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Coppin State University Celebrates 125 Years with Groundbreaking Youth Economic Inclusion Conference



Coppin State University marked its 125th anniversary on April 30, 2025 with the 2025 Economic Inclusion Conference at Coppin (EICAC '25), a landmark gathering designed to redefine how Baltimore youth and young adults access economic opportunity. The event, in partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools and the Mayor's Office of Employment Development welcomed more than 1,000 attendees to the campus, including over 800 high school seniors, 100 local employers, elected officials, and other community stakeholders. (Above): The Excellence in Entrepreneurial Learning (EXCEL) team, including Coppin researchers; Annie E. Casey Foundation staff; student participants; members of the EXCEL Advisory Board; and Chanta Haywood, Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. (See article on page 10)

Photo Courtesy of Chip Dizard Studios

Coalition of AGs Restores Access to Over \$1 Billion in Funds

Attorney General Brown Wins Court Order Restoring Critical Education Funds to States



Photo: Getty Images



Anthony G. Brown,
Attorney General of Maryland

Photo: Commons

BALTIMORE (May 6, 2025) — Attorney General Anthony G. Brown secured a court order forcing the Trump administration to restore Maryland’s access to critical Department of Education (ED) programs that support low-income and unhoused students and provide funding to address the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 students.

On April 10, Attorney General Brown joined a coalition of 15 other attorneys general and the Governor of Pennsylvania in suing the Trump administration for unilaterally ending access to over \$1 billion in grants from the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) created by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021, which ED had previously determined the states could access as late as March 2026.

The preliminary injunction issued May 6, 2025 by Judge Edgardo Ramos of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York orders ED to immediately restore states’ access to these critical funds as the case continues.

“COVID-19 may be over, but its impact is still being felt in schools across our state and nation as reading and math scores remain lower than pre-pandemic levels and students continue to struggle with behavioral health issues since schools reopened,” said Attorney General Brown. “This ruling preserves hundreds of millions of dollars for Maryland schools, allowing our educational leaders to continue giving their students the support they need and deserve. This preliminary injunction is a big victory for Maryland families and ensures vulnerable children will be able to access the services they rely on while

we continue to fight for this funding – and their futures – in court.”

To combat the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress created the ESF to fund three education-related programs to help support states’ school systems and direct more resources to the most vulnerable students. These three programs—Homeless Children and Youth, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, and Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools—provide essential resources to help schools and students recover from the lasting impacts of the pandemic. In Baltimore City Public Schools, for example, ESF money has been used for after-school enrichment activities and tutoring programs as well as improved infrastructure to promote student health and safety.

Attorney General Brown and the coalition asserted that ED’s arbitrary

and abrupt termination of the states’ access to these funds is causing a massive, unexpected budget gap that will hurt students and teachers by cutting off vital education services.

Judge Ramos granted the states’ motion for a preliminary injunction barring ED from blocking states’ access to ESF money. The preliminary injunction order issued prevents ED from enforcing a March 28, 2025 letter from Education Secretary Linda McMahon rescinding states’ ability to access their awarded ESF money.

Joining Attorney General Brown in filing this lawsuit are the attorneys general of Arizona; California; Delaware; the District of Columbia; Hawaii; Illinois; Maine; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; Nevada; Oregon, and the Governor of Pennsylvania.



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Safeguarding Your Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Payment Accounts

By Karen Clay

Clay Technology and Multimedia, L.L.C.

We've come a long way from the days when everything was paid with cash, check or credit card. Keeping a check register and manually balancing your checkbook has virtually become a thing of the past. The latest options now for paying for certain goods and services is via peer-to-peer (P2P) payments. This includes options such as Zelle, CashApp, Venmo, PayPal, and Apple Pay. Sending money to friends and family, paying for in-game tokens, and making other purchases are just some of the things that we now routinely accomplish via these methods of payment. As convenient as this is, there are risks about which we need to be aware. The growing presence of P2P payments in our everyday lives, particularly when children are involved, makes it essential to understand how to use them wisely.

Given the ubiquitous nature of these options, it's important to know the risks associated with their use and how you can safeguard your and your child's accounts. Fraud, mistaken transfers, and account breaches can all cause financial headaches when you or your child don't have the proper mindset or don't take the proper precautions.

Here are five critical considerations in making decisions about the use of P2P payments:

1. Assess Your Child's Readiness Before Granting Access: Children as young as 13 can legally use some P2P payment platforms with parental approval. That, however, doesn't mean every teen is ready. Consider whether starting with a platform that offers parental oversight, like Apple Cash Family or a banking app with

teen account options, is a viable way to go before transitioning them to full independence. In making the decision, consider your child's:

a. Financial Maturity: Do they understand the value of money? Have they managed a savings or spending account responsibly?

b. Impulse Control: Are they likely to make in-app purchases or send money without thinking it through?

c. Digital Awareness: Can they recognize a phishing attempt or avoid sharing personal details online?

2. Enable Strong Security

Settings for Everyone: Most P2P apps offer enhanced security features so take advantage of them. Enable two-factor authentication (2FA) on all of your accounts so that even if someone gets hold of your password, they can't access your account without a second verification step. Use a strong, unique password for each P2P app, and avoid using passwords that are easy to guess, like your birthday or pet's name. Teach and require your children to do the same.

