



COMMUNITY VOICES WORKING TOWARDS EXCELLENCE



African American Student Achievement

1st Edition

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Message



Jim A. Yovino, Superintendent

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

This Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document is the culmination of extensive input and communication over four years with school districts, students, parents and community leaders. African American students in Fresno County are from diverse backgrounds with varying educational and social experiences. Improving the achievement of African American students is one of our top priorities.

Our goal for sharing this document and holding the Community Convening is to create and sustain a culture of collaboration to increase the empowerment and academic achievement of African American students. We are dedicated to engaging the community in this endeavor.

We have had many complex conversations along the way as we work toward progress. But I promise you, we will face the tough issues together and bravely move forward through mutual respect and collaboration to long-lasting change.

VISION STATEMENT

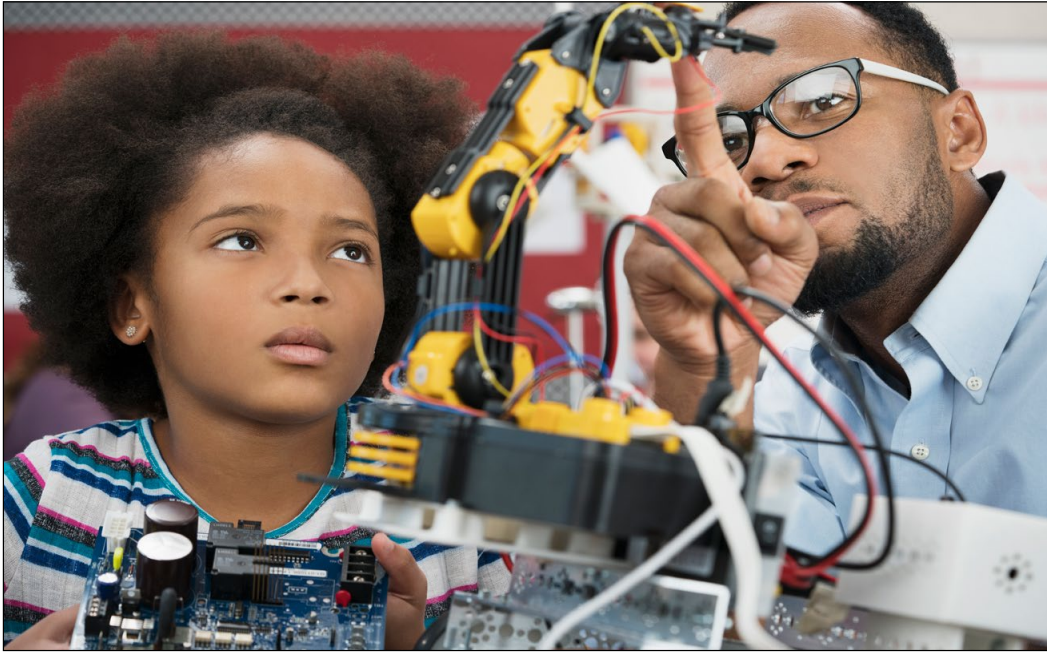
Dedicated to engaging the community in the betterment of the lives of children and families in Fresno County.

MISSION STATEMENT

We will leverage community resources and build coalition partners to find the best programs, practices and services for students in Fresno County.



Community Convening



On September 20, 2018, the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools (FCSS) hosted a Community Convening of nearly 200 members of the community from cross-sectors including government, faith, law enforcement and more who gathered to listen, learn and respond to questions surrounding: Access, Systems, Policy, Racism, and Discrimination. The community was asked to describe some of the barriers and challenges associated with obtaining access to quality education for students in the African American community. This was the first of three direct and Afro-centered dialogue starters meant to encourage individual tables to work collectively to answer and share out their feedback. A panel of students provided moving testimony about their school experiences and their stories continue to reverberate throughout the community. Months following the event, stakeholders from the convening met as work groups to analyze data in order to identify concerns and provide informed recommendations on the four Focus Areas:

- School Systems
- School Climate
- Student Voice and Engagement
- Parent and Community Engagement

The Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document is informed and composed of concerns and recommendations voiced during the workgroup sessions. Unlike the adult workgroups, students were asked to share the pros and cons of their direct experiences on their respective campuses to inform district superintendents of current climate issues. Student comments were shared and recorded at scheduled meetings throughout the 2018-19 school year with Fresno County Superintendent of Schools Jim Yovino during his Superintendent's African American Student Advisory Cabinet sessions.

Community Convening

Workgroups engaged in an Equity Action Plan activity (See Appendix) that helped them understand the practices of Educational Equity and how to support the work moving forward. Prior to the Community Convening there were four focus areas identified as essential for the holistic care of African American students: School Systems, School Climate, Student Voice and Engagement and Parent and Community Engagement. Each Focus Area is highlighted in the Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document with stakeholder concerns and recommendations noted.

Throughout the workgroup sessions, there were several resources shared and referenced for stakeholders to review, including an in-person session with Master Teacher and Culturally Responsive Teaching expert, Dr. Chike Akua. These references and periodicals are listed in the back of this document for review.

The overall objective of the Community Convening and the workgroups was to identify and scale effective practices for African American students in Fresno County and statewide. This document provides those findings. This document reflects the initial meetings by gathering perspectives of community stakeholders. Improving the achievements of African American students is a priority at FCSS and we are dedicated to engaging the community in the betterment of the lives of children and families in Fresno County.

The increasingly knowledge-driven world demands people who have the education and skills to thrive in a competitive marketplace and to understand the increasingly complex world in which they live. That means that in order to compete and succeed, all young people will need an effective education that prepares them for work and life. For African American students, this must include a culturally relevant curriculum and culturally responsive spaces for learning. This can only come from culturally competent teachers and professionals that embody the *Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Practices* (See Appendix 1) and effective and continuous professional development and trainings.

Successful communities recognize the importance of social and emotional learning in a student's personal development. Building on findings from local, state and national research, FCSS is working in partnership with district and community-based leaders and organizations to harness student voice and engage parents and guardians in the selection and implementation of the FCSS Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document.

