

**AFRICAN AMERICAN
ACADEMIC
ACCELERATION**
IMPACT REPORT

**20
24**



Fresno Unified School District

**AFRICAN AMERICAN
ACADEMIC ACCELERATION**



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Message From Our

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Fresno Unified Community,

I am deeply honored to share this Impact Report — a reflection of the profound strides we've made together in advancing the academic success, belonging, and well-being of African American and Black students and families across our district. This report is more than a collection of data; it is a reflection of the passion, purpose, and partnership that have driven our work forward. It highlights the unwavering commitment of our Board of Education, the A4 team, educators, school sites, departments, community partners, families, and students—each of whom plays an essential role in creating pathways to opportunity and achievement.

At A4, we believe that diversity is not just a goal but a cornerstone of our success and identity. This belief guides us as we implement intentional initiatives, targeted resources, and meaningful support systems to address the unique challenges faced by African American and Black students. Our collective action ensures that every student has access to the tools, encouragement, and opportunities they need to thrive.

Since 2017, this work has transformed students' lives, strengthened family connections, and shaped a more inclusive, equitable future for our entire community. The stories and milestones shared in this report remind us of the profound impact we create when we work together. To everyone who has contributed to this mission — thank you. Your dedication fuels this progress and inspires the possibilities yet to come.

As we look ahead, our commitment is stronger than ever: to build a nurturing, empowering, and equitable environment where African American and Black students don't just meet academic goals — they thrive, excel, and shine. We envision a future where every student feels seen, valued, and equipped to leave their unique mark on Fresno, the Central Valley, California, and beyond. Together, through partnership and purpose, we are creating opportunities for our students to dream bigger, achieve greater, and lead boldly into a future filled with promise. Thank you for your partnership, your belief in our students, and your dedication to this essential work.

In Partnership,
Dr. Lisa Mitchell
Executive Director
Office of African American Academic Acceleration
Fresno Unified School District

A4's Story:

Advancing Equity and Excellence for African American & Black Students Since 2017



The Urgent Need for Change

During the 2016-2017 school year, standardized test scores exposed stark inequities facing African American students in Fresno Unified. Only 20.7% of the African American student group met or exceeded English Language Arts (ELA) standards, compared to 52.5% of the White student group. In Math, 13.9% of the African American students met or exceeded standards, compared to the White student group at 42.3%.

The academic disparities experienced by African American students in Fresno Unified resembled trends occurring statewide. California's African American student group scored 31.2% in ELA and 19% in Math, compared to 64.8% and 52.8% of the White student group, respectively. These numbers highlighted a systemic opportunity gap and an urgent need for focused and intentional change. African American students needed equal access to academic success. This reality demanded immediate and meaningful action.

Fresno Unified's Commitment to Equity

Recognizing this disparity, Fresno Unified is committed to the belief that every student deserves the opportunity to succeed. The district understood that achieving equity requires deliberate and purposeful action. While some progress had been made, the reality was clear: equity must be intentionally established.

In 2017, Fresno Unified made a pivotal commitment to transform the educational trajectory for African American and Black students by launching the African American Academic Acceleration (A4) initiative. This initiative was a movement to dismantle systemic barriers, increase opportunities, and empower every student to reach their full potential.

A4: A Movement for Holistic Student Success

What began as a focused literacy effort quickly evolved into a comprehensive initiative addressing academic achievement, leadership development, and holistic student success. This foundation paved the way for A4's expansion into a network of programs designed to create equitable opportunities for all students.

Equity as a Continuous Commitment

The progress achieved through A4 is meaningful, but the journey toward true equity is far from complete. Equity is an ongoing commitment that demands continuous action, advocacy, and innovation. Every success achieved through A4 continues to ensure that every African American and Black student has the same opportunities to thrive. Together, we can transform education into a system where every student is empowered to achieve their greatest potential.



A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY: BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

As a community and district dedicated to educational excellence, we embrace the responsibility of ensuring success for **all** students, as evident in our data and outcomes. Our results are a direct reflection of our districts values and priorities. We commit to ensuring that African American and Black students district-wide experience academic growth by focusing on equity and inclusivity in our educational practices. This commitment drives us to continuously evaluate and enhance our approach to educating the whole child. Together, we are determined to create equitable and sustainable systems that uplift our students.

The A4 Office is implementing system-level transformation within Fresno Unified to address academic disparities for African American and Black students.

Our key focus areas include:

- **Building Trusting Partnerships:** Strengthening relationships between African American families and the district through deeper engagement and collaboration with school site staff.
- **Asset-Based Approaches:** Prioritizing African American students' cultures and contributions to

