

## 3 lessons on making the jump to college (or any new life phase) from STEM leaders of color

*Ingenuity Project gave students a chance to connect with local professionals at its Innovators' Breakfast.*



By Stephen Babcock / STAFF



*(Photo by Stephen Babcock)*

Role models offer living examples of pathways that otherwise might have seemed out of reach. Having been there before, they also have plenty of advice to offer.

Both sides were on view last week at **1100 Wicomico** in Pigtown, as **Ingenuity Project** hosted the **Innovators' Breakfast**. The event celebrated leaders of color in Baltimore's STEM community, highlighting the importance of promoting a diverse workforce.

Ingenuity Project oversees an advanced curriculum in math, science and research for more than 700 local students, and the event offered a chance for students in the program at **Baltimore Polytechnic Institute** to chat with leaders in these fields.

During a panel discussion, some of the leaders also offered advice about the transition to college — and there was plenty that could apply for anyone entering a new stage. Here's a look at three areas that stood out:

## **Seek out mentors, and champions.**

**Jeremy D. Brown** had a ready example of the value of mentorship: One of his valued mentors, **Dr. Willie Rockward**, was sitting on the panel with him.

"It's not too often that you get to share a stage with someone who helped inspire you along this journey," said Brown, who is a professor in **Johns Hopkins' Department of Mechanical Engineering** and leads a research lab focused on haptics and medical robotics.

Brown met Rockward while he was a student at **Morehouse College** in Atlanta, where Rockward chaired the physics and dual degree engineering program before joining the faculty at **Morgan State University** in Baltimore.

“He told me, ‘You have what it takes to get a Ph.D.,” Brown said of Rockward. “That stuck with me through the years, knowing that someone believed in me.”

Speaking on the value of mentors, Rockward said it’s important to seek out both near-peer mentors and older peer mentors.

“They can help you see something that you cannot see just yet,” he said. “They can see talent and gifts in you, but you have to trust them.”

Speaking of his own experiences at the **University of Michigan**, Brown took it one step further, saying it’s also important to have champions — “people who are going to go to bat for you, who are going to put dollars on the line for you when you aren’t in the room,” he said.

## **Make time for yourself.**

Navigating new places, having lots to do and pressure from both external and internal forces can all present mental health challenges like burnout. The panelists were upfront about this reality: As **Miner & Kasch** Data Scientist **Robert Holder** pointed out, it’s easy to overlook burnout or convince oneself that it’s not happening to you.

From college and into their careers, the panelists said it’s important to take mental health into consideration. This can come in the form of seeking out a therapist, which the panelists advocated. **T. Rowe Price** Quantitative Investment Analyst **Raymond Perkins** pointed out that colleges have mental health services, and it’s worth knowing where they are on campus from day one.

It's also important to build time for yourself into your schedule. Along with important meetings and deadlines, Rockward advocates the importance of scheduling "me time" during a week.

"It's designed for you to do whatever you want to do," he said. "That is your time."

## **Chase your passion.**

**Patrick A. Hill**, who is deputy project area manager for civil space programs in the space exploration sector of Johns Hopkins' **Applied Physics Laboratory**, also talked about the importance of bringing passion to a career choice. There are lots of factors to consider and challenges along the way, but knowing that you're working on an area that you're invested in gives a focal point to the work that goes beyond money.

"I've always been focused on chasing my passion," he said. "The dollars have always followed."

