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What’s most important? **Creativity and ingenuity.**”

# A Hunger for Education

**Dr. Freeman Hrabowski** calls on school leaders to elevate education and achievement

Keynote sponsored by  **UnitedHealthcare**



**D**r. Freeman Hrabowski, president of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, has been passionate about education and learning his whole life.

As a child, his parents once bribed him into going to church by allowing him to work on math problems during the service. However, that day a speaker caught his attention.

Hrabowski remembers the speaker talked about education for black children. The speaker said if children march, the nation will see that they want a better education. Hrabowski, who was tired of using old, falling-apart textbooks, agreed with the man at the pulpit. That speaker was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Hrabowski, along with hundreds of other black children, took up King's challenge and marched in downtown Birmingham, Alabama to show the mayor they wanted to end segregated schools. A number of the children, including Hrabowski, were jailed. Hrabowski said he was scared to march, but his passion for education overshadowed that fear.

"Sometimes when people do courageous things it's not that they are courageous, it's just that they want to see change," Hrabowski said.

Out of the civil rights movement, more people began going to college. As Hrabowski pointed out, in the 60s only about 10 percent of Americans had a college degree, whereas today it

is about 30 percent. To people like Hrabowski, education and success are intrinsically linked.

Hrabowski told the story of his mother who, as a young girl, worked for a wealthy family that allowed her to borrow books from the family library. As his mother read more, her appetite for reading and education increased, and eventually, she put herself through college and earned a degree in education.

"There are two groups of people — those who achieve dreams, and those who don't," Hrabowski said. "The biggest reason people see their dreams realized is because of education."

Hrabowski sees this every day in his job as president of a university. With students from 114 countries represented on his campus, Hrabowski said many of these foreign students become successful because they have a hunger for knowledge.

Hrabowski said this same kind of excitement needs to be fostered in our nation's K-12 schools. He asked school leaders how many could say that their best students get as much press in the local paper as their football team.

"We need to bring the same kind of excitement to academics that we do for sports," he said.

Additionally, Hrabowski called for educators and students to not shy away from tough questions, noting that in other countries, students work

on tough math problems over the course of several days.

"We focus on problems that are easier, shorter to solve," he said. "We haven't challenged our children to think critically. You don't always have to be able to solve the problem — the important thing is to be able to talk about the problem."

Likewise, Hrabowski said that American creativity, specifically the technology boom in Silicon Valley, is what helped establish the United States as one of the most successful in the world for several decades. However, the U.S.'s position is slipping with China, India, and other countries quickly catching up. Hrabowski noted that India is in the process of opening 800 new universities.

"We cannot compete against those two big giants in terms of numbers," Hrabowski said. "What is most important? Creativity and ingenuity."

These are big challenges. Hrabowski said today's current climate for public education takes a strong vision and belief in our education system and students.

"When I heard Dr. Martin Luther King speak that day in Birmingham it was the first time I believed that the world of tomorrow could be better than today," Hrabowski said. "There are two kinds of leaders. Those who suck all the energy out of everyone and those who believe in the possibilities." ■