

Improving African American Student Outcomes in West Contra Costa

2017 Policy Recommendations Black Minds Matter Campaign

OVERVIEW

As we enter a time in our district and community of significant transition and potential growth, data-driven and evidence-based decision making has never been more important. Data is one of the most powerful tools to support our students' learning. Our students deserve access to the most effective programming, scheduling, and use of limited resources; however, we cannot make such decisions without gathering student data and other evidence of our effectiveness to assess current offerings and adjust course as needed.

Not just any data will do. High-quality data is disaggregated, providing views of specific groups of students to better identify gaps and inform solutions. High-quality data also shows how students are performing compared to a benchmark or standard. High-quality data offers detailed information at the student level, examining academic progress and impact

of programs and interventions. Lastly, data is most impactful for students when it is made available for use among all of our principals, school staff, and community members in a timely manner.



74% of our African American graduates in 2015 were not UC/CSU college eligible

According to GO Public Schools West Contra Costa's first annual report on student outcomes, **West Contra Costa Kids Can 2016**, throughout the journey from cradle to career, African-American students in West Contra Costa experience some of the largest and most persistent gaps in learning and achievement, as compared to our students from other backgrounds. In both 3rd grade English Language Arts and 8th grade Math -- two key indicators of long term academic success -- our African-American students performed the lowest among all ethnic

subgroups in 2016. In fact, just seven percent of our low-income African-American 8th graders met or exceeded standards in Math last school year.¹

The achievement gap between African-American students and their peers persists through the entire K-12 journey. Among 11th graders region-wide, our African-American students achieved at the lowest rates, with only 10 percent of students proficient in Math and 28 percent in English Language Arts. Additionally, just one third of our community's African-American high school seniors were eligible to apply for admission into the University of California and California State University systems, as compared to less than half of students region-wide. These results should not be acceptable to any of us -- and we can do something about them.

BACKGROUND ON THE BLACK MINDS MATTER CAMPAIGN

Over the course of the past year, GO Public Schools West Contra Costa has worked in partnership with nearly 200 families, educators, elected leaders, and community-based organizations to identify policy recommendations to improve outcomes for African-American students throughout our district.

This work led to the creation of the Black Minds Matter campaign and study team composed of parents, educators, and community members representing schools from across West Contra Costa. Initially, the team intended to develop a set of recommendations geared towards

improving outcomes for African-American students. **After several months of research and many conversations with stakeholders, it became apparent that foundational structures were needed to adequately understand the impact and gaps of the current programming for all vulnerable groups of students.**



APRIL 2016: More than 120 parents, educators, and advocates attended our Black Minds Matter Data Equity Walk. [View the data](#) showing the realities for African American students in West Contra Costa and statewide.



AUGUST 2016: 90+ community members, including WCCUSD board members, come together to offer input on solutions for our African American students. [Watch this video](#) about the Black Minds Matter Action Planning Kickoff.

The recommendations below from our study team build on the work of **The BlackBoard of West Contra Costa** and **The Education Trust – West's Black Minds Matter report**, as well as research on the current actions and services provided within the district and successful programming from around the state and country.

¹ Low-income students are defined as those with family income low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school meals; for a family of four this means an annual income of less than \$29,965 for free meals, or \$42,643 for reduced-price meals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our community engagement over the past year and the findings of *West Contra Costa Kids Can 2016*, we believe that there are four valuable next steps for West Contra Costa Unified School District: one global recommendation on improving data infrastructure and three focus areas where data collection and analysis are particularly urgent to improve outcomes for students. These recommendations are not meant to be comprehensive; however, we believe that they represent a foundational first step toward solving critical issues facing West Contra Costa students. We believe that improving our data infrastructure will enable us to assess current policy, program, and resource allocation and make more informed decisions going forward. Over time, we will also be better able to answer essential questions about what works for our students and what doesn't through comprehensive program evaluation, looking at the impact and efficacy of current program offerings.

