

My Global Vision for Humphreys High School

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A narrative of deficit haunts American education. It places the blame for lack of achievement on students and minoritized communities, when the tests themselves are designed to devalue and exclude anyone who is not part of the dominant culture. The aggregated, quantitative data from which this “achievement gap” is identified is far removed from the students it claims to assess (Safir et al, 2021). At such a distance and with such an integrated bias, the data is not only meaningless, it is harmful (Au, 2009; Safir et al, 2021).

In three areas, current practice harms students, our community, and society. First, lack of support for and nurturing of students' cultural assets leads to a mismatch between ability and achievement (Safir et al., 2021, p. xiii; Williams, 2021). Second, power imbalances between teachers and students reduce learner agency and engagement (Freire, 2009). Third, nationally adopted quantitative measures used to assess student achievement and guide decision making do not accurately represent the capabilities of our students (Safir et al., 2021). We can no longer exclude students' lived experiences—valuable knowledge shaped by culture and identity—then measure achievement without considering those assets.

We envision a future of equitable education that welcomes, respects, develops, and measures the growth of the whole child. To make this vision a reality, we must acknowledge the endemic systemic racism, minoritization, and discrimination of all kinds that pervade American society and create a narrative of deficit in education (Hinnant-Crawford et al., 2023). Instead, we must nurture the assets of our learners, families, and community. Our narratives must reflect ability and competence. We must measure our success using a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools that reflect teaching effectiveness and student proficiency. Asset-based equity pedagogies (ABEP) focus on what students bring to the educational environment, not what they lack, making them an ideal framework to address these challenges by requiring us to speak a language of empowerment for all learners.

Three themes, or areas of focus, must be addressed for this shift to occur: professional development, power structures, and assessment practices. First, we must provide high quality, in-depth professional development in ABEP for teachers, administrators, and staff so they are well versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of Paulo Freire's (2009) pedagogy of the oppressed (POTO) and Django Paris' (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). Freire emphasizes the liberating action of education, while Paris' CSP asserts that instruction should reinforce rather than strip away the cultural uniqueness and life experiences of each student. These foundational ideas must be well understood by teachers before employing ABEP. Training must begin by acknowledging that current practices often uphold white supremacist ideology that suppresses nondominant cultures. This unacceptable systemic inequity fails our students; therefore, we must share our vision with them to prepare them to liberate themselves (Freire, 2005).

Professional development not only makes clear the need for change but also provides skills and resources to support it. It prepares us for the second area of focus, which is shifting

the power dynamic of education to match the reality that students and teachers are all learners and teachers together (hooks, 1994, p. 21). It is essential that the imbalance of power inherent in oppressive educational structures be dismantled if we are to create what bell hooks (1994) calls a “holistic model of learning.” Teachers and students, supported by staff and administration, must develop equitable power distribution to establish this model.

With power shared equitably in our classrooms, our measures of success must mirror the empowerment of our learners. Assessments must guide and emerge from instruction as teachers use ABEP methods, including cross-curricular collaboration, future-focused narrative storytelling, and project-based learning. We must base assessments of students’ abilities on holistic qualitative and quantitative measures, including interviews with students, teachers, and stakeholders (Hinnant et al., 2023, Safir et al, 2021).

Our school community unites in adopting and upholding asset-based equity pedagogies, including culturally sustaining pedagogies. We collaborate to define, develop, assess, refine, and provide continual commitment and support to the ongoing education of our community in ABEP principles and language. Teachers, counselors, and administrators, our nurse and other specialists, coaches, volunteers, school advisory committee (SAC), and parent teacher student organization (PTSO) members agree to hold each other accountable to resist ways of communicating, teaching, learning, and measuring that are deficit-based, minoritizing, or that minimize or exclude members of our community. We invest in the continued development of our teachers and staff, who in turn dedicate themselves to providing an excellent, holistic education to every student. By rejecting the implicit discriminatory mores of American culture, we shift from deficit-based interventions to asset-based engagement—reorienting our narratives, pedagogies, power structures, and assessments to give students an education that supports living and learning fully into themselves (CR-S Framework, n.d.).

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