THE BLACK LEADERSHIP KITCHEN CABINET
AFRICAN/AFRICAN ANCESTRY
EDUCATION ASSESSMENT & RESEARCH PROJECT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JOYCE. E. KING, PH.D.
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JUNE 25, 2018
Letter from Brenda Smith-Ray, Community Elder

Beloved community, we are all familiar with the saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” In the year of 1999 the city of San Jose commissioned A Demographic Profile of the African American Community in San Jose’ and Santa Clara County. The report contained four recommendations. Unfortunately, only one of the recommendations was implemented. Symbolically, we as a community, only took a sip of the water to which we were led.

This Education Assessment and Research Project is more comprehensive than the one which preceded it in 1999. My request is that you read the Key Findings with your heart. Drink from our collective wisdom, and examine your conscience. This report, although painful reading, reflects our truth, our perspective, our experiences and our hope.

After thirty years of employment in this county’s educational institutions, including eighteen years operating a private, afro-centric school, my heart continues to ache for our students. This report affirms that our students encounter a variety of problems in Bay Area school systems (public and private). The key domains of inquiry in this research were: quality education, barriers, policies, and discrimination. The report findings validate personal accounts in which the valley is depicted as a toxic environment for students of African/African Ancestry. No one is qualified to change a system he does not understand, may this report educate and empower you to make necessary changes on behalf of our children.

This report may provide answers to your long-held questions, as it held the answers to some of mine. My questions were: Why do we and/or our students resist being referred to as “Africans”? Why do many youths exude shame of their culture and skin color? Why are our students threatened on school campuses by students and adults? Why would a middle school male silently pay a bodyguard for years? Why are our male students suspended at such a high percentage rate? Why are so many of our boys sitting outside the classroom or in the office? Why do our young adults who leave the valley for college not return? Why are our college graduates refused employment because they are not a “cultural fit?” Why would an 8-year old black boy not know who Martin Luther King was?

As a member of the Civil Rights era, I often feel the need to apologize to our young because when we taught them that they were equal to others, we neglected to teach them that others did not view them as such. We denied the failure of integration, so they were not taught how to recognize racism nor given the tools to fight it. Do your children know your stories of survival and how you cope with injustice? If not, who do they turn to for guidance? How do they handle the incongruities, shame, insecurity, embarrassment, and our denial of their experiences? Perhaps this report will encourage us to open our eyes and our hearts to a commitment of vocal visibility and support for all our students.

Education, unlike basketball and football, is not a spectators’ sports. Please get off the bench and get in the game! Our Silicon Valley community needs rebuilding, although numerous organizations have performed extraordinary work in our community. However, united we can be even more effective and supportive. Can we unite, confront the challenges, cut the criticism, and eradicate the barriers our students encounter? I believe we can. President Obama said, “We are the change we seek.” Sisters and brothers, “where there is a will, there is a way.”
Letter to the Santa Clara County, African/African Ancestry Community

June 24, 2018

The Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet (BLKC) of Santa Clara County was established in 2005 with a mission to promote and establish initiatives, programs, polices and legislative reforms that improve public safety, educational outcomes, economic prosperity and the social well-being of individuals and families within the county’s African/African Ancestry community. The BLKC membership is composed of community leaders that represent more than fifty organizations.

The BLKC elected to conduct an updated Demographic Study on the lives of African/African Ancestry community members of Santa Clara County. The BLKC referenced the landmark Santa Clara County African American Demographic Study developed in 1999 by Mason Tillman Associates, for a baseline comparative for this study. Pastor Lee Wilson, Senior Pastor of Open Bible Church, stated that the BLKC needed to conduct a study and assessment of the education systems affecting African/African-Ancestry Students and Families of Santa Clara County, to determine the “truth” about racism and our education. It is to his leadership and vision, that I dedicate this study to him.

In keeping with the BLKC mission, with the leadership of Walter Wilson, Community activist and business owner, Yvonne Maxwell, Executive Director of Ujima Adult and Family Services, Debra Watkins, Executive Director of, “A Black Education Network”, (ABEN), Brenda Smith Ray, education consultant, owner and President of Della productions, Leon Beauchman, and Carolyn Johnson, President and Vice President, respectively, of the Santa Clara Alliance of Black Educators, Sharon Ogbor, Vice President of Development at ALearn, Tony Alexander former school board member and consultant, our Assessment Research and clerical supporters, Kenisha Makau, MPH, and Ania A. Ray, MHA, worked collaboratively with world renown education researchers, Dr. Joyce E. King and Dr. Linda C. Tillman, and their team of researchers, to conduct this BLKC African/African-Ancestry, Education assessment and research project. We want to take this opportunity to thank each of them as well as the over 700 participants in this study.

