**Black Student Support**

**Summit Hosted By UC Davis Encourages African American Scholars To Seek Academic Excellence**

Students attending last week’s White House Summit on Educational Excellence for African Americans at UC Davis were asked to stand up and be acknowledged. The person making the request was David J. Johns, the man handpicked by President Barack Obama to oversee the national initiative.

“We’re proud of you,” Johns said on behalf of himself, President Obama and national Education Secretary John King, who addressed attendees in a video message.

“We expect each of you to graduate from college,” Johns continued. “Being here is a part of the struggle. It matters not unless you complete the degree.”

African American student retention and success and barriers to them were discussed at the summit, that drew (Continued on Page F-2)

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young people and educators from throughout California and the Sacramento region.

Several speakers called the conversation “critical.” Johns said it is important for decision makers to “anchor solutions in the experiences of students.”

The summit was highlighted by two panel discussions featuring area student leaders. “Campus Climate: Feeling Safe, Engaged and Supported” panelists included Isaiah Soto, a student athlete at Sacramento Charter High School who maintains a 4.0 and is a member of the school’s Architects of Hope Program; Adam Allen, a student athlete at Valley High School and a member of the Improve Your Tomorrow Program; Janay Ezekwe, Sacramento State’s Black Student Union President; Gabriel Johnson, an undergraduate student leader at UC Davis, and Mariah Watson, an undergraduate who served as UC Davis’ first African American female student body president.

“We talk around issues so much that they’re buried,” Ms. Watson said of the need for real talk and real change at UC Davis.

Johns made reference during the summit to a recent incident in which a Black female student was assaulted on campus by two White men. Following the incident Black students approached administration with a list of demands to make life better for African American students.

“What I need as a Black student is to be heard,” shared Ms. Watson, who was among those making the demands.

“There are real neutral policies, but this is not a race neutral environment. We have to keep this issue because of our race,” she added.

A second panel was titled “A Conversation on Retention, Financial Aid and Student Support Resources.” Panelists included Sacramento State student Eliza El-Henson; American River College student Vinson Saldivar; Sacramento Charter High School student and architect of Hope member Raymel Green, UC Davis student Lorenzo Ramsey; and UC Davis graduate student Ralph Washington, Jr.

“This summit is about advancing and preserving the intellectual vitality that African American youth bring to academic life and how critical it is that we as a community recognize and affirm this intellectual heft and that we remove the barriers to African American participation in higher education,” shared Yvette Gallant, UC Vice Provost for Diversity and Engagement.

Ms. Gallant mentioned outreach efforts that focus on getting more African Americans into UC schools and help they receive to make sure they’re prepared for admission.

“We’re proud of the tools we bring, we also know that the status quo is not enough. We must be more creative, we must be more innovative and we must be more passionate about how we engage with our young people,” Smith said.

Other discussion topics included what it means to be young, gifted and Black in today’s society, hiring teachers and professors of color and dispelling myths about African Americans and their potential.

Ryan Smith, executive director of Education Trust-West, shared data on inequality in education, how Black students are faring in schools across the state, how poverty impacts education and how education impacts incarceration rates.

“When we talk about our lives matter, we also have to talk about our education mattering too,” Smith said.

UC Davis solidified its commitment to African American achievement, with the opening of its Center for African Diaspora Student Success last October. At the heart of the campus’ new African American Initiative, the center will facilitate a multitude of services — including on-site tutoring, academic advising and mental health counseling — to support those historically underrepresented in higher education. Its director, Kayton Carter, also spoke at the summit, sharing how the center is now being replicated throughout the UC system.

The summit is a part of a national series that allows organizers to hear student voices and gauge their needs so that all can feel “safe, supported and engaged.”

A student panel engaged area student leaders including Janay Ezekwe, left, Gabriel Johnson, Mariah Watson, Isaiah Soto and Adam Allen. The discussion on campus climate was moderated by David Johns, right.

Summit Offers Black Student Support…