

Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D.

Observations and Recommendations to the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education - Kirwan Commission

December 3, 2018

Introduction

In this document and accompanying presentation, Dr. Ivory A. Toldson provides guidance, through preliminary observations and recommendations, on state-level educational equity to the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, also known as the “Kirwan Commission.” Dr. Toldson used a methodological strategy to provide guidance on state-level educational equity using an equity framework, which involves three core tenets: (1) good data; (2) thoughtful analysis; and (3) compassionate understanding.

The Kirwan Commission, chaired by Dr. William “Brit” Kirwan, Chancellor Emeritus of the University System of Maryland, was created by legislation in 2016. The 19-member Commission assembled elected officials, educational executives and advocates to make recommendations for improving education in Maryland, through funding and policy directives. In 2018, the Kirwan Commission engaged, Dr. Ivory A. Toldson, to review the commission’s report and provide guidance to align funding and policy priorities with the best research on resolving educational disparities across race, gender and socioeconomic status.

Dr. Toldson engaged in the following process to provide input on the Commission’s recommendations. First, Dr. Toldson presented research to the Commission on factors associated with academic success among children of color across four domain areas: personal and emotional, family, social and environmental, and school factors. Second, using thematic content analysis, he reviewed and analyzed written statements from six stakeholder organizations that provided recommendations to the Commission. Third, he identified gaps between the stakeholder groups’ recommendations and the draft report for the Commission. Finally, using an equity framework he will provide final recommendations to the Commission on improving educational access and opportunity to all students in Maryland.

Aligning the themes in the stakeholder recommendations with the Commission working groups, Dr. Toldson explored content related to: (1) early childhood education; (2) high quality teachers and leaders; (3) college and career readiness pathways; and (4) resources for at-risk students. Several gaps between the stakeholder recommendations and the Commission working group drafts were revealed, and final recommendations will primarily focus on equity and leveraging research.

Documents reviewed

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working Group 1 - Early Childhood Education• Working Group 2 - High Quality Teachers and Leaders• Working Group 3 - College and Career Readiness Pathways• Working Group 4 - More Resources for At-Risk Students	Testimony/Letters from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ACLU• Advocates for Children and Youth• Attendance Works• Maryland Education Coalition• Strong Schools Maryland• Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education
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SCHOOL EQUITY MODEL: EQUITY TO EXCELLENCE

