



**New York State
Education
Department
My Brother's
Keeper Symposium**

**Their Highest
Potential:
Part 2**



**May 1, 2025
7:30 AM-4:00 PM
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY**



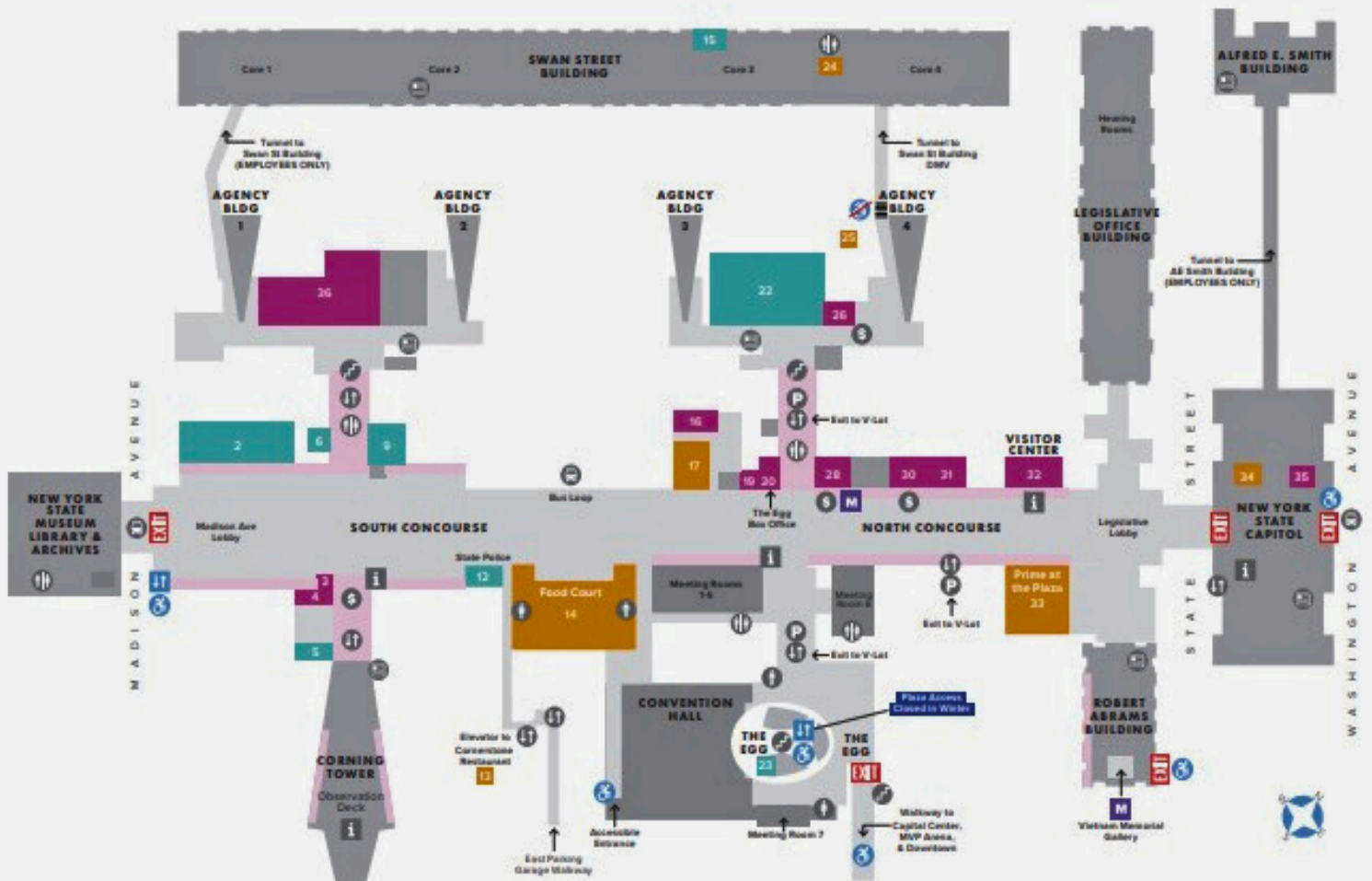
NEW YORK STATE

My Brother's Keeper

WELCOME TO THE EMPIRE STATE PLAZA

empirestateplaza.ny.gov

CONCOURSE LEVEL



Map Key

- i** Information
- ATM** ATM
- EXIT** Exit to Plaza
- ELEVATOR** Elevator
- ELEVATOR TO PLAZA LEVEL** Elevator to Plaza Level
- P** Parking (use elevators)
- CDTA BUS STOP** CDTA Bus Stop
- NEWSSTAND CONVENIENCE STORE** Newsstand Convenience Store
- M** Memorials
Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial
Vietnam Memorial Gallery
- EMPIRE STATE PLAZA ART COLLECTION** Empire State Plaza Art Collection

Food

- 13** Cornerstone at the Plaza
Plaza Level
- 14** Food Court
- 17** Logan's Deli and Market
- 24** Swan Street Cafeteria
WV Plaza
- 33** Prime at the Plaza Café
- 34** Dunkin' Donuts

Services

- 3** Just Jewelry Repair
- 4** Post Office
- 16** American Red Cross
- 19** Patsy's Barber Shop
- 20** The Egg Box Office
- 26** Emblem Health Family Dental
- 28** KeyBank
- 30** Broadview
- 31** DMV
- 32** Visitor Center & Gift Shop
- 35** Post Office
- 36** Retro Fitness

