

**Humboldt County  
Black, Indigenous and People of  
Color Student Listening Sessions  
2022 Report Addendum**

**California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt**

**June 2022**



**CAL POLY  
HUMBOLDT**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by funding from the McKinleyville Family Resource Center and in-kind support from Cal Poly Humboldt.

The California Center for Rural Policy would specifically like to thank:

- Participants of the Northern Humboldt School District Listening Sessions
- Danielle Witten, Instructional Coach, Arcata High School
- Sharrone Blanck, Eureka Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- Aristeia Saulsbury, Prevention Programming & Community Outreach Project Manager, McKinleyville Family Resource Center
- Hillarie Beyer, Executive Director, McKinleyville Family Resource Center
- Dawn Arledge, Executive Director, California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt
- Tom Jackson, Ph.D., President, Cal Poly Humboldt
- Cal Poly Humboldt Sponsored Programs Foundation

Suggested Citation:

Smith, Alannah. *Humboldt County BIPOC Student Listening Report Addendum*. California Center for Rural Policy, Cal Poly Humboldt. June 2022.

The California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt is a research and policy center committed to informing policy, building community, and promoting the health and well-being of people and environments.

Cal Poly Humboldt  
California Center for Rural Policy  
1 Harpst Street  
Arcata, CA 95521  
(707) 826-3400  
<http://www.humboldt.edu/ccrp>  
[ccrp@humboldt.edu](mailto:ccrp@humboldt.edu)

## BACKGROUND

Promoting racial equity and inclusion is not new to Humboldt County, but in recent years it has become even more of a priority in the local schools. Each school and district have taken different approaches to creating a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environment for their Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students. There have been a number of opportunities for students to share their own experiences and make recommendations for changes they would like to see in the schools. In July of 2021, the first Humboldt County BIPOC Student Listening Session report was finalized and shared throughout the community. Information to draft the report was gathered through a series of listening sessions with BIPOC high school students, who then had a chance to review the draft report and share input before it was released to the wider community. The report highlighted the lived experiences of local BIPOC students, the activism and education they've organized, as well as their recommendations for peers, teachers, and administrators to help make school a safer and more nurturing learning environment.

The purpose of this second report is to review the themes and recommendations that emerged from the first report, new themes that emerged from conversations since then, and provide an update on areas where progress has been made and where further efforts are needed.

### History of Humboldt County Listening Sessions

The very first BIPOC student listening session was held in 2019 at Arcata High School. The event was requested by a high school student, and the Eureka branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) supported the effort by setting up the Zoom space and facilitating the session. The event had only one student in attendance. Since then, the listening sessions have grown immensely in both location and attendance. BIPOC students from all the main high schools in the county have either organized or been invited to participate in at least one listening session, with some students attending multiple sessions. During the past academic year schools with grades K-8 have started to organize listening sessions as well and invite both students and parents to share their experiences. The sessions have been facilitated by the students themselves, the Eureka NAACP, or staff from the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) at Cal Poly Humboldt.

Students that have participated in these listening sessions have shared that they value the opportunity to share their experiences in a safe space and be heard by adults without fear of judgment or retaliation. In recent sessions, some students have expressed that they don't feel they have as much to share as they have in previous years as there have been so many opportunities to do so that they finally feel heard and don't feel a need to repeat themselves. This isn't to say that listening sessions shouldn't continue as they are definitely making an impact on the school communities however, it is reassuring to know that at least some students are feeling like they are being heard and actions are being made by the adults.

## Recommendations from 2020-2021 Listening Sessions

During the listening sessions between 2020-2021, students shared a number of recommendations for how peers, teachers, and school administrators could help create or promote a safe and inclusive learning environment. The themes and recommendations for each group are outlined below. The listening sessions during the 2021-2022 academic year revealed that there has been progress on some of these recommendations, but there is still work to be done.

### Recommendations for Peers

The two common themes to emerge from this conversation were that peers can serve as advocates for students of color, and should be open to ongoing learning and conversations. The following recommendations highlight specifics to each of these themes:

- White peers should serve as allies by speaking up when something offensive or bigoted is said, whether a BIPOC person is around or not. This includes both in-person and on social media. Students noted that especially in the last year, students have continued to share social media messages related to racial equity and justice. While this is a positive step in the right direction, being a non-racist means more than just posting online and students of color would like their peers to be more comfortable with speaking out when something racist is said.
- White peers should also be open to learning and not automatically going into defense mode when a person of color tells them something they did or said was racist or offensive. Students shared there is frequent denial of racism and white fragility expressed by their peers, so they would like them to be more open to having these types of discussions and moving past the discomfort they may feel during conversations related to Race.

