

Supporting Black Student Success in California Community Colleges

Hi. This is Eloy Ortiz Oakley Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. And you're listening to another episode of the California Community College's Chancellor's Office podcast. Welcome back, everybody. Today, I have the pleasure of spending time highlighting Black and African-American students in the California Community College's Black and African-American students are critical part of our student body, and they're vital to the success of our communities in the state of California. However, Black and African-American students continue to lag in terms of education attainment gaps in the state of California.

These are decades old gaps that we continue to find ways to highlight and shine a focus on. Part of the *Vision for Success* focuses on closing these equity gaps and closing Black students. Success gaps is critical to our success in the California community colleges.

As part of that effort. We're participating in a Black Student Success Week, which begins April 25th through the 29th, where we invite administrators, faculty, staff, students across the entire system to focus on Black students success. So with me to talk about our Black and African-American students are two amazing leaders in the California community colleges, Dr. Keith Curry and Dr. Edward Bush. These are two amazing leaders who have focused a lot of time and attention and effort on improving equity in our system, specifically focused on Black and African-American students. Dr. Keith Curry is the president of Compton College and CEO of the Company Community College District.

And I know all of our listeners know Compton College is one of our iconic communities in Southern California. And he's led a transformation of Compton College, which not too long ago had lost its accreditation. And Dr. Curry has led that college degree accredited, which then became our 114th college again once they got their accreditation.

And he is leading an effort there to focus on equity in the community of Compton. He's also nationally recognized on issues of basic needs for our students. We also have Dr. Edward Bush, who is the president of Consumers River College, who became president July of 2015 and has led Consumers River College since then, focusing his efforts on improving equity in that community and bringing attention to underrepresented students, particularly Black and African-American students. He's a leading voice in our system on Black and African-American students and has more than 20 years experience in higher education with many of those years spending time in the Riverside Community College District.

So welcome, Dr. Curry and Dr. Bush to the podcast. Thank you for having us. Really appreciate it and excited to be here. I am excited as well to be in this space with you, Chancellor Oakley. All right. Let's spend some time talking about our Black and African-American students.

And I think it's also important for our listeners to know those who don't know that there are also Black males who have lived experiences and who really understand our Black and African-American students and the experiences that they're having on campus.

So it's great to have you both. So let's jump into some of the questions. We're talking about Black and African-American student success. So let's start with you, Dr. Curry. Many people know about Compton College, and since you became president of Compton College, tell us a little bit about your work at Compton College and tell us a little bit about you and how you got the comp in college. So I started out of college in 2005 as the Dean of Students Services. It was a year prior to the accreditation being revoked. I became the CEO chief executive officer of the District in 2011 and became President, CEO of 2000 Catholic Community College District in 2017.

What most people don't know is that when I was 12 years old, I was a ball boy for the college football team. And so my experience at college started when I was 12 years old. And I'm from Compton. I'm born and raised in Compton.

I no longer live in Compton, but I still own a home within the community. So I really appreciate and love being from Compton and the stories from students from our community who have been successful to be able to come back and share that story.

And so I feel like I'm a part of the success of the City of Compton. So you are literally straight outta Compton. Literally straight outta Compton. That's great. So tell us a little bit about the work that's been going on.

It comes about so as mentioned in the intro, we guys, we are focused on accreditation for a long time. We became accredited in 2017 June 7, 2017. Those same day, Chancellor Oakley provided the keynote address at our commitment ceremony, and so we announced it to the campus about our accreditation.

But I would say the work here started with accreditation, but we're focused on basic needs, and we're also focused on the vision for success for community colleges. And we're really excited about our guided pathways work and really looking at the whole student experience approach to supporting students as a student success.

The work that we're doing on our campus, I feel, is a part of a complete transformation. And what I accept about the complete transformation is because we reorganize our whole campus academic units around guided pathways. And so I'm really excited about the work that we're doing within Guided Pathways, but it is transforming our campus because our campus mantra is the Guided Pathways mantra. And so I'm excited about that. We're also excited about the work we're doing with Black women of color students. We just hired a director of Black and male of color success, the first of its kind in California community colleges.

And we're really excited about this work and how we want to move forward to really do something different for Black American college students. That sounds great. I've seen firsthand the transformation of Compton, so I really appreciate the work that you're doing there.

