

# Roots to Excellence



Speakers included, left to right: Tanisha Harris representing Senator Maria Cantwell's office, a representative from the Portland Trailblazers, and a keynote from Erin Jones.

We were honored to welcome around 50 Black/African American high school students to Clark College on February 20. Hosted by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the event provided students with a welcoming space to explore higher education pathways, connect with mentors, and take the first steps toward their future.

Held during Black History Month, the Roots to Excellence event introduced local Black students and students of African descent to Clark as a pathway to higher education and future careers. Students also learned the necessary steps to enroll at Clark.

The event was organized by Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, NAACP, ACT-SO Vancouver, Vancouver Public Schools, and Evergreen Public Schools.

We were pleased to have students from Union High School,

Henrietta Lacks High School, and Fort Vancouver High School join us to celebrate Black History Month and learn about exciting opportunities for their future.

Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Vanessa Neal said, "These events are so affirming for the students who attend. It's so important to be in community and create spaces of belonging for all, especially those who are most historically marginalized. Those who attended shared that they were thankful for the opportunity to engage in this event. Moreover, students felt seen."

Sitting at tables in Gaiser Student Center, the high school students listened to inspiring messages from Dr. Edwards, who gave a warm welcome to the high school students. Additionally, students heard messages from Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Vanessa Neal and Vice President of Instruction Dr. Terry Brown. Tanisha Harris delivered a message from Senator Maria Cantwell and a representative from the Portland Trailblazers shared valuable information about job opportunities.

The event was highlighted by Erin Jones' powerful keynote address, "Roots to Excellence: A Journey to Clark College." Jones is a teacher, speaker, and the author of *Bridge to Heal US: Stories and Strategies for Racial Healing*. Jones also spoke at Clark during Staff Development Days in August 2024.

We were also thrilled to have MarcusAntonio Gunn, who performed the Black Anthem, *Lift Ev'ry Voice*. The history of the song, often referred to as "The Black National Anthem." The lyrics were written in 1900 by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson; his brother, John Rosamond Johnson, composed the music.



The event included a performance from Anasi Beat Drums.

Additionally, students had an enriched experience engaging with the Anasi Beat Drums who performed traditional dances and songs from Ghana, West Africa, and the wobble dance. The students truly immersed themselves in the performance, with many participating in the dance.

Delicious soul food was catered by Ja'Das Soulful EatZ. Following lunch, students had a guided walking tour of the campus.

## **Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

ODEI is committed to serving all students, with a focus on systemically non-dominant groups (Jenkins, 1995-present) as they navigate Clark College. We help foster and retain a diverse college community, which includes students, faculty,

and staff.

Clark College's goal of fostering a social and equitable college community is in part directed by the State (SBCTC), which has charged all community and technical colleges to lead with racial equity. ODEI is committed to serving people from systemically non-dominant populations as they navigate Clark College by helping to foster and retain a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff.

Our office supports individuals with their academic, personal, and professional development, as well as provides training and educational resources for all members of the college community around diversity, inclusion, power, privilege, inequity, social equity, and social justice.

Learn more: Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion ([clark.edu](http://clark.edu))

*Photos: Clark College/Carly Rae Zent*