Report on the SXSWedu Community Dialogue

Austin Aligns for Boys and Young Men of Color
A City-wide Conversation about President Obama’s Initiative, My Brother’s Keeper (MBK)

April 1, 2015
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Introduction

Nearly one year ago, President Obama launched the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative and challenged every city to address the significant challenges that young men of color face. On March 10, 2015, over 100 Austin educators, city government officials, philanthropists, community and non-profit leaders gathered for a two-hour community dialogue at the SXSWedu conference to discuss the lives of the city’s boys and young men of color. The event was co-sponsored by Austin Community College, Austin Independent School District, Huston-Tillotson University, KLRU-TV, the Mayor of the City of Austin, and The University of Texas at Austin.

The event included opening remarks by Austin Mayor Steve Adler and a keynote address by Senior Director of Cabinet Affairs for My Brother’s Keeper Michael D. Smith. The speeches were followed by a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Gregory Vincent (Vice President, UT-Austin) and featuring Dr. Richard Armenta (Associate Vice President, Austin Community College), Dr. Paul Cruz (Superintendent, Austin Independent School District), Johnny Hill (UT-Austin graduate), Dr. Leonard Moore (Senior Associate Vice President, UT-Austin), and Dr. Victor Sáenz (Executive Director, Texas Education Consortium for Male Students of Color).

Commitment Cards

Guests were asked to fill out a Commitment Card pledging to help Austin’s boys and young men of color and what outcomes they would like to see as a result of the event’s dialogue. They were also asked to list what programs and resources they or their organizations would be willing to leverage for a community-wide initiative. Of all attendees, 48 completed a card (46% of recorded attendees).

SXSWedu COMMITMENT CARD RESPONSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome/Action</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% of Cards Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A formal City of Austin commitment to MBK</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A policy scan about issues affecting Austin’s boys and young men of color</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The formation of a city-wide MBK task force that develops recommendations and a local action plan</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that filled out their card, the majority selected the formation of a city-wide MBK task force as a preferred next step, followed by a formal City of Austin commitment and a policy scan. Many attendees selected more than one option.
Roundtable Discussions

Community members were asked to discuss two common questions in roundtable discussions. Prevalent themes and recommendations from the discussions are listed below. Full roundtable discussions have been archived on the The University of Texas Longhorn Campaign for Men of Color at http://ddce.utexas.edu/menofcolor.

Question #1

In September 2014, President Obama issued a challenge to cities, towns, counties and tribes across the country to become “MBK Communities.” The MBK Community Challenge encourages communities (cities, rural municipalities, and tribal nations) to implement a coherent cradle-to-college-and-career strategy for improving the life outcomes of all young people to ensure that they can reach their full potential, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or the circumstances into which they are born.

The six goals of the My Brother’s Keeper challenge are:

1. To ensure all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready
2. To ensure all children read at grade level by 3rd grade
3. To ensure all youth graduate from high school
4. To ensure all youth complete post-secondary education or training
5. To ensure all youth out of school are employed
6. To ensure all youth remain safe from violent crime

Of these national goals, which of these seem most relevant to Austin? What issues relevant to Austin’s young men of color are missing from this list?
Question #1 Themes and Recommendations
(Not ranked in order of importance)

1. An early start

- "Ensure all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready" (MBK goal #1) was frequently cited as most relevant.
- “Ensure all children read at grade level by 3rd grade” (MBK goal #2) was also mentioned.
- Change the mindsets of young men of color early in life with effective teachers and mentors.
- Serve boys of all ages, pre-K through post-secondary.
- Develop positive, long-term relationships with boys and young men early.

2. Parental and family involvement

- Involve parents and family when planning for youth success.
- Incorporate the role of fatherhood, family structure, and the impact of a young man’s personal home situation in solutions for these young men.

Respondents said:
“When we reach the parent, we reach the child.”
“Nobody is a better advocate than a child’s own parent; too often we say that parents are the problem.”
“Parents are super important, but sometimes they are a risk factor too.”

3. Mentors and teachers

- Evaluate if Austin’s mentors and teachers mirror the demographics of the populations they serve.

Respondents said:
“What might be missing from Austin are educators that look like the populations they serve.”

- Establish direct and consistent mentorship with boys and young men.
- Include mentors, teachers, and administrators in solutions.

Respondents said:
“The degree to which these students are unaware of their opportunities needs to be addressed. There are a lot of youth who want to be someone. Yet, that information symmetry does not sink down into their community of how to be someone and reach their goals. Perhaps through mentors providing guidance into the community this can be addressed.”
4. Exposure to opportunities

- Make existing resources available and understandable to organizations and community members.