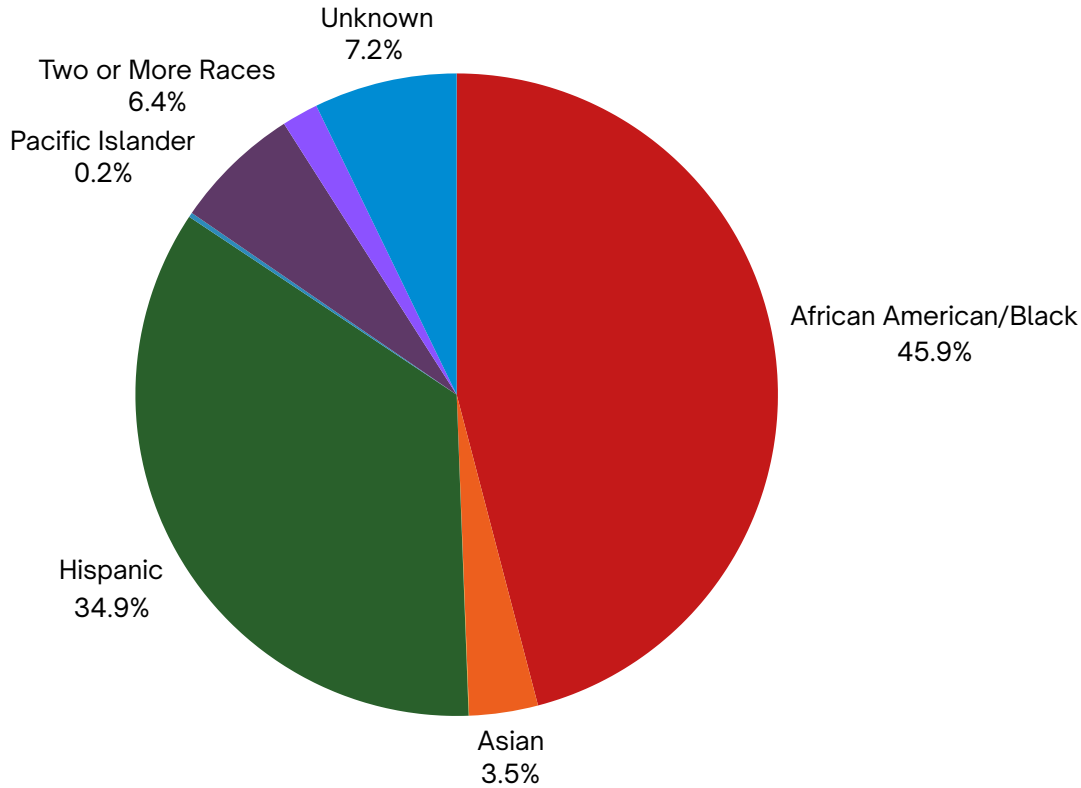
create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

- **Expanding Curriculum Content:** Integrating robust and authentic African American history and experiences into the curriculum enriches learning and reflects diverse perspectives.
- **Celebrating Cultural Contributions:** Honoring and amplifying the cultural differences and contributions of African American students and staff, ensuring they are integral to the culture and climate of our schools and district.

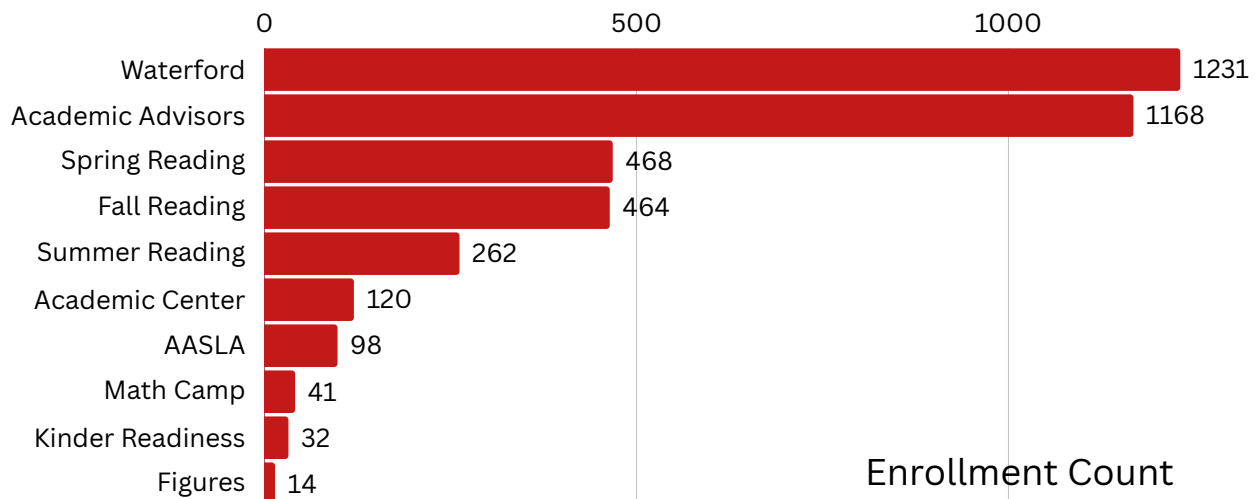
Fresno Unified's embracing these priorities reaffirms its commitment to educational equity, inclusivity, and excellence. Achieving sustainable change requires collaboration, accountability, and an unwavering dedication to better outcomes for African American students and families.