### Recommendations for Teachers & Administrators

While support from their peers was important, students represented in these different conversations continued to emphasize the fact that it's ultimately up to the teachers and administrators to create and sustain a safe, equitable and inclusive learning environment. Some recommendations for how they can do that were highlighted in the other sections of this report, but the following list provides more specific actions the districts and schools can take.

1. Make regular microaggression, implicit bias, and white ally training mandatory for all teachers and school administrators.
2. Provide professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn about generational trauma and the impacts it has on children.
3. Hire more BIPOC staff so students have a trusted adult on campus that they can go to for support as white allies can't always relate.
4. Offer ethnic studies courses that all students eligible to enroll in.

5. Establish accessible systems for students to report their trauma confidentially, without fear of backlash and with no time limit.
6. Create legitimate policies for consequences for racist behaviors or actions towards students of color.
7. Continue to provide opportunities for BIPOC students to engage in decision-making such as the school administrative equity teams or a BIPOC Advisory Board.
8. Allow all students the opportunity to organize and participate in cultural activities without making them jump through so many hurdles to get approval.
9. Continue to collaborate with local agencies that promote racial equity and inclusion such as the NAACP, Two Feathers Native American Family Services, Indian Education Committee and more.

### Humboldt County Demographics

To better understand why students decided to form these support networks and participate in these dialogues, it is helpful to review the demographics of the county which are presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. As reflected in the tables, Humboldt County remains a predominantly white county and the demographics of the high schools reflect that as they are all Predominately White Institutions (PWI). There has been minimal change in school and county demographics since the 2019-2020 school year that was reported on in the last report.

<b>Figure 1. Humboldt County High School Demographics</b>					
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Enrollment Characteristics (2020-2021)					
<b><u>Race/ Ethnicity</u></b>	<b><u>Arcata High</u></b>	<b><u>McKinleville High</u></b>	<b><u>Fortuna High</u></b>	<b><u>Eureka High</u></b>	<b><u>Academy of the Redwoods</u></b>
<b>American Indian / Alaska Native</b>	3%	8.2%	4.2%	4.7%	4.5%
<b>Asian</b>	2.3%	0.8%	0.6%	12.6%	4.5%
<b>African American / Black</b>	1.3%	0.6%	0.2%	1.5%	1.7%
<b>Hispanic / Latino</b>	14.3%	12.2%	28.1%	20.9%	21.2%
<b>Native Hawaiian /</b>	0.3%	0.8%	0.1%	1.5%	0%

<b>Pacific Islander</b>					
<b>White</b>	70%	62.7%	60.5%	50.3%	60.3%
<b>Two or More Races</b>	8.8%	14.9%	6.3%	8.4%	7.8%

<b>Figure 2. Humboldt County Demographics</b> Source: U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates (2021)					
<b><u>Race/ Ethnicity</u></b>	<b><u>Humboldt County</u></b>	<b><u>Arcata</u></b>	<b><u>Eureka</u></b>	<b><u>Fortuna</u></b>	<b><u>McKinleyville</u></b>
<b>American Indian / Alaska Native</b>	6.4%	3.1%	1.7%	2.4%	3.7%
<b>Asian</b>	2.9%	4.1%	6.2%	0.4%	3.7%
<b>African American / Black</b>	1.5%	2.5%	2.3%	0.9%	0.3%
<b>Hispanic / Latino</b>	12.1%	15.2%	15.6%	23%	10.9%
<b>Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander</b>	0.3%	1.0%	0.2%	0.6%	0%
<b>White</b>	83.2%	75.2%	72.9%	78.3%	82.1%
<b>Two or More Races</b>	5.7%	9.0%	10.2%	7.1%	7.4%

## **METHODS**

CCRP utilized a mixed methods approach for this project. Both primary and secondary data sources are included in the report.

### **Secondary Data**

Secondary data refers to information that is already available to the public. For this report, racial demographic data was reviewed from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics. Additionally, information on the student-led activism was collected through social media including Facebook, Instagram, and the local newspapers.

## Primary Data

Primary data refers to information gathered directly from first-hand sources. Information was collected through listening sessions with students in addition to some on-one-on conversations with adults in the school system that have helped support BIPOC students in their efforts.

## **RESULTS**

### Student Led Activism & Education

This section highlights just some of the student led activism that has happened over the past couple years related to racial equity and inclusion around Humboldt County. It reflects information gathered from listening sessions, as well as that which was publicized through social media or local news outlets.

