

And thank you all for joining us today. I also would like to thank everyone involved in making this program possible. The love and energy we feel when we are together carries me for a long time. And I know that you share the same feeling today.

When I look around and see the choir, reverend, Monique, and all the people with mics and cameras running around, it affirms to me how important Martin Luther King, Jr., and his legacy was—and is today. Despite the challenging circumstances we face, we have taken the precautions to ensure everyone knows we will celebrate this day and its meaning for the 49th time.

It is clear. This isn't our first, or the last time. We will keep Dr. King's vision, teaching, and wisdom alive so they will serve to guide our work towards a racism-free country and an equitable community.

In my mind, social justice, higher education, and building a Beloved Community all work hand-in-hand. Michael Eric Dyson reminded us of this, a few years ago, in this very room, when talking about how MLK's education prepared him for greatness at a young age, to paraphrase:

“You can't do homework when the crisis hits. You gotta already know the words. If you want to be like King, do the work. Get up early, study the lesson, and go to school.”

I couldn't agree more. Higher education provides more than opportunity and prosperity, it gives our youth the tools to make change. Articulate rebellion against racism, inequity, and oppression, if you may.

Our Seattle Promise program is an example of social justice, education, and the community coming together. The program targets the underserved. It uses wrap-around support and services along the entire educational pathway. And, it is embedded in a rich educational culture fueled by the community it serves.

With vision, commitment, and the hard work and dedication of Seattle Colleges faculty and staff, we are providing young people with the opportunity to learn and grow.

The regional and national recognition we've received is a testament to our power, sustainability, and persistence.

On one level it is about the students. We are committed to their success and completion. Even during the pandemic, we held true and were a stabilizing force for many.

On a second, it's about community support. Our partnerships with the city of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools have helped us surpass our goals and made us a national model.

But we are not done. There is still work to do.

For whatever reason, young men of color are not going to college. And those that go are not finishing. And the long-term cost—whether in reduced earnings potential or greater vulnerability to job loss—cannot be accepted by anyone.

We know how to combat this. Evidence shows that mentoring support makes a life-changing difference for students.

With that in mind, we at Seattle Colleges have launched Project Baldwin, a name that honors of James Baldwin, the celebrated American author.

Project Baldwin is a mentoring program drawing on insights and successful efforts across the country, and close to home.

Our *Fellas Fridays* at Seattle Central College and *South's Men of Color* program (aka SMOC) at South Seattle College are serving as the building blocks for what we hope becomes a high-impact and cost-effective mentoring program that—by demonstrating clear and positive results—can progressively grow and serve a substantial share of our student population.

As a starting point, our focus will be Black, Latinx, Native American, and Asian Pacific Islander males, who, at our colleges, typically complete programs at rates 12 to 14 points below their White and Asian peers.

For more about the program, here's a short video.

[Roll Project Baldwin video](#)

In closing, let us focus on building our community and keeping our eye on the prize. As this video shows, there is work to do and we are the people to do it.