Similar to our previous Health study, this education assessment and study will:

- Be of, for and by the African/African Ancestry communities of Santa Clara County
- Be a living document with regular updates

With support from the city of San Jose, the Santa Clara County Office of Education and First 5 of Santa Clara County, a collaborative partnership began to develop the education assessment component of the larger African/African Ancestry Demographic Study. Professional researchers Dr. Joyce E. King, PhD and Dr. Linda C. Tillman PhD were contracted to assist with the education assessment. The data was gathered from the African/African Ancestry community that captures the heart and feelings of the Santa Clara County’s African/African Ancestry community. The process developed during this education assessment will be used as a “template” for the remaining components of the African/African Ancestry Demographic Study. Other components of the African/African Ancestry Demographic Study will focus on social services, economic development, criminal justice and social/civic engagement, technology and cultural arts. As the Project Co-Chairs, we say thank you to everyone who has contributed to this education assessment and to those who will be involved in the upcoming components of the Demographic Study.

A very special thanks to our sponsors and major funders, CEO of First 5 Santa Clara County, Jolene Smith and First 5 Board Chairperson, Santa Clara county Supervisor, Ken Yeager, as well as Superintendent of the Santa Clara County Office of Education, Dr. Mary Ann Dewan. Thanks to the city of San Jose for a mini grant to kick start this effort. Thanks to Unity Care Group for their support as our projects fiscal sponsor. Your support is invaluable to the success of this important Research study, and we will look to your continued support as we advance solutions to creating better quality education for the African/African-Ancestry communities of Santa Clara County.

Thank you,

Yvonne Maxwell, Executive Director, Ujima Adult and Family Services, BLKC Co-Chair and BLKC Education Assessment and study Co-Chair

Walter Wilson, African American Cultural Center project, Board member, BLKC Education Assessment and study Co-Chair
The Santa Clara County Office of Education is pleased to have collaborated with the Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet and Unity Care Group on the African/African Ancestry Education Assessment and Research Project. It is my hope that this research can help educators in transforming education through equity, access, achievement, and inclusion so all students have what they need to succeed.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet, Unity Care Group, all the community organizations and individuals that contributed their time to be part of this important project.

Dr. Mary Ann Dewan
County Superintendent of Schools
Santa Clara County Office of Education
THE BLACK LEADERSHIP KITCHEN CABINET
AFRICAN/AFRICAN ANCESTRY
EDUCATION ASSESSMENT & RESEARCH PROJECT

Executive Summary
Joyce. E. King, Ph.D.
Linda C. Tillman, Ph.D.
June 19, 2018

The United States has experienced cycles of tyranny since its inception. For some the United States represents only this experience. A disillusioned liberal establishment has begun to worry that this country might be losing its democracy. However, the democracy some fear to lose was never achieved for many of us in the first place.

(Samudzi & Anderson, 2018, p.1)

Introduction

The County of Santa Clara is the fourth most populous county in California, with a resident population of nearly 1.8 million and a workforce influx that brings the daytime population to approximately 2.2 million. The County’s 1,312 square miles includes 15 municipalities and numerous special districts, as well as the metropolitan high technology area known worldwide as “Silicon Valley.” Santa Clara is the fourth most populous county in the State and the largest in the San Francisco Bay Area. Though this county is influential and world-renowned because of its contributions to technology, the grade point average for most African/African ancestry students is 2.0 and the relatively small number of students in Santa Clara County schools contributes to the lack of attention to their specific needs. Significant and persistent racial disparities that inspired this research include various indicators of disparities in students’ educational attainment as well as disproportionality in rates of suspension and expulsion, placement in foster care, juvenile arrests, and the number of students who are eligible for admission to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems. For example, while the percent of African/African ancestry graduates who fulfilled the course requirements for California college/university entrance increased since 2010 from 32% to 39%, Black students still lag significantly behind White (67%) and Asian American (79%) students. This pattern is particularly egregious for Black males, who lag behind girls in every school district in the County.

The Black Education Excellence Traditions
Which Shaped Santa Clara County

Society cannot neglect, hate, abuse and oppress a class, a part, without suffering itself; the indulgence of evil passions, the practice of bad conduct, re-act backward and forward; ignorance, vice, crime and suffering abound, and society is the sufferer; intelligent men see this clearly; they regard the education of youth one of the first and most important duties society owes itself; give good instruction to the young and withhold not.

Colored Convention of California, 1854

Unlike the well-defined social order of black subservience to whites in the South, race relations in the West were always in flux and conflicted by the region’s insincere embrace of racial tolerance and social equality. From 1890 to 1900 discrimination in the South Bay was administered by custom, complacency, and indifference.


