

YES We Can!

The quarterly newsletter from Youth Empowerment School

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- January 18
- War of the Words at Youth Speaks in San Francisco
- January 29-31
- Student Exhibitions
- February
- Bridging the Gap Conference

"You'll never see our best because we keep getting better!" - Mikel Calderon, founding student

Seniors Saying "YES" to College

Historically, according to Principal Maureen Benson, only three percent of Oakland Unified School District seniors have been eligible to apply to four-year colleges. Last year, five of 30 seniors went on to attend four-year schools. "This was our first senior class," says Karen Pezzetti, senior advisor and English teacher. "We had a lot of learning about the process to do." This year, staff has prioritized the application process as a central piece of its advisory curriculum, and students dedicate time each week to researching prospective colleges, prepping personal statements, and completing applications online. Thanks as well to rewarding partnerships with College Summit and College Works, and a lot of hard work by students and senior advisors alike, YES is proud to have 31 out of 45 seniors applying to four-year colleges!

"Having numbers like this makes such a big difference," explains Pezzetti. "I hear juniors asking seniors, 'What colleges are you applying to?' and 'Are the SATs hard?'" The examples set by today's seniors, she says, "[create] a college-going culture



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Seniors Antonisha, Anthony, Dejana, and Deanna

that will help us continue to raise our numbers in the future." To list just a few of the marquee schools where YES seniors are applying: UC Berkeley, UCLA, Brown University, Mills College, Spelman College, and Howard University. YES is also thrilled with its most recent Academic Performance Index (API) score, which soared 90 points — one of the biggest gains in Oakland. "We are so proud that this year's class is recognizing and living their dreams!" says Benson. "The universities will be lucky to have them. This is an incredible group of young people."

Stay tuned for updates on all our college-bound seniors in future newsletters!



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Joey presents during this fall's debate on the Rwandan genocide



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New at YES: Student Unity Council



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ABOVE: Seniors Edgar, Tiana, and Ricardo
RIGHT: 10th-grader Daneshia during a mock trial covering the effects of colonialism on Africa



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**"I like the students at YES and that we have a small school to [help us] get to know people and learn."
- 12th-grader Sheriff Makanjoula**

Youth Empowerment School is proud to announce its first student-led governing class, Student Unity Council (SUC)! Its 26 student members hit the ground running this fall: "SUC has started building alliances with students, staff, and community partners by putting a lot of energy and hard work into providing culturally relevant education, activities, events, and safe places for everyone to go and have fun," writes YES's recently elected Promoter of Publicity Kendra Johnson.

The empowering effort is a collaboration with the non-profit *Youth Together*, which 9th-grade history teacher and community partnerships coordinator Tim Bremner calls a "partnership with a meaningful student engagement program to help make students' voices

heard in the district." Already this year, SUC has engineered a successful, fair student rep election; organized YES's first student-run assembly, "Panther Rush"; and pulled off its proudest project to date, Unity Week.

The week featured a full slate of activities giving the entire YES community opportunities to come together and learn about one another. During Unity Week, teachers held workshops on an array of cultural topics, from Xicano History to Ethnic Studies to Dia de lo Muertos. In a few short months, Johnson writes, SUC has "[created] many avenues for us to engage in decision making here on campus." It seems they're just getting started: SUC has a long list of initiatives planned for the second semester.



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Seniors Anthony and Dejuana and English teacher Karen Pezzetti

Support YES!

Student Unity Council is part of a school-wide effort to realize YES's holistic vision, says Tim Bremner. The after-school program is another essential piece in creating a school environment where students are fully engaged. To this end, YES is making a big push to develop a Youth Center, making the campus not just a school but a comprehensive community center.

Government funds alone do not cover our costs for this and other projects (such as stocking our virtually empty library). If you'd like to make a tax-deductible donation to help us fund these key initiatives, you can write a check to "OSSF - YES" and send it to YES c/o OSSF, PO Box 20238, Oakland, CA 94620. To donate online, visit www.smallschoolsfoundation.org and click "Donate Now." (Be sure to type "YES" in the Designation field.)