



White House Summit on African American Students with Disabilities

July 26, 2016

Executive Summary

In honor of the 26th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, The White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans (Initiative) hosted the White House Summit for African American Students with Disabilities (AfAmEdSummit) on July 26, 2016 at the Department of Education, in Washington, DC.

This AfAmEdSummit build upon the foundation established during the first ever White House convening for African Americans with Disabilities, hosted at the White House In 2014 by Claudia Gordon, in her capacity as Associate Director in the Office of Public Engagement, and provided a platform for nearly 50 brilliant, beautiful, African American students with disabilities to make recommendations to adults, educators, and advocates to ensure African American students with disabilities feel and are safe, engaged and supported—in school and in life.

A panel discussion featured experts—African American high school and college students with disabilities who discussed the unique challenges and opportunities they face. Panelists along with youth seated in the audience members described, in detail, the supports and accommodations they need from schools, friends and family to thrive.

Following the youth expert panel discussion, students and advocates engaged in concurrent workshops. Students continued the discussion about what they need to ensure post-secondary success. Advocates reflected upon what they learned and heard from student experts while sharing strategies and resources to support them in doing the work required to respond to the requests made. Recommendations gathered from workshops and discussions are included below.

Educators, advocates, and students left the summit with a renewed commitment to ensure the cognitive, social and emotional development of African American students with disabilities is supported.

Caring and concerned adults expressed a desire to continue the conversation, and discussed opportunities to use the Initiative's [AfAmEdTeach-In Toolkit](#) to advance the work.

Because several students discussed fears around the loss of life at the hands of police and school resource officers we shared a recent [article](#) to support engaging in conversations about tragedy with youth. Additionally, Assistant Secretary Catherine Lhamon and Maria Town, the White House Liaison to the Disability Community highlighted investments the Obama administration has made to improve the lives of and increase access to opportunity for individuals with disabilities. Secretary Lhamon spoke specifically about the newly-released [Know Your Rights](#) tools designed to support children and families with disabilities.



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Goals for the Summit included:

1. Highlighting the economic and social impact of excluding or otherwise failing to support African American students with disabilities.
2. Sharing the perspectives of African American students with disabilities.
3. Embracing and affirming African American students with disabilities.
4. Highlight promising and proven strategies to ensure African American students with disabilities receive optimal learning and development opportunities that enable them to fully participate in society including through post-secondary success.

Summit Agenda:

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Morning Keynote: Celebrating our Abilities through Storytelling

Panel Discussion: Reimagining Opportunities for African American Youth with Disabilities

Community Building Lunch

Concurrent Workshops for Students and Advocates

Storytelling and Call to Action

Closing Remarks

Measurable outcomes:

- *Registration*
 - Nearly 150 registered for and attended the Summit.

- *Social Media Metrics*



- Twitter Highlights can be found using the hashtag #AfAmInclusion. Click <https://storify.com/AfAmEducation/white-house-summit-on-african-american-students-wi> for a link to the summary of tweets highlighting the Summit events.

- *Video Archive*

- The Summit was streamed live through the Department of Education's EDStream site. The video is available at: <http://edstream.ed.gov/webcast/Play/ab99da767e8f41d789f332a76cf77c471d>

Photos Photos are available on the Department of Education flickr account

Media

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- **Presidential Proclamation -- Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 2016**
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/07/25/presidential-proclamation-anniversary-americans-disabilities-act-2016>
- Here's How You Can Support Students of Color Who Have Disabilities <http://educationpost.org/heres-how-you-can-support-students-of-color-who-have-disabilities/>
- Three Ways to Support Black Students with Disabilities <http://nbcnews.to/2a6hGo4>

Recommendations:

- Provide students with a support system equipped to disrupt stigma and fill critical gaps—ensure students with disabilities benefit from meaningful relationships rooted in love.
- Family members and educators must be aware of challenges and opportunities faced by Black students with disabilities and identify sources of support. Students spoke candidly about the need for educators to do the work required to understand diverse disabilities and to determine, with students and families, appropriate strategies to provide accommodations or otherwise support.
- Black students with disabilities expressed the need for mentors to assist them as they identify their passion and develop post-secondary plans to support success. Specifically students discussed the need for assistance identifying post-secondary institutions with a demonstrated history of supporting students with disabilities, preparing for the workforce and otherwise supporting multiple identity development.
- Provide words of affirmation and examples of successful Black people with disabilities. Students discussed the sting of stigma and how ignorance and prejudice can negatively impact learning and development. Students discussed the power of affirmation and request that caring and concerned adults, especially families and educators, counter ignorance with affirming words of love.
- Have high expectations for Black students with disabilities, encouraging and support learning and development in all ways. Students recognize when educators doubt their intelligence and capability as it relates to their disability. They have high expectations for themselves and want the adults they encounter to share them as well.
- Creating engaging pedagogy and curricula to support and affirm students' strengths. Students spoke specifically about the importance of arts and technology in education. We must use technology to support students in expressing what they know and have learned.
- Provide professional development and coaching to support educators, students, and advocates to better understanding how to support the learning and development of and Black students with disabilities. Within this training, advocates must learn to disrupt ideas of “good” versus “bad” behavior when it comes to students with disability, highlighting the importance of “difference” disrupting understandings of what is “normal”. =
- Educators and advocates must provide platforms for Black students with disabilities to share their concerns and self-advocate including by hosting Summits, Teach-In's and otherwise providing safe spaces for courageous conversation and to advance the work.