



FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN OAKLAND

In each of Oakland's full-service community schools, the mix of programs, services, and supports reflect the unique assets and needs of the students and families served. At Oakland Technical High School, targeted strategies and a tight coordination of services support a focus on equity and the community school model, ensuring the academic, social, and emotional success of all students.

OAKLAND TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

Writing a New Story About African American Male Achievement at Oakland's Largest High School

Three days a week, you'll find Eric Clayton walking the track at Oakland Technical High School. He does it for his health and he does it to support Johnnie, an African American freshman and one of the young men he counsels and mentors. While students play soccer and Frisbee on the football field or eat their lunches on the bleachers, Clayton and his 14-year-old companion walk a mile or more, talking as they go about cars, school, family, and more.

Clayton (known as "Coach" to students and staff alike) retired in 2013 as varsity baseball coach. But rather than leave the school community, he has joined a new team, committed to providing students with the services and supports they need to graduate high school ready for college and career. Through individual and group sessions, Clayton and his colleagues create a safe space for students to talk openly about life challenges and offer tools and strategies for addressing academic or behavioral management issues. As importantly, they provide the consistent, caring adult presence that can make the difference between students staying in school or dropping out.

While maintaining a clear focus on the academic and social-emotional success of all students, staff are also leveraging targeted strategies to support African American males, addressing historical inequities and closing persistent gaps in

both opportunities and outcomes. It's groundbreaking work that is beginning to shift patterns and practices that have been decades in the making.

"There is a story that gets told about Oakland Tech," says Principal Staci Ross-Morrison. "It's a story that says Tech is two different schools – one school for black kids and one school for white kids." And while Ross-Morrison acknowledges that there are still spaces where those differences exist, she and her team are working fiercely to close the gaps. The school has steadily increased its four-year graduation rate, from 74 percent in the 2009-10 school year to nearly 86 percent in 2013-14, the highest of any high school in the district. Its graduation rate for African American males is nearly 76 percent – more than 20 percentage points higher than the district average. It also has one of the highest college-ready graduation rates, including for African American students.

By maintaining an unflinching focus on equity and embracing the community-school model, Ross-Morrison and her team are tailoring academic, health, and social-emotional supports to meet the needs of African American males and improving outcomes for all student groups. Together, they are writing a new chapter in the history of Oakland's largest high school.

This is their story.

Building a Strong Foundation

In 2011, Oakland Tech took an important step forward in its effort to remove systemic barriers to college and career-ready graduation. That was the year the school began requiring that all freshman take California Studies, a rigorous year-long interdisciplinary course linking history with literature. It was also the year Tech instituted a ninth grade “house” system to provide freshmen with a ready-made community to ease the transition to the large comprehensive high school.

This move was in response to an enrollment trend observed by teachers and administrators that tracked students by race and socio-economic class. Prior to the change, the optional course had become a defacto prerequisite for enrollment in the school’s Paideia program, whose students boasted the highest graduation and college acceptance rates. Students with stronger literacy and writing skills were programmed for California Studies in the 9th grade, and African American and low-income students were greatly underrepresented.

Making California Studies, and later Biology, part of the standard freshman curriculum was an important step towards equity, creating “a common foundation of knowledge, skills, and expectations from the outset,” says ninth grade teacher Jah-Yee Woo.

But, she adds, access to rigorous curriculum is not enough. That’s why the staff also developed the companion supports and practices that would be critical to student success, particularly for those who arrived at Tech without strong reading and writing skills. For example, ninth grade teachers provide drop-in tutoring every day before and after school,

and peer tutors provide additional academic support. California Studies teachers also design classroom activities and devise seating plans to foster equity and collaboration, and to encourage students to both seek out and provide assistance.

A particular area of focus, especially in the first six weeks, is creating a classroom culture where questions are acceptable and encouraged. “That’s a huge obstacle in ninth grade,” says Woo, when students are especially concerned about how they’re seen and viewed by their new classmates.

