

2015 QTEA Impact Application

SF Community School

Award Amount: \$28,477.42

- 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 Impact Grant: Project-Based Learning to Build 21st Century Skills & Engage Struggling Learners

OVERVIEW

At our school teachers share a deep commitment to ensuring that all students succeed, regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or home language. Unfortunately, commitment to equity is not enough to change widespread and deeply rooted patterns of achievement. In addition to the dedication and content expertise necessary for effective and equitable instruction, teachers need the opportunity to plan collaboratively, reflect on their practice, explore emerging and exemplary alternative teaching methods, and share successes and challenges--in order to develop and modify instructional practice to meet the needs of each student AND to prepare each student to be a successful citizen in the 21st century workplace.

Our school has been implementing project-based learning (PBL) since we opened in 1972—indeed, our 40+ year commitment to PBL is the core foundation of our pedagogy. While a recent interest has emerged within many district schools to consider PBL (given the shift to Common Core and the focus on 21st century skills), we lack local K-8 collaboration partners and accessible PBL professional development to push practice. Further, we lack the time needed for teacher collaboration and new staff on-boarding, to ensure that all teachers are equipped to implement high quality PBL from day one. While we continue to implement two 9-week interdisciplinary science-based challenge projects each school year (grounded in grade-level standards, key learning goals, an essential question, and a collaborative challenge), we seek to build greater staff expertise and provide much-needed collaboration time to improve the quality of these projects—allowing us to better serve all students, but particularly our African-American students.

Through this Impact Grant, teachers at our school will build on our existing commitment to engage students through project-based learning--expanding our ability to provide engaging, rigorous, and culturally-relevant project-based curriculum AND utilize the bay area as a learning lab for inquiry teaching. To do so, we will develop teacher leaders through a homegrown PBL leadership institute and create grade-level collaboration structures for projects to strengthen pedagogy and build project-based curriculum.

Focal Students: This project focuses on delivering engaging project-based curriculum to all students, but with a focus on bolstering attendance and achievement for our African-American students – our lowest performing subgroup. While our school has a relatively strong attendance rate (97.7% in 2014-15—higher than similar schools and close to the district average of 98.1%), our African-American students had a lower attendance rate last year (97.4%). Our African-American students also had the lowest performance rates last year of any subgroup on the SBAC national exam (17% proficient on ELA; 17% proficient in math) and on the district’s Common Learning Assessment. We see similar performance discrepancies on our F&P assessments and internal assessments. We see some promising success with writing, an area we intend to build on, given that our African-American students had high IWA scores relative to the district average and school average (African-American students had an average of 2.9 on the IWA for 3rd grade, compared to the district average of 2.0 and the school average of 2.6; African-American students had an average of 2.3 on the IWA for 6th grade, compared to the district average of 2.1 and the school average of 2.6).

Project-based learning is both a pedagogy and a curricular structure, one that we believe, by design, deeply engages students traditionally underserved in public education. Indeed, we experience our highest attendance rates and deepest student engagement during “project time” and find that parent engagement is consistently strong at our two family showcase events (Project Open House). With the incorporation of new PBL expertise this grant would enable, and with the time to focus on building engaging and differentiated project-based curriculum—and embedding culturally-relevant learning strategies—that this grant would enable, we believe this project will bolster both attendance and achievement for our African-American students.

CENTRAL OBJECTIVES:

- 1) Create a PBL leadership team to bring expertise and emerging ideas/research to the school site: Through this grant, 6 teachers (ideally one per developmental level—K/1, 2/3, 4/5,

6-8) will participate alongside our IRF and Principal as part of a “PBL Leadership Team.” Over the summer, this group will:

- Attend the “PBL World” conference in Napa (through the Buck Institute, the leader in K-12 PBL) to build expertise
- Form a study group to read, discuss, and apply learnings from 1-2 books on emerging PBL theory, research and practice, as chosen by the team (PBL for 21st Century Success, Project Based Learning Handbook, Authentic Learning Experiences, The Leader’s Guide to 21st Century Education)
- Spend one summer day designing the PBL learning goals for the year and the corresponding professional development plan for PBL, embedding culturally-relevant learning strategies into the project design template, and designing/updating all documents, templates, and resources teachers will be needing for planning and implementation for the 2016-17 school year.