Dr. Curry now, let's bring in Dr. Bush here. Dr. Bush, I know you've been serving as a college president there, Consumers River College. And for anybody who's heard you speak, I think one of the things that we all leave the room with is being struck by the passion that you bring to these issues, the passion that you bring when you talk about equity. So tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got to Consumers College. Yeah, absolutely. And thank you, Chancellor. I think I bring passion to the work because the work is really deeply personal.

It's been personal from the beginning. What got me to Cosumnes River College really is this idea of having a relentless pursuit of justice. And I viewed working in higher education, particularly within a community college, as positioning myself to be able to add value to create a more just system not only within higher education but in society at large. And I really have been anchored by that idea. Dr. Curry and I have talked about this often, but our orientation to our work really started as student activists, and we very much bring that spirit to our work as college president.

And I've really led in that way at CRC, I was really looking to land at an institution where I was able to show up as my authentic self. So you mentioned know me being a Black male, I wanted to be at a college, where I was able to fully be who I was, bring my experience to the table because I believe it was through those set of unique experiences that I have was going to be the difference. And really, I think changing and transforming the culture at my institution. And I was really fortunate to land at a college that was poised and ready to do deep transformational work.

That was at a point where they felt there's. Been enough conversation about equity, social justice, diversity and inclusion that they wanted someone that came in with a clear vision and a plan towards action so we can finally see some needles move in terms of student outcomes.

I've been really fortunate to be at an institution that is ready to embrace change and go all in on producing a different set of outcomes for students who have been most marginalized by our institution. So, Dr. Bush, let me ask you this.

The work that you've been doing for now in the last number of years, how did that summer of racial reckoning, the murder of George Floyd, everything that was going on in that moment in time. And I know the fight for social justice have been going on for a long, long time, and we've seen many tragic events.

But how did that moment in time affect the work that you were doing there at Cosumnes River College and what positive or negative effects has it had? It had a huge impact. Right. We thought we were doing good work up to that point.

The murder of George Floyd really signaled to us the work that we felt really good about wasn't enough, that we really use this to do a deep institutional, introspective around what are the real structural and systemic issues that's making it difficult for our students to achieve?

And so we used that conversation to talk about policies and practices that have been sacred cows within our institutions. Things that no one ever wanted to touch before. And we say that if we were not going to talk about it now, then there was never going to be an opportunity for us to talk about deleterious practices that existed by our institution for far too long. So we talked about making transparent courts assess race at the section level, so faculty are able to see any patterns of student outcomes and who are they failing, who are they passing, who remains in their class and who they drop out?

We're able to talk about in terms of how is equity competency accounted for within of faculty evaluations. Those are conversations we would have never had before. And we talked about ways in which pedagogy and culture, relevant curriculum needs to be reflected equitize syllabus.

And so one of the things that it did, Chancellor, was allowed us to do work inside of the classroom, which was very difficult to penetrate before the conversations we had wrapped around George Floyd's murder. Yeah, no, absolutely. Dr. Curry, how about you?

How did that period of time affect your work at Compton? So my perspective on that time, it put me back into the activism role, and I became even more apologetic at that time. And I thank the Chancellor's Office for this, when the Chancellor's Office did the call to action and stepped out there, it made me feel even more comfortable about being an activist, stepping out even more. And so we took the call to action document from the Chancellor's Office, and we did a response to that. And we hit every single point of the things that we want to do on our campus.

But the one point I think was very important, and Dr. Bush touched on this, was the faculty's engagement into the call to action. In response, look at their course outline of record having conversations about curriculum, but now they're looking at like, how do you institutionalize it?

Not just having a task force, but actually saying, okay, in our curriculum process, how are we going to review the curriculum to make sure we're here to each component of DEI? But they're starting to have those conversations, which I think was very important.

But for me, the call to action was that guide and allowed me to be even more unapologetic because we had political cover, because the Chancellor and the Chancellor's Office staff all signed on a document about what we need to do in order to support our students.

That was huge. And so our response document was shared with the board. The board approved it and at our next board meeting in May, they're going to have an update on the document and they receive update each quarter.

