To kick off this school year, Fresno Unified held a grand opening for our newest school, Juan Felipe Herrera Elementary, and a renaming ceremony for H. Roger Tatarian Elementary. Two groundbreaking Fresno natives were honored in the naming of these schools. Juan Felipe Herrera was the nation’s Poet Laureate from 2015-2017 and a former Fresno State professor. At the event, he spoke of how honored he was to have the school named after him and the positive trajectory that the STEAM and Dual Language Immersion school will have on the surrounding community.

H. Roger Tatarian Elementary took its namesake from the esteemed journalist and former Fresno State professor as the first school in Fresno Unified to be named after a member of Fresno’s Armenian community. The renaming ceremony featured traditional Armenian dancers, food and music. Armenian leaders from the Fresno community and former colleagues of H. Roger Tatarian spoke of what a great person he was and how deserving he was of this honor.

Fresno Unified has been busy with celebrations and events across the district! We kicked off the year by launching the HBCU Step Up Pathway with a celebration at Fresno City College. This pathway is the first-of-its kind in California and enables African American students from Edison, Bullard, and Sunnyside High Schools to take dual enrollment classes through Benedict College, a historically black college in Columbia, South Carolina. Governor Gavin Newsom and the first partner visited McLane High School to talk about a new push to bolster mental health supports across the state. We celebrated the grand opening of our newest school, Juan Felipe Herrera, and the renaming of H. Roger Tatarian Elementary School with beautiful ceremonies. Throughout the month of September, secondary sites across the district have been hosting activities for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. National Hispanic Heritage Month kicked off on September 15 and schools have been offering a variety of activities for students to educate them of the contributions of Hispanic cultures in America.

To end Hispanic Heritage Month on a high note, Julissa Arce, author of best-seller, My (Underground) American Dream, will speak at Roosevelt High School on October 13. Birney and Calwa elementary schools will host Chalome Gonzalez, illustrator of Elote Man Goes to College, on October 11. Students at these Hispanic Heritage Month events will also walk away with a copy of the book. Lastly, the new Foundation for Fresno Unified Schools hosted its State of Education Gala on October 6 as a launch event and fundraising effort for the Fresno Unified Scholarship program. The foundation will foster community between our schools and partners to accelerate student progress, highlight the amazing happenings in our district, and fund high-impact, mission-driven investment to improve student trajectory. These are just a handful of events that got our school year off to a fantastic start!
“Gastonizing” Cultural Proficiency

Cultural Proficiency training, its implementation, and the creation of new strategies are at full throttle at Gaston Middle School, where Principal Courtney Curtis and Vice Principal Juan Garcia have tailored Cultural Proficiency trainings provided by Equity & Access to meet the needs of their staff, their community and most importantly, their students.

“Gastonizing” is having the tough conversations around disproportionality against historically marginalized groups and issues relating to difficult conversations between staff and students. The Cultural Proficiency Essential Elements has been transformed into a living document alongside the tools of Cultural Proficiency and used by the Professional Learning Community (PLC) in their mission to create a culturally aware, proficient, and inclusive school site.

Gaston is personalizing Cultural Proficiency strategies to meet the needs of their diverse students and staff, understanding the importance of individual stories of staff and students, and working hard on managing the dynamics of difference. A unique conflict management strategy has been developed that involves, getting the facts, clarifying values, checking perceptions, negotiating methods, adjusting to personalities, and seeking to understand cultural differences, currently being utilized schoolwide as incidents arise.

Gaston is a leader in creating a culturally proficiency school environment, through the offering of Ethnic Studies, which promotes an understanding of the cultures, histories, experiences, and issues relevant to and reflective of their student population.

In partnerships, Equity & Access will continue to provide learning supports and data to Gaston, to help with the development of Cultural Proficiency trainings, the development of new strategies, and in support of student groups -including the Black Excellence Achievement Meeting (BEAM).

Welcoming the CARE model

The Origin Story: Cultural Proficiency has been a heavily discussed topic in our district for some time now. This work is represented in a variety of ways in our district; whether materialized as a district Board Policy 0415 or an educational session to resolve a student conflict, Cultural Proficiency is being implemented at all levels in Fresno Unified. However, a reoccurring question regarding Cultural Proficiency is its ability to be adapted to a culturally destructive incident. With an intentional focus on the action-based Essential Elements (Tool No. 4 of the Cultural Proficiency framework) and continuous revision, the CARE Model was conceived and cemented as the next stage of Fresno Unified’s collective Cultural Proficiency journey. So, what is CARE?

CARE is the DEI’s Action Framework for proactive planning and responsive guidance towards managing, creating, leading, and maintaining an equitable and inclusive community. The action framework is comprised of four elements, as follows:

C – The Continuum: The Continuum is the tool used to categorize what you’ve heard – it allows you to be more courageous in those moments and be able to identify healthy vs. unhealthy practices. Recognizing the courage that it takes for someone to speak-out against inequity, moving our actions from a compliance-based tolerance for diversity towards a transformation for equity.

A – Assessment: An assessment of the practice or incident needs to be made by gathering data. You are planning a schoolwide event for families. What are the identifying focus areas, themes/messaging, etc.) Understanding the audience: Who is impacted, who is involved and who is influenced? In a responsive situation, we may utilize existing data, such as our Atlas database, to identify who was involved. Those influenced or being influenced by a practice or incident can be numerous. You may not be able to identify each and every person, but understanding the greater impact helps.

R – Response: Creating equitable practices means reflecting, reimagining and refining existing practices. At times, it may need to be repaired or restored, at times Reinforced. When we recognize, interrupt, redirect we may utilize Fresno Unified processes such as: Restorative Practices, Listening Circles, Peacemaking, hotline reporting and many more.

E – Equitable and Inclusive Environments: Upon completion of identifying the practice on the Continuum, gathering the data through an Asset-based Assessment, Responding in a manner of reimagining, restoring or reinforcing leads us towards creating environments that are inclusive and equitable and that eradicate inequitable practices. Working through the essential elements that we covered earlier in this presentation can also help create an equitable and inclusive environment. These environments can be places that elevate people