Fresno County currently has a total of 32 school districts that educate more than 220,000 students. A vast majority of African American students reside within the Fresno/Clovis city limits at Central (8.8%), Clovis (3.2%), Fresno (8.2%) and Washington (6.8%) unified school districts. There are smaller populations located in the Orange Center and Raisin City school districts, averaging 6.5% of their student enrollment via their charter school affiliations. Note that these numbers only reflect students that were enrolled as Black/African American during enrollment. Bi-racial students may not be reflected in these numbers.

The African American student population in Fresno County is one composed of a vast group of ethnicities that are rich in history and culture: and also diverse linguistically and geographically. Their contributions are numerous and they have played a major part in the community's productive growth. However, the educational needs of African American students continue to be an area of concern, focus and discussion for educational leaders and community stakeholders, due to poor academic and behavioral outcomes.

Introduction



The need for more intentional services and resources that are culturally relevant has led leaders to take an inward look at systemic practices to ensure African American students are being served in an equitable way. In doing this work, there must be identity unification to ensure that no student is overlooked or left behind. This Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document will use the term African American, however, it is referencing all students of African ancestry that are a part of the Fresno County educational system.

Now is the time for this work and current research can drive decision-making. The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) provides an opportunity to ensure the equity of resources to support African American students. Together as a community, we can determine how to marshal various resources to make measurable differences for African American students through improved strategies and interagency collaboration. A key launching point for this was the Community Convening held on September 20, 2018.

The goal of the Community Convening, the pursuant workgroups discussions and future educational opportunities and dialogue is to create and sustain a culture of collaboration between schools, community and parents. This collaboration will optimize the full academic achievement of African American students through the collection and review of shared data, assessment of assets and needs, implementation of evidence-based best practices (local, state and national), and the careful monitoring of individual student success.

Workgroups were designed to engage stakeholders on equity and to gauge the level of understanding as it pertains to African American students in Fresno County. Workgroups were meant to encourage and drive dialogue between all groups to determine and share concerns. Future work will result in making recommendations to educational and culturally supportive programs that are most beneficial to students, educators and the community, while rebuilding relationships.

Guiding Principles



It was decided by the workgroups, during the first gathering that included the students, to adopt Guiding Principles in order to support school districts and their teams in working in an equitable manner when engaging with African American students and their communities. These principles should guide actions and decisions in order to build relationships and promising practices. With the inclusion of these principles, we seek to provide a better focus on the recommendations of the workgroups here in Fresno County.

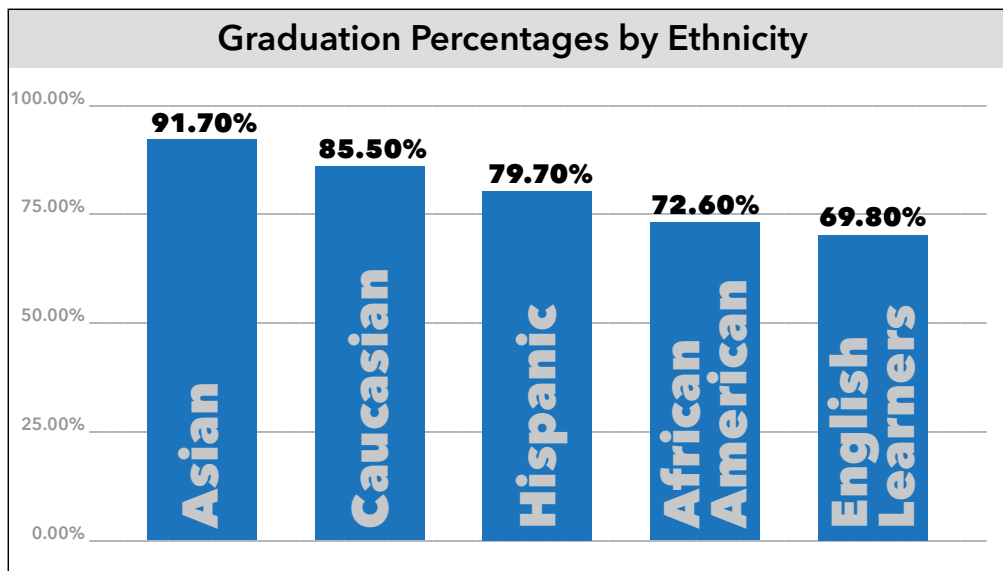
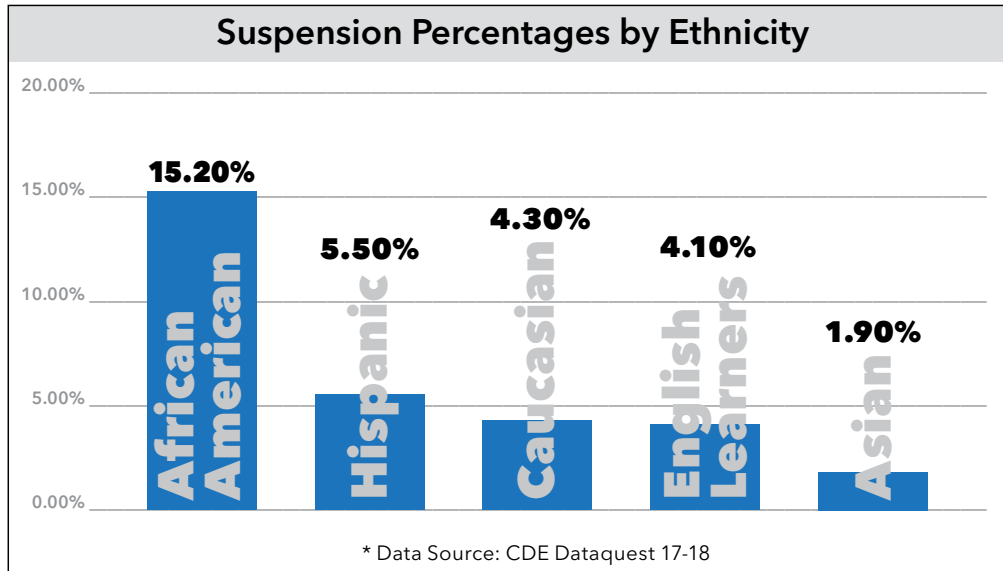
"Guiding Principles are a broad philosophy that encompasses your personal beliefs and values and guide an organization throughout its life in all circumstances, irrespective of changes in its goals, strategies or type of work. They create a...culture where everyone understands what's important" (Broudy, 2011).

