

Supporting and Empowering Black and African American Women Students for Success - The California Community College Experience Podcast with the Founders of the Nandi Organization

Interim Chancellor Dr. Daisy Gonzales:

Welcome back everyone. This is Dr. Daisy Gonzales, interim chancellor for California's Community Colleges, and you're listening to another episode of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office podcast. Thank you for joining me. If you're returning to our podcast, then you already know that the 22-23 series has featured California Community College alums speaking about their educational journey and how they feel empowered and proud to be alums of this system. In doing so, my hope is that by creating a space to uplift alumni stories, we will get a clear picture about the impact of California's community colleges through the hard work and dedication of extraordinary human beings. Today's episode continues that theme, and it features the co-founders of a new organization for Black women in the California community college system. The two leaders featured today seek to empower and support students every day as a part of their jobs as California Community College professors, and as they stepped up to create Nandi, an organization that they created in 2022. I want to share a little bit more about who they are, but first, let me just say welcome Dr. Janue Johnson, Dr. Nesha Savage. Welcome.

Dr. Nesha Savage:

Thank you so much for having us. So excited.

Dr. Janue Johnson:

Yes. Thank you, Dr. Gonzales so much for having us today.

Dr. Gonzales:

Well, you know, for me, it's not really about titles, but it is about being able to recognize women, especially women of color. So from here on out, I'm going to call you Dr. Savage, Dr. Johnson. That's very important I think, for working professionals. So, if you allow me, that is what I will use for the rest of our podcast.

Dr. Savage:

Yes, Dr. Gonzales.

Dr. Johnson:

<laugh>. Yes. Thank you so much.

Dr. Gonzales:

I know we're going to get to chat a little bit more about Nandi, what Nandi is, but let me first start off by making sure that our listeners know who you are. Dr. Johnson has a diverse teaching background with experience in K through 12 and higher education settings. Her educational journey began with a bachelor's degree from California State University, Long Beach. She also received a Master of Arts in

Education from the University of Phoenix and a Ph.D. in Urban Higher Education from Jackson State University. She's currently a tenured associate professor and oversees professional learning for the campus community and the learning opportunities for transformation law at San Diego Mesa College. In her role, she oversees the design and implementation for professional learning activities for faculty and campus employees with the focus on equity.

And Dr. Savage currently serves as the professor and counselor for San Diego City College. She previously served as the dean of student development in matriculation and personal growth. You're going to have to tell me a little bit about that. <laugh> For over five years, but decided to return to the faculty ranks in order to focus on equity work centered around supporting Black women's personal and professional growth in the areas of policy, self-care, community care, professional development, scholarship, networking, and mentorship. Dr. Savage earned her doctorate in educational leadership for community colleges at San Diego State University. She also earned a master's degree in education with an emphasis in multicultural counseling, a bachelor's degree in sociology from San Diego State University, and of course, important to us today and associate degree in liberal studies from Santa Ana College. So welcome Dr. Johnson. Welcome, Dr. Savage. I want to hear a little bit more about your educational backgrounds, because that is what most of our students and alums really listen in for. Where did you come from? How did you get started, and how did it impact your journey? So I know Dr. Savage, in reading your bio, you are an alum. Dr. Johnson, you chose to work at a California community college. So, I want to start there. So, Dr. Savage, if you could reflect on your time as a student at Santa Ana College, why did you choose to come back and work at a California community college, and how did that educational journey shape who you are today?

Dr. Savage:

Again, thank you Dr. Gonzales, for this opportunity for allowing us to have space to kind of share about our experiences as Black women in the system, but also to the work that we're going to be doing with Nandi. And so, yes, I'm from Santa Ana, you know, and so when I think about my why and what brought me into higher education, I think about growing up in Santa Ana, California. And so, I went to Santa Ana High School, which was predominantly black and brown. It was under resourced and had underperforming students who quite honestly were not expected to go to college. And so, you know, when I think about my trajectory, I owe a lot to the community college system. You know, after graduating from high school, I became pregnant with my oldest child who is now a practicing lawyer. And I say that proudly because I <laugh>, right?