3. Double-Check Recipient Information and Only Transact with People You Know and Trust: Before you hit "send," pause to make sure you're sending money to the right person. A typo in a username, phone number, or email address can send funds to a complete stranger, and in many cases, these transactions are irreversible. Encourage your child to verify payment details with their friends or recipients before confirming any transfer.



It's very important to safeguard your P2P accounts. Graphic Design by Karen Clay

4. Monitor Your Accounts Regularly:

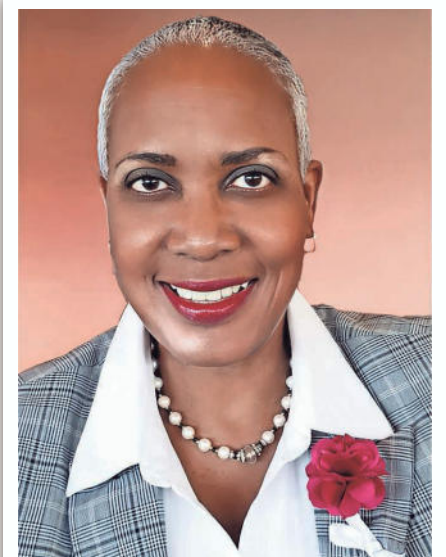
Make it a habit to review your transaction history. Look for any unfamiliar charges or transfers and report them immediately to the P2P provider. Many P2P platforms also allow you to set up transaction alerts, so you're notified in real time when money is sent or received. Be sure to monitor your child's activity by:

a. Supervising usage and setting clear boundaries for your child by establishing clear rules and spending guidelines for P2P payment use.

b. Starting your child with limited access, setting transaction limits, restricting who they can send money to, and reviewing their contacts.

c. Checking their transaction history regularly via weekly or monthly check-ins with them to go over their activity.

5. Educate Your Family on Scams and Phishing Attempts: Scammers are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and children are especially vulnerable to social engineering tricks. Teach



*Karen Clay,
Clay Technology and Multimedia
Courtesy, Karen Clay*

your family to be wary of unsolicited messages requesting money, even if they appear to come from a known contact. If something feels off, verify the request with a phone call or text. Also, remind everyone never to share their login credentials or verification codes with anyone.

Peer-to-peer payment platforms offer incredible convenience and are becoming part of everyday life for teens as well as adults. With convenience, however, comes responsibility. This is especially true when minors are involved. By staying informed and proactive, you can enjoy the benefits of digital payments while minimizing the risks. Start by modeling safe behavior yourself and engaging your children in these conversations, as it's never too early to build smart digital money habits.

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Commentary

Meritocracy is a Myth, Just Ask the NFL or Harvard

By Harold Booker Jr.

Americans love to believe we live in a meritocracy, that hard work, talent, and dedication alone determine our success. But let's be honest: if that were true, Harvard wouldn't need admissions officers. They'd just accept the top GPAs and SAT scores. Kamala Harris would be president, not a political flashpoint. And in the NFL, drafting a Black quarterback wouldn't still be seen by some as a gamble.

This year's NFL Draft felt like a sequel to the media frenzy surrounding the 2024 NBA Draft, when Bronny James, the son of LeBron James, was selected. Critics questioned whether Bronny earned his spot through skill or whether he simply benefited from his father's fame. After all, he didn't dominate at USC, and his season was hampered by health challenges. But in the G League and the NBA Combine, Bronny has shown promise, not superstar promise, but enough to prove he belongs on the court.

Enter Shedeur Sanders, son of NFL Hall of Famer Deion Sanders. Like Bronny, Shedeur was scrutinized not just for his game, but for the path he chose. He didn't play at Alabama or Georgia. Instead, he started at Jackson State and transferred to the University of Colorado. Both are schools that, until recently, weren't known as football powerhouses. And yet, Shedeur delivered: winning records, game-winning drives, and his senior year capped with the prestigious Johnny Unitas Golden Arm Award.

Still, his talent is debated. Still, the conversation is as much about his last name as his stat line.

These two young men are case studies in America's complicated relationship with merit. When Black athletes from famous families succeed, the conversation quickly shifts to

nepotism. When white athletes benefit from legacy admissions or quiet industry connections, it's just business as usual. We shouldn't pretend that merit ever operates in a vacuum; it never has.

What Bronny and Shedeur represent is bigger than sports. They're examples of how perception, access, and bias shape outcomes. That doesn't mean they didn't earn their places, it means our systems often obscure who earns what and why.

Take Shedeur's 5th-round selection. To many, it felt less like a reflection of his actual football ability and more like an effort to humble him. As if the league were more concerned with "putting him in his place" than with doing what's good for business and drafting one of the most commercially viable and productive quarterbacks in college football. This is a trend many Black men in America recognize. It's not enough to be qualified—you have to be exceptional, unproblematic, and deferential, even when the data is on your side.

Just ask Colin Kaepernick. Despite leading the 49ers to a Super Bowl and having stats better than many quarterbacks signed during his free agency period, he was essentially blackballed from the league after kneeling during the national anthem to



Harold Booker Jr.

protest police violence. The public was told it wasn't about talent, it was about business—he was "too controversial," "too polarizing," and no longer good for the brand. So, which is it? Are we hiring based on what's good for business or on merit? Because if it's merit, Kaepernick should've been on a team. If it's business, then Shedeur should've been picked much earlier. The contradiction exposes the truth: it's about control, image, and power—not fairness.