Guiding Principles:

1. Creating safe and equitable spaces for dialogue that recognize students, parents, educators, community organizations and leaders as equal partners.
2. Prioritize intergenerational engagement, space for the community to be "experts" and exposure to important stakeholders in Fresno County.
3. Historical content is important. Data can only expose part of the story and progress cannot be achieved without being action oriented.

Guiding Principles format was adapted from State of Black Education in Oakland.

The data used in the Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document is from the 2017-2018 school year. Quantitative data on Suspension Rates and Graduation Percentages are presented by ethnicity and were obtained from the California Department of Education.



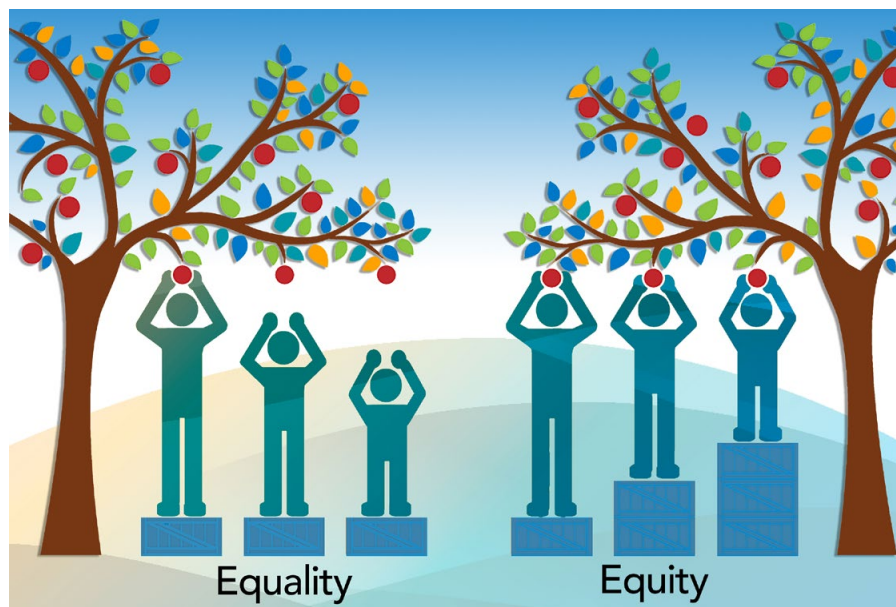
Educational Equity

"Providing resources based on the unique positions of individual students. To recognize where they are and meet them there with resources." - Kaya H., Community Member

To open each work group session, stakeholders were reminded of the general definition of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT). Dr. Geneva Gay (2010) refers to CRT as the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them. It should teach to and through the strengths of students, and be culturally validating and affirming.

What is Educational Equity?

The measure of achievement, fairness and opportunity is a definition of educational equity that is simple, yet the struggle to achieve it continues. This starts in the beginning of a student's education. The lack of space and access to preschool are just the beginning of the failure to achieve equity. So much of the discussion regarding equity led back to the lack of CRT in schools and it was determined that educational equity cannot be accomplished without it.



The extensive question regarding Educational Equity is how do we get there? To what extent do we as a system, student or community engage the work to ensure that the essential needs of students are being identified, assessed and addressed in a culturally relevant manner? It came down to a true understanding of the approach and the need within the academic success of African American students.

Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2017), the originator and leading expert in the area of CRT, stated during a lecture, "No matter how good the curriculum innovation may be, without a skilled teacher it has little or no chance of success."

Educational Equity

The desire for an intentional culturally relevant pedagogy dive was voiced in order to gain a true understanding and to build capacity for service for students in all districts. According to Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy, "...is committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment," and requires three important elements:

- Students must experience academic success.
- Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence.
- Students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.

Workgroup stakeholders engaged in an Equity Action Plan (Mills, 2019) exercise (See Appendix 2) to assist them with their concerns and recommendations, as shared for each Focus Area and could be used in a collaborative way within educational spaces. They were challenged to:

- Analyze their concerns in this work, which included identifying allies and their roles.
- Determine materials and training needed.
- Review potential challenges and solutions.
- Assess progress for the areas of School, Educators and Students (Accountability).
- Establish tasks and proposed actions.

To achieve educational equity, the intentional professional development surrounding CRT for all educators can no longer be optional.



FOCUS AREA 1

"How do we get them [schools] to see our students as Black students instead of just through a Black lens? How do we get to the bigger picture and see them as they are, full of experiences and culture that a lot of people don't understand."

-Fresno County Educator

Educators and administrators cannot effectively serve African American students if they are not equipped with the necessary information and skills. Skills such as the adaptability to different learning styles are critical. Research shows that, "students tend to prefer verbal tasks, perform better with materials and concepts that are directly related to their personal experiences, and are sensitive to the teacher's perceived confidence in their abilities" (Durodoye & Hildreth, 1995). The different workgroups examined school systems and, while there were both common threads and differences in what each group discussed, it is clear that a shift in mindset and professional development is necessary.

What Students Said About School Systems

PROS: *Things are getting better compared to the last couple of years; still room for growth.*

- School system does a good job of making sure students have the right tools to be successful, but needs to become more connected with the Students.
- Some teachers are being more sympathetic to students.
- We are being taught about Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Montgomery Boycott.

CONS: *Teachers and staff not being open, not listening and being too quick to assume things about a situation prior to understanding.*

- We are not going into depth with African American students or history. students do not know about influential African American figures (Harriet Tubman, Booker T. Washington, etc.).
- Improve on allowing teachers more freedom in teaching methods.
- Lack of cultural expression in school policies.
- They do not believe in us or our ability to achieve.
- Be more open to listening and not too quick to assume.
- Need more places for students of color to get help. Often times students are embarrassed to ask for help and that causes low grades.

School Systems

Student Recommendations:

- There should be a requirement that all history teachers read and be trained on Anthony T. Browder or Dr. Chike Akua's books so they can learn to be more [culturally] sensitive.
- Schools should meet and work together to discuss new courses that are offered and other changes that are effective for students.
- A better understanding that Black History exists outside of February and have a bigger presence on campuses.