I say that proudly because I want other students who feel that they've, you know, may have their journey didn't go the way in which they planned because they became pregnant, or because they had some sort of hardship. To know that regardless of your circumstances, community colleges has opportunities for you that allow for you to get back on that path and still be able to achieve whatever level of success that you would want to in your life. And so, after graduating from high school, became pregnant, enrolled in Santa Ana College, and honestly, I didn't know that I really had like an objective of getting like a bachelor's degree, a master's or doctorate. I just knew that I wanted a better life for me and my daughter. I was on public assistance. So you know, when I enrolled at Santa Ana Community College, I was taking classes, but I was a part of the EOPS program and the CalWORKs program, which back then it was TANF, so it wasn't CalWORKs.

And so I feel like, you know, when I think about my why, I know that I wanted to become a counselor because I wanted to be able to support students who have the same background that I have, right? To be able to support them through their journey so that they can transfer, so that they can get their

bachelor's degree and go on to do whatever else that they want to do for their family and their community. And so, community college gave me that opportunity. I remember my EOPS counselor calling me into his office and telling me, "Hey, you're ready to transfer." And I don't even know that I was actually planning to transfer. I just knew I was taking classes, right? Mm-hmm. <laugh> the classes that my counselors told me to take. And so when he told me that I was ready to transfer, I chose San Diego State because it was far enough, right? <laugh>

To kind of get away from, you know, my mom <laugh>, to be quite honest, <laugh>, so that I can, you know, just sort of start my life for myself. But it wasn't too far, right? And I am so grateful, even for San Diego State University, I actually received all of my degrees from San Diego State. Go Aztecs! And so again, my EOPS counselor calling me in, telling me you're ready to transfer, made the world of difference. And so, again, you know, when I think about my why, that's why I'm so passionate about doing equity work, doing anti-racism work, doing race conscious work. Because now I feel that I have an obligation and a responsibility to center the voices of Black and Brown folks so that they have access to the same opportunities that I have been provided that will change the trajectory of their families and their communities.

Dr. Gonzales:

Hmm. Thank you for sharing that, Dr. Savage. I know EOPS was really instrumental in my trajectory as well. Dr. Johnson, sometimes our passion comes from different places, not necessarily a lived experience. And so, I would love to hear a little bit more about your early journey in education.

Dr. Johnson:

Yes, thank you so much, Dr. Gonzales and Dr. Savage for sharing your story. So, I was trying to think of just all the different things that happened as a result of me arriving in San Diego and joining Mesa College. But I thought about a training that I took in maybe in 2019 with the ESCALA. And ESCALA is a program that's a professional development program to gear professionals towards Hispanic serving institutions to earn a certificate. And I remember there was something that stood out to me in the training, which she said that students come into the classroom with a narrative of failure. <Mmm>. And I remember, I just always remember that, and I always think about it. Then she introduced Dr. Lori Rendon's validation theory, and she just went through how the different strategies that a professor or someone would just use to empower a student. And I thought about myself, and because I felt that way, I was a first-generation college student. I did take courses. I grew up in Oakland, California. And so, when I graduated, I think I had like a 1.87 or something crazy <laugh>, it sounds, but I just remember not feeling like I was learning. And it wasn't until later on when I read, you know, things by Paul Freire about the banking model of education and how he said, you know, that students are seen as just containers to pour into or to make deposits. And I remember that was the language that I could not articulate, but I felt when I went to school. Like that I wasn't a whole person, that I was just there to just receive information and memorize it and then try to regurgitate it back. And so I just think about when I started at Inglewood High School and after I graduated college, and I had predominantly, there was a large Latinx students population and Black students, and we didn't have books.

nd it really just prompted me to want to figure out how to be a light post or a guide to bring awareness to students that they were brilliant, that they were capable, that what they had to offer was valuable, and that they could do it through education, by learning about themselves, by learning things that

wasn't always introduced in a K-12 curriculum, but that they could be empowered, you know, to move forward. And so, I just had these different experiences as a student. And then when I did go to, you know, Cal State Long Beach, I, I had some community college classes, but I really just, it just changed my life. And because I started to learn theory, I started to just feel this freedom in liberation in my own learning process, that not only was I receiving information, but there was all this other information I could explore on my own and then try to like weave it together.