So when have you ever seen a board that's engaged in these types of conversations? It is not just a resolution is actually we have a call to action for the Chancellor's Office. We have a response to call action.

And then we have an action plan that the board is monitoring to ensure what we said we're going to do actually gets done. And I think that's what's important for me is that we're actually taking those resolutions into action and in support of our students.

It's a great point, right? I hear you. I think being in higher education, you know, we hope in higher education. Well, one of the challenges is how do you actually translate words and resolutions into action? The action part is usually the part that's missing.

So I appreciate the work that you two have been doing to focus on the action part. The resolution part is sort of the easy part, but getting your boards on board, getting your faculty leadership, getting into the classroom is, I think, what's been key going forward now.

Let's start with you Dr. Curry. You both are Black males. You came through higher education yourselves. Tell our listeners from your perspective, your personal perspective, not your administrator hat your personal perspective, what are the biggest challenges that our Black and African American students face in higher education, not just in California, but throughout the nation?

I think about it from I have three, right? The first one is sense of belonging. Ensure that Black students feel that they belong at our organization. One of these that I got from Frank Harris and Luke Woods, I never forget this presentation.

They did for our faculty staff is that when you see a Black male walk across campus, do you say hello? Do you engage them in e conversation or do you just walk by them and say nothing? So if you're walking by them and saying nothing, then those students are not going to feel that you want them on this campus. So for me, when I walk the college campus, I want

to make sure students feel they have a sense of belonging because I want people to feel that you're welcome. That's how I felt when I was at college.

I went to University of California, Santa Cruz, when I saw other Black students, the other Black faculty, the other Black staff. They will stop you, have a conversation. Ask you how your grades are doing. What are you doing over the weekend?

But they will engage with you as a part of the campus community. So persons have that sense of belonging. The second piece for is about having a financial aid and emergency aid to be supportive of you while you're in school.

When I was in college, I had a financial aid counselor. Her name was Mary Brown. She made sure my financial aid was submitted on time. If I had any questions, I go see her and she would be able to address those questions.

But she was my contact for financial aid and I talked talk to no one else except this one person. So when we think of our students, we want to see the same thing happen for them is that they have that contact as well.

So financial aid and providing financial aid for them. And the third piece I think is a basic needs piece, right? This is separate from financial aid, making sure that the housing and food insecurity and transportation, that they receive those basic needs and mental health.

You're able to see those needs when they need them. So when I was in college, I don't remember the whole having housing food insecurity, but I do remember that if there was free food. We were there who were hungry.

Right. So the term housing and food insecurity was not around at that time. We were hungry. We were always in for a free meal. We were hungry. So making sure that students have their basic needs are met and I think those are three pieces of belonging, financial aid and be sure that we address their basic needs, right?

Dr. Bush Yeah. I mean, taking off my administrative hat. I mean, it feels like it's firmly fixated on my head nowadays, but I do my best to remove it when I think about the times in which I struggled through school the most.

I think a lot of the root cause of that was feeling unseen, and not just in my own physical presence, but unseen in terms of who and what I represented. Now showing up to class, whether this is no kindergarten all the way through high school and not getting any curriculum that is reflective of the contributions of people who look like me. And then when you finally hit that unit in the chapter in history, for that section to only be about enslavement as the start of the history of Black people. I mean, I vividly recall in the fourth grade anticipating getting to something that was going to be in our textbook where I could see someone who looked like me. Then only when we get to that section and it's about slavery,

that I have these classmates around me looking and I feel so embarrassed that I began to shrink inside of my chair because the first time I get exposed to anything about myself is that we were captive, we were enslaved, we were in chains, not making any contributions to society. And my classmates every single day got affirmed in seeing about who they were and who they represented, reflected in the curriculum. And so I tangibly carried that with me at that particular time.

I still could recall it and bring it up today. So the biggest challenge was not seeing the relevancy and what was being taught. I didn't see the connection of how this was going to improve the community in which I lived in, and I definitely didn't see the connection to who I was historically in the contributions of Black people, and also not seeing myself reflected not until I was in eighth grade did I have my first African-American male teacher and it did everything that you thought it would do. I mean, that's when I was introduced to Richard Wright.