Research supports the importance of data-driven decision-making at all levels across the education system, especially in districts with significant achievement gaps. Especially promising is a study of five academically improving school districts with high rates of both poverty and English Learners, which found that "making decisions on data, not instinct" was a critical factor in that improvement.² In addition, a study of 32 Bay Area schools

found that schools closing achievement gaps were more likely to be reflecting on data at the school- and classroom-levels on a regular basis.³ Both research and anecdotes suggest that these are not isolated examples, but that systems engaged in data-driven decision-making see academic improvement.^{4 5}

In West Contra Costa, we need data to light our way. Our African-American students and, let us be clear, many other groups of students, need more support than we are providing them. This is especially true in three areas identified using current data sets in the West Contra Costa *Kids Can* report:

- School Culture and Climate
- Kindergarten Readiness
- A-G Completion Rates

We need more information to thoroughly evaluate our current state of our system and make informed, thoughtful, and efficacious decisions moving forward.⁶

²Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do To Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools. A Project of the Learning First Alliance [and] A Leadership Brief., 2003-Mar. (n.d.). Retrieved February 13, 2017, from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED475875>

³Bay Area School Reform Collaborative. (2003). *After the test: Using data to close the achievement gap*. San Francisco: Author

⁴Supovitz, J., & Taylor B.S. (2003). *The Impact of Standards-based Reform in Duval County, Florida, 1999-2002*. Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

⁵Lafee, S. (2002). Data-driven districts. *School Administrator*, 59(11), 6-7, 9-10, 12, 14-15.

⁶Strategic Use of Data Rubric, Harvard University, <http://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr-sdp/files/sdp-rubric.pdf?m=1431311796>

RECOMMENDATIONS - FOUR NEXT STEPS FOR WCCUSD

To identify gaps in improving equity and opportunity for African-American students in West Contra Costa schools, our Black Minds Matters Study Team recommends the following next steps for the West Contra Costa Unified School District:

#1

DATA CAPACITY

The district should ensure that timely, actionable, and comprehensive data is readily accessible by educators, families, and the community to inform interventions to improve student outcomes. To that end, the WCCUSD Board of Education should provide funds in the 2017-18 budget to allow the district to restructure and, if necessary, expand its central data infrastructure and capacity to meet these goals.

#2

SCHOOL CULTURE

By the end of the 2018-19 school year, the Superintendent and district staff should produce a comprehensive school culture data set and make that data available to educators and families. This data set should include public, disaggregated reports on student attendance, discipline, and content from a comprehensive school culture survey administered twice yearly.

#3

SCHOOL READINESS

By the end of the 2017-18 school year, the Superintendent and district staff should publicly release disaggregated school readiness and preschool data annually, and develop a system to share relevant student-level data between district early education programs and kindergarten teachers.

#4

COLLEGE READINESS

By the end of the 2017-18 school year, the Superintendent and district staff should conduct an internal analysis of (or bring in an expert team to assess) district high schools' current course offerings, master schedules, access to counselors and interventions, and student course fail rate. The purpose of this analysis would be to develop a set of recommendations to increase A-G completion rates for all graduates, with specific strategies for supporting historically underserved populations.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

#1

DATA CAPACITY

The district should ensure that timely, actionable, and comprehensive data is readily accessible by educators, families, and the community to inform interventions to improve student outcomes. To that end, the WCCUSD Board of Education should provide funds in the 2017-18 budget to allow the district to restructure and, if necessary, expand its central data infrastructure and capacity to meet these goals.

CURRENT STATE

We know that many students are not leaving WCCUSD prepared for college and career. We also know that achievement gaps persist between African-American students and their peers throughout K-12 in West Contra Costa; however, we need more robust data to help us understand our African-Americans students' access to and outcomes from current programs, as well as next steps educators should take to help close these gaps.

Our 100+ conversations with school leaders, teachers, and families in the district surfaced concerns that decisions to make programmatic shifts to improve student outcomes are not consistently made in response to detailed evidence or student outcome data.

Furthermore, while the district does provide some high-level data, disaggregated customizable data reporting is not currently available to district staff nor to external partners and community members. Educators require this level of detail to monitor interventions, determine what is most impactful for our students, and make appropriate adjustments when students are not demonstrating mastery.

While school leaders and teachers must use data to inform practice and instructional choices, central office staff has a key role to play in providing tools and training to ensure consistent, quality data-informed practice across the system. Our initial research suggests that other districts and charters have adopted and developed stronger tools and are dedicating more resources toward data access and literacy.⁷ These investments are contributing to an increased focus on student outcomes and accountability.

Over the course of our research, it has also become clear that different types of data live within different district departments. This siloing of student information restricts analysis and slows the production of data that could be valuable for both educators and for the community at large. Consolidating data resources and ensuring clear ownership of data production will support the resolution of all of the above issues.