State Offices

- 2** Media Services Room #146
- 5** Conference Room #125
- 6** Parking Management
Room #144
- 9** Plaza Operations Room #130
- 12** NY State Police Room #115-1
- 15** Department of Motor Vehicles
- 22** Convention & Cultural Events,
Curatorial Services Room #120
- 23** Convention Center Office

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Letters	4
Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr. Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents.....	4
Honorable Carl E. Heastie Speaker, New York State Assembly.....	5
Honorable Kathy Sheehan Mayor, City of Albany.....	6
2025 Class of MBK Fellows	7
Symposium Schedule	10
Keynote Speakers	13
Mr. Brian Favors.....	13
Mr. Jordan Pierre.....	13
Workshop Presenters: Bios	14
Ms. Cheryl Wills.....	14
Mr. Baruti Kafele.....	15
Rev. Dr. Alfonso Wyatt.....	16
Dr. Anael Alston	16
Mr. Anibal Soler, Jr	17
Dr. Jason Baez	17
Ms. Michelle Thompson-Taylor.....	17
Mr. Jeremiah Brown.....	18
Mr. Jalin Thomas.....	18
Dr. Yolanda Sealey Ruiz.....	19
Autumn Griffin.....	19
Workshop Descriptions	20
Concurrent Student Workshop Sessions.....	20
Concurrent Adult Workshop Sessions.....	22
Note Pages for Symposium attendees	23
Wi-Fi Access: Username: OGS-Convention Password: ESPCC1976	Hashtags: #NYSMBK X[Twitter]: NYSEDNEWS

**THE BOARD OF REGENTS
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

Lester W. Young, Jr.
Chancellor

55 Hanson Place, Ste. 400
Brooklyn, NY 11217

May 1, 2025

Dear NYS My Brother's Keeper 2025 Symposium Attendees,

On behalf of my colleagues on the Board of Regents and our Commissioner of Education, Dr. Betty A. Rosa, I'd like to personally welcome you to the 2025 New York State My Brother's Keeper (NYSMBK) Symposium.

In February 2014, President Obama launched My Brother's Keeper to tackle the unrelenting opportunity gaps boys and young men of color face and ensure all young people reach their full potential. NYSMBK communities have much to be proud of. Now, in our ninth year, NYSMBK continues to harness the power of communities to remove barriers to success for boys and young men of color, resulting in improved outcomes both in and out of school. New York State is unique in that it is the only state to have enacted MBK into law, supported by a budget and managed by the State Education Department. Since its inception in 2016, NYSMBK has transformed into a growing movement, expanding from five to 50 communities and seven tribal nations. This remarkable growth would not have been possible without your dedication, commitment, and innovative spirit. I want to thank each of you for making this happen.

This year's symposium welcomes nearly 1,100 attendees, demonstrating the strength and promise of this initiative. Our 2025 theme, "Their Highest Potential Part II," builds on last year's focus and encourages us to delve deeper into our efforts. Throughout the symposium, keynote speakers and workshop sessions will discuss how the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) community can continue to uplift and support students in achieving their highest potential. This theme serves as both a reflection on our progress and a call to action, reminding us of the work that still lies ahead and the collective responsibility we share.

We are proud to induct the eighth class of My Brother's Keeper Fellows during this year's event. These young men exemplify excellence and resilience, demonstrating the transformative impact of ongoing mentorship, opportunity, and belief in one's potential. They inspire us all to stay focused on what is possible when communities unite with intention and love.

Communities across our nation continue to confront numerous challenges with deep historical roots that impact boys and young men. Addressing these issues requires us all to think and act boldly, broadly, intentionally, and creatively. The NYSMBK initiative remains a unique, outcome-focused model aimed at changing the narrative and improving educational outcomes for our most at-risk students. This crucial work is made possible by the vision and leadership of Speaker Carl E. Heastie and the New York State Assembly, as well as Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and the New York State Senate. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Anael Alston, Assistant Commissioner, and the entire team from the Office of Equity, Access, Family, and Community Engagement at the State Education Department (SED) for their tireless dedication and the countless hours they have invested in planning this impactful gathering.

In conclusion, I want to express my sincere gratitude to each of you for attending this year's symposium and for bringing your passion, commitment, and insights to our gathering. Your presence is important, and your voices matter. I hope you leave this event feeling refreshed, inspired, and ready to implement strategies that break down barriers and create pathways to success for our boys and young men. Your leadership and continued partnership are truly appreciated.



Lester W. Young, Jr., Ed.D.
Chancellor, Board of Regents
University of the State of New York



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

May 1, 2025

Dear Friends:

It is an honor to once again welcome you to Albany and the New York State My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Symposium: *Their Highest Potential Part II*.

I continue taking great pride in New York's work as the first state in the nation to accept former President Obama's challenge and enact the My Brother's Keeper initiative into law. In 2014, Mr. Obama established the MBK Task Force, an interagency effort focused on closing opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color, so that all young people have the chance to reach their full potential. My colleagues and I recognize that adequate resources must be provided to facilitate change and embraced this challenge. Since 2016, we have invested \$208 million in New York State's MBK initiative.