By: Ivory A. Toldson

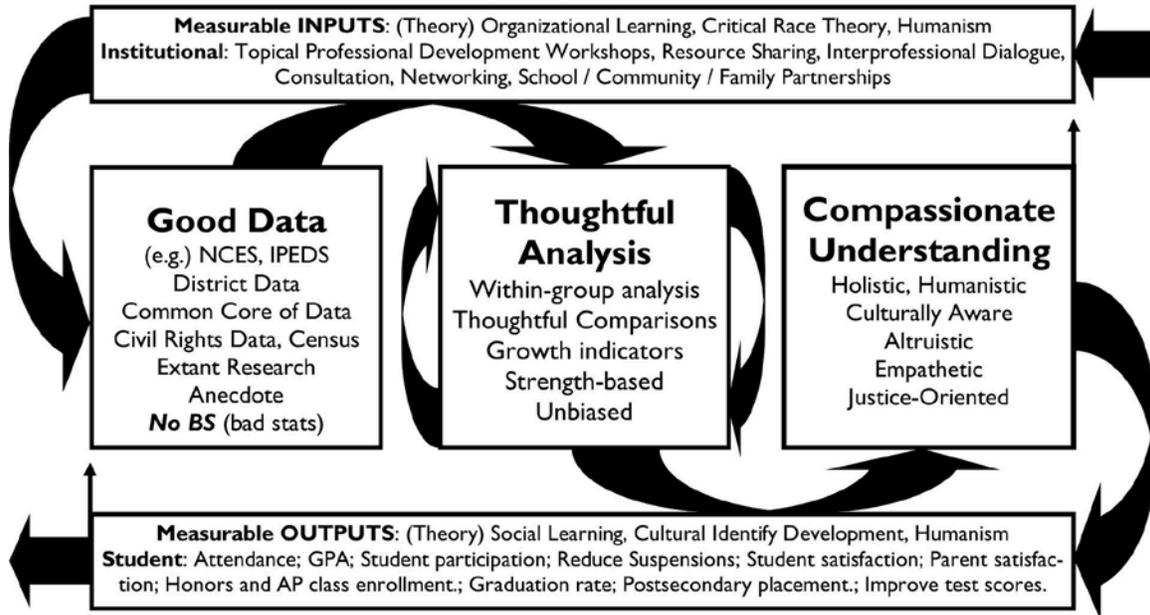


Figure 1. A framework for promoting educational equity

Race Equity and Education

The recent report by Ed Trust to the Kirwan Commission indicated that several indicators of academic success were lower for African American students, even when controlling for race. Three primary reason for this is: (1) Black students from middle-class income families more often live in urban areas, where the cost of living is higher and the wealth gap between Black families and White families are greater; (2) Second, and most importantly, Black students are dealing with racism and bias, implicitly and explicitly, from school personnel, including teachers and administrators - These racial biases manifest in placement and selection for enrichment opportunities like gifted and talented programs and AP classes, racial disparities in discipline and uneven expressions of acceptance, compassion, respect and admiration from teachers and administrators; and (3) The curriculum and school activities are not culturally affirming to Black students. These are specific recommendations, which have research support, to advance racial equity in education.

1. Principals, counselors, and teachers should have **mandatory trainings** and resources to develop cultural competence, enhance empathy and respect, defense management, and classroom management.

2. **Reduce suspensions.** The Civil Rights Data Collection indicates that every district Maryland suspends Black students at a higher rate than students of other races. Replace rigid focus on discipline with a focus on academics and student agency. Have a clear and transparent suspension policy, with a process for students to appeal.
3. Offer a **culturally-aligned** and **academically enriching curriculum** that, at a minimum, meets the admissions requirements for the most competitive public university of your state. Schools and their governing school districts should provide a disclosure statement to students' parents and guardians, which specifies any courses required for admissions to the most competitive public universities of the state, which are not available in their curriculum.
4. **Work with parents holistically.** Parents should have support from the school by way of: (1) information about how to help children learn at home, (2) information on community services to help their child, (3) explanations of classes in terms of course content and learning goals, (4) information about child development, (5) opportunities for parents to volunteer, and (6) updates on student progress between report cards.
5. **Eliminate biases,** stereotypes and misinformation from school staff. Schools should operate under the philosophy that all Black students are capable of the highest levels of academic achievement. The elimination of bias should be facilitated by regular mandatory training, equity audits, and equity plans lead by school leaders with evaluative authority.
6. Regularly **monitor collective student progress, beyond test scores.** Good schools have: a collective GPA of more than 3.0; have near 100 percent of their students involved in an extracurricular activity; have at least 25 percent of their Black students in honors classes or some type of enhanced curriculum (matching national levels); and have less than 6 percent in special education (matching national levels).

Working Group 1 - Early Childhood Education

Core elements

- **Element 1a: Expand full-day Pre-K** at no cost for four-year-olds and three-year-olds from families with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) (approximately \$75,000 for a family of four), and for four-year-olds from families with incomes between 300% and 600% FPL (approximately \$75,000 to \$150,000 for a family of four) using a sliding scale.
- **Element 1b: Capacity building** for new and current programs (tuition assistance for prospective staff; training; support of peer networks; integration with career ladder)
- **Element 1c:** Implementation of a **school readiness assessment** for all students entering kindergarten*

- **Element 1d: Expand *Judy Centers, Family Support Centers, and the Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program*** to provide and coordinate access to education and support services for at-risk children ages 0-5 and their families.

Gaps between working group and stakeholder recommendations

Stakeholders, including the ACLU, Maryland Education Coalition, and Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, recommend an explicit acknowledgement of current racial disparities in early childhood access and policies that address racial disparities in early child education. Stakeholders also want the working group to address cultural specific pedagogy, assessments and curriculum, and attend to more holistic aspect of early childhood development through home visits and social and emotional development.

Observations and Recommendations

Sufficient research evidence exists to justify addressing the unique cultural needs and imperatives of a diverse cohort of early childhood learners. To meet the needs of early childhood learners, the commission will need to have the best understanding of the causes and consequences of the existing racial disparities. Educators at all levels will need to have the proper training to address any early childhood needs that may be dependent upon the cultural background of students and their families. This has implications for capacity building and assessment.