23-24 A4 PROGRAM DATA

Participation by Ethnicity

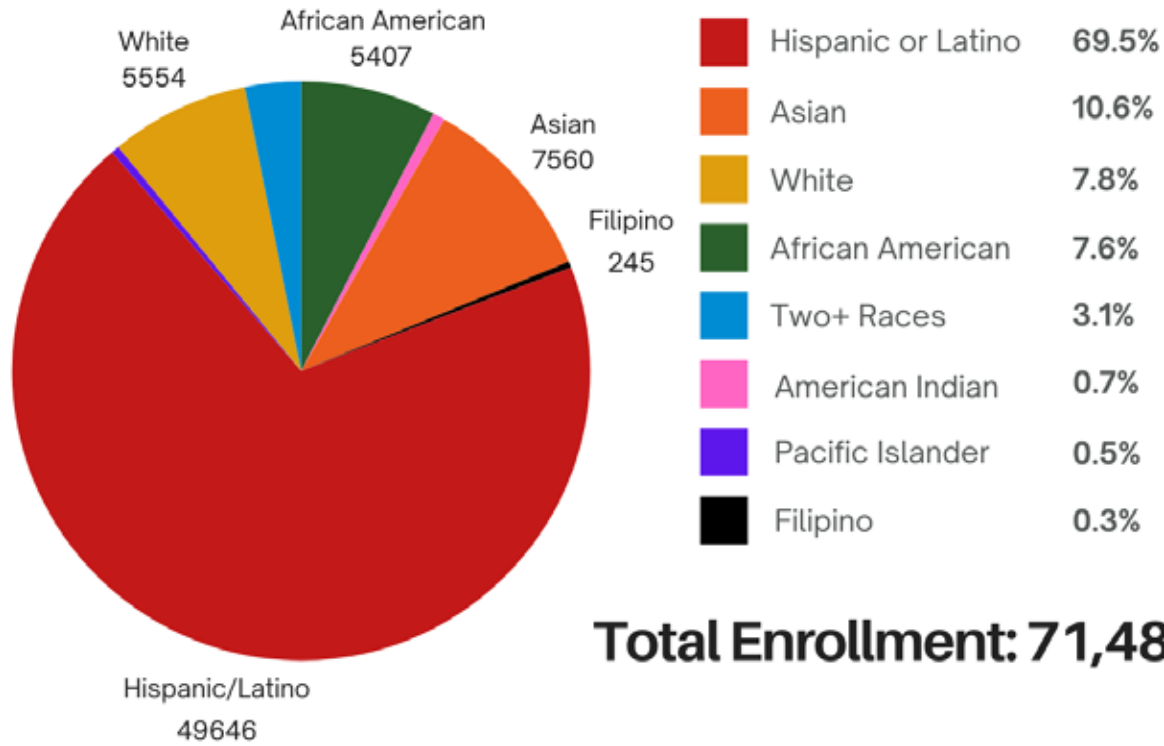


Participation by Program

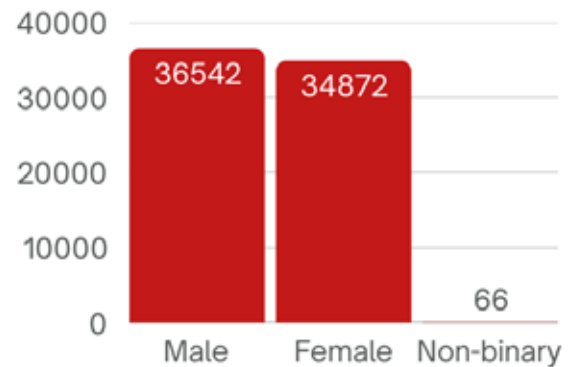


Total Participants: 3896

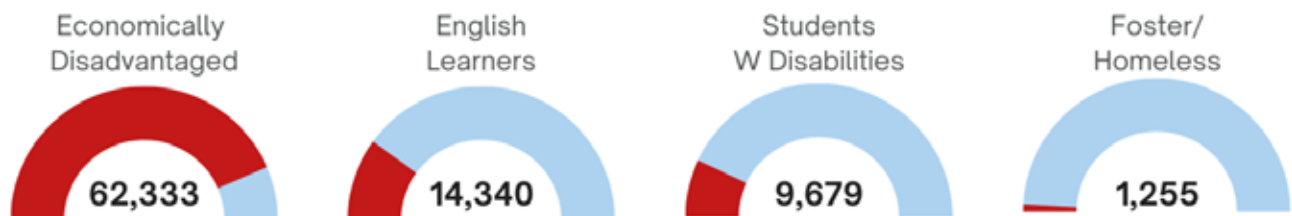
CURRENT DISTRICT STUDENT ENROLLMENT



Enrollment by Gender



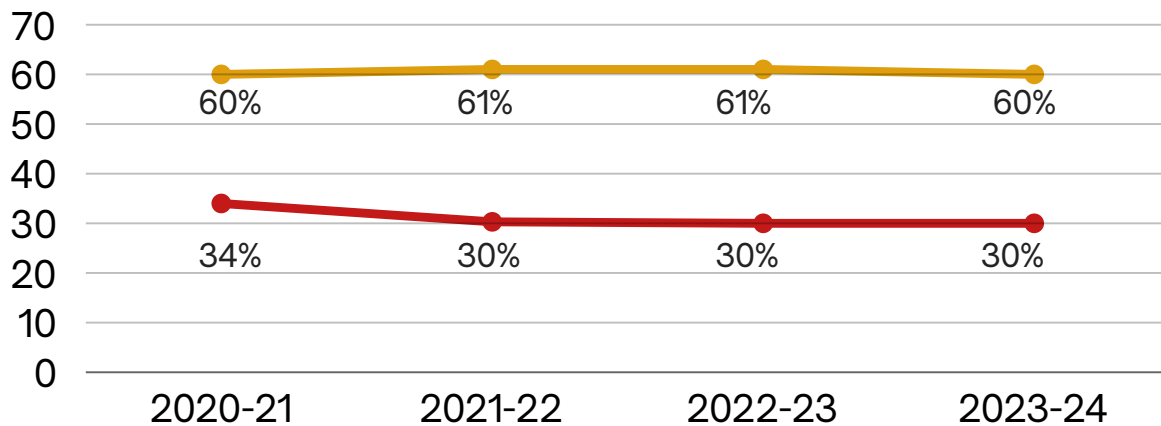
Notable Student Metrics



DISTRICT STUDENT DATA AND OUTCOMES

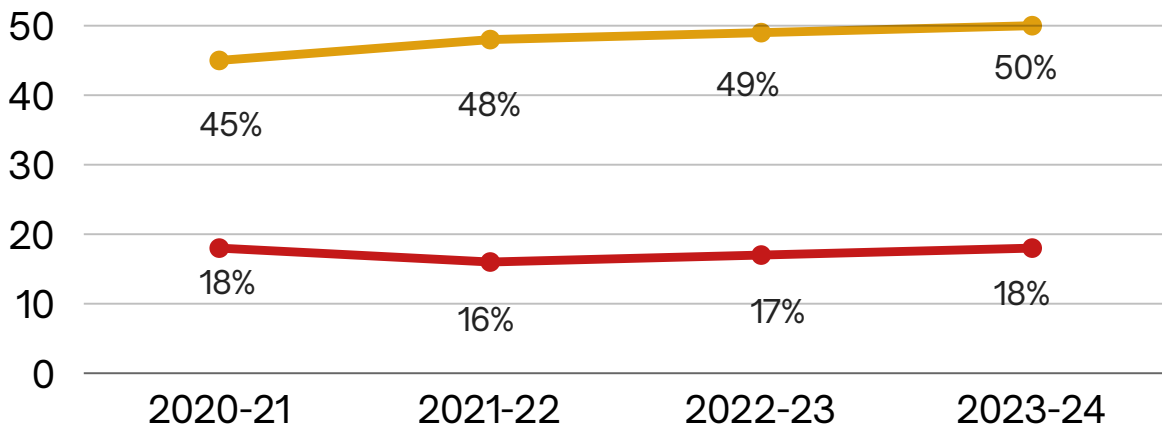
SBAC ELA (English Language Arts)

Percentages of Students at or Exceeding Grade Level



SBAC Math

Percentages of Students at or Exceeding Grade Level



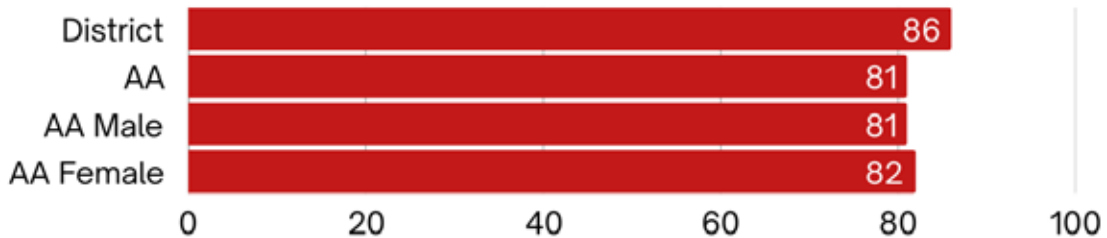
- District - African American
