

Akonadi Foundation

# *Giving Students of Color Every Opportunity to Go to College*

OAKLAND

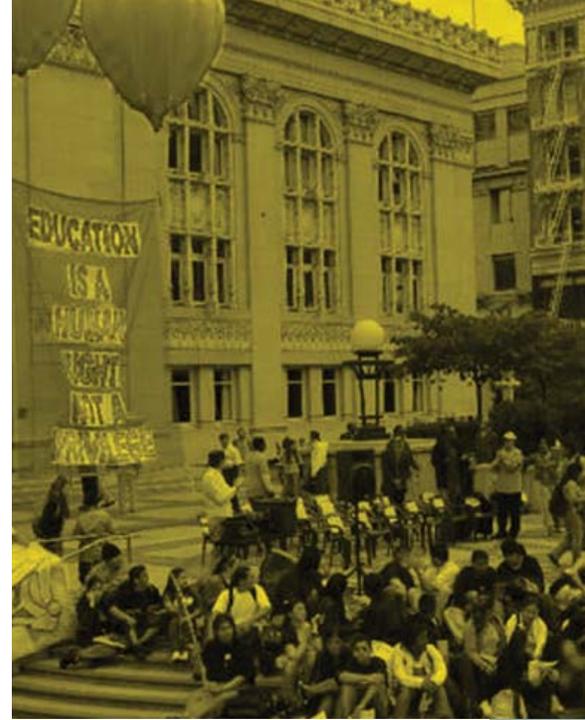


PHOTO USED BY PERMISSION OF THE AKONADI FOUNDATION

**IF CALIFORNIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS** want to attend a four-year college, they must complete a series of specific courses known as the “A-G curriculum.” These courses include basics such as foreign languages, science, history and higher-level math courses.

Unfortunately, only 17 percent of California’s school districts actually provide all enrolled students with the opportunity to complete this “A-G curriculum” and those districts primarily serve white students. As a result, less than a quarter of the African American, Latino, Pacific Islander and Native American students who graduate from high school in California are qualified to apply to colleges in the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) systems.

The Akonadi Foundation, a foundation working to build a movement to eliminate structural racism, provides long-term financial support to a wide range of organizations engaged in racial justice issues, covering their operating costs and allowing them to focus on developing leaders and building strength in their communities.

In 2005, a number of Akonadi grantees, including Youth Together, Oakland Kids First, Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership, and Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, were exploring ways to better align their efforts and promote student-initiated reforms that would address the growing achievement gap in Oakland schools. The grantees formed a coalition that worked with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) to develop a Meaningful Student Engagement (MSE) policy to strengthen student voices and leadership in the district. This policy created a vehicle, the MSE Collaborative, for youth organizing groups to work with official student government leaders and come up with a mutual education reform agenda.

“Thanks to the Akonadi Foundation’s long-term support, our organization is empowered to take advantage of opportunities that can mean real change for students of color. Our A-G curriculum victory is a perfect example of that positive change.”

—AKUA JACKSON

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS, YOUTH TOGETHER

A few years later, many of these grantees were working on issues of college access and readiness and found that Oakland schools did not provide enough “A-G” college course classes for all the students who wanted to take them. In 2008, the grantees presented these issues at an MSE Collaborative retreat and the Collaborative decided to pursue this college access campaign. The grantees and school leaders conducted research about the lack of access to college requirement courses and presented their findings and recommendations to the school board. The Collaborative partners worked together to draft language for a resolution adopting the “A-G” college course curriculum district-wide, garnered support from allies, and mobilized student supporters for the school board meeting.

In June 2009, the OUSD board passed an “A-G” policy designed to align high school graduation requirements in Oakland with state public college entrance requirements – ensuring student access to the courses needed for college. The policy will go into effect in the fall of 2011 when all ninth graders will automatically be enrolled in courses required by the CSU and UC systems.

This successful campaign demonstrates the impact of a long-term movement-building strategy for educational justice, supported by the Akonadi Foundation, in which youth of color advocated for the creation of an official department dedicated to youth engagement within the school system – and as a result, were able to leverage the partnership between official student government bodies and youth organizing groups to win larger, more significant policy changes like the “A-G” policy and ensure its successful implementation.

Akonadi’s ongoing commitment to support the operating costs for these youth organizing groups allowed the groups to build collective power for students and pass policies that increase the graduation and college-going rates for youth of color. This campaign is being used as a model in other school districts around the state to ensure access for all students to attend college.

---

**THE AKONADI FOUNDATION:** *Since 2000, the Akonadi Foundation has been working to support and nurture a racial justice movement that can finally put an end to the structural racism that lies at the heart of social inequity in the United States. We do this by providing grants to racial justice organizations, by communicating about our work and the work of our grant partners, and by nurturing support for racial justice movement building in philanthropy.*

FOR MORE INFORMATION,  
PLEASE VISIT:

The Akonadi Foundation  
[www.akonadi.org](http://www.akonadi.org)

Asian Immigrant Women  
Advocates  
[www.aiwa.org](http://www.aiwa.org)

Asian/Pacific Islander  
Youth Promoting Advocacy &  
Leadership  
[www.aypal.org](http://www.aypal.org)

Californians for Justice  
[www.caljustice.org](http://www.caljustice.org)

Oakland Kids First  
[www.kidsfirstoakland.org](http://www.kidsfirstoakland.org)

Youth Together  
[www.youthtogether.net](http://www.youthtogether.net)