Education, not escape, is the most important variable in the African-American freedom struggle since 1504. Santa Clara County is a regionally-important example of the agency of Black parents to take control of the learning experience of their children. Failure to understand and instill those African-American educational excellence traditions has caused a deviation from the norm. From 1850 to the present, African-Americans in Santa Clara County have placed the highest priority on educating their children, as noted in the statement above, without a commensurate response from local educational institutions. In fact, Santa Clara County public schools waited more than 60 years after the legal desegregation of schools and 50 years after the first Black graduate from the State Normal School in San Jose to open opportunity to Black educators.

African-American churches and social clubs took on the burden of inspiring and illuminating their children with tradition excellence rooted directly in the Free African Schools of the Atlantic coast. Readjusting the paradigm requires a profound shift from the current role of school systems to perpetuate white supremacy, as found by Stanford University Professor Emerita Sylvia Wynter (2005). As originally designed, schools for African-Americans have been the training ground for the central force unifying American democracy. In Road to Ratification: How 27 States Faced the Most Challenging Issue in American History, a direct correlation is found to exist between the creation of the first school for Black students and the end of slavery in a given state in the nation (Templeton, 2016).

For California, such schools were created to prevent the spread of slavery, including the most important of the mid-19th century—in San Jose. Training educators in the tenets of Black education to serve humanity—alasal tarej—the term used by the people of the great West African Songhoy Empire, is.

1 This essay (which will be included in full in the Final Report) was prepared by John William Templeton for the Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet African /African Ancestry Education Assessment & Research Project in collaboration with the Researchers, Dr. Joyce E. King and Dr. Linda C. Tillman.
a prerequisite for restoring the norm of Black academic and cultural excellence. As a pedagogy practice, Black educational excellence means valuing each person and each person’s unique history in daily classroom practice instead of either commodifying or simply erasing entire populations.

The 2016 California History-Social Science Framework offers “students the opportunity to learn about the world and their place in it.” However, as Wynter noted in an analysis of the 1989 version, both the classroom materials and educators’ professional development fail to deliver for African/African ancestry students. The first-grade framework is entitled “The Child’s Place in Time and Space,” with teaching the child about themselves as the first objective. In 2007, the California Council for the Social Studies commissioned an analysis of social science educators’ capacity to teach African-American history. Fewer than 20 percent of study participants could provide a culturally responsive lesson plan. The failure to place Black children in time and space, beginning in kindergarten, is the direct cause of abnormal outcomes.

An Infusion Strategy

Santa Clara County has direct links to the main narrative of American history through its educational history. African-American students are unfairly demotivated at the very first stages of grade school learning because they are not provided their relationship to time and space. The simple shift of describing African-American history as the successful campaign to defeat white supremacy, using the retention of African culture and excellence traditions, instead of an attempt to justify torture and kidnapping, empowers all learners to engage.

John W. Templeton has proposed the framework-compliant strategy of inquiry to encourage Santa Clara County’s school districts to engage learners of African ancestry and all students in the primary source research of the many untold aspects of each stage of African-American history locally. Through the California African-American Freedom Trail over the past 25 years, he has found that locally-based history is central to addressing the profound learning barriers which hamper students’ development and sense of belonging.

These accounts of African-American history are much more likely to catch teachers and students off-guard, tearing down stereotypes in a way they can take ownership of. An example of such a practice would be to assign a group of students to re-enact the class experience of the Phoenixonian Institute, complete with dress, learning materials, and biographies of the students.

The excitement witnessed at the opening of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, still fully booked after two years, or the billion-dollar film, “Black Panther,” is generated organically as students find out how nine generations of their forebears navigated and overcame unfathomable obstacles.

Changing the timeline of history, as Black Studies theorist, Professor Sylvia Wynter, and anthropologist Asmerom Legesse advise, opens up academia to many more students. That is, when the issue of justness is no longer repressed to ignore the slaughter of 175,000 First Nations peoples who lived in pre-Gold Rush California, the learning environment is a much friendlier place for African-American students.

Such knowledge will help African/African ancestry students understand the institutional forces that kept Black educators like Inez Jackson out of classrooms and that are still blocking access to the most lucrative careers in the global technology industry, rather than blaming themselves and losing hope. In African-American history, everyone is important because they have ten generations of ancestors behind them. To ensure that no child is left behind, no group’s story should be left untold.

