White House Highlights How Groups Have Pledged to Improve Access

By Kelly Field

NO MU MENTION

Note from the MU NEWS BUREAU: Deputy Chancellor Mike Middleton is attending the summit on behalf of the University of Missouri.

The more than 100 "commitments" that colleges, nonprofit groups, and foundations will make at a White House higher-education summit on Thursday will help hundreds of thousands of low-income students obtain a college degree, a top adviser to President Obama said on Wednesday.

In a call with reporters to preview Thursday’s event, Gene B. Sperling, director of the National Economic Council, highlighted a few of the pledges the groups are prepared to make, including a promise by the Posse Foundation to provide an additional 250 scholarships to students pursuing careers in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, and a commitment by the National College Advising Corps to provide an additional 80,000 students with college counseling.

In conjunction with the call, the White House released a document detailing all of the commitments that the 100 colleges and 40 organizations attending the event will announce. They include pledges in four broad areas:

- Connecting more low-income students to the college that is right for them and ensuring that more students graduate (80 colleges and 15 organizations).
- Increasing the pool of students preparing for college through early intervention efforts (30 colleges and 12 organizations).
• Leveling the playing field in college advising and test preparation (20 colleges and 16 organizations).
• Seeking breakthroughs in remedial education (20 colleges, 23 states, and 10 organizations).

The Education Department will also announce several steps it will take to support low-income students, including encouraging colleges to place work-study students into college-counseling and college-mentoring jobs; focusing the Gear Up college-prep program on improving college fit and college readiness; developing and testing a new professional-development program for Upward Bound staff members; and sharing data with states and school districts on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, so they can better identify which students have completed the form and focus efforts to increase completion.

Mr. Sperling told reporters that the summit—part of "the president and the first lady's call to action on college opportunity"—was a reflection of "how critical this issue is to the cause of increasing economic mobility in our country."

"We're a country that believes that the outcomes of your life should not be determined by the accident of your birth," he said. "To make good on that, we have to do much more as a country to help young people succeed in college."

Mr. Sperling said Thursday's gathering would "not be the destination" but "the launch," with plans for a series of smaller convenings, a report, and a follow-up summit in the works.

Thursday's summit will begin with opening remarks by Mr. Sperling; Valerie Jarrett, a White House senior adviser; and Cecilia Muñoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council. Panel discussions and remarks by the president and first lady will follow. In the afternoon, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan will speak, and another panel discussion will occur. The event will be streamed live on the [White House's website](https://www.whitehouse.gov).
President Barack Obama is bringing university presidents from across the country together to exact commitments from each to expand access to higher education.

The president and first lady Michelle Obama were to greet leaders from more than 100 colleges and universities, plus 40 nonprofit and other groups, in a White House auditorium Thursday. The price of admission: a promise to voluntarily take action to help more low-income students attend college.

"When the president has a call to action on this area, it is because it is a critical measure for us being true to our values of economic mobility," said Gene Sperling, the director of the White House's National Economic Council.

The summit also heralds a new chapter in Obama's presidency in which he increasingly is turning to his own authority to carry out elusive policy priorities. With gridlock in Congress damping prospects for passing laws, Obama has vowed to move forward on his own by using executive authority and by convening leaders from outside politics in pursuit of broad, national goals.

White House aides hope the strategy will give Obama more flexibility as he embarks on what he's labeled a "year of action." But it also calls attention to Obama's limited ability to drive sweeping changes in his second term, as Washington's focus turns increasingly to this year's midterm elections and the presidential election two years later.

The participating schools have agreed to take action in one of four areas:

- Helping low-income students connect with colleges that can meet their needs and then seeking to ensure that they graduate.

- Reaching out to elementary, middle and high school students in hopes that by engaging earlier, more students will be encouraged to pursue higher education.

- Boosting remedial programs so underprepared students will still have opportunities to succeed.
Seeking to ensure lower-income students aren't disadvantaged by lack of access to college advisers and inability to prepare for entrance exams like the SAT and ACT.