It's time we stop pretending merit is colorblind or context-free. Whether it's in a boardroom, a classroom, or a locker room, opportunity is not evenly distributed. And acknowledging that doesn't diminish achievement, it simply tells the truth.

Your Well-being Matters: Check Your Mental Health Knowledge

During Mental Health Awareness Month in May, it is an ideal time to discuss mental health at home and in communities.

Dr. Ajita M. Robinson, LCPC, NCC, a licensed clinical professional counselor and national certified counselor, owns Friends in Transition Counseling Services, a clinical group practice based in Bethesda, Maryland. Dr. Robinson's clinical work focuses on grief, trauma, and neurodevelopmental disabilities. She is also the bestselling author of "The Gift of Grief" and "The Purposeful & Profitable Therapist."

Dr. Robinson shared good news about stigma reduction connected to seeking help for mental health. People now recognize that therapy can be a proactive act of self-care and not just a crisis response.

"The pandemic forced us all to confront our emotional well-being in ways we couldn't ignore. Social media, public discourse, and mental health advocates—especially in the Black community—have helped normalize seeking support. Platforms like Therapy for Black Girls, Black People Die By Suicide, Too and Silence the Shame have created safe spaces and elevated awareness," she said.

Dr. Robinson explained that according to the American Psychological Association, between 2019 and 2022, therapy usage among Black adults increased significantly, especially among millennials and Gen Z.

When it comes to older generations seeking mental health help, hurdles still exist. "They are more hesitant to seek therapy due to cultural messages around strength, silence, and 'keeping things in the family,'" according to Dr. Robinson.

"Many were taught that therapy was only for people who were 'broken,' but the truth is, therapy can be life-affirming at every stage of life. As independence shifts and life transitions happen—retirement, caregiving, health issues—mental health support can improve quality of life, increase emotional resilience, and provide tools to navigate change with dignity," Dr. Robinson explained.

Dr. Robinson also stated that older adults are more open to mental health support when it is introduced through trusted spaces like churches or primary care doctors.

It is critical to note that a person does not have to be in crisis to benefit from therapy. Dr. Robinson explained that wanting a safe, judgment-free space to process life is reason enough.

"We have to move away from the idea that something has to be 'wrong' before we're allowed to ask for help. Sometimes, support is the most responsible, loving thing we can offer ourselves," she added.

On the other hand, a person may need to seek professional mental health help at any age.

"One of the biggest signs that it might be time to talk to a mental health professional is when you start to feel disconnected from yourself or your life. That might look like a loss of purpose, a sense of hopelessness, or pulling away from the things and people that once brought you joy."

I also remind folks that transitions—whether it's a new job, becoming a parent, retirement, or even something you wanted—can trigger grief. Change almost always involves some form of loss, even if it's just the loss of familiarity. Those moments deserve space, too," Dr. Robinson further noted.

It is important to set boundaries to maintain better mental health. Boundaries are one of the most powerful tools that people have for protecting our peace and preserving our mental health according to Dr. Robinson.

"Boundaries help us define where we end and someone else begins. Without them, we end up overcommitted, overwhelmed, and often resentful," she said. "Setting a boundary might look like not answering work emails after a certain hour, saying 'no' to events that drain you, or even asking for a moment before responding in a heated conversation. Boundaries help us honor the space between what we do and who we are."

Grief and trauma can be passed down through generations. Dr. Robinson stated that she discussed how unspoken harm becomes part of the family culture in "The Gift of Grief."

"We avoid hard conversations to 'keep the peace,' while quietly carrying the weight of what was never addressed. Whether it's 'the talk' we give our kids to keep them safe or the tension at holiday dinners no one ever



Dr. Ajita M. Robinson, licensed clinical professional counselor and national certified counselor.

Photo: Shalia Watts of WhatsGrit

names, that's generational trauma playing out in real time," said Dr. Robinson.

She added that healing can also be passed down.

"Generational trauma isn't just about what happened to us—it's also about what keeps getting repeated because it was never talked about, never processed, never healed."

Visit <https://fit-counseling.com/about/dr-ajita-m-robinson> to learn more about Dr. Robinson. Clients are presently served through online sessions in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Missouri.

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To Mom and Grandmother with Love: 2025 Mother's Day Reflections

A Salute to Some of Baltimore's Best Mothers and Grandmothers

By Andrea Blackstone

Mothers bless our lives in big and small ways alike. They teach us things we need to know and build memories that last a lifetime. Local children and grandchildren reflected on the joy that their mothers and grandmothers bring to their lives.

Lisa Jones Banks

**"Loving, Caring, Strong, Selfless"
Life Coach, Trainer, Event Planner
and Federal government retiree
Family locations: Baltimore County
and Anne Arundel County**

Lisa Jones Banks made a lifelong impression on her son, 20-year-old Troy Tinch, Jr. and Autumn Tinch, her 17-year-old daughter. She stands with her children during pivotal moments in their lives.

Troy, an honors collegiate student athlete and college sophomore, explained what makes Banks memorable.

"I've been playing basketball since the age of five and I can look over and see my mom in the stands cheering me on with her customized t-shirts and pom-poms. Another thing that makes my mother memorable is watching her wake up to pray for me (and my sister) at 5 a.m. with her prayer partner since I can remember," he said.