- District - Subgroup with similar # of Students

Source: California Department of Education (CDE), California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a public agency that collaborates with educators to develop Common Core State Standards-aligned assessment systems. These assessments are adaptive, meaning they adjust to each student’s ability level to provide the most accurate and meaningful insights into their learning progress. In this analysis, white students serve as the comparison group due to the similar enrollment numbers of white and African American students in the district.

DISTRICT STUDENT DATA

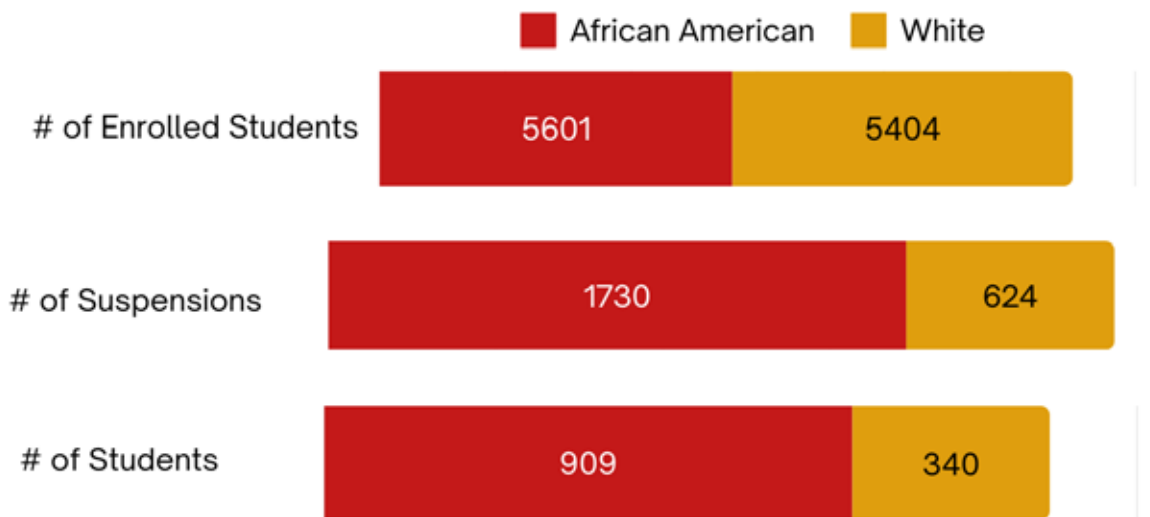
(CONT)