2) Provide collaboration/planning time for all of our teachers to develop two strong projects per year: Through this grant, all of our teachers will be provided 3 planning days (two over summer, one in fall) to establish standards-based essential learning objectives, develop long-term project-based curriculum, and develop common learning strategies—in order to implement high-quality interdisciplinary projects. Teachers will work in developmental level teams, with the PBL leadership team representatives (see above) driving the planning sessions. This component will be teacher-led (with support from the IRF and Principal), providing the opportunity for focused, intensive collaboration among teachers to support learning and curriculum development in the following areas:

- Project-based learning methods to support student learning in real-world, meaningful challenge-driven projects. Our students will participate throughout the year in 9-week, fall and spring, science-based, challenge-driven projects. Teachers will collaborate to identify essential outcomes aligned to Common Core and Next Generation standards and backwards-plan inquiry-based learning experiences.
- Teachers will identify and develop performance-based assessment opportunities and rubrics that are aligned to the projects and indicate the extent to which students have mastered the essential learning outcomes. Special attention will be given to collecting, tracking, and analyzing the formative and summative assessment data for African-American students throughout the project—with the expectation that teachers are using data for instructional decision-making and strategic intervention.

- Teachers will embed throughout the project culturally-relevant instructional strategies designed to engage and support students who are traditionally under-served by public schools—particularly our African-American students.
- Teachers will plan the out-of-classroom learning experiences, organizing meaningful field trips and science explorations throughout the city/bay linked to the project content/challenge.

ALIGNMENT TO THE SIX STRATEGIES

1. Implement the SFUSD Core Curriculum and use student data to make informed decisions and monitor our progress toward goals.

Our project focuses specifically on building engaging, culturally-relevant, interdisciplinary curriculum to meet the range of need in every classroom. During project time we implement the nonfiction reading and writing units – utilizing the reading and writing teaching points through the content of the project (working on main idea and detail while reading about endangered animals, for example). While we continue with the SFUSD math curriculum as intended, we take explicit care to focus in on math applications from the project that apply to the daily math units/lessons. Most important, our project does NOT lose sight of social studies and science—content areas often undervalued given the emphasis on math and ELA nationally. Because projects are grounded in a science challenge and are aligned with the Next Generation Science standards, students are held accountable for their science achievement. During projects we continue to collect F&P data, math assessment and performance task data, rubric-ed writing data, and content-driven data (expert groups, content writing, etc.), adjusting project content and pacing accordingly—and accelerating the learning of our African-American focal students with explicit attention to their data throughout.

2. Provide tiered levels of academic and behavior support to all students using a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI2) model.

This project focuses on successful Tier 1 and Tier 2 academic RTI within the classroom setting. Teachers focus on creating tightly-planned lessons with a lens on depth over breadth, culturally-relevant teaching strategies, and engaging, rigorous real-world curriculum. Because the projects span disciplines, teachers hone their ability to connect learning across disciplines--differentiating by need, targeting struggling readers and writers through guided reading groups, strategy groups, individual conferring, and differentiation within the mini-lesson and interactive read-aloud. Teachers collect and analyze data to create strategic plans of how to best utilize small group and

individual intervention, creating data-driven plans of what groups/individuals to pull, how often, and toward what skill/strategy – within every discipline.

3. Build a clear vision, culture and conditions for college and career readiness at all school levels.

Critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and connecting learning across disciplines and settings are essential life skills and gatekeepers to college and career readiness. Projects demand that students apply learning to a real-world challenge or problem, and utilize skills across disciplines to better understand and address the challenge. Projects push our instruction to build the skills frequently undervalued in traditional pedagogy: critical thinking, deep analytical thinking, using textual evidence to argue or back-up a point, and reading and writing with purpose--thereby preparing students not only with the skills needed, but with the critical thinking and analytical skills needed to be successful in the 21st century workplace.

4. Differentiate central office supports to schools through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

This project maximizes the role of our on-site IRF and literacy coach (central office allocations), ensuring their expertise is driven toward helping teachers plan and implement deliberate, focused units with alignment and depth across content areas. They are charged not only with math and reading support for teachers, but with supporting and coaching teachers to effectively implement project-based pedagogy and to design meaningful, standards-based curriculum.

