

Public and Private Sector Initiatives in Education

Forum 2007

Thursday, October 25

YOULONDA COPELAND-MORGAN: It is my pleasure and a privilege to come to you today on behalf of the College Board's Task Force on College Access for Students from Low Income Backgrounds to announce the results of our two-year effort, a call to action -- the College Keys Compact -- that affects each of you here in this room today. Our plans are bold. Our expectations are high, and our commitment is unwavering.

Two years ago, we began as a group of 26 with our own call to action: to understand why one-half of all college qualified low and moderate income high school graduates did not enroll in a four-year college. Our task at times seemed Herculean. We were well aware that the problem had plagued students and their families for generations, and that educators had long been troubled, deeply troubled, by this issue.

I was reminded in those first days, and have been in the months and years since, of the famous words of the anthropologist, Margaret Mead, who said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

We believe that the Low Income Task Force can change our world by changing the way that schools in this country, represented by many of you here today, prepare, recruit, and support students from low income backgrounds. This change is imperative. While the United States continues to lead the world in the proportions of adults with four-year college degrees, that lead is declining. Several other nations -- China, Japan, India -- now have higher proportions of students enrolled in college and universities than we do.

Equally alarming is the fact that the degree gap between high achieving students from low income backgrounds, compared to high achieving students from upper income backgrounds, have reached almost 20 percent; yet nine out of ten of the fastest growing jobs in the United States will require post-secondary education.

We must take action. My co-chair, Steve Brooks, will discuss our plans and the request that we are making of each of you here today [see below]. But before I close, I must thank the dedicated members of the Task Force whose work we are representing here today. As I reflect upon their work, their dedication, and their commitment, I am simply overwhelmed and encouraged by the level of commitment that they have demonstrated.

So let me say to each of them, the time you spent on airplanes, exhausting. The number of hours spent researching statistics, policies, and practices, unbelievable. The number of

minutes you spent in meetings, taxing. The commitment shown by you to change the path of future generations of low income students: priceless.

I invite all of the members of the task force to please stand at this time and to be publicly recognized for your time and your efforts. Please stand.

This work is the synthesis of lives committed to access and to equity. It is comprehensive. It shows breadth in terms of identifying the issues and potential solutions. It is research based, not brainstorming, and reflects on scholarly research that has been executed in order to bring these issues to light. This is a compilation of a new effort on the part of people who are passionate about the future of America, and recognize the importance of not allowing certain individuals to be systematically excluded from the future of our country. I invite you to seek out those members throughout our Forum and to engage them in this important work.

And in closing, I will again cite Margaret Mead, who said, "I must admit that I personally measure success in terms of the contributions an individual makes to her or his fellow human beings." Margaret Mead is right. Success is the good that we do for our fellow human beings. Join me. Let's begin to change our world together.

And now, it is my pleasure to introduce my co-chair, Dr. Steve Brooks, who has been a great partner in this work, a wise counsel, and a friend throughout the entire process.

DR. STEVEN BROOKS: Youlonda, thank you. It's been a privilege to work with Youlonda over the last two years, and with the members of this task force. It's just been a real joy. At times we thought we might not make it, but we did. And I want to thank each of you here today, as well. Throughout our deliberations, we learned so much from the membership of the College Board. The commitment that this Task Force reflects in this report is the commitment of our membership, and we're very grateful for all the advice and help that we had along the way.

I've spent a career in education, as Youlonda has. And I know that commitment, and in fact, would even call it a calling, that everyone in this room feels toward our nation's young people, both as individuals in our classrooms and on our campuses, and then collectively, as a generation that must be prepared for the future.

As Gaston and Youlonda have said, our expectations are high, because we believe that committed individuals can indeed change our nation's educational system. But the Task Force, and even the College Board alone, can't do this work. We have to join together to lead the change in our home schools and districts, and in our colleges and universities, and among non-profit organizations and state education agencies, we all have to come together. And then, yes, we'll need to enlist the help of federal government, as well.

In a moment we'll have a video that I hope will illustrate for you the reasons for our work, but first I'd like to take a few moments to describe the journey that I hope we'll all be taking together as we go forward. This is really phase one of an effort that begins now.

I also urge you to attend one or more of three in-depth breakout sessions that will be held tomorrow and on Saturday morning that deal with various aspects of this Task Force's work in much more detail. You will find information about those sessions in the program.

You also will have found, I hope by now, in your Forum materials, a copy of the report. This was in your registration packet. And this report is being issued this week nationally, and it's in the style of an open letter from the College Board's trustees to the leaders of American education. The success of this effort depends on each of us making this more than a report that goes on the bookshelf when you get home.

I'd like to emphasize that the College Keys Compact is driven by the membership's commitment to the belief that all underserved students have the right to an affordable, accessible, and successful college experience. We will ask our members to endorse the belief statements that we have put forward in our report. We will also enlist active participation of all schools, colleges, and universities, and other members that accept this call to action.

We, along with the College Board itself, under Gaston's leadership, will be working to secure our nation's educators in this commitment. This will be an organized effort led by the College Board staff, that will ask participating schools, colleges, universities, state agencies, and non-profit organizations, to take inventory of their current status that will engage senior administrators in these institutions in planning actions with measurable outcomes, and who will, in turn, report those actions and outcomes to the College Board, where we can form a clearinghouse of information.

We're very grateful to Gaston for his leadership, and we know under his direction that the dedicated staff of the College Board will work with the membership and through advocacy efforts to accomplish our objectives. More specifically, we have a number of key steps as part of the Compact that we want to challenge colleges, schools, universities, and others to take as the call for action.

In the Compact, you will find long lists of activities, and they're not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, suggestive. People will start where they are and stretch. But among the activities that I would call as examples, creating partnerships to provide more mentors for young people, ensuring the availability of rigorous high school courses, advocating for fee waivers for college applications for the target students as we have described them, educating administrators, counselors, and teachers to help understand the reality of financial aid needs, providing additional tutoring and supplemental instruction, as well as culturally relevant programming, and improving course alignment and acceptance agreements between two-year and four-year campuses.

During our work as a task force, we listened to many, many voices around the country. We'd like to share with you a sample of those voices through a brief video. Thank you.

[Video on the Task Force on College Access for Students from Low Income Background]

YOULONDA COPELAND-MORGAN: In closing, I want to encourage you to read the report. Give us your feedback. Take time to come to the sessions where we will have a chance to get further input from you. We look forward to working together with each and every one of you and collaborating with you as we roll out our call to action -- the College Keys Compact.