Graduation Rate %: Year 2023-2024



Student Behavior

Suspension Rate: Year 2023-2024

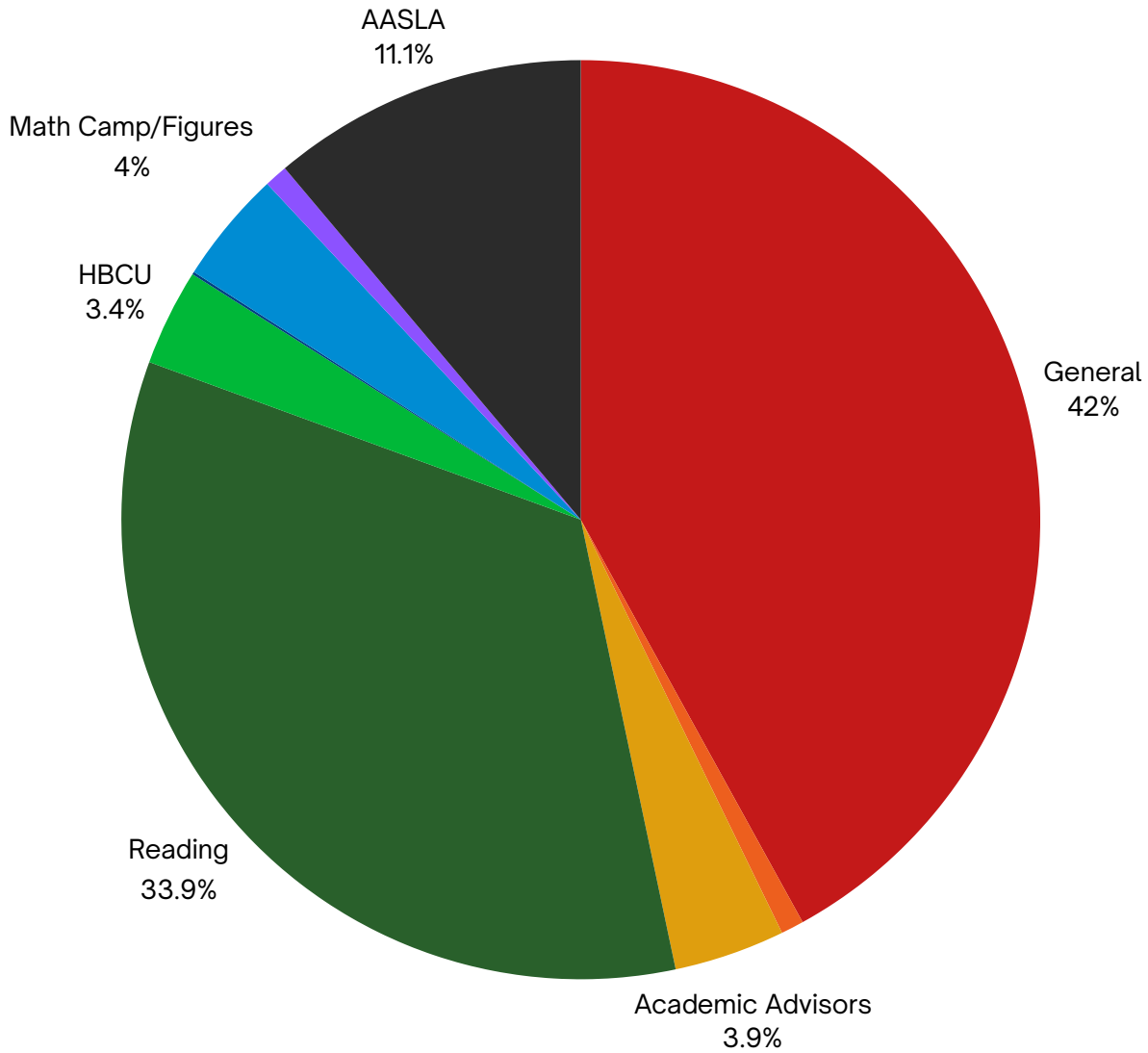


Absenteeism

Race/Ethnicity	Enrolled	Chronic Absenteeism Count	Chronic Absenteeism Rate
African American	5,395	2,294	42.5%
White	5,231	1,523	29.1%

White students are used as comparison group due to similar number of white students and African American students enrolled in the District. SOURCE: California Dept. of Education (CDE)

A4 BUDGET



■ General (inc. Salaries and Benefits)	\$4,869,521	■ Academic Advisors	\$448,228
■ Reading	\$3,745,632	■ HBCU	\$390,000
■ AASLA	\$1,279,116	■ Student Voice	\$93,641
■ Math Camp/Figures	\$457,059	■ Academic Center	\$92,386
■ Kinder Readiness	\$10,525		
Grand Total: \$11,480,731			



PROGRAMS

TK & PRE-K

Kinder Readiness

AA4's Kinder Readiness Program is a 3-week summer academy for pre-K African American students with no prior formal educational experience. It fosters essential academic and social-emotional skills, boosts confidence, and prepares students for a strong start in kindergarten.

Key goals:

- Equip students and families for kindergarten success.
- Build positive adult-child connections beyond the home.
- Lay the groundwork for academic achievement.
- Promote educational equity.
- Empower parents with tools and knowledge.
- Provide at-home learning resources for continued growth.

Waterford Reading Academy

In 2022, A4 partnered with Waterford.org to launch its first literacy program integrated into the instructional day, providing targeted support for transitional kindergarten through second-grade students. Waterford, a leading early childhood education nonprofit, leverages its flagship program, Waterford Reading Academy, to deliver personalized, research-based resources aligned with the science of reading. This innovative initiative strengthens foundational reading skills, enhances school readiness, and bridges literacy gaps during the critical early learning years, empowering students for lifelong academic success.