It's when I was introduced to Ralph Ellison. I mean, he gave me the copy of *Black Boy*. That's the first time I read a book, a novel from start to finish. I mean, it opened up a new world.

So when we say representation matters is not just a catchy cliché. It matter. It shapes the trajectory of my thinking. It gave me a sense of hope and allowed me to feel smart. It played to my strengths. I was excited about learning.

And so the times in which I was challenged is when I didn't have that right. So your comments made me think a little bit. So I'm going to go off my script here and get us in a little bit of trouble.

So I hope you don't mind. Yeah, I wouldn't expect anything less from you Chancellor. So your comments, Dr. Bush, reminded me of this ongoing debate throughout the country about critical race theory and how we expose students of all backgrounds to the histories that speak to them and see themselves represented in the history of our country, of our world, see themselves represented in the classroom. So. From your point of view, Dr. Bush, how do you respond to some of this criticism? And why is it so important that students of color, particularly Black and African Americans in our classrooms, see themselves represented in the curriculum?

Yeah, I'll try to answer the tougher part of the question first and probably the part that would get us in trouble. I mean, is hard to respond because most of the arguments around critical race theory is just things that are made up.

Right. And folks believe if they said enough and say it loudly enough times that is going to be true. I mean, it is just this false reality. A straw man that has been set up that a lot of people have been forced to address.

And I think at the heart of it, it is very difficult for folks to come to grips about the history of this country. And they'd much rather ignore it or bury their head in the sand to deal with some really difficult and hard truths.

It's very difficult to understand the treatment that folks of color have received in this country at the hands of white, powerful people, those who are landowners, those who are rich, those who control our institutions. And I think there's a real fear associated with teaching the truth.

I could not use the term critical race theory to say, how about we just teach true history in our schools? Let's talk about the real contributions that folks of color have made. Let's talk about the real obstacles that have been placed in folks of color's path that has made it difficult for us to be successful and to navigate these institutions and to achieve economic parity within this country. I mean, with that, it's imperative that within our schools that we introduce into curriculum real history, real stories. And so it's extremely important. I mean, I go back to what it did for me in eighth grade, Chancellor me.

That wasn't critical race theory. That was the truth that was being taught and it impact me in a way that was very deep and profound. And it's the same thing for our students, this imperative that we introduce, I think, not just critical race theory, but real true history within our school system.

Right. That's been confusing to me. I don't feel any less American when we talk about the challenges that our country has faced. And in fact, I feel more American when we can honestly talk about where we've been so that we can create a much better path going forward for our country.

So I'll turn it to you, Dr. Curry. How do these issues impact Black student success from your point of view? I struggle with how these issues impact Black student success. What I mean by that is I look at my own experience going through my educational system, and I'm recalling that the first time I was really engaged was when I had African-American professor David Anthony at UC Santa Cruz. And I struggled with it because he was my first and only College professor who was Black male. And what he taught was African-American history. And we took it for two quarters.

And I struggled in that class, but I worked hard in that class. And he pushed me. But if I didn't have him, I would not have seen the African-American instructor professor in my undergraduate experience at UC Santa Cruz.

That's a problem. And so as Dr. Bush is talking about critical race theory and the importance of this pursuit of success, I go right back to the call to action and what we're doing at Compton College regards to the ethnic studies and hiring more faculty to teach ethnic studies, but also try to infuse some of the ethnic studies and also the readings into other areas on our campus regards to different majors and programs. And so as we move forward,

as I move forward, how do I share my own experience and listen to students about what they want to learn as they progress at our institutions?

Regards to critical race theory, but just also understanding where they came from, what struggles they have been through. Because we look at change and transformation, we don't want to reinvent the wheel. But if you don't learn the history, you don't continue to reinvent the wheel.

So we have to, as leaders, tell that story, make sure individuals get that history so they want to be able to change or just to know they have to have that knowledge. And so as I struggle, I think our students are not getting that knowledge because critical race theory and ethnic studies has been so criticized in the popular culture as so negative. But it's not, it is about learning about our own self, knowing about where we came from and learn about our struggles. So we're not repeated again and again, if I can. I think a lot of it is about teaching history in a way that resonates that gives one agency increases one's own cultural efficacy in how they feel about each other, but also think is about themselves. But I think it's deeper than that. Right. I think why we are seeing such a strong reaction to critical race theory is the feeling that once folks know the truth, it would challenge existing power structure.