Autumn Tinch, a student, learned that loving and resilient mothers are the heart of a family, offering unwavering support, strength through every challenge, and unconditional love.

She also said that her mother always puts her first, giving everything she has to help Autumn chase her dreams.

"I'll never forget how she took me



**Autumn Tinch, Lisa Jones Banks,
and Troy Tinch**

Photo: AJCG Photography

to New York for acting auditions, turning what could've been a stressful journey into an adventure full of love and laughter.

"You've always been my strength when I couldn't find my own, and I know your prayers have carried me through more than I can ever understand. I love you so much — more than words can ever truly say," Autumn added.

Carolynn Harris

and Michelle B., owner of Nova's Closet LLC

"A Beautiful Soul" and "A Heart of Gold"

**Family locations: Howard County
and Baltimore County**

Carolynn Harris, mother of Baltimore City-based Michelle B., and grandmother of 6-year-old Nalani Nova plays an important role in the lives of both of her loved ones.

"I want to tell my mother thank you for being the best example of a mother," said Michelle B. "I had my first child my 12th grade year of high school at the age of 17. If it wasn't for my mother, I'm not sure where I'd be. Through her hurt and even some disappointment in me having a child so early in life, she stepped in immediately," Michelle B. shared.

Michelle B. stated that she is blessed and could not imagine her life without her mother.

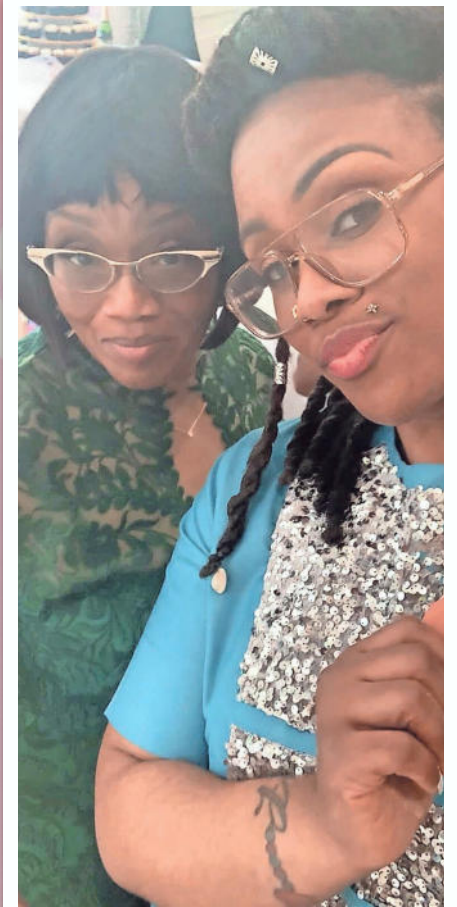
"God really smiled on our family when he blessed us with such a beautiful soul," she added.

Nalani shared her favorite things about her grandmother are that she makes silly faces and makes her laugh.

"I love you MiMi and you're the best," she declared joyfully.

Nalani also said that Michelle B. encourages her and shows her love by giving her hugs and kisses.

"My mother has a heart of gold," she said. "If my mother hasn't taught me anything, she taught me how to pray. When I have nothing left in me, I will always have prayer."



**Carolynn Harris and her daughter,
Michelle B. Photo: Michelle B.**

To Mom and Grandmother with Love: 2025 Mother's Day Reflections

Yvette Fowlkes

"Helpful, Considerate, Fun, and the Best Mom Ever"

Profession: Physical Therapist

Family location: Baltimore City

Kyle Fowlkes, 9, and Kinsley Fowlkes, 7, sang praises about their mother, Yvette Fowlkes.

Kyle shared that Yvette is a fun mother who is also kind, respectful, and generous to everyone in the family. He appreciates being able to take trips to run and jump at the trampoline park and ride bikes with his sibling.

"She always makes sure that we have everything that we need and she always allows us to get plenty of snacks when we go to the market with her," said Kyle.

Something that he will never forget is when his mother bought a bike and PlayStation for him.

Feeling tired does not stop Yvette from helping around the house. Her attentiveness has not gone unnoticed.

"Thank you, Mommy. Happy Mother's Day. I love you. You are the best mom ever. You allow us to have fun, and you care for us all in so many ways," Kyle said.

Kinsley shared that her sweet, caring mother always helps when she needs support, even with her homework.

"She shows me love by listening to me when I need help, and she answers my questions," Kinsley also stated. "She is a great mother, and she puts family first and always makes sure that we always have everything that we need."



Kyle Fowlkes, Yvette Fowlkes and Kinsley Fowlkes
Photo courtesy of the Fowlkes family

Val Jenkins and Tierre Tate

"Appreciate Family and Good Health"

Family Locations: Baltimore City and Baltimore County

Val Jenkins, a woman known for her "can-do" attitude, determination and contagious positivity has worked full-time at Baltimore Gas & Electric Co. for 24 years. Jenkins was also born with a brain disease, Chiari malformation. She was also diagnosed with over 10 other ailments and diseases. On top of that, on November 28, 2021, Jenkins was diagnosed with Stage 3 GIST (Gastrointestinal Stromal Tumor) Cancer.

"My official date of being cancer-free was three years ago. Five doctors called me on my birthday to tell me that I was cancer-free," Jenkins recalled.

Her daughter, Tierre Tate is an ovarian cancer survivor.

