

UMOJA

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Umoja?

Umoja is a school based program designed to support the holistic development of African American learners.

What are the programmatic components of Umoja?

- 1) **School-day course** designed to uplift and empower African American learners using African centered pedagogical approaches.
- 2) **Caregiver Engagement:** 1) increase entry points for caregivers to be informed about their child's progress, and to participate in site/district engagement activities.
- 3) **Site Partnership:** establish collaborative relationships with site staff, and provide thought-partnership for those seeking solutions to better support African American learners.

Why was Umoja developed?

Umoja, was developed in response to the following research questions regarding the Culture, Conditions, and Capacity (of adults) required for African American Learners to succeed¹:

Culture: What are the rituals, routines, and practices that result in effective learning environments for African American learners?

Conditions: What are the policies, structures, systems, and supports necessary to facilitate the healthy development and learning of African American learners?

Capacities: What are the skills, knowledge and awareness that adults need in order to effectively reach and facilitate learning for African American learners?

The Umoja framework allows for implementation of strategies fundamental to the success of African American learners. Being fundamental, Umoja exists to provide a learning experience that is needed but often not afforded to African American learners within BUSD.

What is the Umoja course?

The Umoja course is offered during the school day and provides a unique opportunity to expose learners to content traditionally overlooked by educational institutions. The course is facilitated by an African American teacher.

Umoja course lessons are rooted in African and African American cultural precepts, and are composed to guide African American Learners through:

- an exploration of their identities.
- an interrogation of their ancestral history.
- development of a positive sense of purpose and cultural pride.
- envisioning their futures and outlining a path for fulfillment.
- developing an awareness of their communal role.

What is unique about the pedagogical approach used in the Umoja course?

We believe in the innate capacity of all African American children to learn, and that it is the responsibility of a classroom facilitator to honor, nourish, and support intellectual and personal development. When African American children don't learn it is due to flawed systems, and inadequate teaching practices. We further acknowledge the

¹ Contact Kamar O'Guinn for references.

critical role that racism, bigotry, and cultural domination play in shaping learning environments and guiding teaching practices.²

The Umoja pedagogical approach is grounded in African beliefs about the purpose and process for learning. This approach recognizes that the purpose of education extends beyond skill development³. It asserts that learning experiences must reflect and/or foster African and African American cultural worldview, precepts, and values. The Umoja facilitator recognizes that these components are essential for African American learners to connect, access, and unlock content. They incorporate these elements into the fabric of the class, and understand that their effectiveness as a facilitator are hinged to their capacity to do so.

How does Umoja course impact academic outcomes/what about the “achievement gap”?

It is important to note that Umoja is a component of the BUSD African American Success Project (AASP), and that AASP is situated amongst several key strategies for “closing the achievement gap.” Umoja is not an academic intervention, and will not, alone, cause the “achievement gap” to shrink. However, research indicates that program offerings like Umoja often have a correlated impact on improved student achievement.

While Umoja is not an academic intervention, curriculum and lessons are designed with educational standards in mind, and delivered in a manner that supports academic development. These efforts most frequently align with literacy/reading, speaking, listening, and language abilities. We believed that interdisciplinary approaches to learning help to improve academic performance.

Although Learning Standards provide a common focus for teaching, they are not exhaustive and do not provide guidelines for how content should be delivered. Umoja seeks to enrich the learning experience of African American learners by offering content that is often overlooked by educational institutions and to deliver that content using strategies known to be effective.

What are the goals and anticipated outcomes for Umoja participants?

Dr. Wade Nobles asserts that the Afrocentric goal of education (harmony, understanding and enlightenment) is to assist in the development of a child who is⁴:

1. **Competent** : demonstrates a level of skill indicative that s/he has the ability to do something well.
2. **Confident**: Exhibits an attitude and approach to life which reflects the belief that s/he is capable of doing anything.
3. **Conscious**: Has an awareness of who s/he is, their purpose and path to fulfillment.

In this light education is regarded as more than a process for acquiring knowledge; it is seen as a process of transformation in which the learner progresses through stages to become excellent⁵. Student achievement emphasizes and reflects in the students' human conduct, social responsibility and moral character.⁶ Thus, our degree of success will be measured in our ability to facilitate student transformation in these areas.

As students make this transformation we hope to see improvement in commonly used institutional success metrics. Additionally, we hope to shift narratives about African American learners, and to disrupt the impacts of institutional racism by working with site staff and leadership to transform systems and organizational culture.

How is Umoja staffed?

Umoja is staffed by facilitators who demonstrate an understanding of effective methods for developing African American learners. They also possess requisite teaching credentials.

²Contact Kamar O'Guinn for references.

³Contact Kamar O'Guinn for references.