And so, when I came to Mesa College, it was this purpose or this drive to want to be able to talk to other instructors and practitioners and talk about how do we become that light post or that guide for students so that they understand what they're capable of, and then be that catalyst to empower them to move forward in their journeys. You know? And so, I went through EOPS, and I remember having that as just a strength to me, you know, because I remember, you know, I moved away and I was pretty much on my own when I went to college. And so it's been definitely a learning experience to work predominantly with faculty, but thinking about that students have this narrative of failure, thinking about how I had that narrative for myself, and that this was an opportunity for me to not only help them learn culturally responsive practices, but also understand how to have empathy and how to have kindness and love, and to not think of their students as a container, you know? But to think about them as whole people.

Dr. Gonzales:

Mm. I love how both of your backgrounds start with a personal calling, what you're calling your why, but then you have now in the middle of a global pandemic created a bigger vision to then say, and now we want to help prepare the next generation of African American women who are going to lead this system, who are leading this system. Absolutely. But in growing and nurturing the next generation. So I want to pivot, and I want to ask you some questions about Nandi, but before I do, I want to just share that as I was reading your mission and your vision statement, I got chills. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>, because I have seen so many women, the number of women who are now in roles as CEOs has increased in the last five years. Yes. But to see African American women in leadership, especially as we are closing out Black and African American History month, but as we head into Women's History month, this conversation could not be more important.

Let me just read out your vision. Your vision is to be the nation's, the nation. Imagine, the nation's leading organization in the representation and engagement of women of African ancestry in the community college system. And even more impressive is your mission, your why, to provide your expertise to community colleges, to build support and sustain institutional capacity to help Black women professionals and students succeed in the California community college system. And I added the California part, but I see your bigger vision, and I want to hear more about that. What led you to creating this organization in the middle of a global pandemic? Let's dig deeper. Dr. Johnson, why don't you go first?

Dr. Johnson:

Thank you, Dr. Gonzales. So first I want to say that Dr. Savage, she has been instrumental in bringing us together. And there was a synergy among us around this vision that she presented on how we can be in service, support, and build a community that addressed our unique challenges as Black women. And so, we wanted to create a space for Black women to have sisterhood, for community healing and support. And recently we hosted a webinar and we posed this question to the women that were in that group, what does sisterhood mean to you? And in the word cloud, there were three prominent words

that emerged from that group. And that was love, support, and trust. And so that made me think of this quote from Bell Hook that says, solidarity is not the same as support. We must have a community of interests share beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build sisterhood. And support can be occasional, but it can be given and just as easily withdrawn. But solidarity requires sustained ongoing commitment. And I believe this embodies the why of the group. And so I just want to share a little bit about what Nandi is.

It's a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Uh, we're on a mission to serve, support and empower Black women who work in and attend California community colleges. And we stand at the intersection of misogyny, racism, and we're armed and ready to dismantle harmful practices in educational spaces that are rooted in patriarchy and white supremacy. And we want to achieve this through Nandi's professional development through programs, mentorship, and annual conference. And we will empower Black women to take back our stories by disrupting negative stereotypes and narratives about who we are. And so, we recognize that need, collectively, for representation and engagement for Black women professionals and students, and that it's imperative in order to advance our unique issues in the community college system.