Just as standardizing key components of the freshman curriculum was designed to better prepare students academically, the institution of houses was integral to providing them with important social-emotional supports during the critical transitional year. Today, all freshmen take California Studies and Biology with classmates from the same house, guaranteeing that they have at least two classes with the same cohort. Teachers within each house have the same preparation period and meet once a week as a team to discuss lessons, plan common activities, identify struggling students, and strategize together about how best to support them.

The house structure supports deeper relationships — among students, among teachers, and between teachers and students. Those connections are valuable for all students, and are particularly critical for African American males. Deeper connections to their peers and to adults on campus provides the relational glue that supports good attendance, a key factor in students staying on course to graduation, and is critical to shifting away from punitive discipline practices that have



Students take part in a bondbuilding exercise at Studio One Arts Center



resulted in disproportionate suspensions and expulsions for African American males in Oakland and around the country.

“We’ve created a strong foundation,” says Assistant Principal Josue Diaz, who oversees the ninth grade houses. “We’re making good progress on academics and we’ve taken a giant step forward with school culture and climate.”

Increasing Diversity in Pathways and Programs

Building on the strong foundation that’s been created for all freshmen, Tech’s teachers, staff, and partners have set their sights on their next equity challenge: increasing diversity in college and career pathways and specialized programs, to which students apply in their freshman year. Although students can take challenging college-preparatory courses outside of the pathway structure, a comparison of experiences and outcomes between pathway and non-pathway students revealed some important differences.

On average, Tech students enrolled in a pathway have higher grades (3.0 compared to 2.6) and graduate at higher rates (96 versus 85 percent) than their non-pathway peers. Students in pathways are also more engaged, with better attendance and fewer disciplinary issues. The suspension rate, for example, was just two percent for pathway students, compared to 5.5 percent for non-pathway students in the 2013-14 school year.

Participation in career pathways varies significantly across different race and ethnicity groups, with African American males among the least well represented. In the 2013-14 school year, nearly two out of three African American male students were not enrolled in a pathway. To address this gap, the freshmen team developed a plan for the 2014-15 school year to talk with freshmen early and often about their pathway options, beginning with an overview in August, at the start of the school year. Leading up to the application process in March, they held a pathway fair and scheduled presentations from students enrolled in each pathway. Diaz developed a written information packet that detailed the application and selection process for each of the options.

In a day-long Youth Leadership Forum focused on equity, organized in partnership with Oakland Kids First, Tech staff and partners heard directly from students about the barriers to broader pathway participation and about how to improve engagement across all courses. During their time together, students shared their own academic experiences and the factors that influenced their decision about whether or not to apply to a pathway.

“I did not have the mindset as a freshman that I have now,” DJ, an African American junior, shared with his peers. “I looked at the Engineering Academy and the Paideia program and there were not a lot of black people in them. One or two people told me I could do it at the time, but I didn’t believe it. Now, I wish I had joined.”



Many of the older students echoed DJ's sentiments, citing several key factors that created barriers: not seeing students or teachers who looked like themselves, a perception that pathway courses were more difficult than other Tech courses, and lack of knowledge about the pathway option.

A few days later, parents came together with a similar purpose. Gathering in the library, they learned about the different experiences and outcomes of students inside and outside of pathways. Like their children, parents talked about the importance of students seeing others who look like them in classes in order to feel comfortable and confident to enroll.

Charting a New Course for African American Males

An integral part of DJ's growth – from a young African American freshman unsure of his abilities to a confident upperclassman offering reflections and advice to his peers – has been his participation in the African American Male Achievement (AAMA) program at Tech. The program, part of a district-wide initiative that has earned national praise and attention, begins with the Manhood Development class, primarily for freshmen, and includes additional college-prep courses and companion co-curricular activities.

"The focus is on students' social and emotional development," says Lamar Hancock, who heads up the AAMA program at Tech. "We create a safe space to build a new type of dialog

about what it means to be an African American man," he adds.

