**Meeting Highlights – August 27, 2019**

L. Karen Monroe, Alameda County Superintendent of Schools, was first elected to the position in 2014 and re-elected in 2018. As County Superintendent, she has legal responsibility for the oversight of the fiscal health and basic educational standards of all districts in Alameda County. Additionally, as Superintendent, she provided support and guidance for district operations including training and support services. The County Superintendent also leads initiatives that enhance student academic achievement, such as promoting quality preschools and integrating arts education into the comprehensive school curriculum.

Karen graduated from USC with a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Public Affairs and went to work as an intern for Rep. Shirley Chisholm in Washington, D.C. Then, she began to understand better the nexus between education and policy. When she returned to California, she started working as an educational consultant and trainer before coming a teacher like her mother.

Soon Karen realized that she an realized the power to affect change through leadership and stepped into various educational leadership roles, which culminated with her election in 2014. Karen shared that one of the most difficult aspects of the position is to assure that districts and their leaders have a sense of accountability while focusing on the education of the 220,000 students in Alameda County.

During her presentation, Karen focused on several problems facing public schools in the Country (e.g., classroom size, parent involvement, student health (obesity), bullying. School funding is a critical problem. California is the 5th largest economy in the world, but is 40th in the nation on Educational Spending, 45th for Pupil/Teacher ratio, and 48th Pupil/Staff ratio. In many other states like New York as well as many smaller states, funding for education is double that of funding in California.

Karen led an effort by the 21 Superintendents in Alameda County in delivering a letter to the gubernatorial candidates for a significant increase in education funding in California. While there has been some increase in education funding in recent years in California, but 90% of the states fund public schools at a higher level than California, which has unmistakable impact on the instruction programs and services offered to students.

Chief among the services that are needed for students is an increase in mental health services. Students are facing unprecedented academic, financial, and social pressures, and need support and resources. Under Karen’s leadership, ACOE is leading an effort called Alignment Bay Area to bring together leaders of industry, school districts, colleges, labor, and community organizations so that their experience, energy, and resources can be harnessed to address problems of people of color and women and come up with solutions to persistent inequities.