

A renewed challenge to parents and families

President Barack Obama

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In the 21st century - when so many jobs will require a bachelor's degree or more, when countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow -- a world-class education is a prerequisite for success.

There's no two ways about it. There's no way to avoid it. It's because there is no stronger weapon against inequality and no better path to opportunity than an education that can unlock a child's God-given potential.

The state of our schools is not an African American problem; it is an American problem. All of us can agree that we need to offer every child in this country the best education the world has to offer from cradle through a career.

That's our responsibility as leaders. That's the responsibility of the United States of America. And we, all of us in government, have to work to do our part by not only offering more resources, but also demanding more reform. Because when it comes to education, we got to get past this whole paradigm, this outdated notion that somehow it's just money; or somehow it's just reform. We need more money and we need more reform.

We used to rank number one in college graduates. Now we are in the middle of the pack. And since we are seeing more and more African American and Latino youth in our population, if we are leaving them behind we cannot achieve our goal, and America will fall further behind -- and that is not a future that I accept and that is not a future that the NAACP is willing to accept.

We're creating incentives for states to promote excellent teachers and replace bad ones because the job of a teacher is too important for us to accept anything less than the best.

And we should raise the bar when it comes to early learning programs. It's not enough just to have a babysitter. We need our young people stimulated and engaged and involved. We need our folks involved in child development to understand the latest science. Today, some early learning programs are excellent. Some are mediocre. And some are wasting what studies show are by far a child's most formative years.

But government programs alone won't get our children to the Promised Land. We need a new mind set, a new set of attitudes -- because one of the most durable and destructive legacies of discrimination is the way we've internalized a sense of limitation; how so many in our community have come to expect so little from the world and from themselves.

We've got to say to our children, yes, if you're African American, the odds of growing up amid crime and gangs are higher. Yes, if you live in a poor neighbourhood, you will face challenges that somebody in a wealthy suburb does not have to face. But that's not a reason to get bad grades - that's not a reason to cut class - that's not a reason to give up on your education and drop out of school. No one has written your destiny for you. Your destiny is in your hands -- you cannot forget that. That's what we have to teach all of our children. No excuses. No excuses.

You get that education, all those hardships will just make you stronger, better able to compete. Yes we can.

Parent: we can't tell our kids to do well in school and then fail to support them when they get home. You can't just contract out parenting. For our kids to excel, we have to accept our responsibility to help them learn. That means putting away the Xbox - our kids to bed at a reasonable hour. It means attending those parent-teacher conferences and reading to our children and helping them with their homework.

And by the way, it means we need to be there for our neighbour's sons and daughters. That's the meaning of community. That's how we can reclaim the strength and the determination and the hopefulness that helped us come so far; helped us make a way out of no way.

It also means pushing our children to set their sights a little bit higher. I want them aspiring to be scientists and engineers - doctors and teachers - not just ballers and rappers. I want them aspiring to be a Supreme Court Justice. I want them aspiring to be the President of the United States of America.

I want their horizons to be limitless. I don't -- don't tell them they can't do something. Don't feed our children with a sense of -- that somehow because of their race that they cannot achieve.

Yes, government must be a force for opportunity. Yes, government must be a force for equality. But ultimately, if we are to be true to our past, then we also have to seize our own future, each and every day.

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