What Educators Said About School Systems

Concerns:

- Hiring process in districts and support for those new hires, especially for African Americans.
- The lack of education of staff in regard to data alignment concerning African American students.
- The punitive perceptions (cultural) and areas of expectations that need to be addressed with how students are being taught and engaged.
- Accountability (evaluations) and ownership of role in the situation.
- Mindsets (unconscious and conscious bias).
- Racism and anti-Black sentiment.
- Intentional dismissal of parent and student voices when decisions are made.
- Lack of culturally responsive support systems.
- Product delivery - Systemic definition (ex. Black History Month contributions).

FOCUS AREA 1

Educator Recommendations:

We are grateful for the input provided by the Educator workgroup and below are a few of the many recommendations made based on their professional experiences. At future convenings across broad educator forums, additional recommendations will be made. This area will be the primary focus of the next phase of work for FCSS.

- Tracking of support and accountability are needed in order to ensure that promising practices are being used and implemented efficiently.
- More direct and focused process engagement and delivery trainings for school sites and districts as needed (curriculum and instruction and policies).
- Intentional partnerships with proven culturally trained professionals that reflect students and their experiences
- An intentional culturally relevant pedagogy dive (across all grade levels).

What Parent/Community Said About School Systems

Concerns:

- There exists inherent racism in the system as a whole.
- There is a lack of cultural competence among teachers and relevance in curriculum.
- Teachers lack the ability to provide differentiated learning styles to meet the individual needs of students.
- Improve hiring practices to encourage diversified recruitment.
- The overt presence of political influence on school boards.
- Schools are often rigid, slow to change and respond to feedback.
- School staff and teachers often fail to establish relationships with parents and community members.
- Students are being treated/identified as Special Education when not needed, yet others have the need and are never identified by the schools.
- There is a general low expectation of African American students by staff and teachers.

"The grade point average expectation for student-athletes is too low...My expectation for my son is much higher in order to participate. He is a representation of his school and the school should expect more from him and all students."- Shanel M., Parent

School Systems

Parent/Community Recommendations:

- The need for district administration to be open to courageous conversations about systemic issues.
- The creation, implementation and support of African American Parent Advisory Councils.
- Improve relationship dynamics, meaning that student advocacy comes from the bottom.
- More community engagement in schools, not just at sporting events.
- Improve hiring practices of teachers and staff of color along with training and continuing education of current staff.
- Engage a Community Based Organization (CBO) pipeline to assist districts in the recruitment of teachers.
- CBO to school district partnership (intentional relationship) to include intentional career development for students.
- Ongoing educational events that include ALL stakeholders and the use of multiple engagement practices to include ALL voices.
- Community collaboration to develop expectations along with empowerment and incorporation.
- Increase partnerships with viable organizations that focus on student and family engagement that encourages and develops educational system knowledge and growth.
- Transparency within the system, including hiring practices and exit patterns for retention analysis.
- Systemic assessment of time management priorities of student-athletes.

Group Voice Scenario

"We need more places for students of color to seek help... Students are embarrassed to ask for help and that causes low grades."

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Facilitate more intentional discussions and relationship building between students of color and staff to assess the concerns and develop more culturally relevant learning spaces and processes.
- ◆ Consider a culturally relevant pedagogy dive in all academic areas facilitated by professionals that reflect the students and their experiences.
- ◆ Identify and collaborate with a local Community Based Organization that can support and empower the needs of students and staff.
- ◆ Develop a school-based accountability plan that will ensure improved outcomes.

FOCUS AREA 2

"It is overwhelming. It's more than just unwelcoming, it's like they don't really want us there. There are no teachers or administrators who like us and the ones who do are overloaded. It feels as if they built a wall between us and them. The more some parents try to climb, the higher they build the wall."

- Denise J., Parent

School climate refers to more than just the feel of school campuses. It speaks to the character and quality, as well. The climate sets the tone for positive or negative connections to school. Positive connections to school cannot be established while low expectations and lack of affirmation persist. The African American student population has reported in many forums that this problem is present and continuous on school campuses.



After intentional discussions to break down how climate impacts all areas of focus and how they all work together in an equitable way, it was determined that the climate had to change for all groups in order for change to be embraced, respect restored and relationships forged. Low expectations of not only behavior, but academic success, combined with a failure to present culturally relevant lessons, is a dynamic that must change. This shift from the "at-risk" identifier to one of "at-potential" has the ability to set the groundwork for the positive connection students are seeking, according to research by the Riverside County Office of Education.

School Climate

What Students Said About School Climate

PROS: *The climate has become more culturally aware.*

- The school has been much better with treating all with respect.
- There is a presence of empathetic and genuine administrators who care about the well-being of black students on campus.
- My history teacher is amazing! She teaches history in a fair and unbiased way. It is inspiring and it makes me want to find more educators like her.
- Nice, relaxed, pushes us to the best potential.
- Climate is better. I have had no incidents that were racially charged.

CONS: *Administrators do not take [reported] situations from African Americans seriously.*

- They don't realize the damage that the "N" word can do.
- Things are very inconsistent and can be confusing at times.
- The climate is still at the point where there is a need for many more opportunities for minority students to be heard.
- The climate around my school is basic and sometimes I feel like administrators and teachers just don't care about students, how students are and how they are doing outside of school.
- Low expectations from teachers are present.
- Commitment and the follow through flakey. Not enough listening.

Student Recommendations:

- Embrace more ways of teaching to and learning from Black students.
- Help campus police to treat us better.
- Get to know us and not assume the stereotypes.
- Include us in the conversation. More Black Student Union support and inclusion.
- Teach more about our history other than the month of February.

FOCUS AREA 2

What Educators Said About School Climate

Concerns:

- School not set up as safe environments for students.
- Climate is not set to recognize a student's individual strengths and struggles separately.
- No system in place for people to know and understand each other, which creates cultural and personal bias along with cultural perceptions that can be wrong.
- The low expectation and mindsets of faculty and staff.
- Alienation and isolation of African American faculty and staff.
- Unbiased assessments of students (Special Education and discipline).

