

QTEA Innovation Award Application - 2016

Application # 17

School Name: Everett Middle School

School Org Number: 529

Principal Name: Lena Van Haren

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Person submitting grant: Lindsay Dowdle

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Describe the equity challenge or opportunity you would like to tackle in a different way.

At Everett one of our four priorities for the 2016-2017 school year is to accelerate student growth as measured by various internal assessments, the SBAC, IAB, and F&P. This priority was born from our disappointment with the plateau of our SBAC scores at 38.5% proficient in math and 41.8% proficient in ELA. Our intervention period (acceleration), produced positive academic results. Students in acceleration grew an average of 1.27 years in reading and 0.59 years in math which was better than the students who arrived behind grade level who didn't have acceleration. While these results are positive, we know we can do better.

In June, our staff got together for a retreat to address issues of equity that continued to perplex us. One group focused on acceleration and what it would take for us to meet our academic goals for students. This group engaged in the design thinking process to understand the challenges we were encountering in our quest to accelerate student growth. The group discovered through interviewing both students and families that most had no idea what their academic goals were, what grade level they were performing at, and how they had progressed through the year. We examined our SEL data and were troubled to discover that 76% of our Latino students responded positively to the statement, "My intelligence is something that I can't change very much." This lack of concrete knowledge around goals and progress, coupled with the data telling us about our students' fixed mindsets around their own intellectual capabilities, indicated that we need to make some changes.

The challenge we are hoping to tackle in a new and different way is to discover how to set goals with students, track progress, and communicate that progress both to students and their families in a way that is easy to understand. Stated in a how might we question, this proposal asks, How might we foster academic conversations about achievement and growth with our students and their families that empower students and

generate ongoing dialogue? This project seeks to explore how might we innovate our practice of student led conferences and portfolio presentations to accomplish this goal of communicating clearly with students and families about the learner identity and academic progress of the student.

The 2016-2017 school year will be our third year of hosting student led conferences instead of the traditional parent teacher conferences. This style of parent conference enables us to invite every single family into our building during conference week. Our current practice is for students to present a 3-ring binder of work and corresponding reflection sheets. Concrete data has not yet been a part of the conferences so it is easy for a family of a struggling student to walk away from the conference not fully informed about the challenges their student is confronting. As our school grows, we are considering a transition to digital portfolios and we would like to leverage the design thinking process to explore the best way to hold and present students' academic work, their goals, and information about their progress.

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

If we discovered a way to foster ongoing conversations with students and their families about students' goals, academic progress, and reflections, there would be many positive outcomes. First and foremost, students would be informed of their academic strengths and areas for growth. The practice of presenting their work and data around their progress will serve to empower our students to be self-advocates who speak knowledgeably about their own academic identity and experiences. Finally, students will be motivated by the information and empowered by the reflection to continue engaging in the actions that lead to their successes. As a result of the practice of informing students and fostering reflection, we would hope to see reading, math, and other academic data show accelerated student outcomes.

We believe that the rich and reflective academic dialogue that will occur in the student led conference between students and their caring adults will build partnerships between home and school. These experiences of sharing academic progress and summative assessments will help to build trust and transparency between home and school while engaging families as critical partners in the work.

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?

At Everett, our vision is to raise the next generation of San Francisco civil rights activists who graduate from 8th grade ready for high school. We are still not making the academic gains that we know we need to make in order to realize this vision.

Students and their families have a right to know how they are doing in school. Grades are just one way to communicate that progress and they happen too infrequently. Our students deserve to know and own their goals, and understand the progress they're making towards those goals. We believe that tackling the problem of how to create a more holistic and data driven student led conference will help us build our students advocacy and reflection skills. These skills will help accelerate their academic growth while at Everett, and ensure that they enter high school aware of their strengths and areas for growth and are able to speak to them.

This project is aligned with SFUSD's Vision 2025 in myriad ways. By empowering students with data about their academic progress, time for reflection, and opportunities to share that information with their academic allies at home, we believe students will be supported and seen for who they are as learners. Their feeling of value and purpose will grow as they reflect on their work, build their portfolios, and present their progress to family and teachers. By collecting work and data for three years, students will come to understand the notion of growth mindset by seeing the progress they make. Witnessing and tracking this growth will also help foster confidence in themselves as learners and awareness of their strengths and interests.

Digitizing our portfolios would also help propel our teachers into the innovative practices of the "reimagined classroom". Students would be able to share performance tasks, or other evidence of their learning digitally instead of being restricted to paper assignments. Teachers would be prompted to think of new and innovative ways for students to share their learning both for assessment and for display in the portfolio. The portfolios themselves would help our students continue to build their 21st century digital literacy skills as well.

Finally, innovating our student led conferences and portfolios in order to foster rich and reflective academic discussions between students and their families would build vital partnerships between home and school. This evolution of our portfolios to make them more accessible would ideally enable these academic conversations to be ongoing between the student, family, and the school instead of just when grades and conferences occur.

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

We are constantly iterating our systems for data collection, sharing, and student led conferences. Last year, we experimented with including progress reports in our student led conferences to offer a bit of hard grade based data. We haven't, however, found a consistent and cohesive way of talking about academic goals, engaging with our students in goal setting conversations, and ongoing progress monitoring. In addition to these attempts at solutions, we've tried to encourage our staff to be more diligent with school loop as a communication tool. Our staff finds schoolloop cumbersome and frustrating and using it as a communication tool has not become part of our way of being and communicating with students and families.

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

This challenge comes directly from previous design work completed by six Everett staff members in June of 2016 where the need for transparency around goal setting and progress monitoring with our students became apparent. This proposal has been further informed by work done by our acceleration teacher leader group who has begun to build the documents for goal setting for the 2016-2017 school year. This group is trying to come up with creative ways of sharing small group reading data and reflections with multiple teachers and have discovered the desire for a digital portfolio with a data dashboard. Both teachers and parents are eager for a tool that will facilitate goal setting, tracking, and communication between teacher and student, teacher and home, and student and home.

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

Lindsay Dowdle - Assistant Principal

Esther Fensel - IRF

Lauren Ponti - Acceleration Coordinator

ShIPLEY Salewski - Dean of Instruction

Emilie Sasson - Teacher

Gary Cruz - Teacher

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

We recognize that this challenge presents a huge opportunity for our community. All members of this team are invested in building a student led conference and portfolio system that can foster the kind of academic conversations that will help propel students

forward and accelerate student growth. We know that if done well, this innovation could alter the way we engage with families and empower our students. It will also help us continue student led conferences despite our school's population growth. Because our team is grounded in the whys behind the importance of this work, I believe they will prioritize being part of the process. Various members of this team have also already participated in the ilab experience and so were perfectly aware of the parameters of the commitment when they committed to this group.

Which Innovation bootcamp did your school participate in?

August 22, 2016, 4:30pm-7:30pm