For students like DJ, that safe space serves as a catalyst for academic success. Some of the young men were introduced to the program in middle school, and the Tech courses build on that foundation. For others, the Manhood Development class represents the first time they've been offered a unique space of support and community. Classroom reading, writing, and discussions are augmented with field trips and other activities to support the development of a college-going culture among the young men and their families.

In a unique partnership, for example, the African American Male Achievement (AAMA) Program is partnering with Oakland Community Organizations (OCO) and the Department of Social Justice at Holy Names University in Oakland to increase college readiness and access for African American males. Through the college's Early Admit Program and with support from OCO volunteers, young men participate in workshops, receive peer mentoring from African American male college students, and join trips to area colleges and universities. Students who participate in the program are eligible to receive early notification (in the fall of their senior year) of their admission to Holy Names and are guaranteed a scholarship of at least \$9,000.

The partnership is one more piece of a focused and sustained effort to write a new narrative about what it means to be an African American male in Oakland.

Reading, writing, and intellectual conversations put their lives in an historical context and challenge and support them as they create a new vision of what it means to be strong, what it means to be a man. The day's reading of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, for example, becomes an entre into a classroom discussion of what it means to "take care of business," rather than getting duped by others who glamorize street life over academic excellence.

"Every day you're not on point, you become a pawn to someone else's king," says Hancock. "It's like signing your own death warrant."

Caring Adults, Supportive Communities

To many young men at Tech, Hancock is more than a teacher. He's a role model and a confidante, someone who understands their challenges and believes in their potential for greatness. Besides serving as instructor and mentor for young men in the AAMA program, he is part of a system of support orchestrated through the Coordination of Services Team (COST), a critical community school mechanism for connecting students to the resources they need to be successful. Teachers and other school staff refer students to COST, which meets every Wednesday to review referrals and to devise an individualized plan for each student. This cross-cutting team also includes staff from partner organizations, such as Lincoln Child Center and the TechniClinic, as well as the school's nurse, the parent liaison, Community School Manager Dawn Humphrey, and other school administrators.

Culture Keepers

Just as students have played a central role in Tech's strategy to understand and address equity issues, they are leading the school's effort to develop and reinforce a positive school culture. Student leaders have developed and refined the Pillars of Oakland Tech, an expression of the school's core values and expectations. Through work inside classrooms and at school wide events, they are reinforcing the Pillars.

Each month, Tech students organize First Friday events, centered around one of the school's four pillars: Positive Expression, Honor, Focus, and Community. The events feature food, music, and a variety of games and activities designed to bring the whole school together and build community, says Lukkas Brekke-Meisner, a graduate of Tech and the Real Hard Program Director. Over the course of several years, students developed and then refined the Pillars, which are now posted throughout the school. "New students don't know the history behind the Pillars," says Brekke-Meisner. "First Fridays are an opportunity to make the Pillars real."



A community conversation at Oakland Tech

The TechniClinic

For students and recent graduates of Oakland Tech, the school's clinic provides convenient and confidential services for a range of health needs, from a headache that prevents students from concentrating in class to a physical exam required to participate on athletic teams or education on nutrition or reproductive health needs. Managed by La Clinica De La Raza, the TechniClinic's services are provided free to Tech students and graduates (up to age 21), regardless of immigration status or ability to pay. Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, the clinic also provides health care to students from Oakland International High School, a high school for newcomer immigrant students located down the street from Tech.

Through the TechniClinic, students also have access to counseling, available by appointment or drop-in. Kamla Fennimore, a licensed clinical social worker, sees about 200 students a year, some over a period of several weeks or months, others only once. Some students just drop in for services and others get referred through COST. "Our model lends itself to students who wouldn't normally engage in counseling services," says Fennimore. "Whether they are facing a serious issue or just having a bad day, immediacy is critical to meet students' needs. If I need to talk to someone now, it doesn't matter if you have an appointment on Thursday at 3 p.m. If things are hard now, that's when I need to talk."