Educator Recommendations:

- Make sure that policies are not culturally bias.
- Making student empowerment a priority.
- A collaborative open-door policy from those in authority (superintendents, board members and administration) to listening and receiving student voice feedback.
- Develop and implement mentor training.
- Courageous leadership.
- Build alliances for site and communities by recognizing advocacy versus attitude.
- Create forums where staff and students feel supported and safe to express concerns to administration.
- Utilize monthly administration meetings to identify and address moments that may have hurt student and community relations.
- Be proactive.

What Our Parent/Community Said About School Climate

Concerns:

- Bias (conscious and unconscious).
- Racism and anti-African American behaviors toward students and parents.
- Suspension and Special Education assessment practices.
- Level of relationships (lack of respect).
- Lack of culturally safe spaces.
- Classroom layouts (learning styles).
- Toxic stress.

School Climate

Parent/Community Recommendations:

- Equitable representation at all levels to ensure students and families are respected.
- Continued and practical professional development to include trauma, restorative justice and cultural competence.
- Develop expectation practices, guides and framework to support and encourage positive climates.
- Lose the “system agenda” approach and embrace the community and student voice; embrace differences in a positive way (cultural).
- Embrace and apply community feedback; this includes Local Control Accountability Plan budgets and equitable distributions to meet student needs (transparency).
- More intentional and inclusive events on campus and in the community.
- Create more inclusive parent volunteering opportunities to encourage engagement.
- Develop more qualitative and quantitative surveys to seek family feedback on climate concerns.

Group Voice Scenario

“It is overwhelming... It’s more than just unwelcoming, it’s like they don’t really want us there.”

ACTION RECOMMENDATION:

- ◆ Identify and address the source of the concern.
- ◆ Utilize monthly administration meetings to identify and address moments that may have hurt student and community relationships.
- ◆ Continued and practical professional development to include trauma, restorative justice and cultural competence.
- ◆ Build alliances for site and communities by recognizing advocacy versus attitude engagement.
- ◆ Create more inclusive and diverse parent volunteering opportunities to encourage engagement.

FOCUS AREA 3

"We need to take equitable measures to help Black students and take the time to reach out and let them know we are here for them." - Jaycee H., Educator

Providing forums for students to use their voice allows for real in-depth views and perspectives on the relationships surrounding them was critical to this work. The Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools African, American Student Advisory Cabinet was one forum that encouraged student engagement. The Advisory Cabinet, made up of high school students representing their school site, families and the community, was instrumental in developing the Plan of Action (see Appendix 3).



The examination of relationships between themselves and school systems, educators and administrators, parents and community and each other is imperative to assisting them in achieving excellence at school. As the "gatekeepers" to the growth and success of students, the School Systems workgroup found themselves identifying major areas that directly affect students and their desires to engage in their education. In addition, the Parent and Community Engagement workgroup realized that without proper supports in place for students in Fresno County, they will continue to just exist in spaces and produce statistics that do not reflect their "inner genius."

Student Voice & Engagement

What Students Said About Student Voice & Engagement

PROS: *We are leading, doing outreach and staying focused on grades.*

- Students are doing their part around school and trying to keep grades up.
- More people are getting involved on campus.
- Students can help attract underclassmen to join Black Student Union groups on campus.
- Students are starting to attend and listen to Black Student Union topics.

CONS: *Students are not culturally aware, they "talk the talk", but don't "walk the walk,"*

- Students could be more open to change.
- Students can learn to relate to one another.
- We need more POWERFUL and ACTIVE Black Student Unions on campus for support.
- Students seem scared to be who they are.
- Many still don't realize the importance of a Black Student Union; not being assertive enough to join.
- Students need to be doing more to help themselves in the classroom to help them stay focused.
- We need to introduce students to racial bias at an earlier stage.

Student Recommendations:

- Students should support their Black Student Unions at their home schools.
- More support from district for Black Student Union groups. See it as a leadership opportunity and not just a "fun club."
- More middle school Black Student Unions across the board; let's teach them from the start.
- More events for middle school students; show them the way.
- Cultural clubs and equity are just as important to the African American education as core classes are.
- Ask about Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with their academic counselors.
- More exposure to HBCU's by counselors so they can advise students better on college choices and options.
- Students need more accountability from other students for their actions.
- Students need to do more when it comes to reaching out and asking for help.

FOCUS AREA 3

What Educators Said About Student Voice and Engagement

Concerns:

- Educational achievement gap.
- Failure to recognize student needs.
- Suspensions.
- Low expectations of self in learning spaces.
- Loss of trust towards school system.
- Lack of safe spaces.

Educator Recommendations:

- Give students a voice in their education.
- Equal access and equitable intervention; accountability to students.
- Dual-enrollment access and opportunities.
- Development of educational and career opportunities (internships and apprenticeships).
- Empowerment and incorporation.
- Assessments and surveys to identify possible tensions and concerns.

What Parent/Community Said About Student Voice and Engagement

Concerns:

- Lack of cultural identity.
- Literacy deficiency.
- Intervention for low-performing students.
- Positive relationships with staff.
- Student voice and incorporation of student ideas.
- Special Education labels.
- Low expectations.
- Suspension rates and low graduation rates.

Parent/Community Recommendations:

- Increased targeted intervention practices that are culturally relevant and lead to positive responses.
- Changing the name of Special Education programs to remove stigma.
- Utilizing intentional and informal strategies strictly for building relationships, such as Black Student Union advisors and educators.
- Effective mentoring and community-based organization partnerships.
- Intentional and continued use of student voice with more culturally relevant content and Black Student Union club focus.
- Use media to encourage educational growth.
- More parent/guardian involvement.

Student Voice & Engagement



Group Voice Scenario

"We need more powerful and active BSUs on campus for support... Students seem scared to be who they are."

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Give students a voice in their education; identify African American student leaders on campuses and schedule a dialogue on the needs of students.
- ◆ See the Black Student Union groups as leadership opportunities and not just a club (i.e. California Association of Directors of Activities - CADA).
- ◆ Cultivate a relationship between Associated Student Body leaders and Black Student Union leaders to improve campus climate.
- ◆ Develop and sustain effective mentoring opportunities, including community-based organizations.
- ◆ Identify funding to support leadership growth opportunities.