This year, as the Speaker of the New York State Assembly, it is my great pleasure to welcome back the MBK Fellows. I would also like to congratulate three MBK Ambassadors from New York State: Ikenna Okoye of Uniondale; Michael Muir of New York City and Cameron Williams of Yonkers. New York is proud of the work you are doing to uplift marginalized communities and build a better future. As you come together today to gain information, connect professionally and share experiences, you are cultivating tools and resources to take back to your communities to continue advancing better outcomes for New York State's and the country's future leaders. You can all be proud of the work you have accomplished.

Please accept my best wishes for a productive gathering and your continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl E. Heastie".

CARL E. HEASTIE
Speaker



Dear Friends:

On behalf of the City of Albany, I am delighted to welcome you to the 2025 My Brother's Keeper Symposium. It is a privilege to host this gathering of dedicated students, administrators, community leaders, elected officials, and supporters who share a commitment to advancing opportunities for boys and young men of color.

The My Brother's Keeper Symposium serves as a platform to unite our collective efforts and strategies for empowering young people. By participating in this event you contribute to a nationwide movement focused on providing access to mentorship, support networks, and essential skills that pave the way for successful careers and higher education.

As you gather in the heart of Albany, I encourage you to explore the City's vibrant offerings. Enjoy our exceptional dining scene, lush parks, superb shopping, and an array of museums and historic sites that showcase our rich heritage.

Thank you for your dedication to this important cause. I wish you a successful and enriching experience at the Symposium.

Kindest Regards,

Kathy Sheehan
Mayor, City of Albany



Congratulations to the 2025 Class of MBK Fellows!

Community	Fellow	School
Albany	James Campbell	Albany High School
	Jahmeer Rose	Albany High School
Arlington	Zavier Durandisse	Arlington High School
	Brandon Bailey	Arlington High School
Auburn	Johntae Smith	Auburn High School
	Malik Williams	Auburn High School
Brentwood	Jyaden Egalite	Brentwood High School
	Samuel Lewis, Jr.	Brentwood High School
	Marco Mauricio	Brentwood High School
	Michael Ruiz	Brentwood High School
Buffalo	Angel Barlow	East Community High School
	Marquis Johnson	Frederick Law Olmsted School
	Kevin Manzi	Buffalo Academy of Visual & Performing Arts
	Tacari McCray	Frederick Law Olmsted School
Central Islip	Gabriel Nwuba	Central Islip High School
	Elijah Wellington	Central Islip High School
Dunkirk	Eliel Collazo	Dunkirk Senior High School
	Justice Thomas-Rivera	Dunkirk Senior High School
East Ramapo	Esteban Oved Maldonado	Ramapo High School
	Dorian Manuel Martinez Argueta	Ramapo High School
	Muhammad H. Mehmood	Spring Valley High School
	Austin Renaud	Spring Valley High School
Ellenville	Henry Jones	Ellenville Junior/Senior High School
	Caleb A. Norat Roldan	Ellenville Junior/Senior High School
Elmont	Amare Clark	Elmont Memorial High School
	Malachi Collins	Elmont Memorial High School
Greenburgh	Sebastian Benitez	Woodlands Middle/High School
	Aaron Woodbury	Woodlands Middle/High School
Hudson	Christian Rodriguez	Hudson High School
	Shaun M. Terry	Hudson High School
Ithaca	Emmanuel McBean	Ithaca High School
	Christian Mendez	Ithaca High School
LaFayette	Brycin Jones	LaFayette Middle/High School
	River Porter	LaFayette Middle/High School
Lockport	Lavani E. Myles	Lockport High School
	Cameron R. Warriner	Lockport High School
Longwood	Jeremyh Jean Baptiste	Longwood High School
	Demetrius Flores	Longwood High School
Lyons	Stephen LeBrecht	Lyons Middle/High School
	Contrell Parker, Jr.	Lyons Middle/High School
Massena	Andrew David	Massena High School
	Kingston King	Massena High School

Middletown	Kyle Williams	Middletown High School
	Kenol Surprise	Middletown High School
Monticello	Tobias Brown	Monticello High School
	Anthony R. Ortiz II	Monticello High School
Mount Pleasant Cottage	Nixon Sanchez Galdenez	Edenwald School
	Aiden Greenwood	Mount Pleasant Cottage School
Mt. Vernon	Cayden Mitchell	STEAM Academy
	Leonard David Oduro	STEAM Academy
New Rochelle	Quincy Fosu	New Rochelle High School
	Vasslon Ingram, Jr.	New Rochelle High School
	Stone Pride	New Rochelle High School
	Justin Southwell	New Rochelle High School
Newburgh	Cameron Ford	Newburgh Free Academy West Campus
	Rayden Gould	Newburgh Free Academy North Campus
	Rischneider Guerrier	Newburgh Free Academy Main Campus
	Taymere Mann	Newburgh Free Academy West Campus
NYC Bronx	Antho-Neil Aspinall	Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists
	Zion Mena	P17X
	Javon Scantlebury	Eagle Academy for Young Men
	Miguel Tavarez	Bronx Studio School for Writers and Artists
NYC Brooklyn	Justin Larose	Medgar Evers College Preparatory School
	Aiden Lopez	Brooklyn Lab School
	Anthony Ma	L.I.F.E. Academy High School for Film and Music
	Ethan Nicholas	Clara Barton High School for Health Professions
NYC Manhattan	Jesus Alba	Gregorio Luperon High School
	Moises Manzano	Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change
	Daniel Rodriguez	Esperanza Preparatory Magnet School for Early College, Exploration & Leadership
	Aline Sall	Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change
NYC Queens	Nathan Bawanideen	High School for Law Enforcement and Public Safety
	Discal Henry	Channel View School for Research
	Brison Simpson	Eagle Academy of Southeast Queens
	Carson Simpson	Eagle Academy of Southeast Queens
NYC Staten Island	Terrance Graham	CSI High School
	Elias Hardt	The Michael J. Petrides School
	William Luque	Tottenville High School
	Mujeeb Olayokun	Ralph R. McKee Career and Technical Education High School
Ossining	Malachi Drysdale	Ossining High School
	Aiden Mendez	Ossining High School
Peekskill	Aaron Owusu	Peekskill High School
	Daryan Smith	Peekskill High School
Port Chester-Rye	Jah'meer Furman	Port Chester High School
	Carlos Daniel Palma Morales	Port Chester High School
Poughkeepsie	Kimani Henry	Poughkeepsie High School
	Javone Smith	Poughkeepsie High School
Rochester	Josiah Cooper-Hicks	Padilla High School
	James Pichardo	Padilla High School