Research Methodology: A Culturally Sensitive Research Approach

The purpose of this study was to investigate the educational experiences of African/African ancestry students in Santa Clara County, California. Data for the study was collected using a Culturally Sensitive Research approach (Tillman, 2002). This research is culturally sensitive because it uses the cultural standpoints of both the research participants and the researchers as a framework for the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, as well as reporting back to the community (dissemination of the findings). With regard to the dissemination of the findings as part of the practice of research, this study is culturally sensitive given our explicit intention to use the inquiry process in addition to the findings in support of the efforts of the Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet to mobilize, build capacity for critical analysis, and thereby deepen the community’s historical consciousness, knowledge, and understanding of the role of race/racial identity, belonging, and cultural/heritage knowledge in the liberation of African/African ancestry people. Culturally sensitive research approaches recognize not only race and ethnicity, but also position culture as central to the research process (Fournillier, 2010).
Key Findings

I. African/African Ancestry Community Members’ Definition(s) of Quality Education

Abstract

Community definition(s) of quality education and African/African ancestry (AA) students’ access to quality education as well as their suggested strategies is one of four domains that were investigated. The African/African ancestry community in Santa Clara County is scattered among 32 school districts and 15 municipalities in Santa Clara Valley—from Palo Alto in the north to Gilroy in the south. Like other Bay Area cities, the number of African/African ancestry residents is in decline as immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are well-established. This diversity is represented among the participants in the research and includes individuals (the majority of participants) who have lived in Santa Clara County for more than 12 years. These individuals recall a different time when “the community” was thriving: it was more cohesive, more middle-class, and more involved communally in culturally nurturing activities.

Participants recounted that despite difficulties their children experienced in Santa Clara County schools, many are now successful professionals in fields including engineering, teaching, social work, etc. Relatively newer residents are faced with the high cost of living and housing, in particular, with little or no connection to such shared experiences and traditions. One interview participant stated that some people look down upon the students of lower-income families, who are seen as “destined for juvenile hall”. Similarly, others discussed the “haves” and “have nots,” which reflects the reality of poverty and homelessness amidst the relative prosperity within the community. African and Caribbean immigrant families experience both harrowing racial incidents and are often perceived as being different from African Americans, and some members of these communities are actively participating in Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet activities. It is in this context that members of the Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet urgently embrace a vision of academic and cultural educational excellence that includes establishing an African-centered school.

Essential Questions

• Do African/African ancestry community members embrace a single story about quality education and community identity or do members of this community hold a range of definitions and beliefs about students’ access to quality education?
• Do adult and youth research participants share the same vision or understanding of education quality and access?
• Do “bi- or tri-racial” (a term educators use) students hold the same understanding of education quality as students who identify as African (Black)?

What Does the Education Assessment Tell Us?

Some members of the community hold assimilationist views. Others value cultural affirmation. These are differing responses to the cultural dislocation of mis-education.

While, most of the participants agree that students need to know about their heritage, some wonder how that might work given the “hodge-podge of cultures” in Santa Clara County where “everybody’s mixed with everything”. In addition to this way of thinking about being in the minority, some participants, including educators, fear being perceived as racist or self-segregating. Activist educators, nevertheless, create culturally affirming academic programs that function as “safe havens” to provide quality education.

The online adult questionnaires and interviews and online youth questionnaires provide contrasting stories; more than half the students indicate they feel: protected from bullying and discrimination, for example, that their parents feel welcome at school, that their teachers care, and that they have learned about their heritage at school. Nearly all of the students’ responses to questions about slavery indicate that they have accurate knowledge (e.g., “Enslaved Africans contributed to the development of the United States”). These indicators of a safe and supportive school experience contrast with the less sanguine responses of adults, including parents, in various data collection venues—interviews, group conversations, focus groups, and the Community Forum, as well as the online questionnaires. Parents and teachers recounted overtly racist traumatic situations experienced by even young children. One respondent wrote a lengthy statement that included an implied critique of African-centered education, with a focus on the importance of getting students prepared for jobs.

There are more “mixed-race” students in this community than students who identify with their African heritage and the former are less likely to want to attend a culturally nurturing Saturday school or an African-centered school.

Qualitative Data Analysis

• There is no single story or definition of quality education or belief about students’ access to quality education. The various definitions of quality education range from one that is totally focused on achieving academic qualifications that allow for career goals to be achieved to one that is also culturally centered in African ideals, traditions, and history and allow for individual understanding and appreciation of self as a strong, valuable individual in society.
• In all of the instances the definitions and beliefs relate to community and parent involvement in the education process, and the valuing of Black educators, administrators, and parents’ roles in the creation of a collective that benefits AA students’ academic, cultural, social, and psychological development, and well-being.
• Finally, age, stage in career, educational and personal experiences, and status in the community play an integral part in the adult participants’ definitions and beliefs.