The working group document appears to define kindergarten readiness with a degree of rigidity that exceeds its current status as a theoretical construct. The proposed test for measuring kindergarten readiness, according to its website, suggest that less than half of Maryland students are kindergarten ready. In my opinion, this measure is presented irresponsibly on the website, and is vulnerable to misinterpretation by the lay user, as well as educators. The website also suggests that a higher number of White students than Asian students are kindergarten ready. Given that Asian students consistently perform higher than white students on later measures of academic achievement, it stands to reason that there may be cultural biases in the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

Recommendations:

1. The working group documents should include a specific acknowledgement of the prevalence, antecedents, and consequences of racial disparities in early childhood educational outcomes, as indicated in the stakeholder documents.
2. Resources allocated to expanding pre-K should be determined by factors beyond the federal poverty rates, including cost of living, children with special needs and children at schools with known racial disparities in educational outcomes, including racial disparities in discipline, gifted and talented programs and assignment to special education classes.
3. This reviewer ***strongly opposes*** the universal adoption of kindergarten readiness standards, as delineated in the current working group documents. During the hearing, work group members acknowledged possible racial disparities in the

current kindergarten readiness assessment and indicated that a new assessment will be introduced in the following school year. Therefore, the state of Maryland does not currently have a kindergarten readiness assessment that can reliably be used for diagnostic purposes. Any kindergarten assessment adopted by the state at this time should be used exclusively for training, and curriculum development. Widespread and unqualified use of an assessment with no longitudinal research connecting individual assessment results to long range educational goals is imprudent and unethical.

Working Group 2 - High Quality Teachers and Leaders

Core elements

- **Element 2a: Teacher preparation will be much more rigorous**, and induction will be integrated with teacher preparation more systematically
- **Element 2b: Raise standards for licensing** new teachers in MD to levels comparable to the standards for teachers in the top performing nations *
- **Element 2c: Expand teaching scholarships and loan assistance for highly skilled and diverse candidates** to teach in high-need schools.
- **Element 2d: Encourage higher education institutions to take advantage of national foundation efforts to develop highly qualified teachers and leaders from diverse backgrounds**
- **Element 2e: Launch statewide public relations and communications initiative to rebrand teaching as an attractive career** and attract students from **diverse backgrounds**
- **Element 2f: Raise teacher pay** to make it equitable with other highly trained professionals with the same amount of education
- **Element 2g: Develop career ladders for teachers and school leaders** comparable in design to the career ladders found in Singapore and Shanghai, with respect to standards for advancement and relationship to the system for compensating teachers and school leaders.
- **Element 2h: Train the State Superintendent and the 24 local superintendents, their senior, instruction-related staff, State and local board of education members, and school principals** to give them the vision, motivation, skills, and knowledge they will need to implement the recommendations made in the Commission's report.
- **Element 2i: Change the way schools are organized and managed** to increase the amount of time available for teachers to tutor students who need intensive help and work together in teams to use data and observation to identify students who are falling behind and collaborate on getting them back on track, develop highly

engaging and effective lesson plans, mentor new and struggling teachers and systematically improve the school's instructional program using applied research.

Gaps between working group and stakeholder recommendations

Stakeholders, including Maryland Education Coalition, and Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, recommend more focus on teachers' ability teach across culture. They correctly cite information that demonstrates Black and Hispanic students are more likely to have teachers that are culturally different from themselves. While the working group recommends recruiting teachers of color, the recommendations fall short in specifically recruiting Black and Hispanic male teachers. In addition, the stakeholders mentioned that the working group addressed recruitment, but not retention. Finally, the stakeholder believe the unique need of pre-k, elementary, middle, and high school needs to be addressed.

Observations and Recommendations

This reviewer supports current recommendations that call for diversifying the teacher workforce in Maryland as well as using state resources, such as historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), to strengthen outreach efforts.

The working groups should consider the causes and implications of the teacher workforce in Maryland having significantly different racial and other demographic characteristics than the students they serve. In addition, more information about current teachers is needed to adequately determine what resources are necessary to help teachers provide quality instruction to Maryland students.

