

# Oakland School Board Ebonics Resolution

*[This is a copy of the resolution passed by the Oakland Unified School District Board of Education on December 18th, 1996, concerning the issue of Ebonics]*

1 WHEREAS, numerous validated scholarly studies demonstrate that African-American students as a part of their culture and history as African people possess and utilize a language described in various scholarly approaches as "Ebonics" (literally "Black sounds") or "Pan-African Communication Behavior" or "African Language Systems"; and

2 WHEREAS, these studies have also demonstrated that **African Language Systems are genetically based and not a dialect of English**; and

3 WHEREAS, these studies demonstrate that such West and Niger-Congo African languages have been officially recognized and addressed in the mainstream public educational community as worth of study, understanding or application of its principles, laws and structures for the benefit of African-American students both in terms of positive appreciation of the language and these students' acquisition and mastery of English language skills; and

4 WHEREAS, such recognition by scholars has given rise over the past fifteen years to legislation passed by the State of California recognizing the unique language stature of descendants of slaves, with such legislation being prejudicially and unconstitutionally vetoed repeatedly by various California state governors; and

5 WHEREAS, judicial cases in states other than California have recognized the unique language stature of African-American pupils, and such recognition by courts has resulted in court-mandated educational programs which have substantially benefited African American children in the interest of vindicating their equal protection of the law rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution; and

6 WHEREAS, the Federal Bilingual Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1402 et seq) mandates that local educational agencies "build their capacities to establish, implement and sustain programs of instruction for children and youth of limited English proficiency; and

7 WHEREAS, the interests of the Oakland Unified School District in providing equal opportunities for all of its students dictate limited English proficient educational programs recognizing **the English language acquisition and improvement skills of African-American students are as fundamental as is application of bilingual education principles for others whose primary languages are other than English**; and

8 WHEREAS, the standardized tests and grade scores of African-American students in reading and language arts skills measuring their application of English skills are substantially below state and national norms and that such deficiencies will be remedied by application of a program featuring African Language Systems principles in **instructing African-American children both in their primary language and in English**; and

9 WHEREAS, standardized tests and grade scores will be remedied by application of a program with teachers and aides who are certified in the methodology of featuring African Language Systems principles in instructing African-American children both in their primary language and in English. The certified teachers of these students will be provided incentives including, but not limited to salary differentials.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

1 RESOLVED that the Board of Education officially recognizes the existence, and the cultural and historic bases of West and Niger-Congo African Language Systems, and each language as the predominantly primary language of African-American students; and

2 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby adopts the report recommendations and attached Policy Statement of the District's African-American Task Force on language stature of African-American speech; and

3 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent in conjunction with her staff shall immediately devise and implement the best possible academic program for imparting **instruction to African-American students in their primary language** for the combined purposes of maintaining the legitimacy and richness of such language whether it is known as "Ebonics," "African Language Systems," "Pan-African Communication Behaviors" or other description, and to facilitate their acquisition and mastery of English language skills; and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby commits to earmark District general and special funding as is reasonably necessary and appropriate to enable the Superintendent and her staff to accomplish the foregoing; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent and her staff shall utilize the input of the entire Oakland educational community as well as state and federal scholarly and educational input in devising such a program; and

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that periodic reports on the progress of the creation and implementation of such an educational program shall be made to the Board at least once per month commencing at the Board meeting of December 18, 1996.

**AMENDED  
RESOLUTION OF THE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
ADOPTING THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN TASK FORCE;  
A POLICY STATEMENT  
AND  
DIRECTING THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS  
TO DEVISE A PROGRAM TO IMPROVE THE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND APPLICATION SKILLS  
OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS**

**No. 9697-0063**

1 WHEREAS, numerous validated scholarly studies demonstrate that African-American students as a part of their culture and history **as** African people possess and utilize a language described in various scholarly approaches as "Ebonics" (literally "Black sounds") or "Pan African Communication Behaviors" or "African Language Systems"; and

2 WHEREAS, these studies have also demonstrated that African Language Systems **have origins in West and Niger-Congo languages** and **are not merely** dialects of English; and

3 WHEREAS, these studies demonstrate that such West and Niger-Congo African languages have been recognized and addressed in the educational community as worthy of study, understanding **and** application of their principles, laws and structures for the benefit of African-American students both in terms of positive appreciation of the language and these students' acquisition and mastery of English language skills; and

4 WHEREAS, such recognition by scholars has given rise over the past fifteen years to legislation passed by the State of California recognizing the unique language stature of descendants of slaves, with such legislation being prejudicially and unconstitutionally vetoed repeatedly by various California state governors; and

5 WHEREAS, judicial cases in states other than California have recognized the unique language stature of African American pupils, and such recognition by courts has resulted in court-mandated educational programs which have substantially benefited African-American children in the interest of vindicating their equal protection of the law rights under the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution; and

6 WHEREAS, the Federal Bilingual Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1402 et seq.) mandates that local educational agencies "build their capacities to establish, implement and sustain programs of instruction for children and youth of limited English proficiency; and

7 WHEREAS, the interest of the Oakland Unified School District in providing equal opportunities for all of its students dictate limited English proficient educational programs recognizing the English language acquisition and improvement skills of African-American students are as

fundamental as is application of bilingual **or second language learner** principles for others whose primary languages are other than English. **Primary languages are the language patterns children bring to school;** and

8 WHEREAS, the standardized tests and grade scores of African-American students in reading and language arts skills measuring their application of English skills are substantially below state and national norms and that such deficiencies will be remedied by application of a program featuring African Language Systems principles **to move students from the language patterns they bring to school to English proficiency;** and

9 WHEREAS, standardized tests and grade scores will be remedied by application of a program that teachers and **instructional assistants**, who are certified in the methodology of African Language Systems principles **used to transition students from the language patterns they bring to school to English.** The certified teachers of these students will be provided incentives including, but not limited to salary differentials;

1 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education officially recognizes the existence, and the cultural and historic bases of West and Niger-Congo African Language Systems, and each language as the primary language of **many** African-American students; and

2 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby adopts the report, recommendations and attached Policy Statement of the District's African-American Task Force on **the** language stature of African-American speech; and

3 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent in conjunction with her staff shall immediately devise and implement the best possible academic program for the combined purposes of facilitating **the acquisition and mastery of English language skills, while respecting and embracing** the legitimacy and richness of the language **patterns** whether **they are** known as "Ebonics", "African Language Systems", "Pan African Communication Behaviors", or other description; and

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Education hereby commits to earmark District general and special funding as is reasonably necessary and appropriate to enable the Superintendent and her staff to accomplish the foregoing; and

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Superintendent and her staff shall utilize the input of the entire Oakland educational community as well as state and federal scholarly and educational input in devising such a program; and

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that periodic reports on the progress of the creation and implementation of such an educational program shall be made to the Board of Education at least once per month commencing at the Board meeting of December 18, 1996.