	Jawon Shackelford	School of the Arts
	Corey Mcrae	School of the Arts
Roosevelt	Christian Arthur	Roosevelt High School
	Josiah Lucas	Roosevelt High School
Salmon River	Draiden Back	Salmon River High School
	Oakley Hasty	Salmon River High School
Schenectady	Isaiah Roberts	Schenectady High School
	Elijah Jackson	Schenectady High School
Sewanhaka	Dante Anderson	Sewanhaka High School
	Nehemy Fresnel	Sewanhaka High School
Sodus	Thalés Bell	Sodus High School
	Dexcel Santiago	Sodus High School
Southampton	Mario Portillo Linares	Southampton High School
	Nishawan Williams	Southampton High School
Suffern	Joshua McIntosh	Suffern High School
	Kobe Thornton	Suffern High School
Syracuse	Devin Brown	Henninger High School
	Anthony King	Corcoran High School
	Josmier Pease	Henninger High School
	Demeris Williams, Jr.	Corcoran High School
Troy	Zaryus Ellis	Troy High School
	Vincent Ruiz	Troy High School
Uniondale	Justin Holness	Uniondale High School
	Theodore Jean-Simon	Uniondale High School
Valley Stream	Avery Jones	Valley Stream Central High School
	Sebastian Quezada	Valley Stream Central High School
Westbury	Matthew Mitchell	Westbury High School
	Jayden Telesford	Westbury High School
White Plains	Brandon Archer	White Plains High School
	Emanuel Vanegas Ocampo	White Plains High School
Wyandanch	John Fields	Wyandanch Memorial High School
	William Morgan	Wyandanch Memorial High School
Yonkers	Joel Gonzalez	Charles E. Gorton High School
	Max Hernandez	Yonkers Middle/High School
	Marcus Knight	Barack Obama School for Social Justice
	Quilan Wilson	Lincoln High School



NEW YORK STATE

My Brother's Keeper

New York State My Brother's Keeper Symposium

Empire State Plaza ♦ Albany, NY

Thursday, May 1, 2025

7:30 AM – 4:00 PM

7:30 a.m.	Continental Breakfast and Registration	Convention Hall
8:30	Welcome Dr. Anael Alston, Assistant Commissioner, NYSED, MBK Student Dr. Betty A. Rosa, Commissioner, NYSED Dr. Lester W. Young, Jr., Chancellor, New York State Board of Regents Elected Official TBD Elected Official TBD	Convention Hall
9:00	Indigenous Ceremony Opening – Shinnecock (Tribal Nation Students) MBK	Convention Hall
9:15	Keynote: Brian Favors and Jordan Pierre <i>Our Ancestors' Sacrifice, Your Highest Potential, and the Connection</i>	Convention Hall
9:45	MBK Student Table Facilitation/Q&A	Convention Hall
10:15	MBK Fellows Student Panel moderated by Dr. Alfonso Wyatt "Lessons Learned, Lessons Applied," including Q & A	Convention Hall
11:00	Breakout Sessions Please see below for BOTH the adult and student break out sessions	Convention Hall
12:30 p.m.	Lunch/College Fair A dozen colleges, universities, and supporting organizations will help students design their post graduate plans and share crucial information with adults.	Convention Hall
1:25	Pre-Afternoon Welcome Back: The Pathways High School Step Team Induction of the 2025 MBK Fellows Speaker Showcase – My MBK, Living and Learning featuring Buffalo MBK, Brentwood MBK, NYCMBK-Staten Island, Dunkirk MBK, Yonkers MBK, and Uniondale MBK	Convention Hall



NEW YORK STATE

My Brother's Keeper

New York State My Brother's Keeper Symposium

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7:30 AM – 4:00 PM

2:30	Students Share Insights (Agree or Disagree?) NYC MBK Queens, Newburgh MBK, and Yonkers MBK	Convention Hall
2:45	Special Presentation: Ms. Cheryl Willis (featuring Pathways High School Step Team) <i>Grandpa Sandy and the DNA of Resilience</i>	Convention Hall
3:15	NYSMBK Updates and Next Steps with Dr. Alston	Convention Hall
3:30	Closing Remarks: Principal Kafele Where Do We Go from Here? The Power and Purpose of Community	Convention Hall



New York State My Brother's Keeper Symposium

Albany, New York

Thursday, May 1, 2025

***Breakout Sessions: 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM**

Concurrent Student Sessions

****College Application Insights:**

What You Need to Know

Michelle Thompson-Taylor

Meeting Room 5

Are We There Yet? Navigating School and Beyond

Jeremiah Brown, Jalin Thomas, MBK

Students and Alums

Meeting Room 6

Media Literacy Matters: How to Decode the Messages That Shape Our World

Brian Favors and Jordan Pierre

Swyer Theater

Concurrent Adult Sessions

What Is My Impact and Value of the MBK Program that I Participate In?