FOCUS AREA 4

“There is a disconnect between the schools and the community. Schools invite the community to participate, perhaps the community needs to invite the schools to participate in order to shape the dialogue” - Michael G., Community Member

Family compositions vary by households, as do the roles that individuals play within African American students' education as it pertains to the type of home-school participation that is preferred. Research has shown that parental school involvement is directly connected to increased educational aspirations, educational success, positive attitudes about school, decreased behavioral problems and lower absenteeism (Hayes, 2011; Jeynes, 2005). Unfortunately, the idea of parental engagement can become limited to school conference attendance and Parent Teacher Association meetings.

Community-based organizations have been contributing to African American students from the Black Panther Party through the Civil Rights movement to the present with various programs right here in Fresno County. Community-based organizations that assist in building leadership skills, promoting a true sense of togetherness, providing safe spaces, and advocating for students are essential to students achieving excellence.

Parents and community members met in the evenings to engage and discuss the focus areas. As with the other gatherings of students and educators, many of those involved had to embrace being uncomfortable. Similar to the students, parents and community members were coming from different geographic areas, education levels and careers. All had the passion to work together to improve their community and schools for the children that are currently attending and will attend in the future.

What Students Said About Parent/Community Engagement

PROS: *Parents are willing to create ideas and motivation.*

- They continue to formulate new ideas and opportunities for Black students.
- Schools are beginning to network with one another more effectively.
- The community is responding in a beneficial manner.
- My parents have pushed me to be the best and have been involved in my school.
- Some kids are really engaged and want to change.

CONS: *We need them at more academic meetings than just for athletic events.*

- There are adults that just want to have a “title” yet do not really care enough to work towards change.
- Many parents are too busy to get the information we need.

Parent & Community Engagement

(cons continued):

- Some parents are too busy to attend meetings on campus.
- Some community groups are bad for students.
- The community does a good job of telling us how important college is, but I feel like it lacks the information we need to get to college and graduate.
- I want my parents to be more in-tune with my school and my grades.

Student Recommendations:

- Educate us on the community.
- Community leaders need to push the school for more outreach.
- Request more culturally relevant curriculum for us.
- We need parents to attend more meetings to hear what is happening to us.
- Find a way to stay connected with the school.
- Get more involved with schools to share our ideas (i.e. board meetings).
- Be more intentional in school engagement.



FOCUS AREA 4

What Educators Said About Parent/Community Engagement

Concerns:

- Lack of parent engagement at the school site level.
- Lack of parents attending meetings and school events, such as Parent Teacher Association or other board meetings.
- Lack of partnership with the K-12 system.
- Absence of multi-generational and systemic accountability.
- Negative systemic perception of African American parents and community.
- Lack of trust and failure to identify true stakeholders.

Educator Recommendations:

- Consistent culturally relevant parent meetings.
- Value and respect of parent involvement, needs and engagement.
- Improved pipeline for relatable information.
- Planned and strategic use of parent voice.
- Systematic education and collaboration; must include cultural acceptance.



Parent & Community Engagement

What Community Said About Parent/Community Engagement

Concerns:

- Literacy deficiency (undereducated households).
- Lack of knowledge and purpose.
- No trust in the education system, including other parents, administration, teachers and staff.
- Generational disconnect between community and students.
- Parental accountability (community and systemic).
- Approach to health, jobs and other things related to resident needs.

Parent/Community Recommendations:

- Join or form an African American Parent Advisory Council on your student's campus.
- Answer surveys from schools if you can't make meetings.
- Attend College Night events and workshops.
- Build a positive relationship with your student's school site and community organizations.
- Ask questions when needed.
- Demand multi-tier systems of communication.
- Utilize school and community resources.
- Attend school meetings to hear what is happening on the campus.

Group Voice Scenario

"There is a disconnect between the school and the community."

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Identify parents, community leaders and community-based organizations to support efforts.
- ◆ Create or join an African American Parent Advisory Council to stay engaged.
- ◆ Design and engage a culturally relevant action plan using school and community resources.
- ◆ Consider a multi-tiered system of communication to stay connected.
- ◆ Attend community-centered events to share and learn of resources and needs.

Summary

"If we actually pull off what we are trying to do here, it's going to affect the whole county, our foster care system, the educational system and in all areas where it's very much needed."
- Saul S., Educator

Workgroup members were challenged to find their comfort zones as it pertains to equity and community building, and leave them in order to advance the cause of student excellence. As stated by Dr. Chike Akua, "Uncommon accomplishments require uncommon commitment." For six months these workgroups dedicated their time to being uncomfortable and having courageous conversations on behalf of this community, specifically students. This Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document speaks to the heart of the stakeholders and the demand for change.

The absence of educational equity in the educational system as a whole has a direct effect on the four Focus Areas. How can any of the stakeholders excel and come together in a perceived hostile climate? How can student voices be truly heard without cultural context and understanding? Is there genuine and realistic parent and community engagement without addressing culture-specific challenges? Where are the educators and administrators who look like them? These questions are ongoing challenges. Utilizing the Guiding Principles, schools can address climate issues, increase parent and community engagement and ensure that student voices are heard. Creating and allowing those "safe spaces" is critical for longevity in the relationships being formed or re-established. Community-based organizations are ready to partner, but they need the allowance and encouragement to take the lead when necessary and with proper support.

The four Focus Areas need to work in collaboration to produce positive outcomes within the educational system. One without the others could cause confusion and in many cases destroy trust and relationships. The ownership and accountability of each group is a key component to building capacity in this educational system. When groups take responsibility for their role, it can directly affect how the other groups respond and move forward in an equitable manner.

In this case, when the system itself can identify its role in how team members are functioning and engaging African American students, then the climate on those campuses are directly affected (i.e. bias, racism, etc.). When faculty and staff are being supported and trained in those areas, it can lead to better interactions and relationships with students, parents and the community as a whole. As relationships, respect and trust are built within the school community, therein lies the formula to positive learning and safe spaces for students and their parents.

Summary

Respect and cultural competence must be the foundation of all work moving forward. This is the mortar between the bricks as we build together; the layers that show we see and value each other. Respect is tangible and seen in the effort to build, or rebuild, relationships so that collaboration becomes second nature. Respect goes beyond position, titles and familial bond. It encourages us all to continue in hard times when solutions are difficult to find or implement. As stated by (Gorski, 2019.) "Students experiencing racism can't wait for schools to move at their own pace and comfort level."