5. Recruit, develop and retain highly qualified teachers, leaders and staff.

Through an investment in teacher training and ongoing professional development and collaboration time, this project ensures we are strategically on-boarding teachers new to our school and supporting all of our teachers to grow in their practice through summer planning days and ongoing support for project-based learning and instruction across content areas. Perhaps most uniquely, this project pushes those teachers with higher skill sets to continue to advance in their practice and to take on leadership roles within the school site, as drivers of PBL and as peer coaches.

ALIGNMENT TO THE VISION 2025 ESSENTIALS

This project ties directly to the Vision 2025 Essentials as follows:

Students Find Their "Sparks"—and Their Voices: Projects are driven by student interest and curiosity. Teachers design engaging, relevant projects that target local and global issues (endangered species, water conservation, etc.)—building student responsibility to engage with emerging societal conflicts and needs.

Teachers at the Core of the Vision: Teachers learn to utilize PBL as a structure and pedagogy, honing the ability to teach through an inquiry-driven model and building curriculum to meet new Common Core standards, Next Generation Science and ELD standards, and 21st century skills.

The Re-Imagined Classroom: Teachers create educational experiences that allow students to learn through collaborative “doing” and “creating.” Students engage in interdisciplinary projects with a science challenge, working collaboratively to meet that challenge in new and innovative ways.

The City as Classroom: All projects embed learning outside the classroom. Field trips and science exploration (parks, beaches, urban hikes, Excelsior Science Workshop, Academy of Sciences) across the city allow students to connect and apply their learning to real life within a local—and relevant--context.

Parents as Partners and Advocates: Parents are invited to participate in all trips during project cycles. Further, parents attend our “Project Open House” (student exhibition night) at the culmination of each project cycle, witnessing project learning and the emerging products.

A Truly Equitable School District: Projects are intentionally designed to engage all learners, utilize culturally relevant learning practices, and differentiate to meet the wide range of academic and social-emotional needs in any given classroom. Projects go deep to make learning meaningful, exciting, and relevant—seeking to meet the needs of students historically underserved and students that struggle in traditional classroom settings.

- 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.

As a result of this project, we expect the following outcomes:

- 1) Improvement in project design, quality, and implementation—thus increased student engagement and motivation and increased student and family attendance at Project Open House
- 2) Improved achievement of all students across content areas
- 3) Acceleration in achievement and improved attendance for our focal group, African-American students

We will measure success according to the following outcomes:

- 1) Project Design
 - 100% of projects are aligned to Common Core and Next Generation standards
 - 100% of projects are complete utilizing the Understanding by Design backwards planning model (essential question, clear outcomes, defined real-world challenge, learning experiences, formative and summative performance-based assessments with corresponding rubrics)
 - 100% of projects embed culturally-relevant learning strategies
 - 100% of projects will be documented and uploaded onto the our school's Share drive; Student work will be documented in portfolios
- 2) Project Quality and Accountability
 - Utilizing the SFCESS (San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools) and Buck Institute rubrics for PBL, we will score the quality of our projects. Scoring teams will include all grade level teachers, the Instructional Leadership Team, two parents, and two students. We seek a rating of at least 3 (on a 1-4 scale) for all projects.
- 3) Student and Family Engagement:
 - Increase student and family attendance at Project Open House from 80% to 90%
- 4) Improved achievement of all students:
 - Academic growth in math, ELA, and writing as measured by all grade levels scoring within 10% of the district average on the district's CLAs (math and ELA), the SBAC, and IWA (writing).
 - Reading growth as measured by 75% of students meeting or exceeding end of year benchmark level on K-8 Fountas and Pinnell reading assessments.
- 5) Improved attendance and achievement of focal group: African-American students
 - A 1% growth in attendance rates for our African-American students
 - "Above average" or "substantially above average" acceleration on the ELA and Math CLAs for African-American students

- African-American students will continue to be “at” or “above” the district average for the Integrated Writing Assessment (IWA).

- 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?

Key Stakeholders:

- All students/families at our School
- All certificated staff at our School
- SFUSD STEM department
- SFUSD Achievement & Assessment Office
- Buck institute
- SF Coalition of Essential Small Schools
- Other local schools implementing PBL (Creative Arts Charter, June Jordan, Envision schools, new K-8 charter school that is currently being founded and modeling PBL off of our school)
- 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