Baruti Kafele

Meeting Rooms 2 and 3

Reaching Their Highest Potential: The Role of the Culturally Relevant Classroom in Student Belonging

Dr. Yolanda Sealey Ruiz and Dr. Autumn A. Griffin

Meeting Room 4

Anibal Soler, Jr. and Dr. Jason Baez

MBK Yonkers, Yonkers Magic: How We Bring Out Their Highest Potential

Meeting Room 1

* Each session is 50-60 minutes inclusive of Q&A.

** For students and adults



Keynote Speaker: Brian Favors

Brian Favors is the co-founder of [Breaking The Cycle Consulting Services](#) and specializes in preparing educators and parents to utilize culturally responsive teaching methods to increase academic achievement in at-risk student populations. Mr. Favors is also the co-founder and program director of the Nate Parker Foundation, which partners with HBCUs to empower young filmmakers of African descent to use film and storytelling as a vehicle for community healing and transformation. He

taught social studies and special education at Bushwick Community Alternative High School in Brooklyn, NY for over a decade. Mr. Favors currently serves as the Director of Teaching and Learning for Inspiring Minds, NYC which empowers youth through leadership and entrepreneurial programs. He was a contributing author to both *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (Springer Publishing Company, 2014) and *The Birth of a Nation and the Making of a Movement* (Simon and Shuster, 2016). He was also featured in the National Geographic documentary film, *Rise Up: The Legacy of Nat Turner*. Brian earned a Bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of California, Davis, a M.Ed. from Penn State University, and a M.S.Ed. from Queens College.



Keynote Speaker: Jordan Pierre

A nationally recognized keynote speaker, youth advocate, and media strategist, Jordan Pierre is a force in modern storytelling. With features on *The Tamron Hall Show* and *Hoda & Jenna*, he has harnessed the power of his voice to educate, uplift, and mobilize communities. His words don't just spark conversation—they ignite action.

A proud Syracuse University alumnus, Jordan's academic foundation is as formidable as his presence. With a B.A. in Broadcast and Digital Journalism and an M.A. in Television, Radio, and Film, he merges deep media expertise with an unshakable commitment to truth, representation, and impact. His ability to distill complex issues into compelling narratives has made him a sought-after speaker and strategist, shaping conversations that matter.

With the cadence of Martin and the unapologetic urgency of Malcolm, Jordan speaks with a rare blend of grace and conviction. His eloquence is not just in his words but in his ability to shift mindsets, challenge norms, and inspire the next generation to rise. Whether on stage, on screen, or in the community, he is more than a speaker—he is a movement.

In an era where authenticity is currency and leadership is defined by action, Jordan Pierre stands at the intersection of both—a thought leader, a truth-teller, and a voice that will echo for generations to come.



Mainstage Presenter: Cheryl Willis

Cheryl Willis is an Emmy award-winning journalist for **Spectrum News New York 1**. As the first African American woman to host a prime-time nightly newscast for the cable network, Cheryl anchors the Emmy-nominated broadcast *Live at Ten* on weeknights. Cheryl has been with NY1 since its launch in 1992 and is one of the station's most recognizable journalists for breaking news and special coverage. She is also the talk show host of the weekly public affairs program, *In Focus with Cheryl Willis*, where she interviews the most powerful newsmakers and celebrities in the country.

Cheryl is also the acclaimed author of a series of books about her family's transition from slavery to freedom in the United States. *Die Free: A Heroic Family Tale*, *The Emancipation of Grandpa Sandy Willis*, *Emancipated: My Family's Fight for Freedom*, and *EMMA* all chronicle her 3x great-grandfather's heroic service as a member of the United States Colored Troops during The Civil War.

On March 25, 2011, Cheryl Willis made history as the first journalist invited to speak at the United Nations General Assembly Hall for The International Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, which was broadcast live around the world on UNTV.

Cheryl has been honored numerous times during her 30+ years as a journalist. In 2023, Cheryl was awarded the prestigious Gracie Award from the Alliance for Women in Media. Cheryl has also received awards from The New York Press Club, The Newswomen's Club of New York, and The Associated Press, and she received a special medal from the United Nations Correspondents Association, personally presented to her by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. City & State Magazine hailed Cheryl as one of New York's most "remarkable women", and Cheryl is one of the women profiled in the award-winning 2020 book, *She is Me: How Women Will Save the World*.

Cheryl is proud to be the Commander and Lifetime Descendant Member of the New York Chapter of the Sons and Daughters of the United States Colored Troops – a national organization of Civil War descendants who raise awareness about 200,000 black soldiers who bravely served during The Civil War. She graduated from the prestigious S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

www.CherylWillis.com



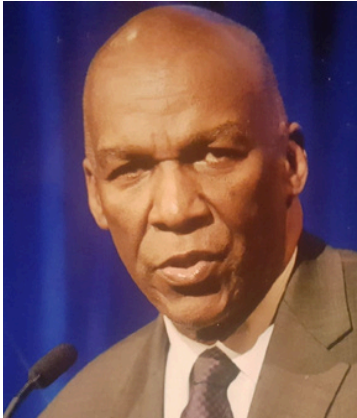
Mainstage Presenter: Baruti Kafele

A highly-regarded urban educator in New Jersey for over twenty years, Principal Baruti Kafele distinguished himself as a master teacher and a transformational school leader. One of the most sought-after school leadership and climate/culture presenters in America, Principal Kafele is impacting America's schools!