ELEMENTARY

Elementary Reading

The A4 Annual Literacy Program supports K-4th grade African American students year-round, enabling them to achieve and exceed grade-level reading proficiency. Through intensive summer activities, one-on-one mentorship, small group lessons, and family workshops, the program replaces summer reading loss with measurable gains, fostering long-term literacy success.

What began as a bold summer pilot in 2017 to close the literacy gap for African American and Black students has grown into a year-round movement, empowering thousands of young readers with culturally relevant learning. The program targets K-4th grade African American and multiracial students performing below grade level based on iReady ELA assessment scores, ensuring

focused and impactful interventions.

Since 2020, over 2,600 students have participated in A4's Reading Programs, collectively reading more than 140,000 books, proving that with the proper support, literacy can thrive.

Elementary Math

The A4 Math Camp is a three-week summer coding boot camp designed to help 5th—and 6th-grade African American students strengthen their math skills in a fun, interactive, and hands-on environment. Students engage in coding by programming robots and explore African American contributions to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and beyond through a culturally infused curriculum.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Figures

A4 Figures, piloted in 2024, is a project-based coding and robotics enrichment program designed to provide academic support and mentorship to African American and Black girls in 5th-11th grade. The program empowers participants to confidently pursue college majors and careers in STEM.

Program Goals:

- Promote Visibility in STEM: Increase representation of African American girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
- Empower and Inspire: Build confidence, establish a strong identity, and encourage participants to pursue STEM careers. Foster Academic Excellence: Enhance self-efficacy to excel in STEM subjects.
- Create a STEM Pipeline: Sustain interest in STEM through peer mentoring and afterschool engagement activities like clubs.
- Provide Culturally Responsive Support: Equip students, families, and academic networks with tools to strengthen identity, confidence, and mastery of STEM concepts and applications.



PROGRAMS

HIGH SCHOOL

Academic Advisor Program

The A4 Academic Advisor Program delivers personalized guidance and mentorship through dedicated advisors at participating schools. With enhanced support and consistent, in-depth monitoring, the program helps African American middle and high school students thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Advisors are committed to keeping students on track for high school graduation and preparing them for post-secondary success.

Academic Center

The A4 Academic Center for Suspended Students provides critical academic and goal-setting support for African American students suspended for non-mandatory expulsion offenses. By addressing disproportionate suspension rates, the center ensures students remain engaged in their education and progress toward grade-level achievement. Integrating African American history and literature fosters cultural empowerment and creates a supportive space for students to learn, grow, and reclaim their educational journey.

African American Student Leadership Academy

The African American Student Leadership Academy (AASLA) identifies college-bound 8th-grade African American students in Fresno Unified and provides mentorship and support throughout high school to ensure they are UC-ready upon graduation. Each cohort is identified by their graduation year, and students who meet UC requirements are guaranteed acceptance to UC Merced, creating a clear path to academic success.

Students engage in various enrichment activities, including:

- CADA Conference: A leadership-focused event emphasizing team-building, personal growth, and leadership training, significantly enhancing students' academic preparedness and confidence.
- UC Merced Onboarding Summer Camp: A program designed to equip students with foundational skills, setting them on the path to UC readiness.
- Cultural Writing Workshops: These workshops empower students to explore their cultural identities through writing while fostering essential skills like communication, critical thinking, and creativity.

Black Student Union (BSU)

The Black Student Union (BSU) fosters intellectual, cultural, social, and ethnic diversity across Fresno Unified schools. Its mission is to provide a positive and empowering representation of African American students through leadership development, college and career readiness, and student empowerment initiatives. BSU creates a supportive environment for students to build meaningful relationships with peers and trusted campus adults.

Types of Engagements:

Social Events: Building peer connections and a sense of community.

Mentoring Opportunities: Developing relationships with trusted adults for guidance and support.

Workshops & Leadership Development: Enhancing academic, social, and leadership skills.

These activities encouraged students to share their experiences, grow personally and academically, and contribute meaningfully to their school communities.

Step Up HBCU

A4's Step Up HBCU allows African American students to earn college credit while in high school from Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, one of the 100+ Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the US. Fresno Unified is the first district in California to partner with an HBCU for a dual enrollment program of this kind. Students accepted into this program have the opportunity to earn up to 12 free college units through live, virtual classes with Benedict professors.

Student Voice

A4's Student Voice is a program that gives African American high school students the opportunity to come together in a safe space as thought partners and create student-led solutions to the challenges they face as black students inside and outside of their educational setting.

Connect with our students and learn from them on Instagram [@a4_studentvoice](#).

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

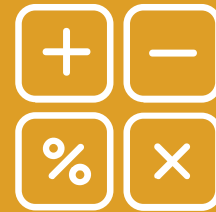
Student Academic Growth (Over 3 Weeks)

Math: 48% students showed growth in counting. 35% of students showed growth in number recognition.
ELA: 60% students improved in alphabet recognition



91%

Average Attendance Rate



Ayer Elementary Students Saw a

17 PT. INCREASE

in the Number & Cardinality Math Strand
over the course of the 3- week program.

"The A4 teachers are helping my son and taking him to where he needs to be before he even starts Kindergarten and that is wonderful to know as a parent."