Best Practice Solutions

The community needs to be mobilized to learn about the real meaning and value of African-centered education as an essential, democratic component of community wellness in order to make informed choices about the present and the future. Education is and should be about more than “getting a job”. What about education for citizenship, collective consciousness, and Ubuntu (Humanity): the Zulu (African) philosophy, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am.” (Mbiti, 1969)? Likewise, educators need sustained professional development to develop knowledge about and respect for African people’s long tradition of excellence in order to counter the prevailing ideology of anti-blackness, or Afrophobia, in education and society (King, 2018). A culturally-centered educational program can, in fact, benefit all students.
II. Barriers in the Education System
   Considering African/African Ancestry Students’ Learning Styles
   via a Cultural Lens Perspective

Being black does not mean that you are Christian. I would ask for events not to include just Christian prayer because if you continue to do so, you will be making minorities feel unwelcome and unrepresented. I say this as a Christian who witnessed discomfort on the faces of those who are not.

(Youth Online Questionnaire Participant)

Abstract

Participants in the education assessment identify barriers related to curriculum, instructional materials (including Common Core) and policy deficiencies, the need for systematic evaluation of the impacts of the many programs that are being implemented, culturally uninformed and insensitive classroom interactions with teachers and administrators that may contribute to harsh disciplinary action, as well as educators’ deficit views toward parents. The lack of a cultural lens exacerbates these barriers. Another barrier for African/African ancestry students is the absence of Black teachers and school leaders and a supportive community of people “who look like them and encourage them to be their best”. The broader community’s less than vigorous, organized, and sustained engagement on behalf of the well-being African/African ancestry students, especially those who are most vulnerable, was also cited as a barrier that needs to be addressed. Although not explicitly mentioned by the participants, the political clout of the African/African ancestry community would be strengthened by stronger collaboration among African ancestry educators, parents, other adult participants, and youth perceptions or assets.

Essential Questions:

- What barriers or assets do educators, parents, other adult participants, and youth perceive or identify related to parent engagement?
- Is the demographic profile of racial/ethnic groups in Santa Clara County a barrier to African/African ancestry students’ success and well-being in any ways?
- What barriers exist for children and youth of different ages and genders?
- Is the type of school setting (public, private, charter, parochial, home school) a factor?
- How do participants suggest African/African ancestry students, educators, and families can overcome any barriers they identified?

What Does the Education Assessment Tell Us?

Findings in this report include that educators often view parent engagement from a cultural deficit perspective and researchers fail to acknowledge race and racism as factors in teachers’ and scholars’ perceptions of students’ experiences. A critique of this deficit perspective using a cultural lens is supported by two important areas of research and scholarship that incorporates the knowledge and research of African/African ancestry scholars: Culturally relevant parent engagement and trauma-informed instruction/intervention. The Final Report includes commissioned essays by Tonia Durden (2018) and Circie West-Olatunji (2018). One barrier with regard to parent engagement is discussed in the parent engagement literature as the “ghosts in the school and its community” (Edwards, 2016). This expression refers to parents’ previous (often negative) experiences with schools and these silent, often traumatic memories, can be overcome by creating a welcoming school environment and communications that are culturally sensitive. Concrete examples of how to achieve better home-school relations were an important theme of the Black Educators Focus Group discussion.

While trauma-informed instruction, which was discussed in an interview with one African/African ancestry educator, is becoming increasingly important as a focus for professional development and school-based intervention, the fact that these approaches fail to identify racism as a form of trauma, can result in such interventions actually creating barriers to meeting the needs of African/African ancestry students (DeCruy, 2005; West-Olatunji, 2018). Expulsions and suspensions of young children, especially boys, can be linked to misdiagnosis and over-representation of these children in special education and pernicious labeling of children as “bad,” when educators are not adequately trained to recognize and respond to their more active and relational learning styles and behavioral responses to race-based trauma that African/African ancestry children and youth may display. Research documents such racial bias among pre-school teachers. Rather than focusing on “implicit bias” alone, however, attention should be given to dysconscious racism, which calls attention to the mis-education of teachers, that is, what educators learn and do not learn in their professional preparation programs about African people (King, 1991).

While not mentioned by the respondents, several African/African ancestry scholars consulted for this education assessment emphasize the urgency of promoting an understanding of the traumatic impacts of negative views of African American language for student learning and development (Nobles, V. L., 2015). A much-needed response to this racialized trauma is to teach African language/s not only for the benefit of African/African ancestry students’ historical consciousness and identity but also for educators’ professional development regarding systemic oppression as well as parent education (King & Maiga, 2018; Nobles, W. W., 2015).

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Participants identified numerous barriers such as: the small number of Black educators, inability to access resources and services, and lack of cultural representation in the school curriculum and the K-12 institutions, and poor communication between groups. These barriers are closely linked to the demographics of the county, specifically, the change over the years, and the economic context.
- Respondents affirmed that African/African ancestry students gain a sense of worth and are shown care beyond the classroom when they are taught by Black teachers.
III. Policies That Hinder African/African Ancestry Student Success

“Please put me in a black school.”