Featured over 3000 conference and program keynotes, professional development sessions, and student assemblies. An expert in the area of "attitude transformation," Principal Kafele is the leading authority for providing effective classroom and school leadership strategies toward closing what he coined the "*Attitude Gap*."

A prolific writer, Principal Kafele has written extensively on professional development strategies for creating a positive school climate and culture, transforming the attitudes of at-risk students, motivating Black males to excel in the classroom, and school leadership practices for inspiring schoolwide excellence. In addition to writing several professional articles for popular education journals, he has authored fourteen books. His newest book, *What is My Value INSTRUCTIONALLY to the Teachers I Supervise?* was released in December 2024. Principal Kafele is also the creator and host of the popular AP & New Principals Academy, which is streamed live every Saturday morning on his AP & New Principals Academy YouTube channel at 10:55 ET.

Principal Kafele earned his B.S. degree in Management Science/Marketing from Kean University and his M.A. degree in Educational Administration from New Jersey City University. He is the recipient of over 150 educational, professional, and community awards, which include the prestigious Milken Educator Award, recognition as one of the world's top 30 education professionals by Global Gurus Top 30 for six consecutive years (2020 - 2025), recognition for creating one of the world's top school leadership training programs by Global Training (2025), and the City of Dickinson, Texas proclaiming February 8, 1998 as Baruti Kafele Day.



Mainstage Presenter: Rev. Dr. Alfonso Wyatt

Dr. Alfonso Wyatt, a public theologian, scholar, and master orator/storyteller, has spent four decades of his life serving as a mentor, counselor, educator, youth program developer, foundation executive, policy advisor, advocate, community organizer, consultant, national leader, and role model.

Dr. Wyatt sounds the clarion call in his acclaimed book, *Mentoring From The Inside Out: Healing Boys, Transforming Men*. This instructional manual is replete with facts, figures, insights, lessons, and commentary from an array of scholars, community activists, and national and international thought leaders from the public, private, and religious sectors. Dr. Wyatt is a founding Board member of The Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academy.



Mainstage Presenter: Dr. Anael Alston

Born and raised in Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn, Dr. Anael Alston ("Dr. A") was recognized at the state and national levels for his ability to lead teams to increase capacity and raise student achievement in education. He is currently the Assistant Commissioner for the Office of Access, Equity, and Community Engagement in the New York State Education Department. In this capacity, he informs educational policy across the state and administers

nearly \$200 million to help support students from Pre-K through graduate school. This includes oversight of the historic New York State My Brother's Keeper movement to improve outcomes for boys and young men of color created by President Obama.

Before serving as Assistant Commissioner, he was the Superintendent of Schools for the Hamilton Central School District. As a superintendent, Dr. A distinguished himself as one of the few Superintendents across the nation to have a 100% graduation rate. Additionally, Dr. A is a former New York State Middle School Principal of the Year, where he led a once struggling school to win the prestigious National Association of Secondary School Principals Breakthrough School award for dramatic school turnaround.



Workshop Presenter: Anibal Soler, Jr.

Anibal Soler, Jr. serves as Superintendent of Yonkers Public Schools as of May 1, 2024, bringing 25 years of experience in urban education and district leadership. He has led transformative initiatives, including community schools and the My Brother's Keeper program, across Buffalo, Batavia, Schenectady, and now Yonkers. Known for championing access, opportunity, and student well-being, Mr. Soler blends visionary leadership

with strategic execution. His commitment to academic excellence and community partnerships continues to create inclusive, empowering environments where students and families thrive.



Workshop Presenter: Dr. Jason Baez

Dr. Jason Baez serves as Executive Director of MBK Yonkers, a role he began in May 2024. He joined Yonkers Public Schools in 2022 as Assistant Principal at Charles E. Gorton High School, where he led the school's MBK chapter and launched its MBK Leadership Program.

Previously, Dr. Baez was an Assistant Principal in the South Bronx, where he spearheaded MBK initiatives in NYC Public Schools. As a teacher in Queens, he mentored early-career male educators of color through NYC Men Teach, helping retain diverse talent in classrooms.

Dr. Baez continues shaping future educators as an adjunct professor in the education departments at City College of New York (CUNY) and Monroe College.



Workshop Presenter: Michelle Thompson-Taylor

Ms. Thompson-Taylor is the Associate Dean of College Counseling at Choate Rosemary Hall. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics from the University of the West Indies and a Master of Science in Strategic Leadership from Roberts Wesleyan College. She began her career in higher education at the University of Rochester, spending over eight years in the undergraduate admissions office and a year and a half as the inaugural Director of the

Intercultural Center. Ms. Thompson-Taylor then made the move to the other side of the desk, working as Associate Director of College Counseling at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire before joining the team at Choate.



Workshop Presenter: Jeremiah Brown

Jeremiah Brown is a devoted husband, father, former NFL athlete, global career and leadership development speaker, and author. After a life-changing brain injury ended his professional football career, Jeremiah turned his pain into purpose—emerging as a powerful voice for mental health, emotional intelligence, and personal growth.