-Melanie Richardson, Parent of 2023 Kinder Readiness Scholar

78%

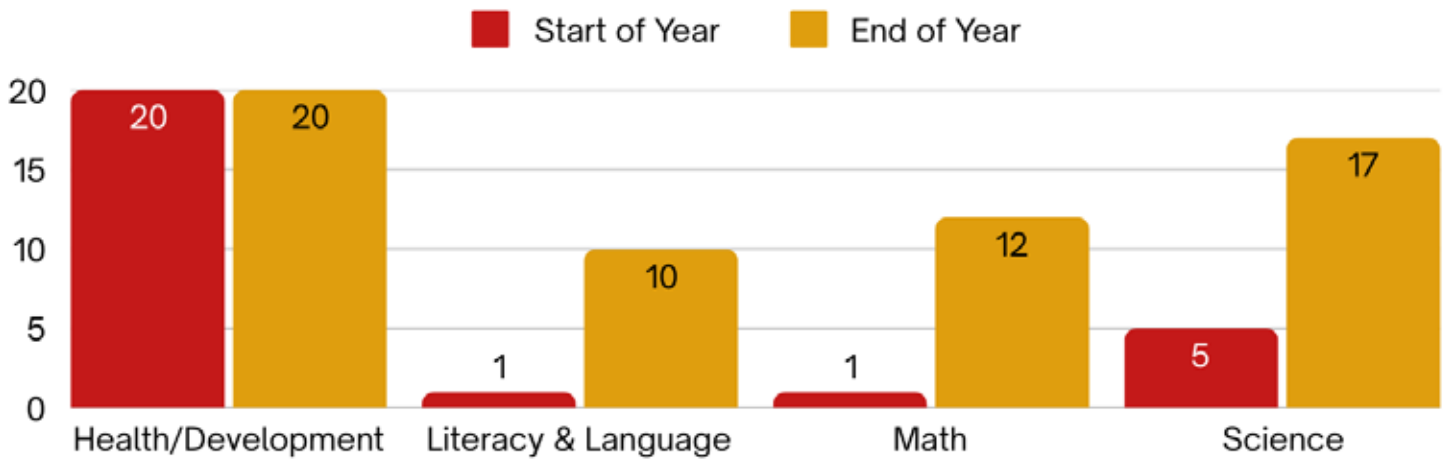
of parents feel valued and represented by the staff and activities.

32

Students Served

WATERFORD READING ACADEMY

African American Students - Growth Per Strand (in levels)



161

African American Students Served



African American students who utilized Waterford averaged

362

usage minutes for the 2023- 2024 school year

1,231

Total Students Served

16 Level Growth

in Literacy and Language

550

Average Annual Usage Minutes

MATH CAMP

In 2023, only **14%** of students pretested at Grade Level, and at the end of the 3 weeks, that number increased to **24%** of students who tested on Grade Level.



Impact:

- Launched: 2021
- Students Served: 185 and counting
- Locations Hosted: 8 schools across the district
- Partners: Fresno Pacific University, Fresno State University, STEM Compass, UC Davis C-STEM

83%

Average Program Attendance
Across all 6 participating schools.

97%

of parents felt their child was
positively impacted by Math Camp

STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

THE MATH I'M LEARNING IS REALLY FUN & I LOVE CODING NOW. I'M SO GLAD I AM IN A4'S MATH CAMP!

J. Chatman Herrera, Math Camp Scholar

NOW WHEN I SEE SOMEBODY NEW NEXT YEAR, I WON'T BE SCARED & NERVOUS TO TALK TO THEM BECAUSE OF A4'S MATH CAMP. IT MAKES ME FEEL REALLY CONFIDENT ABOUT MEETING NEW PEOPLE & MAKING FRIENDS.

Quaday White, 2024 Math Camp Scholar

I BELIEVE I CAN DO GOOD IN THE WORLD NOW BECAUSE OF MY TEACHERS.

Nail Ash, 2024 Math Camp Scholar

AFTER SCHOOL & SUMMER READING



2023-2024 Academic Year Highlights

Students Served:

- 1,193 students served across all sessions in 2023–2024.

Schools and Regions:

- Participation across 33 school sites.

Books Read:

- 70,620 books read or listened to (2023–2024).

Summer 2024 (3 weeks):

- Of 262 students enrolled, 84% of students met goals for books read.

Since 2020:

- Over 2,600 have strengthened their skills through A4's Reading Programs

African American students who participated in the After School Reading Program Experienced a

26%

point decline in **chronic absenteeism**, more than double the 12- percentage point decrease observed among non-participants.

35%

of After School Reading Program Participants grew at least one ELA iReady level from D1 to D3 in the 23-24 school year.

165

FUSD teachers completed pre-program professional development and received instructional support and ongoing monitoring.

33

Schools Participating

70,620

Books Read

TESTIMONIALS

This program has helped me with my confidence. I feel like I can belong as myself here because of the safe space teachers create.
Seraphina Scott, 2024 Reading Program Scholar & 10-Year-Old Entrepreneur

A4 has helped me a lot with reading. When I was 5, I didn't know how to read at all and now I keep on enjoying books and going into the books in my imagination.
Dayona, 2022-24 Reading Program Scholar

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY (AASLA)

Student Group	Attendance Rate	Academic GPA
All 9-12 Students	89%	2.6
Non-AA Students	89%	2.62
AA 9-12 Students	86%	2.38
AASLA 9-12 Students	92%	2.82

TESTIMONIALS

A4 really pushed me pass my limits.

When I came into the program, I was shy and I didn't want to talk to anyone but everyone was so nice and respectful and the teachers were great! This program and its teachers really took my confidence to the next level, and I have grown up to be a phenomenal girl.