So it really is about power and those who are currently in power wanting to maintain power. And if you begin to teach and educate and the result of real education is teaching to history, and then for you to be able to truly examine and critique why certain people hold 1% of the wealth, why certain groups are always impoverished. Why is it difficult for certain groups to get a business loan where others can do that? Right. So when you begin to ask and answer those questions, then it threatens existing power structure. And that's why critical race theory is being attacked.

Right. Let's continue the theme of getting ourselves in trouble and focusing on one of the issues that you both brought up, which is seeing yourself represented in the faculty in the classroom. Our system has been working through a number of issues related to diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility.

And one of those is how we improve the diversity of our faculty, which by all measures is lacking in diversity. And this is not a criticism. This is just reflecting on where we are and trying to find ways to improve the diversity of the classroom.

So let's start with you, Dr. Curry. Why do you think it's important for students to see themselves in the classroom and what efforts are going on in Compton College to improve the diversity in the classroom? So I think the why is important.

Dr. Bush talked about this in his comments, regards to the reflection of seeing yourself within that faculty member and being able to have that connection with the faculty member will

help to support outcomes of students. I think it's important that we double down our efforts as relates to diversity, equity, inclusion and access, as relates to faculty hiring.

But also we have to do something different. We can't do it the same way. You know, most time we do job postings, you post it out on the registry, tell people to apply, you might send a couple emails to individuals.

Our list serves to get people to apply for positions, and that's not been working. That's been a traditional model. Now we have to be more intentional as relates to this work. And so, for example, at Compton, what I'm really excited about is we have PRISM, which is from USC regards to promoting our jobs to a diverse group. But we're also looking at different ways to promote and look at at city information to the historically Black colleges and universities so their graduate students can know about our jobs. We have a new partnership with the University of California regarding ethnic studies, where we're going to be doing a training program for their graduate students who are in ethnic studies to learn about teaching online, which will expose them to community colleges, but also expose them to positions at Compton College. We're also working with USC on a summer program for a faculty internship program for former Compton College graduates who are interested in teaching, but try to get the students to come back home and be teachers at Compton.

But the most important right now, the thing that we're working on, regards to this we're working on a policy that relates to hiring of faculty and also administrators. And this has been a great exercise for the Board of Trustees because through our participation with the Foundation for California Community Colleges, one of our assignments from one of our project that we had a intersectional project that was also include the Aspen Institute was our project was to look at our policies. And so the Board of Trustees have taken a lead on this effort this past week at the board meeting.

We had a presentation from Pasadena City College regards to the redacting individual names and information from the application and the board is interested in that as well. But we're going back and looking at our policies and to change that, to try to be sure that we have a diverse population that's applying for jobs because the Board of Trustees are pushing because it's a policy issue. And so they're engaged in it at the beginning, not at the end. They're engaged at the beginning because they want to be able to hold individuals accountable because they want to see us diversify our faculty ranks even more.

So we look at Compton. What we're doing is we're reaching out to our four year colleges, universities, doing new partnerships with USC and also with the University of California as links to ethnic studies. We're also going back and redoing our policy regards to our hiring of administrators and also of faculty, and we'll make sure that gets done before the end of this year because that's critical as we move forward. And that also provides cover, political cover for the CEO. So the CEO is implementing the board's policy and also developing a measurable

regulation which provides us with that political cover as we continue the push to move forward. And a final piece I would say on this topic is all we really got to look at is who we're hiring for adjunct faculty positions and really being more intentional about this work. A lot of times we look at part time positions.

It's always last minute trying to find people, but last minute trying to find people might not be the best people to teach your classes. And some of those classes are dual enrollment classes, and some of the classes are transfer level English and math.

So we have to be more intentional in regards to what we're doing. in regards to part time hiring of faculty to teach our part time courses. Dr. Bush It's hard I mean, this is a real struggle, nowhere close to being where I want us to be in terms of the diversity of our faculty, even with our new hires.