Most of the recommendations from the working group documents focus on the academic capabilities of the teachers. However, the variance in the teachers' ability to teach students may not be a function of academic ineptitude. Sufficient research evidence exists to suggest that social and emotional characteristics separate effective teachers from ineffective teachers. Teachers who are motivated, empathetic, genuine, and exhibits care and compassion for students, can connect with students in a way that helps them to better engage in the learning process. The working group should construct a profile that captures all of the characteristics of an effective teacher that can teach a diverse student body, that extends beyond academic preparation, and develop policies and procedures to encourage more teachers that fit this profile.

In addition, the working groups should reconsider relying too heavily on other nations to find models a success. Teachers in countries that do not have the diversity of the United States have different needs. In the United States, there are teachers who have been successful with teaching diverse student bodies, who can provide more information on what United States teachers need to be successful than a teacher from another country.

Recommendations:

1. The working group should explicitly recommend an audit of hiring practices to determine if biases in teacher selection is contributing to the lack of diversity in the Maryland teacher workforce. During the hearing, one of the Commission members

acknowledged that some teachers were not being hired because of culturally dependent characteristics that were not related to teaching ability (Such as ethnic sounding names).

2. The working group should identify potential biases in any new strategies to elevate standards for licensure. Newly implemented teacher licensure revisions in the state of Florida recently resulted in hundreds of teachers of color being fired. In the state of Florida, the new licensing standards also resulted in teachers with high ratings being fired. The current working group documents does not sufficiently make the case that problems in Maryland schools are a result of insufficient licensing standards.
3. The working group should recommend cultural competency training for teachers state-wide. Culturally competent teachers invite open and honest dialogue about race and ethnicity in trainings, supervision and interprofessional dialogue, after confronting their own biases, assumptions, and prejudices about other racial or ethnic groups. Culturally competent teachers use professional resources and activities to develop specific skills to accommodate racially and ethnically diverse students.
4. The working group documents should underscore the role of the principals in cultivating an environment for teachers to develop cultural competence and enhance empathy and respect, eliminate biases, stereotypes and misinformation from school staff, and operate under the philosophy that all students of color are capable of the highest levels of academic achievement.
5. Minor recommendation: Change HBU to HBCU in the final document.

Working Group 3- College and Career Readiness Pathways

Core elements

- **Element 3a:** Develop a **fully aligned instructional system**, including curriculum frameworks, course syllabi and assessments, together with clear examples of standard- setting work and formative assessments to ensure that students stay on track
- **Element 3b:** Establish and implement a **CCR standard** set to global standards. This standard will certify that students have the requisite literacy in English and mathematics (and when practicable science) needed to succeed in first-year credit-bearing courses in open enrollment postsecondary institutions in the State. This standard must be periodically reviewed to ensure that it remains internationally competitive.
- **Element Detail 3c (jointly considered by Working Groups 3 and 4)** As a guiding principle, all students who are below proficiency in the foundational skills of literacy

and math should receive additional support using a wide variety of evidence-based programs and strategies.

- **Element 3d:** Develop alternative educational approaches an extended curriculum for students in middle school and early high school who are not likely to meet the CCR standard by the end of 10th grade that gives them extra time and more supports to help them meet that standard as soon as possible.
- **Element 3e:** Require all local school systems to provide all students who meet the CCR standard with access to a set of **post-CCR program pathways**.
- **Element 3f: The State Board of Education will revise high school graduation** requirements so that students who achieve CCR will be able to enter any of the post-CCR pathways and still earn high school diplomas.
- **Element 3g:** Develop **11th and 12th grade programs** for students who do not meet the CCR standard by the end of 10th grade.
- **Element 3h: A new Career and Technical Education Subcabinet will be created** to drive the process of building a world-class career and technical education system for Maryland, in the context of priorities established by the Economic Development Commission.
- **Element 3i:** There will also be a Skills Standards Board comprised primarily of employers from a diverse mix of industries, leaders of industry associations, and labor groups.
- **Element 3j:** Every middle and high school student should have ready access to individuals who can counsel and advise them on CTE pathway options and help them navigate among the available and emerging opportunities.
- **Element 3k:** The Commission's CTE proposals contemplate a CTE system in which classroom education and training (the theory) is combined with learning in a workplace (the practice).
- **Element 3l:** The entire CTE system will be informed by a close relationship between CTE providers and the State's economic development, workforce development and labor agencies.
- **Element Detail 3m:** Funds from local, State and federal sources will be used to support development and delivery of the course and program progressions approved by the Subcabinet that lead to industry credentials. Funding formulas will need to be modified to provide more money for CTE students to pay for costlier facilities, equipment and – sometimes –required faculty.