Respondents said:
“The biggest challenge is the connectivity. It is about information. Almost like a clearinghouse. We need to connect families.”

- Increase awareness and access to job opportunities through field trips to Austin businesses and nonprofits.

5. Data and outcomes

- Prioritize the collection and organization of data and outcomes measurement at all ages to successfully evaluate the gaps and find solutions.

Respondents said:
“Be honest about the statistics. Once we have the real statistics, we can create real solutions.”

“The first one would be data, we don’t have a database that starts at pre-K and goes through post-secondary education.”

“The idea of continuing to track outcomes and examining how we define outcomes is particularly relevant for school districts.”

6. Health access

- Ensure boys and young men of color are healthy and have access to healthcare.

Respondents said:
“If you are not healthy, you will not show up.”

- Address the mental health needs of students.

7. Post-secondary education and training

- “Ensure all youth complete post-secondary education or training” (MBK goal #4) was mentioned.
Respondents said:
“Goal number four jumps out because when you look at Austin’s economy, many of these jobs are unfilled and employers can’t find people to fill these positions. However, there are so many people unemployed so number four addresses this gap.”

Promote early intervention as it relates to exposure to higher education. Build connections between alienated communities and institutions of higher education thinking of cultural relevance and relatability for students and parents.

Respondents said:
“From pre-K through 3rd grade there is no focus on college. It does not start until 4th or 5th grade. That is a missed opportunity for students who lack that intervention to see higher education as a goal.”

“High school graduation is not enough anymore.”

8. Safety from crime

“Ensure all youth remain safe from violent crime” (MBK goal #6) was mentioned.

Respondents said:
“Austin doesn’t have a safety issue in terms of violent crimes. We have to create a place where boys of color feel comfortable and included within the general society. We have to provide a quality education, and safety net programming.”

“Change the way we deal with the punishment of youth. Build self-advocates so that they know how to...advocate for themselves.”

Ensure schools have a friendly environment for students of color.

Give guidance and create safe outlets for young men if they have gone down a wrong path.

Respondents said:
“Provide them life coaches without fear of repercussions for messing up. If they’re selling drugs or doing anything wrong, we need them to have someone they feel comfortable talking to without fear of punishment.”

“There needs to be a connection that lets these kids know, ‘We’re not going to let you fail.’”
Question #2

What are promising programs and initiatives of your organization (or others) that currently support boys and young men of color in Austin? What other resources can Austin leverage in order to maximize their impact? What gaps still exist for Austin’s boys and young men of color, and how can we address these gaps?

Question #2 Themes and Recommendations

(Not ranked in order of importance)

1. Funding

- Increase funding for programs and ensure responsible spending of those funds.

Respondents said:
“Look to city to help with funding.”

2. Tech and business resources

- Engage Austin’s tech resources to improve ease of access to information. These technological resources can provide foundational tools for reaching young men of color.

Respondents said:
“We are a tech savvy city. How do we leverage that to connect teachers, families, and resources?”

“As the #1 tech city in the nation, there is room to strengthen business partnerships within this field reaching students and parents. A city call to action related to this might have significant impact towards the effort of moving us down the list of cities with the highest economic segregation.”

3. Policy solutions

- Recognize the differences in impact between programs and policy, and the importance of positive change in both. Programs cannot succeed without systemic change through policy implementation.

Respondents said:
“One example (of a policy change) is a tax incentive given to companies that move to Austin and invest in community programs that align with the field of business – i.e. tech companies that fund STEM programming in schools.”

4. Program collaboration

- Promote program collaboration for the success of young men of color. Collectively address their needs to strengthen opportunity and impact.

Respondents said:
“Collective impact – instead of siloed programs.”

“We need to do things more comprehensively and in a coordinated, comprehensive way.”

5. Solving systemic segregation

- Address systemic racism and segregation to ensure equity for boys and young men of color through public policy solutions.
Respondents said:

“There is a need to discuss systemic issues. While roundtable discussions are important, there needs to be systemic attunement to inclusion. How are we addressing systemic institutionalized racism?”

“Level the playing field.”

6. Education pipeline

- Strengthen the education pipeline.

Respondents said:

“We don’t have diversity in our schools. What is the university doing that will create a pipeline to increase the number of teachers?”

“Strengthen the education pipeline by initiating earlier intervention through community programs already in existence.”