From 2017 to 2020, he served as a mentor for the New York City Department of Education's Staten Island chapter of the New York State My Brother's Keeper initiative. As a mentor, he helped young men of color grow in confidence, purpose, and leadership. His impactful work earned him the honor of attending the Obama Foundation's national convening in Oakland, CA as part of the New York State MBK delegation. This experience an experience that further solidified his lifelong commitment to mentorship and community empowerment.

Jeremiah is the author of *Lead Like a Champion*, and he continues to inspire audiences around the world through his message of resilience, growth, and leadership. His contributions have been widely recognized; he was named the 2023 and 2024 Mental Health Leader of the Year by NAMI New York State.



Workshop Presenter: Jalin Thomas

Jalin Thomas is proof that leadership, resilience, and vision can shape a life of purpose. A proud graduate of Michigan State University, Jalin developed his leadership skills as a student manager under Hall of Fame basketball coach Tom Izzo, playing a key role in supporting one of the nation's most competitive college basketball programs.

During his time with the Spartans, Jalin gained firsthand experience in the discipline, teamwork, and perseverance required to build champions—serving as part of an NCAA Final Four team and contributing to an Elite Eight run. These lessons became the foundation of his work as an author, entrepreneur, and mentor.

He co-authored *The Clueless Compass*, a practical and inspiring guide designed to help young adults navigate college and early adulthood with confidence. The book offers personal stories and actionable strategies to help readers turn uncertainty into opportunity.

Jalin is also the founder of Clueless: The Movement, a lifestyle brand and clothing line rooted in a powerful message—helping young people embrace uncertainty, ask better questions, and build self-belief. Clueless is more than apparel; it's a mindset that encourages youth to trust the process and take ownership of their journey. With a passion for mentorship, storytelling, and entrepreneurship, Jalin equips the next generation to dream big, take bold action, and define success on their own terms.



Workshop Presenter: Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, Ph.D. is a Professor of English Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research has appeared in several top-tier academic journals. She is co-editor of four books and a co-author of the multiple award-winning book, *Advancing Racial Literacies in Teacher Education: Activism for Equity in Digital Spaces* (2021), where she examines her concept of Archeology of Self™ in education. For three years in a row, she was named one of EdWeek's EduScholar Influencers — a list of the Top 1% of educational scholars in the United States — a highly selective group of 200 scholars (chosen from a pool of 20,000).

At Teachers College, she founded the Racial Literacy Project @TC and the Racial Literacy Roundtables Series, where, for 14 years, national scholars, teachers, and students facilitated conversations around race and other issues involving diversity. Yolanda appeared in Spike Lee's *2Fists Up: We Gon' Be Alright* (2016), a documentary about the Black Lives Matter movement and the campus protests at Mizzou, and *Defining Us, Children at the Crossroads of Change*, a documentary about supporting and educating the nation's Black and Latinx male youth. She also appeared in *Black Girls* (2024), a documentary about Black girls and women in society. Yolanda's first full-length collection of poetry, *Love from the Vortex & Other Poems*, was published in March 2020. Her sophomore book of poetry, *The Peace Chronicles*, was published in July 2021. Yolanda opened the 2022 TEDx UPENN conference at the University of Pennsylvania with her TEDx Talk: Truth, Love & Racial Literacy. Connect with Yolanda on X [Twitter] at @RuizSealey and on Instagram at @yolie_sealeyruiz.



Workshop Presenter: Dr. Autumn Griffin

Dr. Autumn A. Griffin is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Georgia State's College of Education & Human Development and a fellow for NCTE's Cultivating New Voices Fellowship for Scholars of Color. Broadly, with implications across the fields of English Education, Digital Black Studies, and Gender Studies, Dr. Griffin's work explores how Black adolescents engage literature and literacy to read stories and (re)write

counter stories about their experiences with gendered and racialized oppression as well as Black joy and love. Dr. Griffin published her work in the *Research in the Teaching of English*, *Urban Education*, *Equity and Excellence in Education* and she recently released her first book, *Restorying Young Adult Literature: Expanding Students' Perspectives with Digital Texts*, co-authored with colleagues Joshua Coleman and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas. Dr. Griffin also formerly co-founded the digital network Blackademia, a platform built to explore historical and contemporary experiences of Black women in the academy and to support Black doctoral students on their journeys by offering community through its podcast, blog, and virtual book chats. In her spare time, Dr. Griffin teaches and practices yoga, loves to garden, and can be found anywhere there is live music.



CONCURRENT STUDENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS

College Fair

Presenter: Various

Location: Base of the Egg (Outside of Convention Hall)

Many programs in New York State are designed to foster student success at the post-secondary level. The College Fair brings together professionals from across New York State who are helping to change the lives of students by ensuring students have access to higher education.

Several colleges and universities from across New York State will be present. Additionally, representatives from the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities, and MBK Teacher Opportunity Corps II will be on hand to discuss the unique programming and services students can access through these entities.

Students will have the opportunity to gather resources and speak directly with individuals from the colleges, universities, and organizations represented at the fair.

