President Barack Obama (Courtesy of the St. Louis American)

During his remarks at the National Urban League conference in New Orleans, LA, President Obama announced he would sign an Executive Order to improve outcomes and advance educational opportunities for African Americans.

The President has made providing a complete and competitive education for all Americans – from cradle to career – a top priority. The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans will work across Federal agencies and with partners and communities nationwide to produce a more effective continuum of education programs for African American students. The Initiative aims to ensure that all African American students receive an education that fully prepares them for high school graduation, college completion, and productive careers.

In the less than 60 years since the /Brown /v./Board of Education/ decision put America on a path toward equal educational opportunity, America's educational system has undergone a remarkable transformation.

Many African American children who attended substandard, segregated schools in the 1950s have grown up to see their children attend integrated and effective elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Nonetheless, substantial obstacles to equal educational opportunity still remain in America's educational system. African American students lack equal access to highly effective teachers and principals, safe schools, and challenging college-preparatory classes, and they disproportionately experience school discipline and referrals to special education.

Significantly improving the educational outcomes of African Americans will provide substantial benefits for our country by advancing important outcomes, like increasing college completion rates, employment rates, and the number of African American teachers. Enhanced educational outcomes for African Americans will lead to more productive careers, improved economic mobility and security, and greater social well-being for all Americans.

Advancing Educational Achievement of African American Students
The President has set the goal for America to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. To reach this ambitious goal, and to ensure equality of access and opportunity in education for all Americans, the Obama Administration is dedicating new resources, through rigorous and well-rounded academic and support services, to enable African American students to improve their educational achievement and prepare for college and career.

The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans, housed within the Department of Education, will work with the Executive Office of the President and Cabinet agencies to identify evidence-based best practices to improve African American student achievement in school and college, and to develop a national network of individuals, organizations, and communities that will share and implement these practices. It will also help ensure that Federal programs and initiatives administered by the Department of Education and other Federal agencies maintain a focus on serving and meeting the educational needs of African Americans. The Initiative will complement the existing White House Initiative that strengthens the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) by working with Federal agencies and partners nationwide to provide all African American students with a more effective continuum of education programs.

To deliver a complete and competitive education for all African Americans, the Initiative will promote, encourage, and undertake efforts designed to meet several objectives, including:
• Increasing the percentage of African American children who enter kindergarten ready for success by improving access to high-quality early learning and development programs

• Ensuring that all African American students have access to high-level, rigorous course work and support services that will prepare them for college, a career, and civic participation
• Providing African American students with equitable access to effective teachers and principals in pursuit of a high-quality education, and supporting efforts to improve the recruitment, preparation, development, and retention of successful African American teachers and principals
• Promoting a positive school climate that does not rely on methods that result in disparate use of disciplinary tools, and decreasing the disproportionate number of referrals to special education by addressing root causes of the referrals
• Reducing the dropout rate of African American students and increasing the proportion of African American students who graduate from high school prepared for college and career
• Increasing college access, college persistence, and college attainment for African American students
• Strengthening the capacity of institutions of higher education that serve large numbers of African American students, including community colleges, HBCUs, Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs), and other institutions
• Improving the quality of, and expanding access to, adult education, literacy, and career and technical education

The Executive Order also creates the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for African Americans, to aid and advise the work of the Initiative.

The Commission will advise President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan on matters pertaining to the educational attainment of the African American community, including the development, implementation, and coordination of resources aimed at improving educational opportunities and outcomes for African Americans of all ages. The Commission will also engage the philanthropic, business, nonprofit, and education communities in a national dialogue on African American student achievement, and work with the Initiative to establish partnerships with stakeholders from these sectors to achieve the objectives of this Executive Order.

The Executive Order also establishes a Federal Interagency Working Group on Educational Excellence for African Americans. The Working Group will be chaired by the Initiative's Executive Director, and will convene senior officials from the Executive Office of the President and several Cabinet and sub-Cabinet agencies to coordinate the Federal investment in education programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing outcomes for African Americans in early childhood education; elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education; career and technical education; and adult education.