

Visit Hinkley High School

On Monday, October 24, 2016, eight Colorado State University students in ETST 493: Ethic Studies Research and Writing class and their instructor visiting Hinkley High School in Aurora, Colorado. Students participating in this event were: Briana Compton, Galen Donoviel, Angela Groves, Marielle Konzen, Marissa Mullen, Omar Sanchez, and Nataleah Joy Small, along with Dr Tom Cavanagh. Also accompanying them on the visit were CSU staff, Dr. Patricia Vigil, Director of University Partnerships and Student Success for the Division of Enrollment and Access; Amy Notier,, Alliance, Program Coordinator; Star Sullivan, Undergraduate Academic Advising for the College of Engineering; and CSU student, Ashley Tate, former Alliance Presidential Leadership Institute Intern.

Hosting the CSU visitors was Hinkley High School Principal Matthew Willis. He was joined by Assistant Principal Andre Bala; Lisa Birdsong, Counseling Department Chair; Tanya, Ilela, counselor; Anthony (TJ) Cunningham, 9th Grade Student Services; Tom Velasquez, TOSA Instructional Support; and Anna Biknase, Restorative Justice Coordinator.

The purpose of the meeting was to update people from CSU about the progress made regarding implementation of a Culture of Care at Hinkley High School based on restorative justice principles and practices. With some financial support from CSU, Doctors Cavanagh and Vigil, and then CSU student Star Sullivan introduced the Culture of Care to educators at Hinkley High School in 2010. CSU staff facilitated this pilot research and professional development program, which continued for the next three school years, 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013. So the recent meeting was intended to update these people and other CSU guests about how educators at Hinkley High School had sustained the Culture of Care and as a result improved outcomes for culturally diverse students at the school.

Principal Willis proudly announced to the people from CSU that you can see the culture shift at Hinkley High School is we are on tracking well to become a "performance" high school for this school year. The current enrollment is 2,075 students. He explained that this is an outstanding achievement for any large comprehensive high school with over 92% enrollment of students of color and the highest poverty rate among all high schools in Aurora Public Schools. He noted that large comprehensive high schools across our district and state that are similar to Hinkley's demographics are "failing" and Hinkley is currently designated as "improvement." He explained that Hinkley High School has reduced referrals by 76% and improved graduation rates by about 30% since our partnership with CSU began.

Principal Willis divided those visiting into three groups and invited them to go to different areas of the school to watch the passing of students between class periods. Restorative Justice Coordinator Bknase invited students to go with her to watch a restorative justice "check up" circle with a group of freshman students who were experiencing some issues.

CSU staff and students left the visit to Hinkley High School impressed that educators at the school have not only sustained the principles and practices related to creating a culture of care based on restorative justice principles and practices, they have improved outcomes for all students in terms of both discipline and achievement.