



**My Brother's Keeper community event
April 23, 2015**

Good morning and thank you.

First, I would like to thank Discovery Education for choosing Chicago as one of two cities in the U.S. to hold a community forum on such an important topic.

Thank you also to Principal Janice Wells and her team at South Shore International College Prep High School for being gracious hosts for today's event.

South Shore students were recently honored by the Illinois State Board of Education for making substantial academic gains across many subjects and grade levels.

Janice and her staff have set high expectations for their students. And we know that when we have high expectations for children, we are often rewarded with high achievement.

South Shore College Prep epitomizes the tremendous work that is being done in our District by our principals, our teachers and, most importantly, our students each and every day. It is the perfect venue for the discussion we are about to have.

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to public education know that we must do better for students with the greatest need: young men of color.

President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative helps us focus our collective attention—as well as our resources—on ways we can work together as a nation to improve outcomes for communities and families.

Many of the things the president's task force recommended—a push for more early childhood education opportunities, a greater commitment to providing wraparound services and an increased focus on early literacy—have already taken root in Chicago.

This initiative insures that we will not be doing this important work as a lone city or school district, but rather as a nation.

Too often schools do not value or recognize the unique experiences that children of color or those from diverse ethnic backgrounds bring to the classroom.

Sadly, schools have historically labeled these children as failures because their backgrounds -- usually their language and culture -- are seen as inadequate preparation for learning. But that is changing.

As the student population in American schools becomes increasingly diverse, educators must respond with school reform efforts that meet the needs of all students.

We must develop culturally sensitive curricula that integrate multicultural viewpoints and histories, apply instructional strategies that encourage all students to achieve, and review school and district policies related to educational equity.

Last year at CPS, we implemented the most comprehensive Interdisciplinary African-American studies program of its kind anywhere in the U.S.

A few weeks ago, we introduced a companion curriculum focused on Latino and Latin American heritage.

These curricula are driven by the universal themes of culture, dignity and identity that go to the very heart of our collective human experience.

It is our belief in Chicago that every child – irrespective of their race or culture or religion – benefits from learning these universal lessons.

I congratulate Discovery Education and everyone participating in today's forum for moving this conversation forward.

Thank you.