

Celebrating Black History Month

By Kimberly Purvis, Extended School Administrator at Pocomoke High School



In celebration of the many accomplishments made by African Americans, February has been designated Black History Month. Established in 1976 by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), the month-long celebration was an expansion of Black History Week which Carter G. Woodson initiated in 1926. Woodson's vision of focusing national attention on the contributions of African Americans to the history and culture of our country continues today.

This year's theme is "From Slavery to Freedom: Africans in the Americas." According to the Library of Congress' Web site, the national theme is "a dedication to the struggles of peoples of African descent to achieve freedom and equality in the Americas during the age of emancipation." (Please visit www.loc.gov/topics/africanamericans for more information.)

In Worcester County Public Schools, the history of all cultures is integrated into curriculum throughout the school year. During Black History Month, our schools showcase African Americans who have contributed to the betterment of our country, as well as plan special activities to enhance awareness. It is imperative that we educate our children about the sacrifices that were made and the hardships that were endured by African Americans to ensure a brighter future, a future of equality.

Pocomoke High School will celebrate Black History Month by sponsoring various activities that spotlight individuals who have displayed outstanding character in their quest for equal rights. Teaching our students about individuals who are models of outstanding character is consistent with our Accreditation for Growth goal of promoting positive character traits throughout the school.

Throughout the month of February, students will learn about historical figures that confronted the injustices of the Jim Crow laws and segregation. The Jim Crow laws enforced a

“separate but equal” status for Black Americans from 1876 to 1965. These laws resulted in the inferior treatment of African Americans. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled that state-sponsored school segregation was unconstitutional (in *Brown v. Board of Education*) and the remaining Jim Crow laws were overruled by the Voting Rights Act of 1964.

At Pocomoke High School, we not only celebrate historical African Americans, we also salute Pocomoke City residents who serve as role models and mentors to our youth on a daily basis. In addition to recognizing outstanding adults, we identify students at Pocomoke High School who also display good character traits on a regular basis, including respect, trustworthiness, honesty and dependability. During February, these notable individuals will have their picture and their words of wisdom displayed in our school. Recognized students will receive a token of appreciation from the school during a culminating event that will take place February 29.

As a part of the Pocomoke High School After-School Learning Academy, students will research African American history – during the years of school integration – in Worcester County. Students will present their findings through PowerPoint presentations, book reports, and poetry writing.

As Pocomoke High School embarks on an exciting renovation project, students felt it was necessary to know some of the changes that have occurred over the years. Our school will have guest presenters give first-hand accounts of what the experience was like at Pocomoke High School when it transitioned from segregation to integration. To help our students understand the present, we think it is beneficial for today’s youth to hear how these students in 1965 persevered during a tumultuous period in history. As Grade 9 student Lillian Fisher explained, “We have a tendency to take what we have for granted and all of us should understand that there was a time when all students did not have equal opportunities.”

If you have questions about Black History Month and the celebrations here at Pocomoke High School, please call me at 410-632-5192.