Student Equity & Empowerment

The Vision
The Student Equity & Empowerment department is dedicated to engaging the community in the betterment of the lives of children and families in Fresno County.

The Challenge
FCSS exists to provide support to schools. Educators in Fresno County have been studying the issues and challenges facing students in Fresno County schools, with a focus on the contributing factors to a one-in-four dropout rate in the county. Research indicates that a large percentage, conceivably as high as 40% of babies born in Fresno County, are to mothers without a high school diploma, with 70% of those births funded by Medi-Cal. Additionally, statistics on infant mortality and low birth rate are higher in Fresno County than in most counties in California. These factors contribute to more children with chronic health issues that prevent them from experiencing rich school readiness programs. Furthermore, these factors lead to two more alarming statistics: Only 37% of students entering kindergarten are assessed as "ready to learn," which means a child has the abilities and the knowledge to successfully learn in kindergarten, and only 46% of students are reading on grade level by third grade.

Reading by third grade is a crucial benchmark of a child's well-being. In education, it marks the end of learning to read and the beginning of reading to learn. And again, this benchmark is the best predictor of whether a child will ultimately graduate from high school. In Fresno, one-in-four third graders will likely not graduate from high school, which is close to 1,300 students every year. As a result, once a child is behind, they are likely to stay behind. After third grade and into the adolescent years are critical years of influence that could potentially lead to drug and alcohol dependencies, mental health issues, teen pregnancy, gang and other violence factors, which contribute to high incarceration rates in the county.

The Solution
Build human capital capacity
1. Lead efforts to create healthy families, inclusive of culturally astute methods, building on family strength and the development of strong male role models.

2. Initiate collaboration with community partners to leverage resources and build systems of student support.

3. Identify sources and develop agency relationships with mutually beneficial objectives.

4. Build public advocacy through effective messaging, positioning and public relations to inform students, parents, educators and the community about issues, challenges and best practices.

5. Provide specialized training for school and district personnel.

Build systems of support
1. Identify the specific needs of schools that directly impact students and fall within the academic initiatives identified by FCSS.

2. Identify, streamline and achieve efficient coordination of services and programs.

3. Maintain a continuum of care featuring student transition support within and between developmental and grade levels.

4. Develop the concept of "Principal as Case Manager" of a multidisciplinary team serving student and family.

5. Ensure the themes of civility, leadership, academics, service and attendance in schools are reflected in LCAPs.

Research, identify and provide professional development in programs of extraordinary potential for success
1. Seek research-based best practices, identify those that are culturally sensitive and appropriate for Fresno County communities and provide high-quality training opportunities to traditional educators.
2. Provide community messaging to influence the interaction of nontraditional educators relative to student success.

Measure success indicators and monitor progress
1. Seek community consensus on indicators for student success within the themes of civility, leadership, academics, service and attendance in schools.

2. Measure, track and communicate benchmark data and progress over time.