7. Extracurricular activities

- Connect young men of color with extracurricular activities in their communities. Community-based and nonprofit organizations can provide resources to young men that schools cannot.

Respondents said:

“95% of kids who come to court do not participate in any extracurricular activities – let’s get them involved.”

- Engage a student’s passions to complement his academic excellence.

8. Proactive services

- Provide services to young men of color before they enter into negative circumstances in their school or community. Many programs focus on helping youth who are placed in situations where they have no alternatives. Focusing only on these programs can create the sense of a reactionary deficit model rather than a proactive one.

Respondents said:

“One particular program focuses on young people of color in trouble. Students are unable to receive services until they ‘do something wrong’. So, can we provide services to students in a proactive fashion?”
Next Steps
Using Collective Impact to Move Austin Forward

This community dialogue demonstrated that Austin and Travis County have many community members and organizations dedicated to improving the lives of boys and young men of color. The city has community partners analyzing the challenges facing this population, research partners producing evidence-based methods to address those challenges, and community programs engaging young men of color on a daily basis. Austin has the opportunity to unite and inform the work of these stakeholders by declaring city-wide goals and commitments for the city’s young men of color, thereby focusing local resources as well as using collective impact to address areas that stakeholders have not been able to address on their own.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These next steps are based on recommendations for city governments and community partners outlined by the My Brother’s Keeper initiative Community Challenge.

The City of Austin and Travis County should:

- Formally accept the My Brother’s Keeper Community Challenge issued to local executive and community allies. This can include:
  - Announcing acceptance of the challenge with a press release or media statement
  - Designating a staff member to lead Austin MBK efforts
  - Designating a city-wide MBK task force
  - Determining which MBK priorities are most relevant to Austin
  - Enlisting community partners and stakeholders in these efforts
- Convene local action summit(s) similar to the SXSWedu event, but with an issue-specific agenda.
- Conduct a policy scan reviewing local policies, programs, and practices so they may better serve the needs of Austin’s young men of color.
- Collect data about issues that affect young men of color and aggregate this data through a community dashboard.
- Launch a plan of action based on policy and data review.
Acknowledgements

ROUNDTABLE MEMBERS

TABLE 1: Morgan Craven, Kazique Prince, Gina Hinojosa, Jerel Booker, Jessica Khalaf

TABLE 2: Harrison Keller, Raul Alvarez, Cheryl Bradley, Robert Bachicha, Johnny Hill, Betty Johnson, Matt Chester

TABLE 3: Montserrat Garibay, Stacey Archer, Patrick Ockletree, Genevieve Van Cleve, Victor Sáenz, Juan Lopez

TABLE 4: Eleanor Thompson, Richard Armenta, Susan Dawson, Crystal Martinez, Suki Steinhauser, Martin Smith

TABLE 5: Kelly Crook, Margo Dover, Sterling Lands II, Gigi Edwards, Erica Cuevas

TABLE 6: Melissa Chavez, Damon Luckett, Meg Clifford, Gabriel Estrada, Anthony Heaven

TABLE 7: Suzanne Wallen, Mary Ellen Pietruszynski, Teddy McDaniel, John Hernandez, Gene Willis, Terrence Allen, Jacob Freire, Dallas Lawrence Dean

TABLE 8: Terrance Eaton, Nelson Linder, Stephanie Hawley, Alberto Gonzalez, Janice Johnson Shephard, Yvonne Williams, Mike Gutierrez

TABLE 9: Taco Price, Leal Anderson, Rashaanna Lewis, Monica Sanchez, Tiffany Woody, Joseph Gallardo

TABLE 10: Linda Medina-Lopez, Carolyn Goldstan, James Werner, Mariano Diaz-Miranda, Latisha Anderson, Llyas Salahud-Din, Roscoe Overton, Dwuana Bradley-Riley

TABLE 11: Ben Kramer, Michael Lofton, Emmet Campos, Lydia de la Garza, Rosamaria Gonzalez, Jose Rodriguez

TABLE 12: Carlos Rivera, Debbie Bresette, Angela Ward, Ricardo Zavala, Roday Zepeda, Victoria Lewis-Dunn, JoLisa Hoover

TABLE 13: Jodi Granda, Richard Franklin, David Contreras, Helen Miller, Keivon Liburd, Cheri Friedman, Helen Womington

TABLE 14: Joe Trevino, Cynthia Jackson, Christian Clark Cesares, Thais Moore, Leonard Moore, Charles Lu, Charles Cook, Leslie Blair

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