



SACRAMENTO AREA YOUTH SPEAKS



Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS) is a social justice movement that transforms education. Founded in 2008 at UC Davis by Dr. Vajra Watson, SAYS breaks the barriers of underachievement by elevating the voices of students as the authors of their own lives and agents of change.

To accomplish our mission, we connect the community, university and schools through art, activism and academics.



SAYS is a crown jewel of UC Davis. SAYS signals to the region that our university cares about children, youth and their families, as well as the well-being of our communities.

—Maisha Winn



Community-University-School Partnerships

SAYS is a national model of educational equity that moves the most marginalized students into the center of support. Our award-winning curriculum focuses on Health, Education, Activism, and Leadership (HEAL) through a lens of literary arts and spoken word performance poetry.

We connect theory to practice through an innovative method of scholar activism and racial justice:

1. Training poet-mentor educators and teaching artists from the neighborhood to work inside schools as a critical bridge between the community and the classroom;
2. Providing direct instruction to students: helping youth read, write, and share their stories;
3. Conducting large-scale professional development for teachers and school leaders who want to implement transformative social justice practices;
4. Developing a new generation of undergraduate and graduate “warrior scholars” who embody education as a form of liberation.

“SAYS, under Dr. Watson’s visionary leadership, is doing some of the most impactful work with diverse and underserved youth that I know of in the country. I have learned a lot about effective, culturally responsive ways to increase achievement through my connections with SAYS, and I will continue to support this work wholeheartedly.”

—Dr. Jabari Mahiri

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 Transformative Justice in Education Center

SAYS is part of the revolution that is occurring across our country to educate, inspire and energize youth through arts and activism. This work is probably our best hope for motivating and supporting so many youth who have been disenfranchised and alienated by traditional schooling.

—Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings

SAYS Impact

Over the last decade, SAYS has worked with over 10,000 students and teachers. During 2018-2019, SAYS served 3,000 students through weekly in-class residencies, after-school services, school-wide assemblies, and elective courses at 35 middle and high schools in Sacramento and Yolo counties. Longitudinal data demonstrates the following:

48%

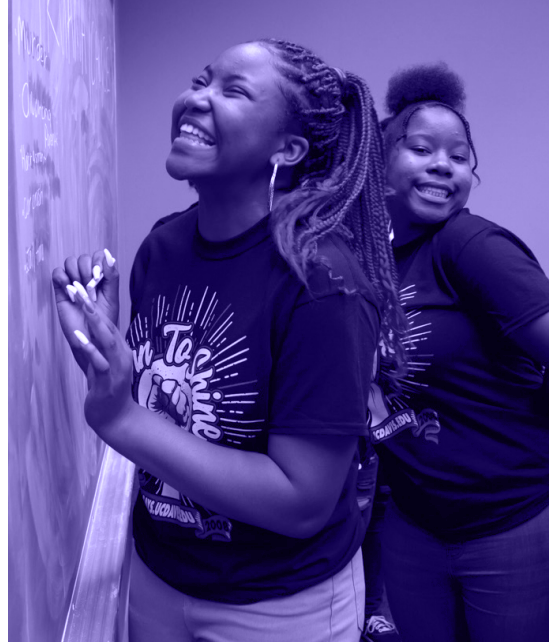
increase in school attendance

81%

will be the first in their families to attend college

90%

who attend college graduate in five years or less



SAYS has established itself as an effective and powerful medium for developing the literacy skills, in all its facets, of young people in the Sacramento area. For educators and students, SAYS has become an invaluable educational asset. I am proud to be a member of the SAYS board.

—Dr. Pedro Noguera

“As a SAYS student in high school, I was given a safe space where I felt my voice mattered and was heard. The things we talked about and wrote about made me change my college interest and enroll at UC Davis as a freshman last year. Through SAYS I have had to ability to strengthen my voice, speak my truth, and positively impact the youth in my former neighborhood in South Sacramento.”

—Malissia B.

“During my first few years at UC Davis, I struggled with depression and anxiety because it was challenging to adjust to college. SAYS doesn’t just provide a healing space for the students they work with but also for their college interns and their staff. After my experience working with SAYS, I realized I needed to be involved in education. I have now changed my career to become a principal because I know how important it is to create a culture surrounded by healing.”

—Candisse G.