⁴Contact Kamar O'Guinn for references.

⁵ibid

⁶ibid

How is Umoja funded?

Umoja is paid for by funds received through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), as represented in the BUSD Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and grant funding from the City of Berkeley.

What is Umoja's relationship to Equity?

Discourse regarding equitable outcomes for African American learners disproportionately focuses on the distribution and availability of economic resources, and the programming opportunities afforded by those resources. Resources undeniably widen opportunities. However, when achievement disparities are attributed to underfunding, and lagging opportunities, we often cease to examine other factors that contribute to unrealized achievement goals for African American students. We divert our focus away from the culture, conditions, and capacities required for success. Along with funding, these components comprise the *educational system*. In order for African American learners to succeed the *system* must continue to be interrogated.

Umoja supplements the educational experience of African American students by acknowledging African/African American cultural precepts, values, and practices. This is particularly evident in the Umoja course. These elements are fundamental to the learning process of African American students, and must be valued as much (or more) as any academic intervention or enrichment opportunity. This perspective aligns with goals housed in the BUSD Local Control and Accountability Plan, expressly:

- Goal 2: Engage Students and Eliminate Barriers
- Goal 3: Involve Families and Communities
- Goal 4: Ensure Cultural and Linguistic Relevance

African American Success Project

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the African American Success Project?

The African American Success Project (AASP) offers a framework for delivering supportive systems to African American learners in Berkeley Unified School District's (BUSD).

Why was AASP Developed?

BUSD continues to struggle to reach identified education goals for African American students. While there are isolated moments of success systemic achievement is still unmet.

During the 2012-13 school year BUSD assembled a working group of internal staff and external stakeholders. The group spent several months analyzing achievement data, conducting research around national best practices, for the purpose of developing a plan to accelerate achievement for African American learners.

The working group submitted a report to the BUSD School Board, May 22, 2013¹. The report referenced the following as key focal areas for improving achievement for African American learners: 1) Racial Identity Classroom Climate, 2) Instruction, and 3) Supportive Systems. The following strategies were recommended for action, including steps for implementation:

1. Racial and Cultural Competency professional development.
2. Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTI2) including a Positive Behavior and Intervention System (PBIS)
3. Middle School Bridge
4. Student Engagement/Mentoring
5. Family/Community Engagement
6. Recruitment and Retention of K-12 Teachers and Administrators of color.

AASP was formed to encompass (4) Student Engagement/Mentoring efforts. This is expressed in BUSD LCAP Goals via Goal 3: Safe, Welcoming and Inclusive School Climate.

What does AASP do?

- **Disrupt patterns of institutional racism** by partnering with BUSD leadership to transform systems and organizational culture to better support the success of African American learners.
- **Uplift African American learners** to shift narratives about who they are.
- **Educate:** Umoja Program (grades 7-8).
- **Case Management** to identify root causes/barriers to success and coordinate support for individual learners.
- **Caregiver Engagement:** 1) increase entry points for caregivers to be informed about their child's progress, and to participate in site/district engagement activities.
- **Site Partnership:** establish collaborative relationships with site staff, and provide thought-partnership for those seeking solutions to better support African American learners.

What are the goals and anticipated outcomes for AASP?

The purpose of AASP is to create and cultivate a framework for delivering supportive systems to African American learners. Thus far, AASP efforts have uplifted needs for individualized support via case management and culturally specific learning and development opportunities as strategies for positive student growth. As such, each of these programmatic components have specific goals and anticipated outcomes.

¹<https://www.berkeleyschools.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/African-American-Acceleration-Strategies-052213.pdf>

How is AASP staffed?

AASP is staffed with the following positions: AASP Manager, AASP Umoja Facilitator and AASP Student Welfare and Attendance Specialist.

How is AASP funded?

AASP is paid for by funds received through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), as represented in the BUSD Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and grant funding from the City of Berkeley.

What site(s) have AASP programming?

AASP programming is offered at Longfellow Middle School.

What is Umoja?

Umoja is a school day class facilitated by an African American teacher. It is designed to support the holistic development of African American learners. This unique class uplifts classroom culture, conditions and adult capacities required for success of African American learners.

Umoja lessons are rooted in African and African American cultural precepts, and are composed to guide African American Learners through:

- an exploration of their identities.
- an interrogation of their ancestral history.
- development of a positive sense of purpose and cultural pride.
- envisioning their futures and outlining a path for fulfillment.
- developing an awareness of their community role.

What is the difference between Umoja and AASP?

Umoja is a programmatic component of AASP. The Umoja class serves as a vehicle for implementing outlined BUSD strategies for African American success specifically: supportive systems, student engagement/mentoring, family/community engagement, and recruitment and retention of teachers of color.