**** College Application Insights: What You Need to Know**

Presenter: Michelle Thompson-Taylor, Associate Dean of College Counseling, Choate Rosemary Hall

Location: Meeting Room 5

Graduation is a matter of time—which means it is time to get serious about what’s next. Two big questions are front and center: “How do I apply to college?” and “How do I stand out on my college applications?” This engaging and eye-opening workshop breaks down exactly what you need to know to take control of your college journey before senior year begins. From choosing the right schools to writing a personal essay that sounds like you, this session is filled with insider tips and practical strategies most students don’t hear until it’s too late. You will learn how to build a college list that fits your goals and budget, understand what admissions officers look for, and discuss how to use your summer wisely so you’re not overwhelmed in the fall. By the end, you will walk away with a clear action plan, a checklist to stay on track, and examples of real application materials that worked.

Are We There Yet? Navigating Post High School and Beyond

Presenters: Jeremiah Brown, Jalin Thomas, and MBK Students

Location: Meeting Room 6

Inspired by Jalin Thomas’s groundbreaking book, *Clueless Compass*, this workshop is designed to equip teenagers with essential knowledge and skills to succeed and thrive beyond high school. Here is what you can expect:

- Discover practical strategies to be successful in your first year of college or the first year of work;
- Learn how to create and use the five daily habits that the most successful people use; and
- Hear from a panel of young people who are walking the walk.

This empowering session will set you on the path to short-term wins in life and long-term success. Do not miss this opportunity to take control of your future and live toward your highest potential.



CONCURRENT STUDENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Media Literacy Matters: How to Decode the Messages That Shape Our World

Presenter: Brian Favors and Jordan Pierre

Location: Swyer Theater

In a world where we scroll more than we speak and headlines come faster than facts, understanding how media works is not optional—it's essential. This interactive workshop is designed to help young people become *critical thinkers, smart consumers, and confident creators* of media in all its forms.

Participants will explore how media is used to inform, educate, entertain, and influence—from news reports and social media trends to advertising and pop culture. Together, we will break down how messages are constructed, who creates them, what's left out, and why it matters.

Through real-world examples, short video clips, and collaborative discussions, attendees will gain tools to:

- Recognize bias, manipulation, and misinformation
- Analyze how media shapes opinions and identity
- Understand the power of storytelling in shaping social norms
- Build awareness of how algorithms and platforms affect what we see and believe

Whether it is a viral TikTok or a breaking news alert, this workshop empowers young people to ask better questions, think deeper, and take control of how they interact with media—not just consume it.



CONCURRENT ADULT WORKSHOP SESSIONS

What is My Impact and Value of the MBK Program That I Participate In?

Presenter: Baruti Kafele

Location: Meeting Rooms 2 and 3

In this highly engaging and introspective workshop, renowned author and dynamic speaker Baruti Kafele guides participants through a transformative exploration of their personal and collective impact within the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Program. Drawing insights from his latest book, *What Is My Value Instructionally to the Teachers I Supervise?*, Kafele adapts his powerful framework to the unique contexts and experiences of MBK mentors, educators, and leaders. Participants will engage in reflective activities designed to uncover and articulate the specific ways their involvement in MBK directly influences and empowers the young men they serve. Through thought-provoking dialogue and actionable strategies, attendees will leave equipped to clearly communicate the significance and profound value of their work within MBK, renewing their commitment to leadership and advocacy in their communities.

Reaching Their Highest Potential: The Role of the Culturally Relevant Classroom in Student Belonging

Presenter: Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz & Dr. Autumn Griffin

Location: Meeting Room 4

This workshop is a call to the heart—and a call to action—for mentors, educators, and advocates who walk alongside our young people, especially those supported through My Brother's Keeper. Together, we will explore how culturally relevant classrooms become more than learning spaces—they become sites of liberation where Black and Brown boys are affirmed, challenged, and empowered to reach their highest potential. Grounded in love, research, and the lens of the *Archaeology of Self™*, this session invites participants to reflect on how affirming identity, honoring lived experience, and building authentic relationships contribute to student success. It is a space to replenish your spirit, sharpen your tools, and recommit to the sacred work of fostering belonging, purpose, and possibility in the lives of those we are called to serve—because when our young people feel they belong, they don't just show up. They shine.

MBK Yonkers, Yonkers Magic: How We Bring Out Their Highest Potential

Presenter: Jason Baez & Anibal Soler

Location: Meeting Room 1

What methods can convert an equity vision into tangible results for boys and young men of color? MBK Yonkers achieved national recognition as a model community from the Obama Foundation for its success in Milestone 3: Ensuring On-Time Graduation.

Listen to Superintendent of Schools Anibal Soler, Jr., and Dr. Jason Baez, the Executive Director of MBK, as they reveal their successful strategies. In this interactive session, you will:

- Hear the Inside Story: Yonkers achieved national MBK success status by combining strategic leadership with an unwavering focus and community involvement.
- Gain Practical Strategies: Explore affordable yet powerful initiatives that districts can use to uplift boys, young men of color, and all students without needing large financial resources.
- Take Immediate Action: Participants will obtain instantly applicable strategies and defined steps to enhance or initiate their MBK program.
- Build Your Network: Network with leaders who share your dedication to eliminating opportunity gaps and advancing student achievement.

This workshop offers practical solutions and inspiration to assist you in helping our students reach their highest potential whether you're beginning your MBK journey or looking to expand your impact.

**** For students and adults**

*** Each session is 50-60 minutes inclusive of Q&A**



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My Brother's Keeper Symposium Advisory Committee (NYSED Internal Team)

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Dr. Christopher Fernando
Mr. John Michael Forezzi
Mr. Carlos Garcia
Ms. Kimberly Hardaway
Ms. Karen Hymes
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