SOLUTIONS

We believe in prioritizing funding to the school site; however, we also understand the myriad roles that teachers and principals are already asked to play at their sites. We believe that a streamlined district data department could provide foundational support to schools and

⁷<http://www.air.org/resource/improving-equity-and-access-fresno-lessons-k12-higher-education-partnership>

educators to make data-driven decisions in pursuit of high student achievement.

We also believe that disaggregated and actionable data sets must be made public in a timely manner. To allow families to best support their students and to allow community organizations to act in support of the district, the entire West Contra Costa Community must have a clearer picture of the state of our schools.

In the 2017-18 budget, West Contra Costa Unified School District should fund an in-district Office of Data to provide the foundational and on-going data and school support necessary to increase student achievement. A fully developed and sustainably funded data team should:

- Collect, analyze, and publish student outcome metrics disaggregated by school, grade level, race, household income, program enrollment, and LCAP target subgroups,
- Support teachers and school leaders to be data-driven in their work, by providing easy access to customizable, disaggregated reports on both student achievement and school culture,
- Provide on-going coaching and professional development on using data to evaluate progress and make smart decisions in response,
- Identify district-wide trends and outliers to capitalize on successful programs and

invest resources in areas where more support is needed,

- Publish accessible public data resources developed to help build capacity among families and community members to better understand the state of our schools,
- Develop a district-wide data system that identifies struggling students, connects them to opportunities for remediation, and measures whether interventions are making a difference, and
- Assess each child's academic progress, incorporating data from the standard academic program, as well as any support programs, interventions, or electives.

This work should begin immediately and be resourced in the 2017-18 budget. A first step might be for the district to conduct an analysis of comparable districts to compare against the current WCCUSD data staff configuration to ensure that the adequate support needed to serve the district's 30,000 students and 52 schools is in place.⁸

⁸ <http://www.system2020.org/>

#2

SCHOOL CULTURE

The Superintendent and staff should gather and analyze a comprehensive school culture data set. This data set should include public, disaggregated reports on student attendance, discipline, and content from of a comprehensive school culture survey administered twice yearly by the 2018-19 school year.

CURRENT STATE

Overall, school climate and culture is an area of concern for many teachers, students, and families. Research shows that compromised school culture affects students' emotional and academic outcomes.⁹ The current data available on West Contra Costa schools includes the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and a district-administered survey for the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). Both of these instruments survey a limited number of students and neither has been updated on the district website to include information on the 2015-16 school year. These data sources cannot be easily disaggregated by student subgroups and therefore have limited value for gaining an understanding of local program effectiveness or unique school site needs.

While we lack detailed data about school culture, we do know that the disproportionality in African-American student suspensions is significant at a system level. In 2014-2015 across district and charter schools, African-American students made up 18 percent of students, but 44 percent of overall suspensions, with many of those including a “defiance” code. Information like this brings up many more

questions that current data cannot answer. To truly make an impact on this reality we must be able to gain deeper insight into many areas of our students' school experience.

44% of all suspensions in WCC schools in 2014-15 were of African American students

SOLUTIONS

Given the critical importance of school culture on student achievement and emotional health, the Superintendent and staff should develop a plan to improve and expand data collection on school culture metrics with one pilot cycle in the 2017-18 school year and full implementation during 2018-19. This plan should include:

- Collecting and publicizing school culture metrics, such as attendance rates and disciplinary actions, all of which can be disaggregated by school, grade level, race, program enrollment, and LCAP target subgroups,
- Maximizing the value of the CHKS data through disaggregation by subgroup and site to identify areas of success and areas of development, and
- Adopting, administering, and analyzing a survey taken at all grade levels each year at the start and end of the year to track student, staff, and parent reflections on school culture and program effectiveness.¹⁰
- An exploration of the possibility of enacting a policy that would end “defiance” suspensions, which are disproportionately used to punish African-American students.

⁹ <http://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/meta-analysis-child-development-1.pdf>
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Full-Report.pdf>
<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

¹⁰ <http://www.transformingeducation.org/measuringmesh/>
<http://www.air.org/resource/are-you-ready-assess-social-and-emotional-development>
<http://www.casel.org/compendium-of-preschool-through-elementary-school>

#3

SCHOOL READINESS

The Superintendent and staff should release disaggregated school readiness and preschool data annually to the general public while developing systems and structures to share student-level data with kindergarten teachers.

CURRENT STATE

The district currently uses the Desired Results Developmental Profiles (DRDP) assessment to measure student readiness for kindergarten. The results from this test, which provides information on student development in eight domains, is not currently publicly shared. The aggregated data is not integrated in existing district dashboards.