We are called to do better for African American students and the community. We will do all that is necessary to ensure they have the resources and supports required to increase student excellence and release the "genius" inside each of them. Through asking ourselves, "What is my part? ...What is my Why?" not just today, but repeatedly over time, we will continue to place ourselves in the best position to effect change. This Community Voices Working Towards Excellence document demands that we do as one of the student representatives recommended, "Walk the walk and not just talk the talk." We have the means and the tools to go forward, move the needle and set new standards of excellence as educators, students, parents and community members.

Fresno County Promising Practices

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

- Superintendent's African American Student Advisory Cabinet
- Ujima Servant Leadership Academy - Facilitator
- CHIPS Summer Leadership Camp - Facilitator
- Cyber High School - Creation of African Centered Curriculum (9-12th)
- Community Convening Conversations - Facilitator
- Fresno County African American Student Leadership Conference (high school)
- Building Community in the Classroom - Professional Development for Teachers
- Culturally Responsive Professional Development for beginning teachers
- EPOCH Education - Equity and Cultural Readiness Certification - Trainer of Trainers
- Collaboration with district administration

Central Unified School District

- Black Student Union campus support
- Culturally Responsive and Relevant training for Teachers and Administrators (Dr. Chike Akua and the Teacher Transformation Institute team of professionals)
- Ujima Academy participation
- African American Literature Class (A-G requirement)

Clovis Unified School District

- African American/Black Student Union campus support
- Ujima Academy participation
- Browder Scholars Cultural Immersion Program
- African American Student Leadership Middle School Conference
- Culturally Relevant Training for new teachers prior to new school year (Dr. Chike Akua and the Teacher Transformation Institute team of professionals)
- On-going Culturally Relevant professional development throughout the year for multiple school sites and departments
- Human Relations Council
- Diversity Training with Craig Simms (attorney at law)
- Intercultural Diversity Advisory Committee
- CLASSI III for Cultural Proficiency system implementation and accountability

Fresno Unified School District

- African American Academic Acceleration Initiative
- Black Student Union campus support
- Cultural Proficiency Training sessions
- Ujima Academy participation

- GOAL 2 - African American Student Leadership Academy Cohorts
- Office of African American Academic Acceleration
- Men's and Women's Alliance
- Mentoring program (school based, community based, e-mentoring)

Washington Unified School District

- Black Student Union campus support
- Ujima Academy participation
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities campus visitations
- Dual Enrollment class in African American Studies in partnership with Fresno City College

Clovis Community College

- Black Student Union
- Historically Black Colleges and Universities transfer services
- Student success coaches
- Directed outreach services

Fresno City College

- Umoja Community
- Strengthening Young Men By Academic Achievement (SYMBAA)
- IDILE Program
- Peer Assisted Study Session Program
- Directed outreach services

Fresno State University

- President's Advisory Board for African American Student Success
- African American Initiative
- Office of Black Student Success
- Summer Algebra Institute targeting African American students
- Harambee

Community Based Organizations

- West Fresno Family Resource Center - Yolanda Randles
* *Sweet Potato Project - Collaboration with Fresno State University*
- Fresno Street Saints - Brian King
- Sankofa School of Central California - Keeza McCoy
- Queen Califia Youth Empowerment Project - Camille Valentine
- Hand in Hand Mentoring - Charunn Jones

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CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING/PRACTICES

Validation -

- It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and a worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum... Black history is American history!
- It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities... The Algebra Project.
- It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
- It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's cultural heritages.
- It incorporates multicultural information, resources and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Comprehensive -

- In classrooms, students function like members of an extended family, assisting, supporting and encouraging each other.
- The entire class is expected to rise or fall together and it is in the best interest of everyone to ensure that each individual member of the group is successful.

Multidimensional -

- It encompasses curriculum content, learning context, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques and performance assessments.
- Empowering:
 - * *Students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained.*
 - * *Teachers must show students that they expect them to succeed and commit themselves to making success happen.*

Transformative -

- It deals with confronting and transcending the cultural hegemony nested in much of the curriculum content and classroom instruction of traditional education.
- It develops social consciousness, intellectual critique and political efficacy in students so that they can combat prejudice, racism and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

Emancipatory -

- It releases the intellect of students of color from the constraining manacles of mainstream canons of knowledge and ways of knowing.

Caring -

- It is manifested in the form of teacher attitudes, expectations and behaviors about students' human value, intellectual capability and performance responsibilities.

Equity Action Plan

Choose a primary topic of change: **Classroom** **Policy** **Family/Community**

Make your pitch. Identify the problem. What's your "why?"

A problem in our classrooms is that not all students are able to access the grade level content. Our practice is that students are provided Response to Intervention (Rtl), but it is not happening in each classroom. Students need to be assessed and their gaps in reading and math need to be identified before the teacher can provide the appropriate lessons.

Who are Your Allies in the Work?	Role (If possible think of allies who have a variety of roles)
Teachers	
Parents	
Curriculum & Instruction Departments	

Materials/Training Needed

Pre/Post diagnostic assessment
 Training for teachers who will administer the assessment and provide the intervention
 Parent support for understanding

Potential Challenges	Potential Solutions
There is a general belief in our schools African American students have poor behavior, therefore they are out of the classroom, which leads to being behind academically or they are low achieving.	African American students will be on or above grade level, allowing them to access the grade level materials. May decrease classroom behavior.
Some teachers may not feel comfortable communicating with parents.	Schedule 4-6 parent meetings/trainings for the year- how to support their child/ren reading/ math; how to support their child/ren in SEL; provide time for school expectations; provide time for rewarding students and parents

Content of example was submitted by a work group stakeholder

(Design borrowed from BetterLesson)

Equity Action Plan

What does Progress Look Like? School Climate	What does Progress Look Like? Educators	What does Progress Look Like? Impact on Students
Classrooms will be managed more effectively, student gaps will no longer exist, which may decrease student absences due to suspension or students not in the classroom during core instruction.	Teachers would be able to teach and scaffold more effectively. The academic achievement gap will be eliminated or will decrease.	Students will be prepared and less likely to be suspended from school or will not miss instruction. More African American students would be performing on grade level and would be able to stay at the level of their peers. All students will stay on-track to graduate high school college and career ready.