And I could share a little bit about the goal. I was going to summarize because we have a lot of goals. <laugh>, we're ambitious, but, but we love that. We know that it'll take time to unfold. But we really just want to center and respond to the voices of Black women while de-centering traditional practices that work against their success. And we want to bring awareness to misogynoir and a waste to eliminate and advocate for Black women to ensure that success. One of the things that we've talked a lot about is just how can we collect data and conduct research to articulate a clear vision about how to impact the success of Black women at varying levels in their academic journey. And then again, you know what ways we want to achieve that is through professional learning, professional development, hosting a conference and retreat, webinars and creating a large network. And so, as we expand and grow, we hope that through that expansion and growth, as we learn that we can provide expertise to community colleges to support and sustain institutional capacity to effectively address the needs of Black women employees and students. And then also look at ways in terms of hiring the retention of Black women in the community college system. And so those are in summary, some of the things that we are really passionate and looking forward to working on as we grow and expand. And so I hope Dr. Savage, if she wants to add anything, but she is our fearless leader and we <oh> appreciate her so much.

Dr. Gonzales:

I love that. Dr. Johnson. I love what you said though. You said it was, uh, ambitious, but it's only when we have a bold vision that we can achieve the unimaginable. And I know that was the first thing folks said when we introduced the *Vision for Success* as a system. You have a roadmap, you have a big, bold vision, and it's possible with the two of you working together, Dr. Savage, what can you tell us about Nandi and in particular, what does it mean for this organization to exist < mm-hmm, affirmative> and in terms of the context that we are in today here in California. So why is Nandi so important for working professionals, but also for Black and African American student success in California?

Dr. Savage:

Well, so thank you Dr. Johnson, for giving such a thorough background about Nandi. And I want to just kind of underscore the word sisterhood because as a Black woman working in the system, like you shared before Dr. Gonzales, I previously served as a dean for five years. In fact, I just transitioned back

into being a faculty member at the beginning of this year. And so being a Black woman administrator, it was a struggle finding my voice within an oppressive system of white supremacy and patriarchy. And so, Audrey Lord said that rage is a legitimate political emotion that when focused with precision can be a powerful source of energy that serves to progress change. And so Nandi is a manifestation of a collective rage, right? <laugh>, as a Black woman administrator, I was looking for sisterhood and support just to survive and thrive, right? And so the only thing that I would add to what Dr. Johnson shared about Nandi is that Moyer Bailey coined a term called misogynoir, which is misogyny directed toward Black women. And so, misogynoir explains how race and sex intersect, and it describes the hatred, the dislike, the distrust and mistreatment toward Black women. And so institutions are unaware of misogynoir and how it manifests to collectively cause harm to Black women. And so the first step to dismantling misogynoir is awareness. And so now you organize to give voice and awareness to how Black women are treated on college campuses. That's both students and professionals, so that we can help institutions better support the success of Black women professionals and students. And again, that would be done through our core focus areas of research, professional development, mentorship, advocacy, and scholarship. And so, you know, when I think about the question about what can we do to support Black, that was the question, right? To support Black student success.

Dr. Gonzales:

Yes. Mm-hmm.

Dr. Savage:

<affirmative>. Okay. So there's a, there's a ton of things that we can do. In fact, we've had a lot of initiatives coming out of the Chancellor's Office, including Guided Pathways, AB 705, and AB 1705. And even when we look at the *Vision for Success*, the goals and commitments there, they're all focused on helping students complete their educational goals. And so, we saw through our equitable placement practices through AB 705, where the focus was on ensuring that students were able to complete their transfer level English and math within one year. We saw like how the transfer rate for Black students change drastically, right? Because we know that having access to transfer level English and math is going to make it more likely that students are going to make it to the transfer gate. And so enacting, you know, laws like AB 1705 is going to have significant, you know, improvements for Black student success outcomes.

And so, the RP Group did a study and released a brief called the African American Transfer Tipping Point, which highlighted factors that were predictors of success for transfer for African American and Black community college students. And so basically the study found that for African American and Black students, specifically when they passed both the transfer level English and math in the first year, they were more than 300% more likely to make it near the transfer gate than those who did not take transfer level English and math in their first year. And so that's significant, right? Especially because currently there's a very low percentage of African-American and Black students who are successfully transferring from a community college to a university. And so when we talk about implications, well the lifetime earnings for those who have bachelor's degree are significantly higher than those who do not obtain a bachelor's degree. So if we can increase Black student transfer through the implementation of AB 1705 and other initiatives, then we are helping to close some of the racial wealth gaps and other equity gaps that we see today.