“We’re kids. A lot of us kids don’t see race. . . we see people. Many people have suffered greatly.”

“I wish there was a school just for African/Americans.”

“I wish Ujima had an actual class at our school for credits.”

(4 Online Youth Questionnaire Responses)

Abstract

Generally, respondents did not cite specific policies with respect to discipline, racism and discrimination, and other issues. Rather, in most cases respondents were unaware of specific policies and made general comments about the absence of policies that should or should not be used to address particular issues. However, responses indicate that parents, adults, parents of young children, and community forum participants felt strongly that there should be policies that guide the interactions of teachers, administrators, and other school personnel with respect to African/African ancestry students and parent and community engagement.

Essential Questions

- What do the data reveal about policies in Santa Clara County schools that are hindering student success?
- What are respondents’ perspectives about school and district policies in Santa Clara County schools?
- What types of information do policy makers need to foster success (academic and cultural excellence) for African/African ancestry students in Santa Clara County schools?
- What are best practice solutions that can effectively address school and district policies in Santa Clara County schools?

What Does the Education Assessment Tell Us?

A priority should be given to expanding the conversation on how policy affects educating African American students. (Parent respondent)

Respondents indicate that the Santa Clara County schools should implement and enforce policies that specifically address African/African ancestry students. Several policies were found to be especially important:

- **Discipline Policies.** Almost 60% of adults and 59% of parent respondents agree that “school discipline policies are administered unfairly in Santa Clara County” and that these policies are harming African/African ancestry children and youth.
- **Parent Engagement.** Respondents overwhelmingly agree that the education of their children is a real priority for African/African ancestry parents in the Santa Clara County community.
- **Recruitment, Hiring, Retention, and Promotion of African/African Ancestry Educators.** The majority of respondents agree that more African/African ancestry educators are needed in Santa Clara County schools. For example, 30% of parents indicate that their child/children had never had an African/African ancestry teacher, while only 26% indicate that their child/children had been taught by at least one African/African ancestry teacher. Further, almost 90% of the African/African ancestry educators who responded to the questionnaire agreed that “the absence of African/African ancestry adults (as teachers, administrators, parent volunteers, etc.) in the schooling experience of our children is harmful to them”.
- **Racism and Discrimination.** In this inquiry domain, much of the data applies to implementing effective policies. The majority of adult respondents in all categories indicate that African/African ancestry students are more often subjected to racism and discrimination and that there should be specific policies that address this issue (e.g., professional development of teachers and administrators). Parent education for advocacy in this area is also needed.
- **Curriculum.** California’s newly established requirement for teaching Ethnic Studies will require attention to curriculum development and teachers’ professional development in order to implement this new law.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

- Participants listed lack of knowledge, Common Core standards, and the disconnect between written policies and implementation as a few of the glaring hindrances.
- While there are district policies geared towards activities like restorative justice practices that can benefit AA students, there is still the issue of making the decision about whether or not it is worthwhile to spend the funds, given the small numbers of AA students and the greater interest in focusing attention on their lagging academic performance.
- Simultaneously, changes made based on new policies seem to lack an academic focus.
IV. 
Racism and Discrimination

Both overt and more subtle forms of racism and discrimination adversely affect students’ academic performance and well-being in Santa Clara County. Educators and families also experience traumatic impacts of racism and discrimination.

Abstract

Racism and discrimination is the fourth domain of inquiry in the Santa Clara County educational assessment. This research sought to gain insight and to understand how and in what ways racism and discrimination impact the social, emotional, and academic achievement of students of African/African ancestry in Santa Clara County schools. Further, the inquiry sought to reveal in what ways the Santa Clara County schools personnel engaged with parents, community members, social service agencies, and other entities to address incidences of racism and discrimination.

Essential Questions

- What do the data reveal about racism and discrimination in Santa Clara County schools?
- What are the research participants’ perspectives about racism and discrimination in Santa Clara County schools?
- What are some best practice solutions that can effectively address racism and discrimination in Santa Clara County schools?

What Does the Education Assessment Tell Us?

We examined publicly available records on students’ academic performance as well as the various forms of data collected during the investigation. The data yielded four key themes relevant to how racism and discrimination function and affect students, educators, and families in Santa Clara County schools.

Theme #1: Educators’ low expectations adversely affect African/African ancestry students.

I think teacher expectations prevent African/African ancestry students from reaching their full potential. The stereotype is that African/African ancestry kids are behavior problems, and it starts in third grade with African/African ancestry males especially. (Adult respondent)

- Eighty-one percent of parents, 70% of adults, 66% of parents of young children, and 20% of youth agree that teachers in the Santa Clara County schools set low expectations for African/African ancestry students.