Khloe Tate, Tierre's 15-year-old daughter and Jenkins' granddaughter, said that she feels incredibly thankful and inspired that both women in her life overcame cancer.

"It shows how strong they are, and I am grateful to still have them in my life because they remind me every day to appreciate family and health," said Khloe.

She added, "My grandmother and mother are important to me because they have shaped who I am today with their love, support, and strength. Their presence gives me hope and confidence in everything I do."

Additionally, Tierre stated that she feels overwhelmed with gratitude that she is able to celebrate another Mother's Day with Jenkins, in addition to Jenkins' three-year cancer recovery.

"This Mother's Day isn't just about celebrating her as a mom — it's about celebrating her life, her fight, and her incredible spirit," she added. "She's a living example of strength, faith, and perseverance."



Khloe Tate, Val Jenkins, and Tierre Tate
Photo: Val Jenkins



EICAC '25 Serves as a Cornerstone for a Growing Movement

Coppin State University Celebrates 125 Years with Groundbreaking Youth Economic Inclusion Conference

By Ronald C. Williams, PhD

Baltimore, MD – April 30, 2025

— Coppin State University marked its 125th anniversary with the 2025 Economic Inclusion Conference at Coppin (EICAC '25), a landmark gathering designed to redefine how Baltimore youth and young adults access economic opportunity. Held in partnership with the Mayor's Graduating Seniors Career Fair and Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPSS), the event welcomed more than 1,000 attendees to campus, including over 800 high school seniors, 100 local employers, elected officials, and other community stakeholders.

Themed “125 Years of Leading the Way to Wealth: A New Paradigm for Youth Economic Empowerment,” the conference built on Coppin's enduring mission to transform lives through education, community engagement, and economic leadership. This year's gathering not only honored the historic contributions of Coppin namesake Fannie Jackson Coppin but also cast a bold vision for the future, centering young people as agents of innovation and equity in Baltimore's economic ecosystem.

A Vision Rooted in Research and Collaboration

EICAC '25 followed the release of Excellence in Entrepreneurial Learning (EXCEL): Equipping Baltimore Youth & Emerging Adults for Opportunity, a 2024 report produced by Coppin's Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The EXCEL report offered a deep, data-informed analysis of youth entrepreneurship education in Baltimore City, highlighting gaps, opportunities, and the potential



Mayor Brandon Scott with BCPSS team. Photos courtesy of Chip Dizard Studios



CSU President Anthony Jenkins, accompanied by members of the transdisciplinary EXCEL research team, addresses attendees of the July 1, 2024 release of EXCEL 1.0

of “intrapreneurial learning”—the development of entrepreneurial mindsets within traditional employment settings.

The conference translated those findings into action by convening educators, public officials, funders, nonprofit leaders, corporate partners, and students to engage in dialogue, share promising practices, and develop strategies for equipping young people to succeed in a rapidly changing economy.

As a lead developer of the report, I assert that EXCEL made it clear

that we need to rethink how we prepare our youth for opportunity. We must go beyond job placement and help students build wealth through both entrepreneurial and workforce pathways.

Human Flag Ceremony Honors a Legacy of Leadership

One of the most powerful moments of the day was the Human Flag Commemoration at noon on the Physical Education Complex Athletic Field. In tribute to the university's 125th anniversary,



Dr. Ron Williams with the centerpiece of the human flag commemorating CSU's 125th anniversary celebration

participants—including high school students, Coppin scholars, faculty, and staff—stood shoulder to shoulder in formation to create a living flag. The ceremony symbolized Coppin's longstanding commitment to building unity, resilience, and opportunity through education.

Learning Tracks That Bridge Education and Enterprise

EICAC '25 featured four comprehensive learning tracks tailored to diverse audiences:

- **Student Track** (in collaboration with Baltimore City Public Schools): This track engaged graduating seniors in sessions like “Future-Proof Your Career,” “Money Moves: Mastering Personal Finance,” and “Side Hustle to CEO,” providing foundational skills for both employment and entrepreneurship. Participating companies included JPMorgan Chase, Northwestern Mutual, and community entrepreneurs.

- **Entrepreneurship and Workforce Education:** Facilitated by Angel St. Jean, co-founder of Equity Brain Trust, this track explored how instructional design and data can drive



Baltimore City Mayor Brandon Scott with BCPSS graduating seniors



BCPSS Student in attendance at 2024 EICAC which laid the foundation for 2025. Photos courtesy of Chip Dizard Studios

outcomes for youth employment and venture creation.

- **Ecosystem Building:** Led by experts like Selisa Jefferson and Valerie Davenport, sessions examined how emerging technologies (AI, crypto) and community partnerships can create inclusive innovation networks.

- **Policy and Funding Strategies:** Public policy advocates and funders, including Rashad Staton, Brittany Young, and Dianna Vass, presented frameworks for aligning investments with youth-focused outcomes and telling powerful impact stories.

A fifth special track—Innovative Program Models—highlighted high-impact youth development organizations such as HeartSmiles LLC, Mentoring Mentors, and The Epic Art Universe, offering models that are changing lives through creativity, leadership, and purpose.

Real-Time Access to Opportunity

The heart of the conference was the Mayor's Graduating Seniors Career Fair, which brought over 800 students face-to-face with more than 100 employers offering full-time jobs, internships, and apprenticeships. "This is what it looks like to close the opportunity gap," said one student

participant. "We're not just talking about jobs—we're being introduced to careers and futures we can build."