Dr. Gonzales:

Wow. I could listen to you all day. I could see you, why your students love you <laugh>. I love what you just shared. It truly is remarkable progress. The progress of this system in implementing AB 705, 1705. I've been asked about it multiple times, and it's only one of the tools that we have in front of us, right? Implementing the law is one of the tools. But we also had this bigger vision, going back to the *Vision for Success*, bold, ambitious goals. We said we want to reduce and completely erase equity gaps in the state of California for traditionally underrepresented students by the year 2026 - 2027. And you know, as I'm listening to you, I'm hearing this, I still believe it's possible. I'm hoping others join Nandi and they believe it's possible. And so, I want to ask the two of you this question. What recommendations do you have for California community college professionals who want to support students, but in particular Black and African American student's success? What advice do you have for them?

Dr. Johnson:

I would like to share a little bit about my thoughts on that. I think there's multiple answers to this question. And I believe some of the major factors that impact equity gaps can be addressed through basic needs, DEIA and curriculum, equitable hiring practices, classroom and campus climate, resource allocation, and of course, professional learning, which is what I am responsible for at my campus. So in my role, I've contemplated how our department can serve the students and reduce equity gaps. And I know that a well-designed professional learning program can have a strong impact on student retention and completion. So at Mesa College, we conducted a pre and post assessment on faculty who redesigned courses as they were learning how to integrate culturally responsive practices into their courses. So for example, they learned about culturally responsive pedagogy, some frameworks, and then they redesigned their syllabus and they created some authentic assessments.

And so as a result of that pre and post assessment, we learned that 63% of the faculty who attended that C R I or that Course Redesign Institute improved success rates for their redesign courses. And so, the way that I envision it is that I think that I could be wrong, but I'm going to jump out there and say this, but I think that professional learning and sometimes underutilized in the way that it could be, you know, used as a compass to lead towards the change that an institution wants. And so sometimes I think that professional learning is tasked with this institutional charge, but sometimes it's underfunded and then it's not sourced in a way that it could take on that task and then actually meet and realize that goal. So I've come up with a framework that I've used that I've learned how to look at professional learning through a lens of equity.

And I've created six framing elements that I think a practitioner or a professional, even someone who's at their campus who may lead professional learning, who is involved with it, and who actually takes time. I know that most faculty, because of flex and the flexible calendar, they did, you do have to participate in professional learning. But I think a strategic professional learning program can create opportunities for that. And so if it's okay, I want to share those explaining elements quickly. But what I will say is that the reason that we use professional learning as a term is because we see it as a collaborative venture in which teachers or educational professionals are recognized as leaders and learners in their disciplines. And so we've learned that through professional learning, that this collaboration, this coaching, and this active learning experiences allow them to improve student outcomes. And it also allows them to retain instructors.

And so one of the key framing elements that one can consider to align to their professional learning program can also be aligned to the *Vision for Success* with the intent to address equity gaps for disproportionately impacted students. So the first one is the institution. And so looking at the

leadership things like the 10 year strategic plan, how the institution is aligned to the state's initiatives and integrated them into the institution. So for example, Dr. Gonzales, you've mentioned some of the examples, and I also have a few that we've leveraged in our campus work that are connected to the structural changes that were led by you and your team at the state Chancellor's Office. And one of them is the DEI in curriculum, the rubric, the EEO plan, the five DEI integration plan, and then amending title five to include DEIA and the faculty evaluation.

Oh. And so we see that <laugh>, that the *Vision for Success* and other recent initiatives have provided a guide or compass for our institution to strengthen professional learning and articulate a clear vision about the purpose of the DEIA focused professional learning program. So one can also look at the program review or their annual program plan, right? So establishing data coaching through professional learning to support faculty to meet their annual program review plan. Uh, culture. I like to use (Robert) Birnbaum. He was a book that I read in about how colleges work in my doctorate program. But he gave these profiles of culture that institutions have. And so for example, Mesa's Collegial Institution is very collaborative, but it's very important for someone looking to make changes in their campus to understand the culture, and then how to develop strategies to create safe and relevant learning that is aligned with DEIA within that culture.

