

Good afternoon everyone,

I am deeply honored and humbled to stand before you today as the recipient of the *2025 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drum Major for Education Award from the Cambridge Branch NAACP*. To be recognized in the name of Dr. King, a visionary leader and a true drum major for justice, equality, and education, is an immense privilege.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Cambridge Branch NAACP for this incredible honor. To be here this afternoon, in a space where we celebrate not only excellence but the deep commitment to our children's futures, is truly humbling.

For nearly 30 years, I have been part of the Banneker family as an educator, and since 2014, I have had the privilege to serve as the Executive Director. Our school was founded on the belief that all students—regardless of race, socioeconomic status, culture, native language, gender, or sexual orientation—are capable of achieving academic excellence. This belief, inspired by the life and legacy of Benjamin Banneker, the African-American mathematician, astronomer, and surveyor, has been our guiding star.

Banneker is recognized as a high-achieving STEM school, yet we proudly consider ourselves a STEAMS school because we know that education is not complete without the Arts. We embrace creativity, music, dance, and self-expression because they, too, are the building blocks of innovation, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The scientists, mathematicians, readers, writers, thinkers, artists, and creators of tomorrow walk our halls today, and we are honored to be a part of their journey.

But let's be honest—preparing our students for the future is no small task. The world they will inherit is unpredictable and, quite frankly, sometimes frightening. The ever-changing social, political, and racial landscape, along with economic uncertainties and technological advancements, creates a future that can feel overwhelming. However, at Banneker, we choose to see this as an opportunity. We are not just preparing students for jobs; we are preparing them to be adaptable, resilient, and compassionate leaders who will shape the future rather than fear it.

And while we are a school of academic excellence, we also know that success is about more than just achievement in Mathematics, Science, or English Language Arts. Our students' social-emotional growth and well-being are just as important. We teach our students to navigate the world with confidence, empathy, and strength. We foster a learning community where they see themselves not just as students but as individuals capable of greatness. We see them, and more importantly, they see themselves.

None of this would be possible without our families. Parents and caregivers place their trust in us every single day, believing in our mission and our work. They are our partners in this journey, and

their faith fuels us to continue breaking barriers and creating opportunities. Their belief in our students, in our educators, and in the Banneker community reminds us why we do this work.

Our commitment to excellence has led to remarkable achievements:

- Banneker is among Massachusetts’s highest-ranked schools in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science.
- In 2023, we were honored with the National Blue Ribbon Award.
- We have received multiple commendations for excellence, including the esteemed Pozen Prize.

These accomplishments are a testament to the dedication of our exceptional educators, many of whom have been with us for over 15 years. Our faculty represents one of the most diverse teams of educators among public elementary schools in the Commonwealth, and they are the heartbeat of our school. I feel truly blessed to work alongside such extraordinary educators and staff, who are more like family than colleagues. Their unwavering commitment, passion, and love for our students create a nurturing and inspiring environment that makes Banneker a special place for all of us.

But our work is far from over. We recognize that systemic inequities in education persist. That is why we remain committed to:

- Leading by example by serving as positive role models who inspire and empower students to embrace excellence, resilience, and a love for learning;
- Empowering student success beyond Banneker by ensuring seamless transitions into schools that nurture their potential and align with their aspirations;
- Investing in educators by providing meaningful professional development that equips and inspires teachers to better serve historically underserved students, fostering a culture of excellence and continuous learning.

And as we move forward, we are excited about our next chapter: our new "forever home" at the former Matignon High School campus. This incredible opportunity will allow us to:

- Create state-of-the-art facilities that enhance learning.
- Expand our curriculum and extracurricular offerings.
- Provide a space where our students can thrive in an environment that fosters engagement, curiosity, and achievement.

Banneker believes in the strength of our community and understands that, as an elementary school, we are laying the foundation upon which our students will build not only their academic futures but the trajectories of their lives. We are committed to ensuring that this foundation is not only strong enough to support them, no matter how high they aspire to go, but also inspiring enough to ignite a passion for learning and achievement that propels them toward limitless possibilities. With unqualified dedication, Banneker continues to advance its mission of providing a high-quality, equitable education that empowers our students to excel academically and thrive in life.

Dr. King once said, *"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."* At Banneker, we have never waited for the full staircase to appear—we have built it, step by step, with boldness, with vision, and with an unshakable belief in the boundless potential of our students.

Banneker is a little school that serves predominantly Black and Brown kids, and for nearly 30 years, we have stood in the storm—when they said we couldn't, we proved we could. When they said we shouldn't, we showed we should. And when they said we wouldn't, we made sure we did. We have weathered the winds of doubt, the rains of inequity, and the thunder of systemic barriers. But we did not yield. We did not falter. Because we know that excellence is not given—it is earned through courage, resilience, and an unwavering belief in our children.

The Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School is a testament to what is possible when a community refuses to accept limits, when a school dares to defy expectations, and when Black excellence is not just an aspiration, but a standard.

Today, I stand here not just as an individual, but as a vessel—one who has been blessed to be a part of this transformative journey. I share this honor with our founders, every stakeholder, every board member, every educator, every student, every family, and every community member who has contributed to making Banneker what it is today.

Thank you for this honor, for your support, and for believing in the power of education to transform lives. The work continues, the mission is clear, and fair warning—Banneker is just getting started. We are here. We are rising. And we are ready to make *good trouble*.

Thank you.

PS. Banneker Beat- our dance group is having their Black History performance on March 28 @ 6:00 pm at our school because we celebrate Black History *every month* and we hope you can come!