For each of the columns, write in the primary task, and then break it down into smaller action items.		
Review student data (academic and behavior)	Plan CRTL training for whole staff	Plan assessment training for whole staff
Prepare a document that displays academic data (ELA and math) by student group - highlight the African American student group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with CRTL trainers to select a team/group who will be able to support the district • Determine funding stream • Communicate the purpose/rationale/need • Schedule training dates • Provide training • Collect - survey/feedback from participants • Track/Monitor - who/when • Assess the outcomes • Determine next training needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract with an assessment company (pre/post) • Decide on timeline for training • Communicate the need for training • Determine dates for trainings • Provide training • Collect feedback • Track student data

Content of example was submitted by a work group stakeholder

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- Dr. John Hannigan - Executive Leadership Coach, Curriculum & Instruction
- Dr. Jeffrey Hunt - Director, Charter School Oversight
- Lori Willson - Coordinator II, Curriculum & Instruction

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- Dr. Tanya A. Fisher - Selma Unified School District
- Randy R. Morris - Washington Unified School District
- Dr. Robert Nelson - Fresno Unified School District
- Dr. Eimear O'Farrell - Clovis Unified School District

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- Brad Edmund - Administrator, Central Unified School District
- Terri Edwards - Administrator, Fresno Unified School District
- Jasmine Ellard - Community Education Specialist, Fresno Unified School District
- Erin English - Vice Principal, Central Unified School District
- Sean Ford - Guidance Learning Director, Clovis North Educational Center
- Ana Karen Gonzalez - Intervention Specialist, Central Unified School District
- Kimberly Hendricks-Brown - Principal on Special Assignment, Fresno Unified School District
- Jaycee Hines - Counselor, Washington Unified School District
- Paul Holland - Intervention Specialist, Washington Unified School District
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- Dr. Paul Parnell - Chancellor, State Center Community College District
- Dr. Nicole Campbell-Cochran - District Partnerships Manager, Foundation for California Community Colleges

STUDENT STAKEHOLDERS (Superintendents African American Student Advisory Cabinet)

- Abigail Akande - Buchanan High School
- Zion Chatman - Buchanan High School
- Cedric Coward - Central East High School
- Brittney Hall - Washington Union High School
- McKinley Lee - Edison High School

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- Makayla Sandoval - McLane High School
- Derek Smith - Clovis North High School
- Kasandra Tate - Central East High School
- Ujima Servant Leadership Academy

PARENT & COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS & ORGANIZATIONS

- Ola Akande - Parent, Clovis Unified School District
- Pastor Paul Binion - Community Member, Westside Church of God
- Arogeanae Brown - Community Member
- Roger Brown - President, Building Youth Tomorrow Today
- Leroy Candler - President, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Fresno)
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- Randall Cooper - Vice President of Operations, CenCal Impact Mentoring
- Shantay Davies-Balch - Director, March of Dimes
- Brooke Frost - Consultant, Fresno Cradle to Career (C2C)
- Robert Goodman - Parent, Washington Unified School District
- Tracy Goodman - Parent, Washington Unified School District
- Courtney Griffin - Counselor, School of Unlimited Learning, Fresno Economic Opportunities Commission (EOC)
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- Elisha Henderson - Parent, Fresno Unified School District
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- Kasan Jones - Parent, Central Unified School District
- Rachel Kultz - Community Member
- Roshelle Lee - Parent, Fresno Unified School District
- Jessica Miguel - Community Member
- Robert Mikel - Parent, Fresno Unified School District
- Melissa Mikel - Parent, Fresno Unified School District
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- Ray Moore - Parent, Central Unified School District
- Shanel Moore - Parent, Central Unified School District
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- Pamela Tate - Parent, Central Unified School District
- Shawn Wills - Parent, Clovis Unified School District

FRESNO COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

- Dr. Allen Clyde, Trustee Area 5
- Dr. Marcy Masumoto, Trustee Area 4
- Daren A. Miller, Trustee Area 3
- Mike Robinson, Trustee Area 2
- Kimberly Tapscott-Munson, Trustee Area 1

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools
African American Student Advisory Cabinet

Plan of Action

We, the student members of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools African American Student Advisory Cabinet, submit this Plan of Action on behalf of our K-12 peers, to ensure academic and social-emotional excellence within our African American student communities.

We believe the Goal and Vision, School Site Expectations and Student Roles listed below are essential to rebuild, restore and sustain the necessary relationships to achieve excellence.

We, the 2017 - 2018 African American Student Advisory Cabinet, are individuals who have answered the call to leadership and created this Plan of Action as a resource for future Cabinet members to reference and improve to ensure excellence here in Fresno County.

Excellence is in Our DNA!!

Goal & Vision

Mentoring to younger students
Increase Unity, Equity, and Equality
A recognized and valued Student Voice
Focus on building relationships

School Site Expectations

Eliminate Racial Bias
Tangible support for BSU clubs on campus
More opportunities to mentor younger students (K-8)
Increased Administrative support when needed

Student Role

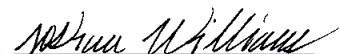
Encourage student and faculty engagement and involvement
Positive reinforcement of self-value
Push for cultural acceptance and awareness
Pass on ideas that can better the campus climate



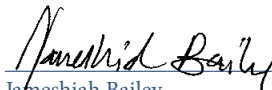
Avery Boyd
Central High School



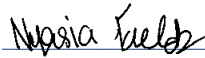
Christian Wood
Clovis North High School



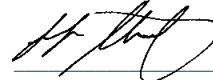
Joshua Williams
Roosevelt High School



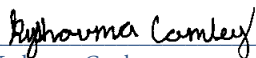
Jameshiah Bailey
McLane High School




Nyasia Field
Washington Union High School



Leah Moment
Clovis High School




Kyshauna Conley
Cambridge High School



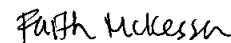
Devontae Massey
Washington Union High School



Aikailah Parker
Clovis High School



Natine Williams
Clovis North High School



Faith McKesson
Clovis High School



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WE BELIEVE EVERY STUDENT CAN THRIVE!



"I believe we can all make a positive difference in the lives of our children, not only through education, but in a shared interest in the well-being of others."

Jim A. Yovino
Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

