QTEA Innovation Award Application - 2016

Application # 13
School Name: Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. Academic Middle School
School Org Number: 710
Principal Name: Michael Essien
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Person submitting grant: Leslie Hu
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Describe the equity challenge or opportunity you would like to tackle in a different way.
https://docs.google.com/a/sfusd.edu/document/d/14Ry9m25sD7U5vPr34bb6ZatARzG5bItTKGz6t3sfBfM/edit?usp=sharing

The equity challenge we have identified is two-fold: disproportionality of student test scores, and lack of student engagement. As President Obama said, "A child's course in life should be determined not by the zip code she's born in."
Standardized test scores at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Academic Middle School, like many schools in the Southeast sector of San Francisco, highlight the opportunity gap. These test scores correspond with student disengagement, as indicated in data collected on chronic absenteeism, tardiness and students leaving the classroom during instruction for extended periods of time without permission.
Many students at MLK have historically struggled to achieve, across all subgroups. Our African American (AA), Asian Pacific Islander (API), and students with IEPs, have particularly underperformed and not reached their potential for at least the past five years. Our other subgroups have also not met standards (or performed below their peers), including our Asian and white students. In looking at CST results at MLK from 2009-2013, 76-83% of our AA students scored Far Below Basic, Below Basic, or Basic (i.e., not Proficient or Advanced) in ELA. In Math, 92-97% of our AA students scored Far Below Basic, Below Basic or Basic.
We have also struggled with providing a safe and supportive environment where students have opportunities to learn, grow and be joyful. Lack of supports and resources, combined with high rates of absenteeism for certain subgroups have contributed to the equity dilemma. Over 27% of our AA students are chronically absent, over 42% of our API students and over 26% of our students with IEPs are chronically absent, and all groups represent significantly higher rates than district averages.
Our students have also reported feeling unsafe in our social-emotional and culture climate survey last year as well (only 47% of of our students feel safe as compared to

60% the rest of SFUSD students.) Our AA students are overrepresented in our school-wide behavioral data, accounting for approximately 65% of suspensions over the last three years.

Our limited experience with STEAM suggests that it works because it encourages collaboration between students. When done well, cross-curricular projects allow students to display multiple intelligences as they bring together their life experience and We have identified STEAM as a lever to address the inequities that exist in our school community. Now that we've identified the new paradigm, we are looking for a design thinking solution to help us with the shift. We want to move forward but how do we overcome the obstacles that our teachers face in developing curriculum for project based learning? How do we help our students realize their voice has influence and is valid in moving forward with solutions to real life issues? How do we emphasize that their learning in one class connects to the learning from each classroom throughout the day?

If we are truly going to change the outcomes of public education, then we need to change the system in which our students and teachers operate. We believe it is imperative to thoughtfully consider and innovate both a new student and new teacher experience at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Academic Middle School.

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

We hope our design will help us to implement project-based learning and the concept of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math) in order to reimagine the everyday student experience at MLK. We want students to feel empowered and enable them to make informed decisions, to debate and wrestle with different perspectives, work collaboratively in preparation for life in the 21st century, and use their voices to bring change to their communities.

We want students to see the relevance of their daily life when they walk into their classrooms at MLK. We want students to become experts in their own learning. We want them to take concrete experiences with hands-on materials and connect them to their next iteration, their next prototype, their next task at hand, and in this way, build inherently more complex ideas, systems and structures, as well as mastery.

We want to reimagine the school day so that students no longer think of their day in terms of silos of information, separated into neat categories of English, social studies, mathematics, physical education, art and science. When students arrive at school, we want them to experience real life. In this way, school needs to imitate the real world's varying interdisciplinary mix of each content area, depending on the day and the task at hand.

If we can successfully achieve these ideals, then students will be more engaged in their lives at school. This will provide teachers more opportunities to build relationships and work directly with students that have historically been overrepresented in the data on referrals, suspensions and chronic absenteeism. Ultimately, these relationships and the time and space to work with students can begin to close the knowledge gaps that exist. An additional outcome is that we will build teacher capacity to design and use curriculum that provides space for student ownership of their learning. Anecdotal data suggests that even the usually-higher-performing students at MLK underperform when it comes to tasks requiring critical thinking or creativity / outside the box thinking. In the age of standardized tests, students have grown accustomed to individual work, sitting in rows, listening to the teacher and taking notes with the goal of rote memorization and recall. When asked to perform, create or think critically, we notice students lack the skills and confidence to jump into a project. STEAM-related project-based learning gives students opportunities and venues to practice effective communication and collaboration strategies in a safe and nurturing environment. Agency in the learning process teaches students that their voices matter.

One implication of this challenge/opportunity, is the need to build teacher capacity and comfort in developing project-based, interdisciplinary curriculum. Transitioning students to new models of learning requires new skills from the teachers, as well as new skills from the students. Students will feel more confident taking intellectual risks and approaching the challenges of creative thinking inherent in project-based learning if they feel safe.

