

HIGHER EDUCATION

Black university leaders say boys of color face opportunity ‘crisis’

Leaders at four Washington-area campuses discussed opportunity gaps among boys of color and offered solutions

By [Lauren Lumpkin](#)

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Landon Jones, a sixth-grade student at Statesmen College Preparatory Academy for Boys, speaks with Howard University provost Anthony K. Wutoh during an education equity panel in Washington on Monday. (Rodney Choice/AP Images for Venture Philanthropy Partners + Raise DC)

D.C.-area university leaders denounced an opportunity “crisis” affecting young Black and Hispanic boys, who lag behind their White peers on metrics such as reading proficiency and high school graduation rates — while offering solutions to try to close the gaps during a wide-ranging panel discussion this week.

Panelists included officials from George Mason University, Howard University, the University of the District of Columbia and the University of Maryland Global Campus — all of which, along with University of Maryland College Park and Montgomery College, have Black male presidents.

“The reality is, having six Black male presidents in this region is a tremendous accomplishment and the region should be commended for doing it,” said Gregory Washington, who leads George Mason. “It does not mean that we have arrived. There is still a crisis of opportunity in the country, and many Black and brown youth are not getting those opportunities.”

For many students, those disparities begin in K-12 classrooms. In Montgomery County, for example, 64 percent of White third-grade boys were proficient in English Language Arts, compared with about 34 percent of Black boys and 25 percent of Hispanic boys in the same grade, [according](#) to state data from 2019. In the District, nearly 90 percent of White students graduated high school in four years, [data](#) from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education show. That number fell to about 71 percent for Black students and roughly 70 percent for Hispanic children.

“They are more likely to drop out of high school and be involved in the criminal justice system. They are more likely to suffer the effects of poverty and less likely to find quality career opportunities with professional advancement,” said Carol Thompson Cole, president and chief executive of Venture Philanthropy Partners+Raise DC, which hosted

the panel discussion on Howard's campus. "We also know that they suffer from racially charged stereotypes and embedded inequities."

Part of the solution to improving outcomes for children of color, according to panelists, lies in ensuring equitable access to higher education. At Howard, that approach involves expanding scholarship offerings and developing mentorship programs.

It also includes reaching young men in the criminal justice system, said Anthony K. Wutoh, the university's provost and chief academic officer. Howard has offered courses to incarcerated individuals through a partnership with the D.C. jail.

"We're continuing to consider initiatives like that," Wutoh said, "What actual, practical things can we do to help make sure that brothers get skills and that they have the opportunity for reentry into society, and they have the opportunity to pursue a college degree, or vocational training or some other route that will give them a productive outcome."

[The University of the District of Columbia lands a record \\$2.3 million gift](#)

At UDC, the District's sole public university, officials are using a record \$2.3 million gift to support scholarships for low-income students and create pipelines to employment. "We're focused on connecting the higher education component of education to the K-12 system. But also while we're working with the students in the K-12 system, we can work with their parents in our workforce development program," said Ronald Mason, Jr., the university's president.

Campus leaders also said it is important to ease financial barriers to college. Washington touted initiatives including a community college pathway program where students earn an associate's degree from a Virginia community college, then transfer to George Mason to get their bachelor's. The cost of attendance at George Mason, Washington said, is determined by a student's income.

"We cover 100 percent of your need," Washington said.

[Fathers or students: Black men in college often face a choice](#)

Blair Hayes, ombudsman, vice president and chief diversity officer at UMGC, mentioned the 3D Scholars program — a pipeline that begins for students in high school, then feeds them into a two-year program at Prince George's Community College and, finally, a bachelor's program at UMGC. The total cost: \$10,000.

But, Hayes added, leaders should also attempt to redefine what it means to be successful. College is not the right path for every student, he said.

"Success might mean entrepreneurial pursuits. It might mean that you are a community activist but you're not going through the college systems," Hayes said. "I'm a big proponent of college. College has served me well. But sometimes, when we have those individuals and those young men who don't go that pathway, they are looked at as failures."