parent who went to college can still be considered first gen especially if

they went to college when the child was older as opposed to before having the child.

So Toya, do you have a definition of (unintelligible) that you use more frequently.

Toya Corbett: Well, what you just said is pretty much correct. A lot of times, you will hear first generation college student or first year student which pretty much still means you will get the same support and same resources from the university. And this is why so many colleges now and I will say in particularly HBCUs are starting the university college model where first and second year students receive a lot more attention, tutoring, advising, support and resources their first two years while they're in school because they may more than likely be the first person in their family to attend college.

Or they have been tracked as the type of student who needs additional resources.

Khalilah Harris: That's right. So, we know in this economy, we've seen the heavy impact on African Americans after the recession. And I can tell you in the summits and convenings and listening sessions we do around the country, we even have students who are second generation college attendees who need the same types of support that first generation families do because often times in our community because of the structural issues you know that we are one generation.

And sometimes and too frequently, one paycheck away from having a generation behind us not attend college at all. I also want to flag an additional resource which is the college scorecard. If you Google the college scorecard,

it's important that students are making the best choice for the best fit school for them.

And we've seen a decline in the enrollment of African American students. And what we don't want to communicate although we want students to come home with degrees and not debt, the best way for them to do that is to find a university that is the right fit for them. So in addition to studentaid.ed.gov, we want students to take a look - and adults who are supporting them, take a look at the college scorecard so that they can make some choices about what the right fit and university would be for them.

Sometime, we know students are under matched which means they don't apply to universities that they perceive to be expensive and because they think that even if they can get in, they can't afford it. Well, typically the most expensive schools offer complete aid packages for students from families with lower income.

And so we want to make sure that students and families are finding the right fit. We also want to acknowledge that some of our first gen students are returning students. Right. So we want to encourage people to not only work with our younger scholars who are currently in the pre-K to 12 space, but also consider ways that you can support adult learners who are returning to the university setting because they want to insure that the generations behind them have access to every opportunity to be successful and live the American dream.

So with that said, do any of our guests have anything compelling they want to share. If not, we're going to respect people's time and close out the call.

(Lamar Butler): There was one more question. I don't know if we have time for that.

Khalilah Harris: What was the question? Go ahead, (Lamar).

(Lamar Butler): It was are there federal funds available for institutions with significant populations of first generation students to help develop effective programing to support the success of first generation students?

Khalilah Harris: Absolutely. And those funds are connected to a program called Trio. You heard Ms. Meadows talk about the upward (unintelligible) program which is funded under the Trio Grant program. And if you would take a look at Trio, you can learn more about that grant competition. But there are many institutions across the country who receive federal dollars to support first gen students and students from families with lower income.

Alrighty. So I'm going to thank everyone for joining this call. I want to thank (Trevor Ebbert). I want to thank (Lamar Butler), our two students. I want to thank Stephanie Sprow from the Reach Higher initiative for joining us to tell us more about the First Lady's focus on reaching that 2020 goal. I want to thank Ms. Meadows who's a professional school counselor.

And she has a wealth of knowledge. So looking forward to receiving her slides. And last but not least, Dr. Toya Corbett who's been a career professional in higher education supporting our scholars to not only make it to campus but to succeed through completion. So thanks to everyone. And please have a safe and peaceful holiday this week.

And we hope you'll take this information to help at least one young person to achieve their dreams. Thank you.

Woman: Thank you.

Woman: Thanks.

Man: Thank you.

Man: Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you, speakers. That concludes today conference. Thank you all for joining. You may now disconnect.

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