

## 2015 QTEA Impact Application

### Grattan Alternative School

**Award Amount: \$29,987.76**

- Describe your strategies, projects, and/or practices. Tell us who your focal student groups are, what the strategy is, and how it supports or aligns to the Six Strategies for Success and Vision 2025 Essentials

Our school is currently working to promote inclusive practices, not only in our classrooms, but throughout our community. One pernicious barrier has been developing authentic communication between our neurotypical students and their peers on the autism spectrum. Our project proposes to deepen and connect multiple initiatives concurrently operating on site with the specific lens toward universal transference of communication skills beyond structured activities, using facilitated playgroups, integrated drama and guided play during recess.

Our focal student groups include those who are receiving specialized education services in special day classes and general education placements, and their general education peers. Using a variety of support, practices and strategies, our intent is to connect all of these pieces of work through genuine transference to our school population, including our students, teachers, administrative staff and after-school program staff. With a strong emphasis on social emotional learning, we are dedicated to creating a school environment where differences and challenges can be demystified. Our learnings will be shared through the creation of a best practices guide that can be distributed throughout the district.

By successfully connecting all of these various components, we will be helping to develop our students into self-aware, collaborative and empathetic community members. Furthermore, our strategies and practices work in service of the district's Vision 2025 Essentials and its Six Strategies for Success, specifically:

Providing Tiered Levels of Academic and Behavior Support to All Students Using a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI2) Model: Students with IEPs who are receiving specialized academic instruction in either the Special Day Class or general education setting will also benefit from tiered levels of support that focus on social emotional aspects of their learning. Additionally, through our classwide SST process instituted at the beginning of each school year,

we are able to identify those students who most likely to benefit from the various strategies outlined below.

**Recruit, Develop and Retain Highly Qualified Teachers, Leaders and Staff:** Extensive professional development for our special education and instructional leadership teams will help build capacity with inclusive practices, differentiated learning and addressing the unique needs of students on the autism spectrum. By working in partnership with educators across the school and research professionals leading the work in the field at large, we gain increased capacity which will sustain teachers' sense of efficacy and therefore diminish the high rate of burnout common in the special education realm.

**Increase Awareness and Build the Support Necessary to Fully Implement SFUSD's Family Engagement Standards** - This initiative has been spearheaded by our Inclusion Committee, a group of parents and teachers working to ensure students with IEPs are fully included and integrated into all aspects of school life.

**Students Find their "Sparks" - and Their Voice:** All of our students have the capacity to make meaningful contributions in the classroom and on the play yard. We aim to provide a host of opportunities, through formal and informal playgroups, drama productions, and reconfigured physical space to allow our students to shine and be their best selves.

**The Reimagined Classroom** - Addressing the learning objectives in IEPs not only in the classroom but during the arts and recess, we are redefining the learning spaces of the school.

**A Truly Equitable School District** - By demystifying autism and related communication disorders and building authentic relationships across difference we are beginning to interrupt the systemic oppression visible in the lack of universal access to full rights and privileges of citizenship in our society for people with disabilities in our communities.

Through a combination of existing, ongoing support and the QTEA grant, we will implement the following practices and strategies:

**Integrated Playgroups:** The Integrated Playgroup Model, originated by Dr. Pamela Wolfberg at San Francisco State University, is an evidence based practice designed to provide intensive guidance for children on the autism spectrum to engage with typical peers in mutually enjoyed play experiences. Through direct work with Dr. Wolfberg, our SpEd leadership team and support staff will become a master training site for Dr. Wolfberg's Integrated Playgroups model, an internationally acclaimed, outcome-based intervention promoting authentic interdependence between students with autism and neurotypical peers.