Data. The Office of Institutional Effectiveness should support the efforts across the college to provide coaching, interpretation, and humanize data so that it can be understood how to look at the retention and the completion of the students so that they're able to interpret it and have the awareness on how to use it and leverage it and what they're doing in their department and school levels. The individuals, so identifying the needs of the campus community. So for example, providing culturally responsive practice for classroom and non-classroom employees. And then the students are the core of this framework. And so not only should we use quantitative data, but we should also create space for them to contribute to the curriculum of the professional learning for the faculty and the non-classroom employees. And there was this young woman that I heard, she was a student, and she said that she was giving a lightning talk at a conference, and she said that she shouldn't be the youngest person in the room.

And I was reminded that inclusion acknowledges the value of a diverse community, and it creates conditions to affirm our collective voices and identities. And so in conclusion, I want to be able to not only leverage the student's voice, but also recommend that strategically design professional learning can address student success by centering the student voice, collecting data, and investing in the campus community to learn culturally responsive practices to reduce equity gaps for disproportionately impacted students. And so what of my recommendation is it would be AB 1705, you know? So if we can take the actions, right? So at the state level and the legislative level, they've created this action to remove these barriers. Then at the institutional level, we need to create professional learning for those math and English courses so that they can implement culturally responsive practices, such as understanding the difference between independent, dependent learners, understanding how to reach their students and create curriculum that's not repetitive, but that's challenging. And then also engage their students so that they enter into productive struggles to grow their brain power. And I think that's oftentimes what is missed or lacked when instructors see them, students from a deficit mindset. So thank you. I know this was a little long, but I just, I just really love professional learning. Excellent job. Yes.

Dr. Gonzales:

No, what I loved about it is it brings us back to Nandi, right? So what you were describing, and I think what I'm witnessing here and hearing the two of you is what it means to design a successful system requires us to then bring it back to the people, the people that have to serve our students, which is why it's important to recruit, hire, and retain professionals that understand that. And it brings us back to Nandi, because the two of you are bold in your vision to grow that generation, to center the work and student success, while at the same time balancing what it means to do this in a way that working professionals feel respected, that there is personal growth, professional growth, but that it's always centered in the student voice. Is there anything else you'd like to say about Nandi and the impact that Nandi will have and have in our system and into the future?

Dr. Savage:

Well, first of all, I'm a data nerd. And <laugh>, you know, when we talk about Black women and Black students in general that attend the California Community College system, as I shared before, I owe a great deal to this system. And we know that the majority of African American and Black students who pursue higher education will begin their post-secondary education at a community college. And so community colleges play a very critical role in ensuring that our Black students get the skills and education that they need to participate in and advance in the state's workforce and economy. And so, I want to share some data only because I feel like sometimes sharing data is a very safe place to start. There was a report released by the Campaign for College opportunity called the *State of Higher Education for Black Californians*. And what it showed was that there was a large percentage of Black 19 year olds in the state that had high school diplomas, but there was a very low percentage of Black students who are completing degrees and or transferring once we get them to our college campus.

And so you ask, what is the recommendation? Well, when I see data that shows only one third of Black community college students earning a certificate or a degree, or transferring, or are even transfer prepared within six years, we really have to start asking ourselves, are we okay with that and why? And so I do have some recommendations. And it's very simple, just being intentional. Being intentional is key. I mean, we have to look at the Black student success data and just commit to increasing Black student success by any means necessary. And so Dr. Johnson already shared some of those strategies. We've seen the data that supports, you know, why it's important for initiatives such as AB 1705 and what those implications are for Black student success. But we also see that diversifying the faculty ranks, right? Hiring more Black instructional and counseling faculty, hiring more Black classified professionals and administrators.