Low expectations of African/African ancestry students can have a cyclical effect. That is, when students are told overtly or when this message is conveyed in more subtle ways that teachers, administrators, and other school personnel do not expect them to do well socially and academically, they can internalize those expectations and may underperform in the classroom or disengage from the teaching and learning process.

Theme #2: Curriculum issues are implicated in the under-achievement of African/African ancestry students.

I have witnessed instances where students have changed their academic performance after being immersed in understanding their culture, regardless of identity. These experiences have led me to conclude that attitude, not aptitude influences performance. (Adult respondent)

- Sixty-seven percent of parents, 93% of adults, 78% of parent of young children, and 63% of youth who responded to online questionnaires indicated that it is important that African/African ancestry students see themselves in the curriculum.

- African/African ancestry students who see themselves, their history, and culture affirmed in the curriculum are more likely to feel confident in their ability to perform well academically and more likely to have a sense of belonging in schools where they are the minority of the student population.

- Only 49% of youth respondents indicated that they “have learned about my African/African ancestry heritage at school.”

- Nearly 70% of youth respondents indicated that they would “like to learn more about my history and culture at school.”

- Nearly 95% of parent respondents agreed that education that affirms our children’s African identity and African heritage is important for their success in school and in life.

The absence of a curriculum that teaches about and affirms students’ African/African ancestry identity, the small numbers of African/African ancestry students, and the limited numbers of African/African ancestry teachers, counselors, and administrators in Santa Clara County schools suggests that these environments do not provide a space for students to form a collective identity that affirms their race, ethnicity, culture, and heritage.

Educators of African ancestry and families experience the harm that racism and discrimination inflict upon students. Teachers reported being reluctant to advocate for African Ancestry students for fear that their colleagues will accuse them of “being racist.” (Educators’ Focus Group and Online Questionnaires). Parents indicate they teach their children at home to correct what is being taught in school about students’ culture and heritage.
Theme #3: African/African Ancestry students experience the absence of protection from racism and discrimination by school personnel (teachers, administrators, etc.).

An African male junior high school student was told by his European American coach/teacher: “You better stay away from me,” as the teacher wrapped a rope around his neck and held the end up like a noose. A European American history teacher, during his instruction, told the class that many Africans wanted to be slaves and chastised the African ancestry female student for questioning him. (Black Leadership Kitchen Cabinet Steering Committee Member/local published news report)

- Nearly 87% of adults and 77% of parents of young children agreed with the statement: “I am concerned that teachers and school officials do not protect my children from racial discrimination at school/child care.”
- Thirty percent of youth respondents indicate that their teachers do not protect them from racial discrimination.
- Santa Clara County schools have had several incidents of racism/racial discrimination over the 2017-2018 school year.

Theme #4: Santa Clara County school teachers, administrators, counselors, and other school personnel need professional development to understand and respond effectively in culturally informed ways to the educational experiences of African/African ancestry students and impacts of racial trauma in their lives.

- Sixty-seven percent of the parents, 69% of the adults, and 94% of the parents of young children agree that it is important for educators to understand “the specific academic experiences of boys and girls of African/African ancestry,” as well as the “traumatic experiences of African/African ancestry students.”
- Ninety percent of adult respondents do not believe “Santa Clara County educators understand the ways that our children and youth learn best and use the knowledge to provide effective instruction for African/African ancestry students.”
- School counselors as well as counselors who are trained to recognize and address trauma should be more attentive to the challenges faced by African/African ancestry students.

Qualitative Data Analysis

- Discrimination and racism was a domain that participants most often associated with racial disparities, barriers, and attitudes of teachers.
- Instances of discrimination and racism were related to low academic performance, educators’ experiences, confrontations between teachers and parents, and gender-specific experiences of African/African ancestry students.
- Participants have called for professional training in traumatic stress and restorative justice practices to assist teachers in dealing with the experiences of AA students in the classroom.

Best Practice Solutions & Recommendations

Below is an example of a blueprint for a “Best Practice Solution” currently being implemented in the Rochester, New York School District by Dr. Joy DeGruy (2005), based on her now classic text, Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome.

The Relationship Model for Educational Intervention is a culturally specific approach for centering children of African heritage in their instructional program. Developed by Joy DeGruy, this model outlines and implements an authentic approach for engaging with and supporting students that is consistent with their lived experience and cultural heritage. DeGruy provides educators with a framework that defines and expresses the power of relationship to strengthen, motivate, and effectively connect educators with students and their families. This model accesses an African Diasporan worldview that offers healthy and healing emotional and behavioral supports for students of color. It provides a foundation for creating safe, engaging school environments, instructional programs, and school policies that are student centering and culturally responsive. Students, families, and educators experience the Relationship Model as a transformative approach for building student engagement and strong learning communities.