"However much inequality and opportunity there is by the time kids get to 11th grade, those of us who are more fortunate exacerbate that inequality out of a desire to do what's best for our kids. We spend enormous time with college counselors, enormous time in SAT-ACT preparation," Sperling said. "Those things are not available for lower-income kids."

Georgia State University is committing to rolling out an "early alert system" aimed at identifying students at risk of dropping out for financial reasons. By monitoring students who are running out of aid eligibility, losing scholarship dollars or paying bills late, the university plans to deploy financial counselors to intervene to help those students stay enrolled.

Senator calls on education chief to resign

Democrat introduces nonbinding measure.

NO MU Mention

Wednesday, January 15, 2014 at 2:00 pm

JEFFERSON CITY (AP) — A Democratic lawmaker called on Missouri's education commissioner, Chris Nicastro, to resign or be fired yesterday, accusing Nicastro of being "less than truthful" about her involvement with a ballot measure that would end teacher tenure and require student performance to guide employment decisions.

Nicastro also has been criticized for the way she negotiated a contract with a consulting firm last year to improve the failing Kansas City schools. The bid went to a firm that was nearly three times as expensive as the closest competitor.

Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, a University City Democrat, introduced a nonbinding measure yesterday calling for Nicastro to resign or be fired by the State Board of Education.
"Reports have indicated that the state education commissioner has engaged in blatantly unethical practices," said Chappelle-Nadal. "She has misused her position, severely damaging both the reputation and effectiveness of the department."

Nicastro responded by saying she was "committed to carrying on the work that we're doing on behalf of kids in Missouri, and that's what I come to work every day to do, and that's what I'll keep doing."

Nicastro has been under fire from Democratic lawmakers and teachers' unions for her involvement in the ballot proposal that would end teacher tenure and require student performance to guide employment decisions. State email records show Nicastro met with an advocate of the ballot initiative in 2012, suggested specific wording and reviewed a final draft of the initiative before it was filed this March with the Missouri Secretary of State's Office.

Nicastro insisted she took no position on the initiative but provided the group information just as she would with anyone proposing a change in state law.

Teachers were angered because the measure would have ended tenure protections for teachers and other certified school staff by limiting their contracts to three years. Starting in July 2015, all public school districts would need to use a staff evaluation that relies on "student performance data" to guide decisions on promoting, demoting, firing and paying personnel.

In yesterday's resolution, Chappelle-Nadal wrote that Nicastro's advice to the sponsors of that initiative an example of "disregarding facts and truth in favor of political expediency."

Nicastro also has been criticized for the way in which she negotiated a contract with a consulting firm last year to improve Kansas City schools. The state awarded the contract to Cities for Education Entrepreneurship Trust, or CEE-Trust, even though its bid was more costly than other submissions.

Posted in News, Wire on Wednesday, January 15, 2014 2:00 pm.

Lessons learned from college loans

NO MU MENTION

David Nicklaus hit the nail directly on the head with his column regarding the federal Parent PLUS loan program ("Student loans can trap unwary parents," Jan. 12). We fell into this trap with two of our children.
It was so easy to do, as Mr. Nicklaus cites from the study by the New America Foundation. We had no college fund, no way of finding extra money, but felt an obligation to contribute to our kids' pursuit of higher education. The financial aid declarations said we could take a loan to meet the total cost, and we did so, year after year. The agreement with the kids was that they would pay this back once they became earners, but that is not always so easy to do. Thank God, our children have been wonderfully responsible in this area. Still, we carried a large loan amount on our credit report for years. And with our children's outstanding accountability, this is finally being paid down.

There are two cautions I would like to offer. One is for parents: If they choose to take loans for more than one child, do not ever, ever, consolidate them. This makes it so very difficult to delineate them for repayment later on. Two, do not defer payments. This is called forbearance, and all this does is keep the principal and add large amounts of interest. These are two mistakes I made when trying to manage these loans.

