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## Civil Rights Coalition Offers New Congress Action Plan for Closing the Achievement Gap

### Campaign for High School Equity calls on federal government to prioritize high school education reform

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Less than 60 percent of African American, Latino, and American Indian and Alaska Native students graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma, compared to a national graduation rate of more than 70 percent of all students, a crisis that threatens the nation's global competitiveness and economic security. Many Asian Americans also face barriers in education that are often overlooked as a result of inadequate data collection and reporting by schools, school districts, and states. The Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE), a coalition of national civil rights groups addressing high school education quality and equality, hosted a congressional briefing to outline policy priorities for improving student outcomes, including recommendations related to implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"In these increasingly challenging economic times it is more critical than ever for us to address the obstacles that stand in the way of student performance and to introduce solutions that will keep students of color on the path to high school graduation," said Hilary O. Shelton, NAACP's vice president for advocacy and director of the Washington Bureau.

"Too many American high schools fail to provide a high-quality education to the youth who should become our next generation of business and political leaders," said Michael T.S. Wotorson executive director of CHSE. "While CHSE is pleased that the House and Senate versions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act include some relief for states to address public education, much more needs to be done now to ensure that every student graduates prepared for college and the 21st century workforce. The current stimulus bill does not, for example, include funding for high schools, Title VII, Title III, TRIO, GEAR UP, and other programs that directly support students of color and English language learner (ELL) students."

At the briefing, CHSE members urged the federal government to hold high schools accountable for student achievement and graduation and to give schools the resources they need to adequately prepare students for success. The leaders also called for comprehensive and consistent data systems to report student progress, implementation of a variety of effective high school models that support different learning styles, and strategies to place highly-effective school leaders and teachers in high-need high schools.

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As students of color and ELLs continue to grow as a proportion of the total student population, CHSE called for improving their educational outcomes to be a national priority. Schools that serve a student body made up of more than half minority students are more likely to be "dropout factories" - schools where fewer than 60 percent of freshmen go on to graduate three years later. Implementing federal accountability standards matched with adequate resources and data that indicate which schools and students are most in need will raise the bar in high schools nationwide.

"The potential for student success and achievement exists through structural reform in public education," said Wotorson. "We need to hold our new president and Congress accountable for delivering on promises of education reform, funding, and policy at the federal level, and high schools must be included in that dialogue."

CHSE is a coalition of leading civil rights organizations representing communities of color that is focused on high school education reform. Members include the National Urban League, National Council of La Raza, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, League of United Latin American Citizens, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund, Alliance for Excellent Education, National Indian Education Association, and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center.

CHSE is a special project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors.



Kenya McKoy, Keith Newsom and Leslie Blocker pick up trash around NCCU. See related story and photos on page 3.

## As Obama Gets His Groove Back, Black Leaders Launch Grassroots Campaign for Health Care

By Pharoh Martin and Hazel Trice Edney  
NNPA National Correspondent and Editor-in-Chief

The line is drawn. The Congressional Black Caucus has pledged to kill any House health care bill that doesn't include a robust public option and organizational members of the Black Leadership Forum are rolling out an array of grassroots campaigns in support of passing health care reform overall.

"All of us combined, the organizations who make up the Black Leadership Forum, are going to begin a series of efforts across the nation - in our neighborhoods, in our churches, in our communities to pass comprehensive health care reform," said National Urban League President Marc Morial, also chair of the 34-member BLF. "This effort is going to be far ranging. It's not the kind of effort where we have a big sack of money to buy television commercials. But it is an effort that is going to appeal to people's hearts and minds."

CBC and BLF members spoke out in a joint press conference Sept. 9. The conference marked the first time that Black elected officials and Black activists have held a joint gathering to help push through the reform that has become an appendage of the Obama Administration and could become his legacy.

Later that evening, President Obama appeared to have gotten his groove back as he gave a dynamic speech before a joint session of Congress with the level of charisma that was reminiscent of his campaign days. It also made a strong moral appeal to the nation that pundits had said was missing in his earlier advocacy for the health care bill.