**Integrated Drama:** Building off of the research and theories of Dr. Wolfberg's Playgroup model, StageWrite will be facilitating an integrated drama project spanning two semesters across multiple classroom environments, and culminating in a community performance celebrating and highlighting the unique gifts our students with autism bring to the community. This partnership with StageWrite will include customized curriculum development in partnership with teachers, consultants from the field, and professional development for faculty and staff. Phase one of the project will include drama residencies with one to one student partnerships comprised of students from Special Day Classrooms paired with a neurotypical peer from the general education setting. The 10 week residency will utilize interactive drama games to explore a story and build relationships through play. This first phase will culminate in an interactive play based experience integrating staff and teachers, student pairs, and their families through a drama based play experience. Events like these build bridges across difference among cohorts in our community that rarely have the opportunity to interact meaningfully due to the unique constraints of being a parent of a child with autism. The work undertaken in phase one will transition into a whole-school performance based integrated project bringing *Where the Wild Things Are* to life in the language of autism. Opportunities for mainstreaming, reverse mainstreaming, and peer to peer relationship building will all be critical elements of this phase of the project.

**Social Emotional Development Curriculum:** Second Step is a classroom based program that explicitly teaches developmentally appropriate social emotional skills, social competence and empathy. Second Step will be used as a Tier I support for all students. Social Thinking, developed by Speech and Language Pathologist Michelle Garcia-Winner, is a form of differentiated instruction that provides practical concepts and strategies to encourage all students to continue to develop improved social skills and strategies for self-regulation. Social Thinking will be a Tier III support. Our project will create a Tier II support out of the marriage between the two.

Professional Development: Our Special Education Leadership Team and its Instructional Leadership Team will participate in a variety of enriching professional development opportunities related to the social emotional curricula. Additionally, coaching will be provided to general education staff around communication challenges and effective strategies for accommodating organic connections between neurodivergent students and their general education peers. Release time is included in the professional development budget in order to allow various professionals within our community to collaborate in real time during the phases of the project. By seeing the work each other is doing, we will increase the level of transference between and among the learning professionals and the learning spaces within the school.

Reverse Mainstreaming: Our grades 3-5 Special Day Class collaborates with upper grade teachers to bring in 4th and 5th grade students as peer tutors. They help their SDC peers on social skills, as well as academic games to gain a better understanding of how SDC students learn. Additionally, our K-2 SDC collaborates with 1st grade teachers to bring in 1st graders during free choice time to model language and play skills.

Playground Training: Learnings from the integrated playgroups, integrated drama, and the social emotional curricula professional development will be used in explicit trainings for paraprofessional and yard monitor staff to ensure and promote authentic communication across difference during unstructured activities at recess.

- What outcome(s) or change(s) do you believe this project or practice will have at your school site? Note: Quantitative and/or qualitative data are encouraged.

--Increased communication and collaboration between general education and special education staff through multiple professional development workshops and collaborative planning time.

--Greater depth of knowledge for teachers on how to serve students receiving special education services within the general education setting through professional development, curricular resources, and real-time observations and coaching.

--Empowering the teachers through professional development to take ownership of the social emotional needs of our students.

--The articulation of specific Tier I, II and III social emotional curricula school wide.

--Making visible the gifts, talents and voice of our Special Day Class students through ten week drama residencies with three groups of Special Day Classes integrated with partners from the general ed classes (60 students) and performed at three family drama events and two performances impacting the whole school community.

--More authentic relationships across difference with individual pairs of students as witnessed through videotaped interactions and anecdotal records taken by school staff.

--The development of an assessment tool for documenting social emotional progress throughout this process.

- The inclusion of dramatic arts into our balanced literacy program school wide.
- Improving the quality of home school connections for our families receiving special education services through the addition of sensory strategies into school wide events to address the environmental needs of students on the autism spectrum, advocacy for inclusive special education policies at the district level and empowering family voice through our inclusion committee representation at the CAC.
- The development of a best practices document for serving special education students in various environments to share across the district.
- The transference of improved relationships school wide into unstructured environments (lunch, recess) will be visible through videotaped mainstreaming interactions that we can code to identify authentic unprompted interactions.
- The promotion of school wide use of "People First" language. People First language puts the person before the disability, reinforcing the belief that people with disabilities are not their diagnoses or disabilities; they are people, first.

- As part of the application, you will provide a detailed action plan for how you plan to implement this within 12 months. In addition to this action plan, below please identify the key stakeholders, major milestones and any major risks you foresee?

Students & families in our special education programs

- Also, as part of your application, you'll send a detailed budget set-up form. Below can you tell us, how much is needed for implementation? (Ranges provided between \$0 and \$30,000)

\$15,000 - \$30,000