And I guess another might be, don't take the loans in the first place. It may be difficult, but the conversation should be had with the prospective student that mom and dad just can't help out much, and they need to adjust their college choices accordingly. There are many other fine options, with far less expense, right here in their own backyard.

In spite of many parents' desire to see their child have the "college experience," sometimes the cold, hard truth is the best lesson learned.

*Tom Anselm • Florissant*

**ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH**

Learning institutions are in the loan business

I appreciated the David Nicklaus column advising that student loans can trap unwary parents (Jan. 12), however this timely perspective scratches only the surface.

When notable Ray Kroc of McDonald's invited those listening to identify what business he was in, of course the response was "hamburgers," at which time he corrected them by stating, "No, I'm actually in the real estate business."
And so it is with predatory, yet government loan-eligible learning institutions that tout opportunity and secure financial futures while soliciting naive young people and parents desperate to get them on firm footing in life. Like the storefront bank satellites that sprang up overnight approving any and all only to result in the housing crisis, these institutions are simply in the loan business, and education is truly an afterthought. They are happy to use students as a means to enjoy government money that sadly they and their parents will labor to pay back, likely with underemployment or retirement funds.

The education bubble is on its way, and once again we all will pay while the dean and faculty are in Barbados.

*Steve Wymer • Crestwood*

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**Editorial: Great schools change lives. How do we get them?**

By the Editorial Board

**NO MENTION**

“Great schools change lives.”
That’s the most important sentence in the 78-page education consultant’s report that the Missouri Board of Education might rely on to figure out how to turn around struggling urban school districts in St. Louis and Kansas City.

It seems so intuitive. Yet too often that truth is not central to discussions at the state and local level about how to improve schools in impoverished neighborhoods.

Lawmakers, school officials and advocates get caught up in personalities, in name-calling, in philosophical throw-downs with no middle ground. They forget what they’re supposed to be doing.

Unfortunately, with [the release of the CEE-Trust report](http://example.com) commissioned by the Board of Education, we suspect much of the same behavior that has kept the Missouri Legislature from helping to create great schools will happen again.
The report itself hints at the coming debate, including an entire section trying to explain what it is not. The section is meant to reassure teachers’ unions and opponents of charter schools. The fact that the very week that the report came out, state Sen. Maria Chappelle-Nadal, D-University City, introduced a measure seeking to force education commissioner Chris Nicastro out of her job hinted at the unrest ahead.

It’s deep breath time.

Great schools change lives. So how do we get there?

The CEE-Trust report has some of the same elements that both education reformers and traditional public school backers support.

- It calls for universal early childhood education in urban school districts.
- It suggests the formation of a statewide “achievement district” to take over districts that fail to meet accreditation standards.
- It urges local schools to provide “wraparound” services to students who daily face obstacles to learning, obstacles like hunger, poor health care and lack of supervision before or after school.
- It proposes a solution that keeps most children educated close to home, in their neighborhood schools, with additional accountability measures to make sure those schools improve.
- Each of those ideas finds common ground with similar proposals made by the Missouri Association of School Administrators and approaches advocated by the Rex Sinquefield-funded Children’s Educational Alliance of Missouri. There is also crossover between the CEE-Trust report and the bipartisan legislation filed by a group of St. Louis-area senators, including Democrats Gina Walsh and Scott Sifton, and Republicans Eric Schmitt and Scott Rupp.

Among the more promising ideas, the consultants’ report also touches on the current school transfer crisis engulfing the Normandy and Riverview Gardens school districts: Rather than bus students from the urban districts to the suburbs, the suburban districts should operate certain schools in failing school districts.

This is how the entire region takes responsibility for all of its children. We share resources and knowledge of what it takes to create a great school. We create a cooperative effort rather than one that has divided us by north and south, white and black.

None of this will happen, of course, if Missouri lawmakers don’t put their money where their mouths have been and pull the Show-Me State out of the bottom tier of states for education funding.

This is where the CEE-Trust report falls short. It implies that there are enough savings in reconfiguring school districts — while also creating a new state bureaucracy — to shift money to local schools and also create a fund for universal preschool. We have no doubt
there is waste in many urban school districts. The improved financial condition of the St. Louis Public Schools since its state takeover proves the point.