Additionally, there is no structure that currently supports kindergarten teachers in receiving data about their incoming students' individual outcomes from the previous year's DRDP. Without this detailed baseline data, kindergarten teachers are less able to plan or differentiate to meet the varied needs of their students. It is a missed opportunity to build on the positive outcomes we see in the pre-school data.¹¹

First 5 of Contra Costa County conducts a bi-annual school quality assessment on preschools that opt in to the process. It is a strong bright spot that every eligible district school has opted in to the quality assessment -- and the results are promising. This information is available on the First 5 website but, like the DRDP, is not integrated into existing district dashboards.

SOLUTIONS

Research suggests that high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are critical for both short- and long-term student success and cognitive development.¹²

We need to take action to ensure that West Contra Costa pre-kindergarten and transitional kindergarten programs are serving children effectively, including using currently existing data to help families and educators make decisions about student learning.

By the end of the 2017-18 school year, the district should:

- Release school-level preschool data publicly, to help families make decisions about the early learning programs in which they want to enroll their children.
- Develop a system to ensure that kindergarten teachers receive DRDP data on their incoming kindergarten children who have come from within the district preschool system. For students that do not come in with DRDP data, the DRDP should be administered in August so that comprehensive baseline information exists for all students
- Explore the validity of the DRDP as an assessment of early learning and determine whether a more accurate instrument exists.
- Explore the use of DRDP modules for grades beyond preschool. The quality of the K-2 modules should be assessed to determine whether it would be valuable to have one common PK-2 data set over multiple years to monitor student progress and program effectiveness.

¹¹ <https://gopublicschoolswwc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Quick-Stats-Pre-K-1.pdf>
<http://www.earlylearningdepartment.org/index.html>

¹² <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Pre-kindergarten/Pre-Kindergarten>

#4

COLLEGE READINESS

The Superintendent and staff should conduct an internal analysis of (or bring in an expert team to assess) district high schools' current course offerings, master schedules, access to counselors and interventions and student course fail rate. The purpose of this analysis would be to develop a set of recommendations to increase A-G completion rates for all graduates, with specific strategies for supporting traditionally underserved populations.

CURRENT STATE

As noted in West Contra Costa Kids Can 2016, despite a graduation rate of 85 percent, fewer than half (42 percent) of West Contra Costa graduates meet A-G requirements -- the baseline eligibility requirements to apply to colleges in the University of California or California State University systems. This issue is particularly pronounced for African-American graduates, only 30 percent of whom leave West Contra Costa schools with their A-G requirements.

There are many components that contribute to a lack of student readiness for college admissions. These can include a lack of course access, failure to complete a course with a "C" or better, and missing foundational skills. The current level of data available does not offer any insight into which of these is the core issue, nor to how the root cause might be ameliorated.

SOLUTIONS

We cannot continue to send forth the majority of our graduates and nearly 3 of

4 African-American graduates without the skills they need to succeed in college and career.

To address this problem, we need more information than is currently available. How many students have access to or are on a college prep track? How are we monitoring whether students are on track? How do students remediate lost course credits? Improved internal data systems analysis and an audit of district high schools would provide much needed information from which WCCUSD can prioritize areas for improvement and investment.¹³

To ensure that our graduates leave West Contra Costa schools ready for success in college and career, the Superintendent and staff need to conduct an investigation into the cause of the gap between graduation and A-G completion rates.¹⁴ This analysis, conducted by central office staff or by an external partner, should be conducted by the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year and include:

- A set of recommendations to increase A-G completion rates for all graduates, with specific strategies for supporting traditionally underserved populations,
- An examination of the extent to which schools create master schedules and

¹³https://www.erstrategies.org/districts/oakland_unified_school_district

¹⁴ OUSD Educational Opportunity Audit Report, Education Trust West

course offerings to enable students to graduate college- and career-ready in four years,

- An audit of student course completion with a “C” or better and pathways for course remediation for those who don’t,
- Next steps for high school staff that may include a) making adjustments to their 2018-19 master schedule to increase access to A-G coursework, b) support and training on responses for students off-track for college eligibility, c) the development of a system to identify and plan for students who begin or become off-track during high school, and d) the development of creative solutions to support student course completion and credit recovery.

Together, we can create the change that our students need. We must start with the basics of high-quality data and data-driven decision making.

Thank you for your leadership and input. It has been critical to research and action planning for these Policy Recommendations. We are honored to continue as partners in the work to improve life outcomes and opportunities for our community’s young people.

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