Employers and community partners echoed the sentiment. "EICAC offers more than a platform—it's a pipeline," said one hiring manager. "It's connecting talent with purpose."

Stakeholder Synergy for Lasting Change

EICAC '25 underscored the critical role of higher education institutions like Coppin in shaping economic mobility. Through its Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship, Coppin continues to serve as a catalyst for collaboration between academia, government, business, and community organizations.

In my opinion, our students—and the youth we serve—don't need charity. They need strategy, structure, and support systems that recognize their value and invest in their potential.

Looking Ahead

As Coppin embarks on its next 125 years, EICAC '25 serves as a cornerstone for a growing movement. It affirmed Coppin's place not only as a historic institution but as a modern engine of economic transformation.



Dianna Vass, PhD, Associate Vice President, Principal Giving University of Maryland, Baltimore instructs EICAC students on "Storytelling that Counts: Advocating with Numbers and Narratives"

For more information about the Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship and upcoming initiatives, contact: entrepreneurship@coppin.edu

About Coppin State University
Coppin State University, a Historically Black University in Baltimore, Maryland, was founded in 1900. With a legacy shaped by pioneering educator Fannie Jackson Coppin, the university remains committed to academic

excellence, community impact, and opportunity creation for generations to come.

Ronald C. Williams, PhD is the Associate Professor of Management and Founding Director, Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship, Coppin State University.

Say 'No' to Student Loan Debt, Say 'Yes' to Strategic Career Planning, Financial Freedom

By **Andrea Blackstone**

The U.S. Department of Education announced that its Office of Federal Student Aid would resume collections of its defaulted federal student loan

portfolio on Monday, May 5, 2025. (<https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-begin-federal-student-loan-collections-other-actions-help-borrowers-get-back-repayment>.)

The current economic climate offers an opportunity to reassess the path of college and the risk of debt accumulation for graduating seniors who are charting their course without scholarships or solid career plans.

Juanita Banks-Whittington; her husband, Ian Whittington; and Ashley Logan Graham offered insight into how they navigated past student loan debt and found career success and satisfaction.



Getty Images

Juanita Banks-Whittington Odenton, Maryland

Juanita Banks-Whittington earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in social work with a concentration in mental health. She is a licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) who works as an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program Manager.

Banks-Whittington did not want to be burdened by student loan debt, so she knew that she had to find another way.

"That's when I made the life-changing decision to join the Maryland Army National Guard. Through the G.I. Bill and tuition assistance, the National Guard helped fund my education, allowing me to avoid student loans. More than that, it gave me structure, leadership

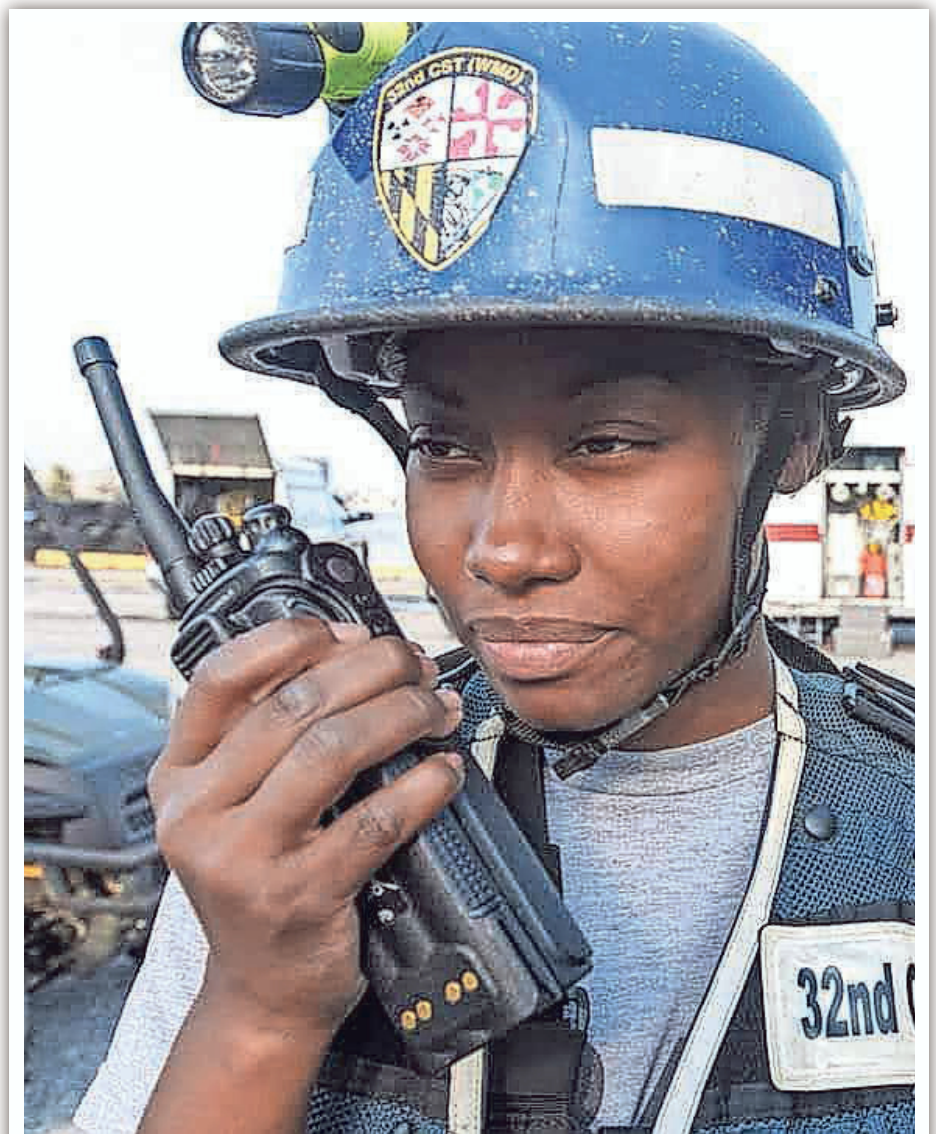
skills, and real-world experience that continued to shape my life today," said Banks-Whittington.