But to imply that money is not a problem ignores Missouri’s historically poor state funding — currently 40th lowest — for K-12 education compared to other states. This is both a recipe for disaster and an admission that the biggest obstacle to providing great schools in urban areas is overcoming massive poverty.

Great schools take money, and the Missouri Constitution makes it crystal clear that it’s the state’s job to provide that money.

A serious conversation in Missouri about providing great schools in failing districts must include these elements:

- Adequate funding.
- Universal quality preschools.
- A regional approach to educating all children regardless of political boundaries.

If all the voices in this raucous and important debate were committed to those common ground principles, 2014 could be the year that Missouri makes a real promise to all of its children. It will be the year that Missouri makes a commitment to its own future.

Great schools change lives.

Athletes, Drugs and Entitlement

January 16, 2014

By
Allie Grasgreen

NO MU MENTION

SAN DIEGO -- As Division III officials prepare to reduce the penalty for athletes who test positive for non-performance enhancing drugs Saturday, new data released here Wednesday showed that use of marijuana and other drugs is highest among athletes in that competitive level.
The data, presented by National Collegiate Athletic Association researchers here at the group's annual convention, are a preview of findings from two quadrennial surveys of 21,000 athletes on their drug use and social environments.

The surveys also found that many athletes are not comfortable outside their athletic social circles, and feel entitled to more flexibility and special treatment from professors.

All three divisions are considering the marijuana policy change, but the proposal is being billed as one of the main items on the Division III legislation agenda here, with Division I focusing on recruiting and athlete welfare items (not to mention governance restructuring), and Division II considering a big academic reform package. Division III also has a significantly smaller-scale drug testing program than its more competitive peers.

Regardless, the policy change must be approved by all three divisions in order to be enacted, because athletes can't be punished differently under NCAA policy.

Twenty-two percent of athletes reported using marijuana in 2013, with Division III smoking the most and Division I smoking the least (as was the case with most drugs). About 29 percent of Division III athletes reported marijuana use, up three percentage points from 2005. Across all divisions, about one in four men smoke, compared to 17 percent of women.
NCAA officials discussed the survey data and substance use among athletes at two sessions here Wednesday.

The proposal would reduce the penalty for students who test positive for "street drugs" such as marijuana from a full year of athletic ineligibility to a half-season. A pamphlet on NCAA drug policies distributed at the convention notes that "marijuana is linked to anxiety and panic reactions, respiratory damage, short-term memory impairment and a decreased focus on goals and achievement." Other "commonly abused" drugs banned by the NCAA are cocaine, anabolic steroids and stimulants.

The NCAA's Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports proposed the idea for a few reasons: marijuana is not a performance enhancing and is not considered "cheating," so its use should carry a punishment
different from those for other drugs; officials want to focus more on helping
athletes overcome use and less on punishing them for it; and many who have been
punished under the current policy have lost much more than a year of eligibility.

Of the more than 60 athletes who lost eligibility due to marijuana use in 2009-10,
only 12 returned, Mary E. Wilfert, NCAA associate director of health and safety and
liaison to the committee that proposed the legislation, told Inside Higher Ed.

"We don't want to lose those students, we want them to have the opportunity to
come back to their sport and to school," Wilfert said.
At the same time, Division III presidents acknowledged, there is some concern
"with the perception that could be associated with reducing the penalty for a
positive drug test."

Yet while both the Division III Management and Presidents Councils voted to
support the legislation, the latter actually expressed interest in one day abolishing
the penalty altogether.

Drug testing is generally on the rise. At least three-quarters of Division I and II and
30 percent of Division III colleges have an institutional drug testing program. Many
are testing without "reasonable suspicion," more frequently and with more severe
punishment than in years past. The NCAA also tests athletes on campuses and at
championship events.