There's a lot of structural things in place that make it really difficult to move the needle. I mean, we have but it's been really hard how search committees are constructed and policies around that minimum quals, which is a system issue within certain disciplines that we know minimal quals reduce the pool of diverse applicants.

But some of our efforts, including now pre-pandemic, we use our seed dollars to hire contract employees with the specific purpose of recruiting diverse potential faculty pools and then following them throughout the entire process. So, you know, oftentimes getting hired within these faculty positions is an insider game.

If you don't know the terminology, you are already going to be Dean. And so this contract, the employee, walk our applicants of color from the point of application all the way through the interview process to demystify, you know, what it took to write the qualifications necessary, the language in order to successfully navigate so they can show up as their best selves. And we rewrote job descriptions that talked about that we explicitly looking for someone with a demonstrated track record of success for teaching students of color, and particularly African-American and LatinX students. Our college launched in the fall of 2020, the We Won't Fall campaign, an urgent and immediate plan to address structural racism in a time of pandemic. And we have very specific targets for African-American and LatinX student success and part of those strategies associated with hitting those targets is increasing the number of African-American and LatinX faculty. And so the concept and the ideas there, the implementation is really lagging far too many times are still getting finalists.

That doesn't represent who we say we are trying to be as our institution. So there's some real disconnect. I'm still trying to figure out, quite honestly, how to best position our institution to solve the riddle of getting more diverse faculty at our college.

If I could just add to this Dr. Bush, I want to know what your thoughts on it. I think we just have in the job as a CEO, a president CEO is having more time to be able to educate and have conversations with faculty, staff, students and Board of Trustees about diversity and inclusion in hiring.

I think we're so spread across with all the work that we're doing, we don't have that time to do more and have more conversations about why it's important. And then we have to make statements. And what I mean by statements, if you kick back a group like we're doing a hiring interview and you kick it back saying it's not diverse enough, that's your statement. But I think we're able to have more conversations prior to that statement of kicking back is trying to figure out how to do more education. But we all have to be at the table with the same goal.

Sometimes I feel people say, Oh, we want to see a diverse pool. We want to see this together but that Dr. Bush says. But when it comes to be a finalist is not what you say you about this life of diversity.

But we come to finalists, you have three white finalists and it's not a diverse pool. All right. Well, we're going to continue to work at the Chancellor's Office to improve the regulatory environment, to set the expectation and give you both and all of our leaders, including our faculty leaders, the cover and the runway, to put a dent in this challenge. So I've got two more questions. One for you, Dr. Bush, and one for you, Dr. Curry based on some of the work that you've been doing individually. So let's start with you, Dr. Bush. You spent some time focused on following the money last year's theme for Black Student Success Week was follow the money. There was also a report from the Campaign for College Opportunity titled Follow the Money. So from your perspective, Dr. Bush, when we follow the money, what do we find? What's on the other end of that? We found that money matters.

I mean, really that simple. When we look at where the funding goes and who gets it, we see there's a direct correlation to those groups and those institutions being more successful and producing student outcomes. When we look at institutions and students that receive the least amount of money, there's a direct correlation to those.

Students are being the same traditional populations that have lower student outcomes. One of the things that the report did. And what was so significant about it. Oftentimes we've tracked money by institutions. This is how much UC, CSU and community colleges are getting in comparison.

This report turned that on its head by not looking at the institution, but by looking at the student. And so we were able to see in that report that African-American and LatinX students receive anywhere between \$100 and \$200 less in terms of state subsidy on their path towards bachelor's degree completion than white and Asian students.

And so when we look at that, there's less investment, real dollars and cents investment in the amount of money given to African-American students and LatinX students for their success. And we wonder why there's a perpetual gap in achievement, right?

We don't have to wonder that much. Really, the answer to that riddle has been answered. It's a lack of resources. Black and brown students are underfunded as a result of the institutions that we are more likely to attend being underfunded.

Right. Dr. Curry, let me ask you this question. So there is cadre of Black and African-American leaders in the California community colleges, and I've been impressed by the way that you all have worked together to support each other.

Can you tell us a little bit about those efforts, your personal experience in those efforts and why it's important that we support Black and African-American leaders in our higher education systems? I'm going to give you an easy response to this is an easy one.