A Family Forum at Oakland Tech





An Oakland Tech student

“We work as a group,” says Humphrey. “Everyone is at the table and together we create a support plan that brings in services, involves parents, and makes sure students get the help and support they need.” The tight coordination, she adds, has been one of the key benefits of moving to a community school model. “In a large high school like Tech, it is all about organizing the services and partners and making sure everyone is talking to each other,” says Humphrey. “That’s how you are able to see the gaps and make sure we are serving students.”

Three key members of Tech’s COST team work out of Room 230 just down the hall from Hancock’s classroom, in Tech’s east wing. That’s where Coach Clayton, along with Kusum Crimmel and Gynelle McBride, have set up shop. Clayton and McBride provide individual counseling, including support for students with substance abuse issues, and run two co-ed groups, where students discuss a range of topics, from relationships to academics to health and fitness.

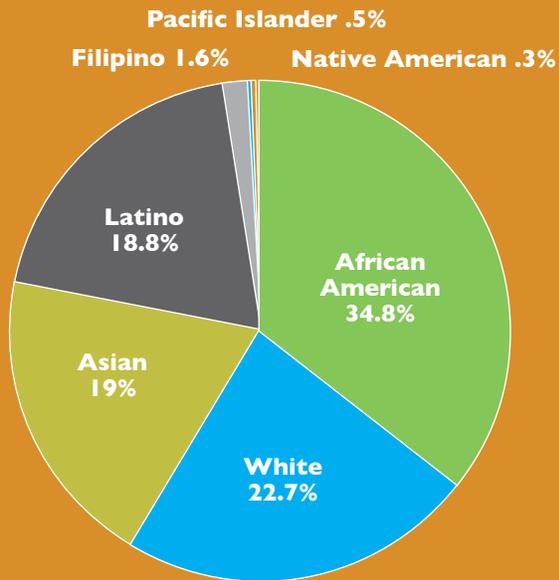
Clayton also has a group for young men, and Crimmel and McBride run one for young women. McBride manages a peer mentor program out of Room 230 and Crimmel co-teaches the student leadership class and trains students in conflict mediation.

Through all of this, the three, like Hancock, have developed a rapport with students, rooted in respect and trust.

A Life-Changing Combination

A laser focus on equity of opportunity, tight coordination of services, and caring adults who provide the personal connections so important during adolescence – these are the critical elements of Tech’s success. It’s this system of supports that is enabling Tech to write a new chapter in its 100-year-old story, one in which African American male students are at the center of efforts to create a school that works for all, not just the few.

2014-15 DEMOGRAPHICS



Number of students: 2,019

Students' Home Language

English: 70.1%
 Spanish: 13.7%
 Cantonese: 8.5%
 Vietnamese: 2.8%
 Arabic: 0.8%
 Other Non-English (Language): 2.4%
 Khmer (Cambodian): 0.4%
 Mien (Yao): 0.4%
 Filipino (Tagalog or Pilipino): 0.9%
 Tongan: 0.1%

Students Receiving Free or Reduced-Price Lunch: 56%



Oakland Technical High School

Oakland Technical High School opened at 4351 Broadway in January 1915. The historic building was declared seismically unfit in the 1970s and was scheduled for demolition, but instead was renovated and retrofitted. In 1983, a group of students successfully petitioned to have the building named an historic landmark.

Tech is nestled between the Temescal and Rockridge districts and many busy cafes, restaurants, and small shops line the main streets in the area. As the district's largest comprehensive high school, Tech attracts students from all over Oakland and its student body reflects the city's racial, cultural, economic, and language diversity. The school also boasts a number of well-known alumni, including actor and producer Clint Eastwood, June, Ruth, and Anita Pointer (aka The Pointer Sisters), and professional athletes Rickey Henderson and Marshawn Lynch.

HEALTHY SCHOOLS, THRIVING STUDENTS: Key Themes in Community Schools

A full-service community school shares much in common with one of Oakland's stately old oaks. Just as our beloved oaks need deep roots and healthy branches to grow and thrive, our schools need to be rooted in caring, respectful relationships and to cultivate strong partnerships if they are to provide students with the safe and supportive environment they need to be successful inside and outside of school.



OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
 Community Schools, Thriving Students

FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
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