While Divisions I and II have adopted year-round drug testing, Division III
presidents have opposed expanding testing beyond championship events.
"They want to focus on education and integration and making sure that we do some
collaboration," with groups like NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher
Education, Kari Eckhart, senior woman administrator at Gustavus Adolphus College,
said in a presentation Wednesday.

Despite the repercussions it may bring, drug testing should continue and penalties
are appropriate, three in five surveyed athletes said. And 57 percent said testing is
a deterrent for drug use.
The survey data also showed that Division III athletes are most likely to drink alcohol, and men are "much more likely to drink excessive amounts," said Markie Rexroat, the NCAA's assistant director of research.

Many athletes also reported negative -- in some cases "disturbingly" so, Rexroat said -- consequences of alcohol use. Thirty percent said they experienced memory loss or did something they later regretted because of alcohol, and while a quarter had a friend who criticized their drinking habits, only 6 percent thought they had a drinking or drug problem. Twenty-three percent got into a fight or confrontation while intoxicated in the past year, and while 14 percent drove drunk, only 1 percent were arrested for it.

"These are just a few of the negative situations that can stem from [drinking]," Rexroat said.

However, Wilfert noted in an afternoon session that most students are still reporting that they're neither using nor abusing drugs.

"If students come to campus and believe that the norm is for students to use, they're more likely to use," she said. "We want to be sure that we're putting out the message that most students aren't."

**Social Interaction and Academic Entitlement**

Many athletes feel stereotyped by their community and professors, yet feel they deserve more of a break than their peers in life and in the classroom, the survey data show.

About 23 percent of athletes said that if their test grades are low, professors should grade on a curve, and one in five say that if they turn in all their class assignments they are entitled to good grades. Another 8 percent believe that faculty are responsible for how they do in class, and half say professors are obligated to be flexible when athletes have conflicts due to games or practices.

However, the NCAA's director of research and academic performance, Lydia Bell, noted that due to lack of research, it's unclear whether athletes are more or less entitled than the general study body.
"For student-athletes who are struggling in the classroom, maybe it's a lack of preparation, challenging material, balancing demands," Bell said. "Some students need to be taught or possibly reminded that grades are earned."

Less than 30 percent of athletes believe most people generally can be trusted, but they have strong confidence in their coaches and teammates.

Only 63 percent of male and 58 percent of female students said they feel comfortable among surrounding campus community members, and most are more comfortable around their team than in any other environment.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, more than half of Division I athletes choose to live with teammates. That figure is just over 40 percent in Division II, and about 25 percent in Division III.

These findings suggest that colleges should reconsider how they encourage athletes to engage outside their team environment, Bell said.

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**ASK A SCIENTIST Q: How do electrons move around the nucleus of an atom?**

By TAMRA REALL and DEANNA LANKFORD of MU's Office of Science Outreach

Wednesday, January 15, 2014 at 2:00 pm

The question is from a student in Mrs. Alexander's seventh-grade science class at Smithton Middle School.

A: "An electron is both a wave and a particle. You cannot pinpoint exactly where it is at any one time, but think of it as a cloud around the atom." said Jason Cooley, a biochemistry professor at the University of Missouri. Electrons are found in different levels — or orbitals — surrounding
the nucleus. The electrons can be found at any point in their orbital. The orbitals can be shaped as a sphere, as lobes — which kind of look like two squashes put together at the small ends — or in the shape of a doughnut around the nucleus.

Atoms are made up of three major components: electrons, protons and neutrons. Protons and neutrons make up the nucleus in the center of the atom. "Early on, we thought that electrons were revolving around the nucleus like planets," Cooley said. "We no longer think of it that way because of experiments that came later on." Now we know that electrons do not orbit around the nucleus like planets around the sun. However, because of the simplicity of this model, this misconception is often taught in many science classes today.

All matter is made up of atoms that are largely made up of energy. If you add energy, electrons can move to a higher orbital level and then back again when the energy returns to normal. This changes matter and how it works with the matter nearby. Cooley concluded, "What it comes down to is that all matter and chemistry has to do with exchanging energy in one way, shape or form."

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