I talked to Edward Bush probably 4 to 5 times a week. It could be four or five times a day and it could be in the conversations, we could be talking about Black student success. We could be talking about great opportunities.

We could be philosophizing about what the future might look like for Black students or even for us professionally. So what this does have this type of relationship is that you have someone to talk to. It's lonely being a community college CEO or president.

It is lonely. But having someone who thinks like you or you could be vulnerable with changes my whole perspective. So our relationship has grown over the last 15 to 20 years where we're just focused on, I can call and say, Dr. Bush, this is what I'm thinking about.

He can say, you know, I've tried this. Maybe do something different. Or we could be vibing on, okay, what we would do for Black student success to take it to the next level? What can you do differently? But having someone to talk to and engage with, for me, I feel a lot better with the work that I'm doing because I don't feel like I'm by myself. But it's important as Black CEOs, but also Black administrators, that we include other individuals in these conversations. So not only Dr. Bush have a conversation with me. We're both having conversations with other individuals and trying to bring in more people.

It's a network so they don't feel like they're alone. And if you look at the data for CEOs and their tenure and look at the 5.2 years, but think about the struggle for Black CEOs who are these positions, especially when you start talking about the George Floyd murder and start talking about the racial reckoning, the stress that individuals were under, having that support system is very important. But I also want to say this, too, is that under with working with Black Student Success Week, we have a coalition of individuals who support and they're not all CEOs.

Right. So Dr. Bush and I are the only CEOs who are on a planning committee. But we have a lot of individuals who are faculty, who are staff on community college campuses or at a district level, or they work for external organization that are part of the planning.

And we're a team and we all say, Dr. Curry, Dr. Bush, we're by first name, we're all working together. But that's another coalition that's been developed, but is all developed based off relationships. So we're able to continue to build relationships among educators around Black student success.

I think that's how we can be able to move forward. But my relationship with Dr. Bush has helped me out tremendously and the relationship I have with the committee members as well. It fuels the fire. Right. And I think the reason why you have the level of organization and cohesion with Black leadership in our system out of necessity for all the reasons that Keith mentioned. And then also, I think we have a common understanding that if we do not do something within the positions that we hold now is not going to be done and that we are at a window, that we have an opportunity and time to make substantive change.

Because of your leadership, Chancellor, an agenda that you set because of what's going on in larger society with the reckoning around race, that we feel like the time is now and we operated with a sense of urgency. So the things that may have created some division, you know, five or six years ago are what kept you for reaching out to a colleague then because more imperative now, things that would have been divisive doesn't seem as important in light of everything that we have an opportunity to do. So that's why the work of many Imoja now even through work of the Coalition and Equity Avengers, I mean, all of these things are coming together under one umbrella, which is really transforming a system that has been broken for far too long. Right. Well, look, I really appreciate having you both here. Really appreciate having you both in the California community colleges. You are inspirational leaders and we're a much better system because of the work that you bring to the table.

So last word, one sentence, Dr. Bush, what do you want to see come out of Black Student Success Week? I want us to know that the perpetual and persisting gap in achievement is not a problem that is absent of a solution.

That it is indeed possible to eliminate the achievement gap. That is something that we can do. Great. Dr. Curry. I want to see more community college and educators in general be involved and be active in this work. No more sitting on the sideline.

If you're on the sideline, just stay on the sideline. But we need more people in the game. But if you're on the sideline, don't criticize the individuals who are doing the work. We need more people doing this work because people are tired and we need more people, active individuals doing this work in support of students success.

So I want to see more people move from the sideline and into the conversation and doing the work as relates to Black Student Success. We need more people involved in this conversation. All right. So you heard it from my two guests, Dr. Edward Bush and Dr. Keith Curry.

Let's get in the game. Let's get off the sidelines. And let's get engaged in improving student success, because improving student success for Black and African-American students will improve the success of every student in higher education. So thank you both for joining me.

It was a pleasure to have you. Thank you for having us. Enjoy the rest of your day. All right. You've been listening to another episode of the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office podcast. It's been a pleasure to talk about Black student success with Dr. Keith Currie and Dr. Edward Busch and look forward to having you all back to listen to our next episode. Thanks for listening and be sure to join us for the next California Community College's podcast. This has been a California Community College's presentation.