As a Human Resource Specialist (42A) in the National Guard, Banks-Whittington gained leadership, discipline, and skills that continue to serve her today.

"After leaving the military, I used my benefits to keep learning and carving out my own path," Banks-Whittington also said.

She shared insight for young people who may still be exploring their future career plans.

"Whether it's college, a trade, military service, or starting your own brand, do what feels right for you. Don't let fear, finances, or other people's opinions define your journey. Your dreams and voice matter, and your journey is valid as long as you make it your own."



Juanita Banks-Whittington's military photo with the 32nd CST WMD. She joined the Army National Guard in 2006. Photo courtesy of the Whittingtons



Ian Whittington's Navy Basic Training photo, 1998.
Photo courtesy of the Whittingtons



Ashley Logan Graham, IT Project Manager and entrepreneur
Photo: Chris Graham

**Ian Whittington
 Odenton, Maryland**

Juanita's husband, Ian, earned a bachelor's degree in Cybersecurity. He works as an infrastructure engineer and reflected on his experiences sorting through career options.

"When I graduated high school, I planned to join the military. I had already enlisted before graduating. My view on attending college was that it's not for everyone. At that time, I knew it was not for me," Ian recalled.

Ian observed many people who were older than him going to college and accumulating debt just to work a job making less than what he would consider ideal. He elected to join the Navy immediately after high school, attend trade school to become an electronics technician, then pivot into IT.

"I enrolled in a now-defunct tech school, ITT Technical Institute. Unfortunately, I waited too long

to utilize the G.I. Bill and took on a decent amount of student loan debt with the understanding that this education could provide a path to making six figures. Although not guaranteed, I saw that as a risk I was willing to take. If it paid off, I would be able to pay off the loan easily," Ian stated.

He added, "Once the 2008 financial crisis hit, I pivoted to IT by obtaining my bachelor's degree. I was successfully employed in the field before graduation. I have been in IT for well over a decade now, moving from a network administrator to a network engineer, then to an IT manager, and finally finding a sweet spot as a senior-level engineer. I am now working to pivot within IT by pursuing my master's degree student loan-free, thanks to my wife's veteran benefits."

"Trades are excellent options; hands-on work is in high demand, offers good pay, and provides job security. Evaluate your interests and

check the earning potential. If a degree isn't required, use those years to gain real experience. If college is your goal, but scholarships aren't an option, consider joining the military and utilizing the G.I. Bill," Ian informed.

He added, "Avoid student loan debt if possible."

**Ashley Logan Graham
 Southern Maryland**

Ashley Logan Graham, a wife, mother, IT Project Manager and entrepreneur, attended community college for a year and a half in her youth. She paid out of pocket, and books were very expensive for her while she was working at a childcare facility and earning minimum wage. She worked in childcare but eventually collaborated with a temporary employment agency.

"That changed my life. The temp agency allowed me to work as a data analyst for nonprofits, McDonald's Corporation, and government

agencies, which led me to a full-time position where I worked as a data analyst for 10 years," Graham explained.

She further explained that her supervisor at the time provided a certification plan and advised Graham that if she did not want to pursue the college route, Graham should obtain a certification in project management to become a project manager and gain enough experience to become a Subject Matter Expert (SME).

"I followed his advice, and it was successful for me," she said.

Graham advised young people to pursue internships, study diligently, and seek out co-workers who could serve as mentors.

"These mentors can introduce them to career paths that align with their aspirations. As long as they remain lifelong learners and focus on their goals, they will find their way and achieve success," Graham stated.

Who Made the Potato Salad? How the Right Questions Can Save Your Health

By Michelle Petties

When you hear “Who made the potato salad?” at a Black family gathering, it might seem like a simple question about taste and trust. But as a Food Story coach who has helped countless people transform how they manage food, I’ve learned that this familiar query holds the key to revolutionizing our health.

I first explored this concept in my memoir “Leaving Large: The Stories of a Food Addict” (<https://leavinglarge.com>) and later in my TEDx Talk, “A Food Addict’s Lesson: Confusion. Clarity. Recovery.” After gaining and losing over 700 pounds before finding lasting freedom from stress eating and emotional overeating, I discovered that our food stories—the narratives we inherit and create about food—profoundly impact our health choices.