One form of support that almost all the high schools in the county continue to have available and that are organized by students are cultural clubs, unions, or groups. Each school varies in the number of groups available and frequency of meetings, but when asked how being a part of these groups have supported students similar themes emerged. Students shared that the clubs have helped open their eyes to the diversity that does exist in the predominately white schools and serve as a safe space to meet people from a similar ethnic or cultural background that they may not have a chance to interact with during the regular school day. They have the opportunity to share their experiences, vent, and learn from one another without feeling judged. For those that are interested in advocacy these groups allow for that, but they can also serve as a space for students who just want to socialize. Student participants also noted that some BIPOC students don't attend the groups as they think they are all about activism so there's a desire to clarify that and get the word out about them being social clubs as well.

In addition to the listening sessions and organizing on campus club meetings one to two times a month, these groups also plan a wide variety of events that help celebrate and promote their cultures or heritage. These events are generally open to all students on campus and some examples include educational lessons on history, food, or culture, guest speakers, student organized protests, movie nights, field trips, mural painting, and any other ideas that students come up with to help celebrate or educate on their different cultures. The events are usually promoted through student social media accounts, and when approved by school administrators or teachers in the school bulletins as well. This is one area where students would like to have more support from adults in the schools as there are still barriers in getting events approved and promoted through the school systems and often requires extra advocacy by student organizers.

The following list outlines the cultural clubs, unions, or groups available at the larger high schools in the county. This may not be reflective of all groups in Humboldt but includes those

which were either mentioned in listening sessions that have been held over the past few years or that have an active presence on social media.

Academy of the Redwoods

- Minority Priority Club

Arcata High School

- Black Student Union (BSU)
- Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Club
- Native American Club
- LatinX Club

Eureka High School

- Black Student Union
- Hmong Club
- LatinX Club
- Native American Club

Fortuna High School

- Black Student Union
- First Nations Club
- Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA) Club

McKinleyville High School

- Black Student Union
- Native American Club

Lived Experience of Humboldt County BIPOC Students

While there has been progress made in the past few years, local BIPOC students still face incidences of microaggression and racism, many of which were outlined in the first report. In recent listening sessions students primarily highlighted the offensive remarks or microaggressions they face from their peers, the lack of appropriate response from school adults in response to these comments, the feeling of pressure to serve as a spokesperson for their entire race or ethnicity, and the limited options for diverse curriculum or cultural knowledge available in the schools.

Though there was less mention of racial slurs being used directly towards BIPOC students compared to last year, there was still frequent mention of insensitive comments being made by white peers about particular races or cultures. The comments often question or mock certain stereotypes or cultural practices, leaving BIPOC students to feel uncomfortable or unsafe in the classroom. Often, these conversations are started in response to lessons being taught about other cultures in the classroom, many of which are from a Eurocentric lens. While some students feel comfortable addressing their peers directly, many would prefer that the teachers or adults in charge in the classroom be prepared to address the comments or take disciplinary action instead. Students shared that they often feel these forms of comments are ignored by teachers who don't feel comfortable having these types of hard conversations with their students. This is an area where students noted that additional training on how to better address these situations would be beneficial for both teachers and school administrators.



Participants of listening sessions also talked about incidents in which they felt they had to serve as a spokesperson for their entire race or ethnicity when both peers and adults ask them questions and assume that a general answer applies to everyone. The students are often left feeling uncomfortable and unsure how to address the questions or comments. Students shared that they would prefer if there were more trusted adults that people are aware of that can help answer questions related to race and equity or provide resources for more information. Some school adults have already started to step into this role but making those individuals more clearly known and accessible for each school community is important to the students.

Another challenge students continue to struggle with is the strong focus on Eurocentric curriculum and lack of diverse representation of other cultures, especially in history and English classes. When history lessons are taught about other races or cultures, they tend to be from a Eurocentric lens and often only include one perspective of a historical event. A number of BIPOC students also shared that they often feel uncomfortable during lessons about their own race or culture as peers will look to them for input and assume that they are prepared to speak for their entire race, even when it comes to lessons on tragic events such as genocides. Some teachers have found ways to better support BIPOC students by giving them a heads up when sensitive topics are coming up in the classroom and giving them the option of participating in the conversations or not. Students who have had that choice appreciate the option and wish that more teachers would be aware and offer that BIPOC students in all classes.

Additionally, for students that choose to take advanced placement (AP) courses most schools only offer European history as an option and world history doesn't count towards AP credit. Students noted that when their AP teachers have tried to incorporate a more diverse curriculum by assigning books by BIPOC authors, it's often only for summer reading so there isn't an opportunity to have deeper conversations about it in the classroom.

Though there weren't many details shared, some students highlighted the racism and microaggressions that occur outside of the school setting throughout the county. Many people consider Humboldt County to be very progressive in terms of racial equity and inclusion however, a number of students said that's not the case as they still encounter people who make racial remarks or profile based on the color of their skin color.

### Models for School or District Level Change

While there is still much work to be done in terms of addressing racial equity and inclusion, schools and districts across the county have started to respond to the needs of BIPOC students in positive ways. In addition to partnering with organizations like the NAACP and CCRP to help with listening sessions, some have also implemented new policies, procedures, and staff positions that help provide direct support to BIPOC students.

