MEDIA RELEASE

Office of African American Academic Acceleration Kicks Off Summer Literacy Program

What: The district’s Office of African American Academic Acceleration (A4), in collaboration with the Springboard Collaborative, will launch its third annual Summer Literacy Program with largest enrollment to date.

When: Monday, June 8, 2020 (continues through July 10)

Availability: Staff available for interviews upon request

The acclaimed A4 Summer Literacy Program kicks off its third consecutive year with a COVID-19 adapted distance learning format. More than 650 Fresno Unified elementary students will participate, a significantly larger enrollment than previous years. The program offers enhanced learning bolstered by home-based engagement and parent-child collaboration.

This year offers a five-week distance learning model for kindergarten-fourth grade students via Google Classroom and other virtual platforms. The goal is to accelerate reading for African American and all Fresno Unified students who are below reading grade level to proficiency and beyond. The program consists of daily independent reading with a teacher, targeted small group
lessons, writing, family workshops and more. The program will also help students continue to master distance learning.

The Afterschool Literacy Program, a 10-week long extension of the Summer Literacy Program, was implemented in nine elementary schools this past academic year. This program was similar to the summer initiative, including one-on-one literacy mentoring.

“For the past two years, our results have surpassed the national average growth for Springboard Collaborative school districts and have exceeded expectations in accelerating grade level proficiency in literacy for our African American students. In our first year, students experienced an average of 4.9 months of reading growth in only five weeks,” said Wendy McCulley, A4 executive director. “Our students in the program ranked No. 1 in the nation with literacy growth, outpacing all other participating districts in major urban cities.

“This has been a worthy investment of resources and parent-engagement to foster and maintain fundamental skills as part of required goals for all students. It has also been vital in working towards A4’s primary goals: to create an environment in which all students are positioned to achieve academic success during their time in the district and beyond and to close the large gap in support that leads to disparate academic outcomes between African American students and their peers.”

McCulley also said: “Over the course of the past two years, we’ve worked to identify and illuminate the root causes for the gap in academic experiences and outcomes between our African American student population and their peers, and we have also launched efforts and interventions to begin to close this gap by better serving these students and being stronger partners to their families. We thank the Fresno Unified Board of Education, Superintendent Nelson, teachers, staff and the Fresno community for their continued support. While the need for the work continues, we are proud of the progress made to date.”

Program manager Tonisha Hargrove said the summer program will help parents who are anxious over their increased role as teachers during the shelter-in-place mandates: “Our parents are learning new skills alongside their children. This is an added bonus to the effect we had hoped for with the program.”

**Additional program goals of the A4 initiative include:**

- Strengthen relationships between the district and the African American community
- Build trusting partnerships between educators and African American families at school sites
• Bring awareness to educators regarding cultural responsiveness and implicit bias to encourage an asset-based approach and increase understanding of African American families’ experiences in Fresno Unified

• Instill institutional pride in and respect for African Americans and our cultural heritage

• Increase the number of African American teachers and provide targeted support to retain them

Irrefutably, the Office of African American Academic Acceleration believes that literacy – the ability to read, write and comprehend – is a civil right of every student and is the gateway to a successful academic future, career and livelihood.

“We recognize literacy is a fundamental building block of learning and academic growth so we ensure that it is an integral part of our programs,” McCulley said. “A4 has been at the forefront of providing literacy programs with proven results to close the academic achievement gap for African American students within the Fresno Unified School District since 2017.”

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