Right? And then last I would say that, you know, the most important component is we need a race conscious funding model, right? Where we're allocating sufficient funding for colleges to provide intentional programming to support Black women students on our college campus and Black students in general. And so the Campaign for College Opportunity released another report titled Follow the Money, and it basically showed how California systemically under invest in Black degree attainment. And so we know that there's a direct correlation between funding and student success. So what is a recommendation? Well, we need to provide enough funding for colleges to actually support Black student success. And because if we don't, that's why we see the inequities in Black Student success, which again, ultimately perpetuates the economic inequities for Black folks. And so that means funding programs like UMOJA, like A²MEND, like HUBU, and other programs that are actually supporting Black student success across the state.

And so I just want to give a quick plug, a statewide effort that we have to promote Black student success. And that's during Black Student Success Week, which is led by Dr. Keith Curry and Dr. Edward

Bush. This year, Black Student Success Week takes place the week of April 24th through the 28th. So I encourage everybody to log on. It's a week long of daily webinars from 12 to 1. I mean, every day there's a different focus. And so I know that the Chancellor's Office supports Black Student Success Week, so I know that your office will probably be sending out emails. So please, everybody look for those emails. There will be a lot of important information shared about how you can promote and support Black student success on your respective campuses.

Dr. Gonzales:

I love that plug, Dr. Savage. I feel the sisterhood. I hope that's what all of our colleagues around the system are offering. Nandi, as you are building up your organization and growing, I'm going to ask you our last question, and I love to always bring it back. Thank you for just sharing your journey, for being yourselves authentically, you. But I want to bring you back to a younger version of you. And you know, we've seen a lot of students join in and listen to the podcast because they want to learn from successful alums. They want to learn about your journey. So this last question is always the same. What words of encouragement or advice would you give a younger version of yourself? Who would like to start first?

Dr. Savage:

<laugh>, I'll go ahead and start. So I guess the advice that I would give my younger self is to be more forgiving of myself and to show myself more grace, knowing that, you know, every single hardship that I've been through, including getting pregnant at a young age, they were all a part of God's plan for me. Right? I remember I used to be an FYE coordinator at my college at San Diego City College, and I remember one of my FYE students, he was a Black male, extremely gifted and talented on so many levels, right? But he had a very troubled background. He was born into circumstances that were out of his control, and it just made it really hard for him to live, right? He was in and out of jail. He battled with addiction. But you know, I remember him just showing up to class, you know, after being released from jail, like right from jail into my class.

And I was always so extremely proud of him. And I admired his tenacity and his determination just to show up, right? And so, you know, it's because of those kinds of hardships, right? Whether it's being locked up, battling and overcoming addiction, or in my situation, becoming pregnant, right as a teenager. Those hardships are the reasons why I feel that I'm so passionate about the work that I'm doing now. Like, I mean, passionate, like I will work tirelessly to ensure that students who have similar backgrounds as me, that they have opportunities to be successful. And so I don't feel that I would be as effective, as empathetic, or even passionate about the work that I'm doing had it not been for those hardships.

Dr. Gonzales:

Hmm. Thank you, Dr. Savage for sharing that. Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson:

Thank you. That was beautiful. So I would share a quote by Rumi, and it says, when I run after what I think I want, my days are a furnace of stress and anxiety. If I sit in my own place of patience, what I need flows to me. And without pain from this, I understand what I want also wants me, is looking for me and attracting me. And I would tell myself, trust yourself. Trust your process. Especially the

difficult ones are the difficult parts of your process. And remember, you can't miss what is meant for you. And that's it.

Dr. Gonzales:

I love that ending. One of my favorite poems.

Dr. Savage:

Dr. Johnson, is like our spiritualist in the Nandi group <laugh>. She makes us cry. She makes us get all in the spirit. Oh, wow. That was beautiful.

Dr. Gonzales:

<laugh>. That was a beautiful ending. Thank you. Well, I really enjoyed our time, Dr. Savage. Dr. Johnson. I hope our listeners enjoyed learning a little bit more about Nandi and that they check out your website. Thank you for joining me for another episode of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office podcast. Please join us next time.

Announcer:

Be sure to join us for the next California Community College's podcast. This has been a California Community College's presentation.