Gaps between working group and stakeholder recommendations

Stakeholders, including Maryland Education Coalition, and Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, agreed with many of the Work Group recommendations, however they did not think the documents adequately addressed existing academic diversity and racial disparities in college preparation and access. Specific recommendations from the stakeholders that were not apparent in the working group recommendations include: Special focus on Black, Latino and immigrant students; a tiered instructional system (Tier 1 - in the

general education classroom and Tier 2 & 3 - intervention framework for students who need additional instruction); expanded supplemental instruction (beyond early grades); expanded stakeholders eligible for the subcabinet to educators, parents, students, and advocates; more counseling services; and inclusion of the different needs and services required for successful Gifted & Talented students.

Observations and Recommendations

The college and career readiness working group document contained the longest and most comprehensive list of recommendations, among all of the working group documents. The stakeholder groups were concerned about the race neutrality of the recommendations, because of data that demonstrate racial disparities in college preparation and access. Without addressing the data revealing fewer students of color participating in AP and honors classes, gifted and talented programs, and higher-level math and science in secondary education, it will be difficult for the State of Maryland to meet their benchmarks for success.

There also appears to be a gap between the working group's recommendations and typical college entrance requirements. For a student to gain entry into the more competitive universities in Maryland, they will need 4 units of math, 4 units of science, high ACT or SATs scores, a foreign language, proficient writing, and demonstrated leadership through clubs, organizations, student government, and competitions.

Many students with college-educated parents receive information on navigating the college admissions process at home. However, first generation college students rely more heavily on their school to provide them with what some may consider basic information on how to prepare for college. The working group should be mindful of the circumstances of academically competitive students who may attend schools where college prep classes are not available, have counselors without the appropriate training on college advisement, and have parents who are not aware of the nuances of preparing a competitive college application.

Specific recommendations:

1. The working group documents should explicitly acknowledge the antecedents, prevalence, and consequences of the current racial disparities in access to college preparatory opportunities in the state of Maryland, as revealed by the United States Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection.
2. The working group should recommend that Maryland high schools have learning opportunities for students that are congruent with the admission standards of competitive 4 year colleges and universities. The current recommendations are complex and convoluted, but also disconnected. It does not address the basic inequities that contribute to racial disparities in college preparation at the secondary education levels. These include:
 - a. No access to higher level math and science courses, such as physics and calculus at schools that enroll the highest percentage of students of color. The Civil Rights Data collection indicates significant racial disparities in access to these courses in the state of Maryland.

- b. No access to ACT and SAT preparation courses.
- c. Minimum focus on writing and foreign languages at high schools that enroll the largest percentage of students of color.
- d. Guidance counselors with inadequate training on how to properly advise students for college at predominately minority high schools (although the working group document provides some general recommendations that address counselors and advisement).

A specific recommendation should be to mandate that all students have access to a curriculum that, at a minimum, meets the admissions requirements for the most competitive public university of Maryland. Schools and their governing school districts should provide a disclosure statement to students' parents and guardians, which specifies any courses required for admissions to the most competitive public universities of the state, which are not available in their curriculum.

Working Group 4 - More Resources for At-risk Students

Core elements

- **Element Detail 4a:** Add a **concentrated poverty weight** to the funding formula to support intensive services for students and their families to enable them to succeed in school, that are coordinated and able to meet the additional needs of students in schools located in distressed communities. Add fixed, categorical **funding amounts** for each school with concentrated poverty to be used to: 1) establish or enhance community schools and 2) establish or enhance school health and behavioral services.
- **Element Detail 4b (referred to full commission):** Train school staff in all schools to recognize mental health issues as well as other issues related to trauma and coordinate access to needed mental health and other services for students, as part of effort to increase school safety
- **Element Detail 4c:** Revise funding formula weight for special education students.
- **Element Detail 4d:** Revise funding formula weight for **English Learner** students.