The Statistics Tell a Sobering Story:

- 82% of Black Americans are overweight or obese
- Black adults are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes
- Diet-related diseases cost the Black community billions in healthcare annually

That cautious inquiry about potato salad shows we know how to question our food. We understand that who prepares our food matters. Yet when it comes to processed foods, we often stop questioning. This selective scrutiny reveals a deeper truth: we must expand our curiosity beyond the potluck table to every food choice we make.

Essential Questions We Rarely Ask:

- Who profits from my consumption?
- Who benefits from my poor health?
- Who decided this was “food”?



Michelle Petties

- What exactly am I eating?
- What’s behind this colorful packaging?
- What was this before processing?
- Where did these ingredients come from?
- Where in my body will this cause harm?
- When was this actually made?
- When did we start accepting this as food?
- When will this impact my health?
- Why can’t I resist this?
- Why does this have 47 ingredients?
- How was this engineered to be addictive?
- How will this affect my health?
- How far is this from its natural state?

In my Mind Over Meals (<https://go.michellepetties.com/mind-over-meals-virtual-retreat-may-2025>) free online retreat, we explore these and many more questions through integrated practices:

Prescriptive Writing Prompts: “Think about a food that’s important in your family gatherings. Who makes it? What memories surround it?”



Potato Salad

Photo: Canva

Visualization: “Imagine yourself at a family gathering. Notice the food before you. Rather than focusing on taste or tradition, tune into your body’s wisdom. What does it truly need for nourishment?”

Affirmation: “I choose foods that honor both my culture and my health. My food choices reflect self-love and wisdom.”

The Neuroscience Behind the Method:

When we combine writing, storytelling, meditation, and affirmation, we create new neural pathways. Research shows that writing about emotional experiences strengthens the brain’s ability to regulate emotions. Meditation reduces stress-related eating, while affirmations activate brain regions associated with positive self-appraisal.

The processed food industry thrives on unquestioned consumption. It spends billions on marketing to keep us focused on taste, convenience, and pleasure—none of which has anything to do with nutrition. The industry doesn’t want us to ask these tough

questions because informed consumers might make different choices.

Just as we trust Aunt Ida Mae’s potato salad because we know her kitchen, her ingredients, and her love for our well-being, we must develop this same level of scrutiny for all our food choices. Our ancestors questioned their food sources out of necessity. In today’s world of engineered edibles, we must revive this tradition of questioning - our lives depend on it.

Through my workshops, participants learn to:

- Identify limiting beliefs about food
- Create new associations with healthy choices
- Build emotional resilience
- Develop sustainable habits

When we ask these deeper questions, we begin to see food differently. We move beyond the marketing myths and start making choices based on what truly serves our health. The path to freedom from processed food addiction and diet-related diseases begins with curiosity and the courage to question what we’ve been sold as “food.”

The next time you hear “Who made the potato salad?” remember: if we can question who made the potato salad, we can, and must, question everything about our food choices. Sometimes, the path to better health starts with a simple question and the courage to explore where it leads.

Are you ready to take your questioning and your health to the next level? Join our next free online Mind Over Meals <https://go.michellepetties.com/mind-over-meals-virtual-retreat-may-2025> retreat.

Justin Tucker's Release Marks Strange End of Ravens Era

By Tyler Hamilton

The tumble for Baltimore Ravens kicker hit what could be a career-ending low when he was released by the team on Monday, May 5, 2025. The guy who once seemed like a walking example of the “Ravens Way” is now someone who felt he needed to be shown the door. Tucker is in the middle of a series of sexual misconduct allegations. He was accused of inappropriate behavior by 16 Baltimore-area massage therapists between 2012 and 2016, as first reported by the Baltimore Banner in January.

Tucker has denied the accusations on multiple occasions, saying that they were “simply not true.” But here we are, the allegations still pending and Tucker is no longer a member of the Ravens.

Ravens coach John Harbaugh adamantly told reporters that any decision on Tucker's future would be “based on football” earlier this week. The team drafted kicker Tyler Loop out of Arizona in April. Loop is the first kicker ever drafted by the organization since they moved from Cleveland to Baltimore and changed their name to the Ravens.

The team released the following statement from general manager Eric DeCosta:

“Sometimes football decisions are incredibly difficult, and this is one of those instances. Considering our current roster, we have made the tough decision to release Justin Tucker,” DeCosta said in a statement. “Justin created many significant and unforgettable moments in Ravens history. His reliability, focus, drive, resilience and extraordinary talent made him one of the league's best kickers for over a decade.

We are grateful for Justin's many contributions while playing for the



Justin Tucker

Photo: Jason Miller/Getty Images

Ravens. We sincerely wish him and his family the very best in this next chapter of their lives.”

Tucker is coming off one of his worst seasons since joining the Ravens as an undrafted free agent out of Texas in 2012. He made a career-low 73.3 field goal percentage and missed three field goals in a game for the first time in his career.

Tucker spent the last 12 seasons with

the Ravens and holds the NFL record for longest field goal at 66 yards and career field goal percentage at 89.1%. He has also been named to seven Pro Bowls and five first-team All-Pros, and was a member of the Ravens team that won Super Bowl XLVII.

None of that matters because of the looming allegations. The NFL is conducting an ongoing investigation into the matter. No information has

been made available to the Ravens, according to Harbaugh.

The organization came to the conclusion that Tucker is no longer someone they want to move forward with. They say it's due to his declining ability. But it is hard to imagine the allegations he's facing didn't help push Tucker out the door.



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