Our dream at MLK Middle School is for each student to be the master of her or his learning experience. With project-based learning students have more control over how they learn, and students can begin to alter the traditional dynamic of teacher-as-possessor-of-knowledge to become masters of their own learning and experience. In communities experiencing daily trauma and poverty, students begin to feel disenfranchised and disempowered by the chaos and lack of choice which surrounds them. Giving students agency over their day-to-day educational experience, via project-based learning and STEAM, allows them to feel ownership of the process and result of their education, and will increase student engagement.

How is this challenge or opportunity an equity dilemma, one that affects with your school's ability to ensure that all of your students will thrive?
The Graduate Profile emphasizes Content Knowledge, Career & Life Skills, Global, Local and & Digital Identity, Leadership, Empathy and Collaboration, Creativity, Sense of Purpose & Sense of Self. While MLK Middle School has made tremendous progress the last several years, we are still facing an inequitable environment where students are

not able to reach their full potential in many capacities (as reflected in academic and behavioral data elaborated above). We hypothesize that some of these outcomes are a result of the inequitable system currently in place: Curriculum is not created and delivered in ways for every student to be successful.

Other schoolwide issues may also be creating equity challenges. For example, at MLK we have historically had high rates (over 50% for several years) of teacher turnover and lack of appropriate training to address the needs of our population. This can contribute to unstable learning environments and inconsistent instructional delivery. The lack of institutional knowledge and roots in the community can contribute to the equity challenges we face in the quality of instructional delivery and depth of relationships between students and teachers, leading to disengagement.

If we are truly going to change the outcomes of public education, then we need to change the system in which our students and teachers operate. Using the Graduate Profile as a guide, we believe it is imperative to thoughtfully consider and innovate a new student and teacher experience at MLK Middle School in order to develop our youth to meaningfully engage in the 21st Century.

While we are facing many challenges, we have also made progress towards the 10 Big Shifts. We've intentionally engaged in reimagining space in time. Two years ago, MLK hired a Community School Coordinator (CSC) to intentionally coordinate and build bridges across the following areas: Behavioral Health & Wellness, College/Career & Transitions, Extended Learning, Family Engagement & Support, and Teaching & Learning. The CSC is intentionally engaging in making the best use of existing resources and being able to support student learning, including deepening the partnerships with existing community partners.

We have also been rethinking other resources, such as our instructional time. By re-conceptualizing our Bell Schedule, we were able to create more time for students to engage in deeper learning, relevant projects rooted in real life content. We were also able to hire a part time Science Technology Engineering Arts Math (STEAM) coordinator to continue to support the creation and sustain an equitable system.

We also are maintaining teachers at the core of STEAM at MLK. We want to focus our energies on training and supporting our teachers on embedding STEAM curriculum. We want teachers to be given as many opportunities to grow as an educator and collaborate with one another.

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

Inequity in testing data and student disengagement are challenges that have been facing educators at MLK for several decades. We have implemented new solutions,

such as "Push-In" services, to increase student instructional minutes lost due to discipline interventions. Students cannot be engaged if they are not physically in the classroom.

The new schedule is meant to increase attendance and reduce absenteeism through block scheduling which allows for increased project-based learning and therefore stronger relationships between students and teachers. Staff-wide Restorative Justice trainings have been implemented to provide staff with an alternative to traditional disciplinary models that disproportionately affect AA students, and will provide opportunities through circles for better communication and collaboration.

How have you engaged your school to identify your challenge/opportunity for this process?

The MLK community spent six months in the 2015-16 school year identifying the needs and challenges of our students and staff. This work group, focused on creating a new vision for MLK, included administration, classroom teachers, after school staff, family and community members, and UBC representatives.

We were able to reimagine space and time at MLK by coordinating with the UBC to design a new master schedule for the 2016-17 school year. The staff met to analyze, comment and question the ideas, and collaborate on the most effective schedule to maximize student engagement and learning, resulting in the current partial-block schedule to optimize project-based learning. By re-imagining the Master Schedule and changing the start times, we were also able to re-imagine our Common Planning Time to make better use of that time.

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

Michael Essien, Principal
Dinora Castro, Assistant Principal
Leslie Hu, Community School Coordinator, member of the UESF Safe and Supportive Schools policy committee
Dan Bernhardt, 6th Grade Science Teacher and member of the UBC
Kristin La, STEAM Coordinator
Katy Hugo, Integrated Arts Teacher
Chun Li, Family Liaison
Emily McManus, Teacher Librarian

How will you make sure your team will commit the time and effort needed to succeed?
Each member of our team has been made aware of the commitment in both time and effort involved with this opportunity, and is willing and eager to begin the work. We will ensure success by planning time with regular check-in meetings with the entire team. Despite our heavy workload, we are eager to support the success of this endeavor, and will maintain flexible schedules.

Which Innovation bootcamp did your school participate in?
August 11, 2016, 4:30pm-7:30pm