APPLICATION: Dr. Charles R. Drew College Preparatory Academy

Describe the critical challenge you would like to tackle in a different way.

At X School, we have a small core of students who consistently miss a significant number of educational minutes because of tardiness, absences, in-class off-task behavior, and out-of-class time usually for "behavioral" issues. We have a small core of third four and fifth graders who lose more than 10% of their learning minutes a year from lost time out of class because of tardies, t30s (tardies longer than 30 minutes), absences, failure to return to class, and being sent out of class for disruptive or violent behavior. When teacher estimates of off-task in class time are added to the analysis, we see some students missing more than half of their learning time.

For the 2014-2015 school year we found 32 students are far below basic in reading and losing on average more than 68% of their educational minutes but only 12 receive extra services. We have another 24 students who are below basic in reading and losing on average 13.7% while only 1 receives services. We consider these students to be underserved.

Clearly, our current best efforts are not reaching them and providing the education they need. It is no surprise as well that many of our most struggling students miss a significant amount of class time. These students are very likely to exhibit strong self advocating behaviors regarding issues that matter to them, such as participating in activities they enjoy or avoiding the humiliation of class work that they cannot engage because it is so far beyond their current skills. Whether it is ready for science content, reading math word problems or reading a book at their current reading level that other students ridicule, these students have well developed self protective habits.

At X School we frequently talk about the academic opportunity gap these students experience because of limited early childhood learning such as being read to, lost education minutes, and limited family support. We devised ways to get them integrated into the classroom plan with excellent remedies such as behavioral response to intervention (BRtI) and differentiated teaching methods such as Writers' workshop. While these are worthy Tier 1 solutions, we also need another way of engaging these students as they fall further and further behind.

As much as fifty percent of our underserved students have had an early degree of autonomy and responsibility in their personal lives that had made self-determining and self-advocating skills very valuable. Because these students generally have developed self-protective limited interest pleasing adults, including teachers, and can develop and prefer their own plan to the class or group plan, we have treated these skills as problems to be remedied. These critical life skills for these students are treated as problems to be fixed is and represent another opportunity gap for these students.

This grant proposes to address the gap these independent students experience with the devaluing of their autonomy skills. We propose to augment the services to these underserved students in a manner more in line with their skills and strengths using mobile computing and independent one-to-one learning apps such as MyOn personalized ebook and audiobook platform and Khan Academy's personalized math module. These apps allow us to track how much time the students are on task with pursuing their own learning at their own pace.

What outcome(s) or change(s) would you like your design to achieve at your school site?

We would like empower our most independent learners to develop agency with their own education by pursuing reading and math on their own terms at times when they would otherwise be distracting themselves and others and losing valuable learning time.

How have you engaged your school to identify your critical challenge?

The staff at X School is deeply dedicated to providing all of our students with an equitable education and all are in agreement that far too many of our students are underserved despite our long hours and deep caring. Collecting this data and writing this grant has been a whole staff effort, including our classroom teachers, the literacy and reading coaches, the family liaison, the truancy officer, the behavioral coaches, one of our community partners, the social worker, a parent, and the principal, spearheaded by our teacher librarian. The staff at X School is always ready to look at our challenges from a new perspective and develop student-centered solutions.

What solutions have you tried or considered to address this challenge so far?

We have pursued a multi-year behavioral response to intervention program as well as worked on developing more culturally relevant teaching practices. While these are very worthy programs and should continue, they are focused on working with the staff to provide better education for students from within the paradigm of the classroom. They still focus on valuing some student life skills and deprecating others. While in the short term we see some behavior modification, we continue to see our students' educational outcomes stagnate.

How is this challenge an equity dilemma, one that is interfering with your school's ability to ensure that all of your students will thrive?

The education system is currently designed to meet the needs of children who already have strong skills in being compliant with adults, going with the group plan, and are able to sit quietly for long stretches of time. These skills are highly correlated statistically with socioeconomic status and ethnicity. For students from our neighborhood are much more likely to be independent and less easily influenced with adults. The goal of this grant is to explore best practice in engaging our students *as if their current life skills are an asset, not a problem.*

Who is on your design team? (the more diverse the better)

Our current team consists of the staff listed above. We would focus the core team on support staff and community members; teachers would be free to act as consultants and not be taken away from their classroom responsibilities.

How will you make sure your team will commit the time needed to succeed?

X School is fortunate to have a strong support staff that are charged with both supporting our students and teachers as well as implementing new programs. The core staff would be the support staff, such as the librarian, a literacy specialist, an Edgewood community partner behavior coach, the family liaison, parents, and the principal. X School values organization follow through with our initiatives. With leadership and accountability from our principal, our X School team is ready to commit to supporting these children taking ownership of their learning like they take ownership of their sense of self.

It is important to note that this solution will reach only a portion of our underserved students While education abounds with one-size-fits-all solutions, we have students who are far from uniform in their skills, life situations, and needs. This grant is

focused on highly independent students who are more than one year behind their peers academically.

To fully realize a solution for these students, we will to more formally assess their needs through more rigorous documentation of: student interest and suitability through interviews with teachers and students; off-task time percentages through direct observation; and effective student and family engagement strategies using evidence-based best practice in the peer-reviewed education literature. Once we have identified our student most likely to benefit and have our strategic approach defined, we will need to create an implementation plan in conjunction with the classroom teachers, to choose the hardware and software, develop the learning program, roll out the program to the targeted students and families, and implement a monitoring system for efficacy.

"My Alma mater was books, a good library... I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity."
- Malcolm X