

BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

TO: Javetta Cleveland and Neil Smith, Co-Superintendents
FROM: Debbi D'Angelo, Director, Evaluation and Assessment
DATE: April 24, 2013
RE: Status Report on Plan to Accelerate the Achievement of African American Students

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The recommendation to develop a District plan to accelerate the achievement of African-American students was presented to the Board in December. This is the third of three status reports, intended to keep the Board up-to-date on the progress to develop this plan. Staff intends to present detailed recommendations for 2013-14 to the Board on May 22, 2013.

The purpose of this three-month planning process has been defined as follows:

- * Build upon the previous work to achieve the *2020 Vision* and the District's Plans to Close the Achievement Gap to choose the next steps for BUSD
- * Examine data to identify the students who do not appear to be benefitting from current efforts and need additional support
- * Select actions designed to improve outcomes for identified students based on national research on effective practices and familiarity with BUSD

In the last status report, presented to the Board on February 27th, staff reviewed the demographic and achievement data for African-American students in the District as compared to their peers and the decision to focus on the Middle School in 2013-14.

This report includes (1) a brief overview of the research on this topic, (2) a summary of findings from the student focus groups, the parent focus group and the community meeting, and (3) proposed high-leverage strategies based on best practices in Berkeley schools and other districts that have demonstrated success in improving outcomes for African-American students.

Review of National Research

The work group reviewed national research to identify best practices for African-American students. A list of the research articles is provided in the accompanying section on Best Practices. The group identified four common areas of focus in the research that affect outcomes for African-American students: racial identity, classroom climate, instruction and support systems. Within these four areas, the nationally recognized best practices were summarized by the work group as follows:

Racial Identity: Culturally-competent professional development on race and racial identity is necessary to examine and isolate race, recognizing that racism is not a series of isolated acts, debunking the myths that African-American

students are not doing well, and using a counter narrative to eliminate negative racial stereotyping.

Classroom Climate: A classroom climate that promotes fairness (equity vs. equality) and high quality teacher-student relationships creates an effective learning environment for African-American students. Further findings suggest that when African-American students are treated as competent, they will likely demonstrate competence. Classroom environments that promote “High Help / High Performance” provide a vehicle in which African-American students can ask for help and structures by which teachers enable students to be successful.

Instruction: Effective pedagogical practice involves in-depth knowledge of the students as well as the subject matter. Instructional methodologies such as teacher collaboration, group work, and affirming every student’s contribution (not just the students who are raising their hands) further engaged students in the learning process. Instructional scaffolding for students is necessary to extend students’ thinking and abilities beyond what they already know and acknowledge what skills students need to master the learning objectives.

Support Systems: In addition to performance goals, systems and structures are necessary to ensure that greater numbers of African-American students graduate high school prepared for success in college and their careers. These structures can include: 1) reducing the use of harsh and extreme policies that result in disproportionately higher rates of suspension and expulsion for African-American students, thus “pushing” African-American students out of school; 2) expanding the use of school discipline models that promote retention and academic engagement in schools, for example, restorative justice practices that keep students in school and build their efficacy as students.

Focus Groups Update

Staff conducted focus groups with African-American students at Berkeley High School facilitated by Berkeley High Staff and at the Middle Schools, facilitated by the Berkeley Alliance. This information along with the Spring 2012 BHS student survey enabled the group to hear from our students. Staff is examining the information from the Parent Engagement Community Meetings held last year, the parent focus group held on April 10th and the community forum held on April 16th. Both the parents and students indicated the need for more racially and culturally responsive practices for students and parents, inclusive school and classroom climates, and meaningful relationships with staff. In addition, parents expressed the need for a more diversified staff and district practices that promote the recruitment, hiring and retention of teachers and administrators of color who embrace a culturally responsive educational climate. The participating parents appreciated the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions and requested more community forums and focus groups.

Best Practices in Berkeley and in Similar Districts

The work group identified and highlighted the best practices within Berkeley

and in other districts that have achieved positive results for African- American students. Since the focus is on the middle schools, the secondary school principals were interviewed to prioritize these best practices. The work group considered all of this information to identify the following four high-leverage strategies to be implemented in the middle schools in 2013-14:

Racial and Cultural Competency: Provide professional development for all middle school staff members to build foundational knowledge for infusing racially and culturally responsive practices into their work with students, families, and co-workers.

Response to Intervention and Instruction (RtI²) including a Positive Behavior and Intervention System (PBIS): Implement a continuum of academic, behavioral, and/or other intervention strategies for the Middle Schools.

Student Engagement/Mentoring: Address the need for African American students to feel successful, actively engaged in the classroom and in school life, and on a pathway to success. Strategies will include effective mentoring and coordination of support services for targeted students.

Middle School Bridge Program: Design a Middle School Bridge program targeting identified African-American students beginning with a 5th to 6th grade cohort from all three middle schools. Curriculum will focus on self-confidence, leadership, organizational skills and navigating Middle School.