In conclusion, participants named a myriad of suggestions for best practice solutions that ranged from: the need for community involvement at various levels, culturally relevant teaching, creating a collective amongst the Black community, and hiring policies that would increase Black teacher and administration representation. Specific recommendations are as follows:

- Organize a Think Tank with and Study Groups with scholars and community-based historians and cultural preservationists to develop African-centered, project-based curricula about the history of African/African ancestry people in Santa Clara County communities, using local history resources. Use the curriculum for teacher training and for implementation in the schools (and community organizations) in conjunction with California’s new required Ethnic Studies curriculum. Marianne Kaba and Essence McDowell’s (2018), “Mapping a History of Black Women on Chicago’s South Side,” provides a model approach or blueprint for engaging youth in community-based research.
- Provide consistent, long-term professional development for all educators. It is important that administrators implement a systematic approach to addressing racism and discrimination in schools—one that uncovers attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that can be harmful to African/ African ancestry students.
- Implement specific policies that address the academic and social achievement of African/ African ancestry students. Policies should directly address the presence of racism and discrimination and how racism and discrimination can lead teachers and administrators to lower their expectations of African/African ancestry students, fail to protect students from traumatic racial incidents, and to view racist and discriminatory events as “isolated” rather than acknowledging the fact that racism and discrimination are a part of the school culture and institutional organization.
- Implement policies that ensure that African/African ancestry students who have the required GPA are encouraged to enroll in gifted and talented and advanced placement classes.
- Re-evaluate discipline policies to determine under what circumstances they unfairly disadvantage African/African ancestry students. Determine if these students are more likely to be disciplined for minor infractions such as not bringing supplies to class, not turning in homework, negative verbal interactions with teachers, not following directions, and other infractions that could be addressed without causing students to miss class time.

- Implement policies that ensure that African/African ancestry students have access to information about career and technical/vocation, the range of careers available to them, the type of training needed for various types of jobs, opportunities for internships, and post-secondary education generally. Such policies should place an emphasis on the role of the school guidance counselor in helping students to make informed choices about what they will do after graduation, how they can access information about post-secondary education, vocational/technical training, and other factors that will impact their lives after they graduate from high school.

- Form a planning committee to establish an African centered school(s) and/or form a coalition of churches, community and civic organizations, and professional organizations to establish formal relationships and discuss combining their resources to operate an African centered school(s). An African centered school would help children to become both culturally and academically proficient, instill a sense of cultural pride in students, and provide a consistent safe space for meeting and engaging in same-race affiliation. An African centered school could operate as a full-time school or as an after school and/or Saturday school. Consider offering African language instruction as part of the curriculum as well as a focus on African sacred science and the contributions of African people to math, engineering, science, and technology in Santa Clara County and throughout the ages.

- Provide intensive training to all pre-school workers. Such training should cover working with pre-school children (age groups, gender differences, appropriate instruction for each age group, classroom management, how to assess progress, working with parents, etc.) as well as anti-bias and anti-racism education.

- Provide training that is specific to teaching African/African ancestry pre-school males.

- Design an evaluation component to: assess teacher effectiveness (teaching strategies, classroom management, interactions with students, and parents, etc.) and measure family engagement outcomes and beneficial impacts of programs serving AA youth.

- Initiate and maintain consistent communication and collegial relationships with parents of African/African ancestry pre-school students and their care givers. Allow parents to express their expectations, concerns, and suggestions for working with their children.

- Promote positive parental engagement. School officials should model policies, communication, and other behaviors that let students and their parents know that the education of African/African ancestry students is a priority in schools. This would require that school administrators consistently communicate with parents and teachers about students' progress, opportunities for growth, and how the school can and will help students to access the various opportunities that are available to them (gifted and advanced placement classes, eligibility for scholarships, etc.). Implement models of parental engagement that position parents as advocates, assets, and leaders rather than helpers.

- Organize opportunities for African and Caribbean immigrants and African Ancestry residents of Santa Clara County, including the children and youth, to study together, plan together, and build their capacity for collaboration and mutual support. Similar efforts are needed to support families of “bi- or tri-racial” children.

References


This African/African Ancestry Education Assessment & Research Project was conducted with the assistance of the following researchers:

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Leon Beauchman: President of the Santa Clara Alli ance of Black Educators since 2002. He has worked with board members and stakeholders to offer activities that support African American students. He served 15 years as a Trustee on the Santa Clara County Board of Education and six years in a similar position with the Campbell Union School District. Leon served on the Board of directors for the California School Boards Association. He held management positions with AT&T. He has an MBA and master's Degree in Counseling Psychology.

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