

## Focus on Equity for African American Students and Closing the Achievement Gap



Rose Owens-West, Ph.D.

**Session Description:** Closing achievement and opportunity gaps is the most prevalent and enduring challenge that we face in American public education. The negative outcomes for African American students are at the core of this challenge, and in California, the gaps in outcomes between African American students and their peers is expanding.

During the 2017-2018 school year, concerned African American community members and County Superintendent Steve Tietjen met to address the negative outcomes for African American students in Merced county. In response, Supt. Tietjen convened those community members, with district representatives and staff from Merced COE to form the Council for African American Student Success (CAASS). Since then CAASS members have worked together to identify ways to improve educational services and outcomes for African American students at every level.

Many other county offices and districts across the state are responding to this same challenge. Believing that we should learn from one another, the Merced County Office of Education is convening this Pre-Conference session to provide an opportunity for us to learn about the work in different counties and districts.

Representatives from the Merced COE, CAASS, Madera USD, Madera USD, the Office of the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, and the Riverside COE will share about their journey and lessons during this Pre-Conference Session. Dr. Rose Owens-West from WestEd will serve as the moderator for the session. The session is designed to allow the panelists to share their experiences, discuss some key issues, and to engage in discussion with the audience.

**Rose Owens-West, Ph.D.** is the Director of Equity for the Comprehensive School Assistance Program at WestEd. Throughout her career she has focused creating better opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for historically under-served students.

At WestEd she has led multiple federally-funded projects focused on improving schooling for students impacted by poverty, redesigning high schools, and ensuring the civil rights of students. Dr. Owens-West has worked with the state departments of education in Arizona, California and Nevada, and served the major urban school systems in each of those states in addition to

multiple mid-size and rural districts. She began her career as a Social Studies teacher in Raleigh, Tennessee. Prior to WestEd, she worked with the Illinois State Board of Education and RMC.

She has a BA in Anthropology from Rhodes College, and an MA in Anthropology and Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana. She earned a Ph.D. in Education Administration and Policy at Stanford University.

Dr. Owens-West has received recognition for her outstanding work in equity. Most relevant, under her leadership, the Equity Assistance Center at WestEd received excellent reviews from clients, and excellent outcomes on evaluations conducted by the National Library of Congress for the US Department of Education (USDE). In 2014 the leadership and staff of WestEd honored her “for her tireless efforts to improve education and achieve better outcomes for children, particularly those historically underserved.”