In addition to the four strategies focusing on Middle School, the group is recommending two additional K-12 strategies:

Family/Community Engagement: Convene an on-going African-American Parent Advisory Committee to establish systems and structures to engage African-American families as essential partners in supporting the academic achievement of their children.

Recruitment and Retention of K-12 Teachers and Administrators of Color: Strengthen the District's commitment to meet Goal IV, Strategy B in the Action Plan to Close the Achievement Gap: develop and invest in prospective and current K-12 teachers and administrators of color by establishing networking, mentoring and other support systems.

The rationale and research for implementing each of the proposed strategies are listed below.

Racial and Cultural Competency

Rationale: Equity Rubric Section 3, Student Centered Learning and Teaching. Sections: Culturally Responsive Teaching. Student Focus Group Narrative Data Notes collected from middle schools, Pamela Harrison-Small.

Research: *Desire to Learn*, Jeffrey Lewis, Ph.D. & Eunhee Kim, Ph.D.; *Who Really Cares - The Disenfranchisement of AA Males in Pre-K School*, Tyron G.

Howard, UCLA; *Challenge the Status Quo*, Ivory A Tolson, Ph.D; *Toward a Critical Race Theory*, Gloria Ladson-Billings; *Race & Schooling of Black America*, Claude Steele.

Response to Intervention and Instruction (RtI²) including a Positive Behavior and Intervention System (PBIS)

Rationale: References in research as a proactive approach to keep struggling students engaged and connected to school. www.otlcampaign.org Cited in best practices of BUSD and other districts that have made progress in closing the achievement gap.

Research: *Closing Achievement Gap*, P-16 Council, California Dept. of Education; *Reducing Disproportionate Minority Representation in Special Education Programs for Students with Emotional Disturbances: Toward a Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention Model*, Nancy Harris-Murri, Kathleen King, and Dalia Rostenberg, Arizona State University; *Getting It Right This Time*, Donna Walker Tileston; *Pyramid Response to Intervention*, Buffom, Mattos and Weber; *Learning by Doing*, Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas Many.

Student Engagement/Mentoring

Rationale: Research as well as BUSD schools and other districts showing success with closing the achievement gap identify mentoring as a proactive approach to keeping students engaged and connected to school.

Research: www.otlcampaign.org pp.12-14; *The Pedagogy of Confidence*, Y. Jackson, Teachers College, Columbia University; *Courageous Conversations about Race*, Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton; *A Black Civil Rights Educational Agenda*, www.EducationIsACivilRight.com

Middle School Bridge Program

Rationale: Research shows that extended learning time focused on student academic, social and health needs will prepare them for grade level and college/career success.

Research: www.timetosucceed.com ; *Desire to Learn*, Jeffrey Lewis, Ph.D. & Eunhee Kim, Ph.D.; *Challenge the Status Quo*, Ivory A Tolson, Ph.D; *Toward a Critical Race Theory*, Gloria Ladson-Billings; *Race & Schooling of Black America*, Claude Steele; *The Urgency of Now*, Schott Foundation for Public Education.

Family/Community Engagement

Rationale: Building upon the work of the Parents of Children of African Descent (PCAD) and the District Equity Team's Equity Rubric, Section 2. Research supports the need for African-American affinity parent groups to engage with staff in the re-building of trust and to empower parents to navigate the school environment effectively. African-American Parent Focus

Group Narrative Data Notes collected by Charity DaMarto and the Berkeley Alliance.

Research: *Courageous Conversations about Race*, Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton; *Challenge the Status Quo*, Ivory A Tolson, Ph.D; *The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings; *The Urgency of Now*, Schott Foundation for Public Education; *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*, Henderson, A.T., Mapp, K.L., Johnson, V.R., Davies D.D.; *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*, Lindsay, Robins, Terrell.

Recruitment and Retention of K-12 Teachers and Administrators of Color

Rationale: The research shows the need for educators to become more conscious of the role that race and racism plays in school environments. The Action Plan to Close the Achievement Gap - Goal IV, Strategy B. African-American Parent Community Forum notes collected by Charity DaMarto.

Research: *The Dream-keepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*, Gloria Ladson-Billings; *Recruiting and Retaining Effective Teachers for Urban Schools: Developing a Strategic Plan for Action*, Claycomb and Hawley; *Reimagining Race in Education: A New Paradigm*, Carter; *Too Angry to Leave: Supporting New Teachers' Commitment to Transform Urban Schools*, Quartz and the Teacher Education Program (TEP) Research Group.

Staff is continuing to work with the 2020 Vision Design Team to explore ways that partnerships with the City, U.C., and/or the community could help to support these strategies.

The specific strategies proposed for 2013-2014 will be presented to the Board on May 22 for approval.

DISTRICT GOAL

II. Strategies to Promote Student Success

POLICY/CODE

Board Bylaw 9000

FISCAL IMPACT

None at this time

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Receive the Status Report on the Plan for 2013-14 to Accelerate the Achievement of African-American Students for information.