Gaps between working group and stakeholder recommendations

Stakeholders, including the ACLU, Advocates for Children and Youth, Attendance Works, Strong Schools Maryland, and Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, believed the Working Group recommendations neglected important racial considerations that place students at risk for discrimination in education, and did not provide an operational definition of “at-risk.” Specific recommendations from the stakeholders that were not apparent in the work group recommendations include: More focus on race; add a working definition of “at-risk;” more fully examine the full range of constitutionally appropriate legislation to eliminate the opportunity and learning gap; and implement restorative practices.

Observations and Recommendations

Some debate exists regarding the utility of "at-risk" as a classification for students. Many researchers and advocates consider the term "at-risk" to be a label that can leave students vulnerable to stereotyping and stereotype threat. The working group report does not provide an operational definition for "at-risk." The circumstances for students, including poverty, special education, trauma, and English learners, may or may not leave a student "at risk" depending on their respective protective factors.

The Working Group report for at-risk students is a lot shorter than other reports and has fewer recommendations. In relationship to the other working group reports, if published together, the optics of having a much shorter section that addresses the needs of some of the most vulnerable students may not convey the right message to the field. The commission will need to decide whether the "at-risk" section should be a standalone report with a further specification of the target groups for which the recommendations are intended.

All of the populations represented in the current working group report should have the right to quality early childhood education, competent and compassionate teachers, and resources to help them become college and career-ready. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to add an appropriate section to the previous working group reports that provide guidance on how to make sure the new benefits for Maryland students are accessible to all students regardless of their socioeconomic status, ability, or any other demographic factor that has been traditionally or historically marginalized.

Recommendations:

1. Revise the use of the term "at-risk" as a classification for students. Using "at-risk" as an adjective for students, as in "More Resources for At-risk Students" is problematic. It makes "at-risk" a category like honors student, student athlete, or college-bound student. "Risk" should describe a condition or situation, rather than a person. In that sense "More Resources for At-risk Students" would more appropriately be "More Resource to Reduce Risk Factors for Students." Using "historically underserved" is better than "at-risk" because it acknowledges the system has not served the population well, as opposed to suggesting that something is wrong with the population. However, some may argue that the students are "currently," rather than "historically," underserved, which is something the working group can address in the policy statement.
2. This section specifically deals with students in poverty, special education, trauma, and English learners. The working group documents should develop stronger recommendations that address the needs of these groups, which emphasize resilience and the legal mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
3. A very important statement in the document should be unpacked, divided into separate sections and elaborated upon.

"Accountability measures should focus on indicators identified in the master plan that include, but are not limited to: successful implementation of the plan,

number of students served and not served, time to receive services, **attendance, enrichment opportunities, reduction in disciplinary actions, student and principal satisfaction, and meaningful family involvement.** It is important that **accountability measures** and data points be clearly defined and developed locally in partnership with each school district.”

4. The Civil Rights Data Collection:

<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/DistrictSchoolSearch#schoolSearch>), and the audit tools from the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC: <https://maec.org/res/tools/>) can be used to assist with developing accountability measure.

5. The working group documents should clearly delineate the intersection between race and the vulnerable categories of students listed in this section. For instance, ignoring the intersection of race and poverty will lead policy makers to suggest the same recommendations for poor Black students in Baltimore, who are dealing with, for instance, tensions between law enforcement and their community, and poor White children in rural Maryland. Ignoring the intersection between race and special education will lead to policy makers and practitioners ignoring the pervasive biases that lead to Black children being incorrectly diagnosed with “emotional disturbances.” Ignoring the intersection between race and English learners will lead to policy makers and practitioners disregarding the racism against Hispanic and immigrant students.

About the Reviewer

Dr. Ivory A. Toldson is the president and CEO of the QEM Network, professor of counseling psychology at Howard University and editor-in-chief of The Journal of Negro Education. Previously, Dr. Toldson was appointed by President Barack Obama to devise national strategies to sustain and expand federal support to HBCUs as the executive director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (WHIHBCUs). He also served as senior research analyst for the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation and contributing education editor for The Root, where he debunked some of the most pervasive myths about African-Americans in his Show Me the Numbers column.

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