In 2020, a couple of local school districts released their own versions of Equity Statements, which were outlined in more detail in the first Listening Session Report. Since then, they have worked to follow through on a number of the goals outlined in those statements. One effort is the continuation of the on-campus Equity Teams which are made up of students, administrators, teachers, school counselors, and board members. The meetings are held once a month by invite only and serve as another safe space for students to speak out about their needs and make recommendations for changes in the school policies or procedures. The meetings are facilitated in a way that students always have the opportunity to speak first and ask for what they want before adults respond. Students that have had the opportunity to participate in these groups are very thankful and have noted they feel adults are receptive and responsive to the information being shared.

Another procedure implemented at two of the local high schools is an Incident Reporting Form. The form is available to all students, parents, guardians, close relatives, or school staff members who wish to report an incident of alleged harassment or discrimination. The form asks questions such as contact information, role in the school community, where the incident occurred, description of the incident, how the reporting party is feeling about the incident, and what type of support they might be interested in following it. The form states that administrators in charge of reviewing the forms will do their best to protect confidentiality and keep the reporting person's identity private, unless there are circumstances of someone being unsafe. The form also includes resources for someone in need of immediate support.

Once the form is filled out, there are five steps the schools have committed to following:

- 1) School administrator will review the report within 2 school days.
- 2) Administrator will meet with the reporter within 2-3 school days. If someone would prefer not to meet the school administrator, they can choose another trusted adult on campus.
- 3) School staff and trusted adults will work towards meeting the needs for one's safety and healing.
- 4) Administrators gather all the information and meet with all parties to review options and make a responsive action plan.
- 5) Administrators meets with the reporter to communicate next steps and follow up to let one know of the outcomes. Due to privacy laws some, information on disciplinary actions may not be shared.

The school's Equity Teams worked together to create the form and process in addition to a number of documents to help promote it. The form is available in both English and Spanish and accessible to the full school community. Students that have used the form have found it to be very helpful and appreciate the clear procedures and short follow up time.

Another effort from schools and districts is the hiring of specific staff positions that can help support students, teachers, and other staff in training or advocacy related to racial equity and inclusion. One example is an Instructional Coach based at a specific school site who is there to provide support to the teachers around many different topics, with equity and inclusion being a big focus in recent years. Some of the local Instructional Coaches have gone beyond their regular job duties to help support BIPOC students in getting their needs met by serving as a liaison between them and school administrators. Such positions can help support an Equity Team, planning of events, education for teachers and administrators and much more.

District level administrators have taken a similar approach in creating a position called Learning Specialist for Equity & Inclusion whose role is to help students, teachers, and administrators at multiple school sites by providing a wide range of support and education. Some of the training that has been offered at a district level so far includes the Four Dimensions of Racism & Implicit Bias Training, Equitable Hiring Workshop, and an Equity Series that covered a range of topics.

In addition to the district and school level actions, community partners such as the Eureka NAACP and The McKinleyville Family Resource Center continue to support students in a number of advocacy related efforts. There are plans for the listening sessions to continue in future school years and district and school staff are starting to explore the opportunity for BIPOC students to participate in the On the Verge training. On the Verge is a program recognized statewide that is dedicated to developing non-traditional leaders to help address the educational, social, health, and economic inequities that exist within a community. Again, the efforts outlined here are just those that were brought up in listening sessions, but they can help serve as a model for other schools or districts interested in promoting equitable practices and inclusion for all students.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list outlines additional recommendations from recent listening sessions that were not already included in the first report or areas that need more work. This set of recommendations is primary for teachers and school administrators and actions they can take to help make school environments feel safer and more nurturing for BIPOC students.

1. Implement or continue school specific supports such as Equity Teams or Incident Reporting Forms.
2. Establish clearer policies that make it easier for BIPOC student groups, events, or educational opportunities to be organized and promoted on school campuses.
3. Help identify and promote trusted adults within each school that the school community can go to with questions, comments, or issues related to racial equity and inclusion and who can provide information or additional resources.

4. Identify and promote resources that will help teachers diversify curriculum so that it is not so Eurocentric.
5. Continue to offer training opportunities for teachers and school administrators that will help them learn how to appropriately navigate conversations related to race and equity that come up in the classroom setting.

## **NEXT STEPS**

While this report outlines some of the current experiences and efforts related to supporting the Humboldt County BIPOC student community, there is still always work to be done. If anyone is interested in being involved in current efforts or has ideas for more, please consider joining a student group within a local school or contact the McKinleyville Family Resource Center at [info@mckfrc.org](mailto:info@mckfrc.org).