

UPDATE ON THE UMOJA COMMUNITY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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INFORMATION AND REPORTS

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Item 6.2

Issue

This item presents an update on the progress of the Umoja Community for Student Success in developing and expanding as a statewide effort to improve the success of at-risk students, especially African American students. Members of the Umoja Community Executive Committee introduced this program to the Board of Governors in January 2008 and returned at the Board's request for a follow-up report in July 2008. The Board expressed its unanimous support for the Umoja Community programs through a motion endorsing the programs as a component of the system's effort to improve basic skills attainment. The Board also included funding for Umoja in past year budget requests and asked to hear periodic updates on the expansion of the Umoja Community programs.

Background

Umoja, which began in 2006, is the first organization of its kind in California to develop a fully articulated philosophy and strategy, based on extensive experience and supported by strong institutional data, to improve African American student success. The Umoja Community serves at risk, educationally and economically disadvantaged students through culturally responsive curriculum and practices that are integrated with student services in supportive learning communities. A statewide model program, the Umoja Community has developed an expansive curriculum and serves as a professional development resource for community colleges wishing to better serve underachieving students, particularly African American students. With programs at 25 community colleges throughout California, the program serves more than 2000 students annually.

The core of the Umoja Community approach is grounded in culturally responsive theory, research, and proven practices that improve student success. The Umoja Community deliberately engages students as full participants in the construction of knowledge and critical thought and seeks to help students experience themselves as valuable and worthy of an education. The Umoja Community defines its mission as "seeking to educate the whole student—body, mind and spirit -- informed by an ethic of love and its vital power."

Umoja began as an all-volunteer, grass roots organization supported only by its members and a small fund generated by a consortium of community college Chief Executive Officers at participating colleges. The Umoja Community for California Community Colleges was incorporated in 2010 as a nonprofit organization with formal bylaws and a governing board. The Foundation for California Community Colleges serves as its fiscal agent and collaborator on grant writing projects.

The Umoja Community conducts a Summer Learning Institute for colleges preparing to launch Umoja programs. In addition, an annual conference is held each fall and regional symposia are held in northern and southern California each spring to provide ongoing support to affiliated campus programs. These professional development opportunities are the means through which Umoja pedagogy, practices and philosophy are shared. Umoja recently received funding from Learning Works to host a year-long professional development project with Umoja community programs, including 6 pilot colleges. This project will focus on the effectiveness of Umoja practices implemented across all Umoja colleges and findings will be shared statewide and nationally.

The Umoja Community continues to receive inquiries from high schools, colleges, and community-based organizations as awareness of the critical need to address African American student achievement increases and opportunities to collaborate with external entities are pursued. A partnership was recently established with UNCF (originally the United Negro College Fund) to create a pipeline which will increase articulation agreements and provide our students with directed guidance in admission and enrollment processes to facilitate the pre and post transfer transition. Umoja Scholarships (Historically Black Colleges and University tour scholarship and Academic Transfer scholarship) have been increased.

The work of the Umoja Community aligns closely with the recommendations of the Student Success Task Force and can play an essential role in addressing student equity in the drive for success. A data element has recently been added to the Chancellor's Office Management Information Systems to identify students who participate in Umoja campus programs. This will facilitate evaluation of the program to support its future direction and expansion.

Conclusion

This item is for information only.