"I am not the first President to take up this cause, but I am determined to be the last," he told the members of the House and Senate who repeatedly applauded the points of the speech. "Our collective failure to meet this challenge - year after year, decade after decade - has led us to a breaking point. Everyone understands the extraordinary hardships that are placed on the uninsured, who live every day just one accident or illness away from bankruptcy."

White House Domestic Policy Advisor Melody Barnes said in an interview with the NNPA News Service that perceptions that Obama was not moving swiftly enough on clarifying the issues were wrong. She said he was listening to the people at town halls and other gatherings during the month of August.

"I think consistently he has believed that when he can talk to people and talk directly to them that he's able to explain and convey the level of important around a particular issue," she said. "While there was a lot of media attention focused on a few of the town halls, there was a lot of hyperbole and controversy. There were also a number of other town halls where there was reasoned and considerate debate."

Once Congress was back in session, the status quo was not acceptable to Americans but it was also clear that because of the amount of information flying around out there - a lot of misinformation around death panels and immigration issues that it was also time for the President to explain to the American people and be very clear about what he does believe in and what he doesn't believe in, to in some ways provide a summary of what he thinks is an important health care plan and to cut through a lot of the noise that had existed and some of the confusion that had been mounted in the months prior."

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## Injunction Allows HBCU to Maintain Standing

Special to the NNPA from the Dallas Weekly

DALLAS (NNPA) - Paul Quinn College won a temporary yet significant battle in preventing the college from having its accreditation removed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Inc. (SACS). Attorneys for the school secured a preliminary injunction that allows it to maintain its accreditation status.

The document from the Atlanta Division of the United States District Court stated: "Paul Quinn College - is hereby reinstated to membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, Inc. (SACS-COC), in the same status it was in immediately before the action to remove it; that is, as a member in Probation."

The injunction is pending until the final outcome and resolution of Paul Quinn's case will be resolved. It's not sure at this point if any further actions will be taken by SACS or the North District Court. The injunction will allow Paul Quinn to remain accredited during the pendency of its litigation against SACS - challenging efforts to remove accreditation from the 137-year-old college. As a result of the August 21 order, Paul Quinn may continue to award degrees and distribute federal financial aid to students. But classes will begin as planned on October 5. "The injunction allows Paul Quinn to continue serving students and the community in its full capacity, and represents an important step toward securing the long-term future of this college," said William A. Brewer III, partner at Bickel & Brewer Storefront and lead counsel for Paul Quinn. The law firm filed the injunction on Aug. 25 in Atlanta.

The accreditation dispute involving Paul Quinn has become one of the most closely watched cases in higher education. SACS' Commission on Colleges notified the college on June 25 that it was removing it from membership in the organization, and that decision was affirmed by an appeals committee on August 24.

The following day, the Bickel & Brewer Storefront filed a lawsuit in Atlanta federal district court and a motion seeking a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction.

The Storefront argued that SACS had violated Paul Quinn's constitutional law and statutory due process rights and that removing the school's accreditation would represent "catastrophic and irreparable harm" to the institution, the oldest historically Black college in Texas. The filings demonstrate the extraordinary recent progress the school has made in its financial and administrative management - and cite specific concerns that SACS "made multiple material factual errors in connection with its assessment of [Paul Quinn's] financial condition."

The Storefront alleged that SACS violated the Higher Education Act by denying Paul Quinn the opportunity to "present new and significant financial information" relating to its accreditation appeal. Paul Quinn President Michael J. Sorrell hailed the development as a signal that the college would ultimately prevail in its legal challenge and ongoing pursuit of accreditation.

"This is an incredibly important day in the history of Paul Quinn College," said Sorrell.

"The message for our students, faculty, alumni and supporters is that we remain fully accredited and confident in our future, and focused on our goal of becoming one of America's great small colleges."

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