Samiihya Delancy, A4 Scholar for 3 years & 2029 AASLA Cohort Participant

Impact:

- Launched: 2017
- Students Served: 752 and counting
- Locations Hosted: 30 Middle and High Schools across the district
- Partners: UC Merced, Fresno State University, Another Level Training Academy (Writing Workshop), and California Activities Directors Association

BLACK STUDENT UNION (BSU) LEADERSHIP



"I started BSU when I was in 7th grade and now as a freshman, I am the BSU secretary at my school. I am really glad I get to connect with a lot of new people on my campus and talk about BSU and all its beauty and light and invite other people to join as much as I wanted to. Learning about my culture really opens my eyes to new things I thought weren't happening in our community but really are like Fresno Unified's 10th Annual Black History Month event. Seeing women like Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Ricks leading this event makes me feel proud to know that when I am older I can create something like this and help other female students come together."

Jada Wells, A4 Scholar & BSU Secretary

FIGURES

In Summer 2024, 14 students district wide participated in the **Figures** STEM enrichment program. The STEM projects explored in coding and robotics included:

- **Shelters on the Go**, to support the local unhoused population.
- **RoDeliveries**, an errand service for the elderly to reduce motor vehicle accidents.
- **Medical Robot Delivery**, a contactless medical delivery service to reduce the spread of germs and illnesses.
- **Walkway Guardians**, a traffic guarding system to increase pedestrian safety for children.

ACADEMIC ADVISORS

A4's AA4's Academic Advisors have successfully provided support to over 1,000 African American and Black students in grades 6-12, helping them thrive academically and stay on track for high school graduation and post-secondary success.

Student Support Sessions:

- Grade Checks
- Binder and Backpack Checks
- Class Check In
- Small Group Intervention(s)
- Social/Emotional Support
- AVID Skill Building
- Attendance Check In

1,168

Students Served

6,196

Total Student Support Sessions Provided

FEBRUARY

saw the largest number of Student Support Sessions at 2207.

OUR TESTIMONIALS

This program has changed my life by inspiring me to keep on reading, work hard, and express myself.

Seraphina Scott

2024 A4 Reading Program Scholar & 10-year-old Entrepreneur.

"I didn't know I could program a robot as a 8th grader and now I know how to before I go into high school because of A4's Math Camp. I never really had a lot of confidence until I was part of A4."

Zakarius Mosley

2022-2023 A4 Scholar

A4 programs are showing students that representation is so critical to drive the message home that you have a place here at Fresno Unified.

If we had more programs like this, kids would feel confident. They would be raising their hands and answering questions and not feeling like they have to dim their light.

Dr. Janelle Pitt-Parker

Parent of A4 Math Camp Scholar

Both of my sons have been part of the A4 Reading Program for 2 years. They were behind in their reading skills and this program has been a springboard to help them get to the next level. My second grader was struggling academically because of the pandemic and this program has helped him by leaps and bounds. Reading has moved from a challenge to a pleasure for him. And my soon-to-be Kindergartner has already finished his 1st grade sight words before he starts elementary school.

This program has also helped me help my children learn better at home.

Gregory Scott

Parent of A4 Reading Program Scholars

My absolute favorite part of A4 Figures is building the robots because it allows me to express myself and create different designs. I can express all my creativity into these robots and that is so fun to me. Each summer I take a new program with A4 and they help me understand who I am and what I like to do. A4 has been so eye opening. Growing up, I never had an African American teacher and it was really sad to me. I never grew up with a teaching role model. A4 has shown me there are African American educators who can teach me and connect to me deeply. I now have role models in teaching. I have also seen videos of female African American scientists. This representation unlocks so many different emotions. I am proud and amazed at what these people are doing that look like me.

Trina Smith

4-Year A4 Scholar & Participant of A4 Figures Pilot Program

MEET THE A4 TEAM



Dr. Lisa Mitchell
Executive Director



Luis Ramirez
Program Manager



Dr. Domino Chumrley-Birch
Program Manager



Dr. Deshunna Ricks
Program Manager



Dr. Kimberly Hendricks-Brown
Principal Special Assignment



Robert Green
Project Manager



Jamaal Washington
Project Manager



Yolanda Rico
Coordinator I



Mai Kao Vang
Program Technician



Tamar Grigsby
Project Manager



Jazzma Perry
Paraprofessional



Pat Riddlesprigger
Manager III



Gloria Jenkins
Admin Secretary



Winnie Fletcher
Coordinator I



Jacqueline Machado Austin
Program Manager



Trisha Sutherland
Manager I



Stasia Salinas
Analyst II



Lakeysha Mattis
Teacher Special Assignment



Michelle Orozco
Budget Technician II



Annaket Saechao
Program Technician



THE POWER OF COMMUNITY: THANK YOU FOR STANDING WITH US

Acknowledgment and Gratitude

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the progress shared in this report.

To our Students and Families:

Thank you for your dedication, resilience, and trust in this work.

To our Educators and Staff:

Your passion, commitment, and unwavering belief in every student's potential inspire us daily.

To our Board Members and Community Partners:

Your advocacy and support make this work possible.

To our Readers:

Thank you for taking the time to understand the importance of this mission.

Equity in education is the collective effort of an entire community. Together, we are reshaping the future, breaking down barriers, and ensuring that every African American and Black student in Fresno Unified has the opportunity to thrive.

The journey continues, and we invite you to join us in this commitment. When we invest in equity, we are changing outcomes, transforming lives, and shaping a future where every child can thrive.



KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING



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<https://www.fresnounified.org/departments/african-american-academic-acceleration>



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