

## QTEA Innovation Award Application - 2016

**Application #** 12

**School Name:** John Muir Elementary School

**School Org Number:** 650

**Principal Name:** Shawn Mansager

**Principal Email:** mansagerm@sfusd.edu

**Person submitting grant:** Shawn Mansager

**Submitter's Email:** mansagerm@sfusd.edu

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

How can we support families in being advocates for their children and feel valued and respected by our school? Approximately 90% of John Muir's families are socioeconomically challenged. We serve about 60% Latino, 48% African American and a mixtures of biracial, Asian and Arabic speaking children. These families are increasingly feeling the pressure of gentrification and increased costs of living in the city. They may be working two jobs and cannot always be a regular presence in the school environment. We also have a very committed core of families that volunteer their time quite regularly to John Muir by participating in our Parent Leadership Group, mentoring, and volunteering time in the classroom. Last year, our Community Meetings revealed that families wanted more communication and partnership with classroom teachers, especially around academics.

John Muir has many caring teachers and support staff who work hard every day for their students and are also mostly culturally and racially disconnected from the reality of the majority of our students. However, they are very willing to explore and reflect on their racial and cultural identities as evidenced by our recent PD cycle with Dr. Ammar Saheli and large attendance at a retreat where we explored how to build stronger partnerships with families. Our work together in these workshops, revealed that we often make assumptions about families and that these assumptions can lead to roadblocks. We must be better listeners and provide multiple opportunities to engage with our families. We want to explore and create different opportunities to engage with families and redefine what a true partnership looks and feels.

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

We would like our families to know that we value their voice and need them to be advocates for their children. Teachers at Muir recognize that we are working under a system that does not always meet the needs of children-- especially black and brown students. The more our students feel we are partners with their families, the more we will be able to connect and understand their learning and social needs. We want to create more authentic experiences with our families beyond Back to School Night and Report Card Conferences. Educators are immersed in the education environment daily and may not be aware that our families do not feel as comfortable. We educators must open the door for these families and be flexible with time and space in order to share power and decision making.

Muir teachers have shared that they feel they are being to work past contract to meet with families. Teachers have asked that we create spaces during the day where they can be released and meet with families. The teachers would meet as a grade level and share with families learning objectives and receive feedback from families. This is one opportunity to help create alternative times and spaces. Many teachers have also shared that they would like to do home visits, but want to be compensated. This is also a change in the system that would allow for increased relationship building.

### **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?**

As educators, we must avoid living in a Discourse 1 model where we use statements like: "My families don't care because they didn't show up to back to school night," and move to Discourse 2 and ask ourselves: "What visible and invisible barriers are in place that send a message to our families that their values are not respected?" and "How do we create authentic experiences for our families to engage with the public school system?"

The parent or guardian is the first teacher for these children and without being to tap into that knowledge we have relegated ourselves to carrying a smaller tool chest. This is especially true for teachers who do not have the same cultural background as their students. The school system relegates itself to Back to School Night, Family/Teacher Conferences, IEP's and SST's. Who is doing the talking during these meetings? Who

is the one listening? Families are often left as the listeners which leaves us educators at a disadvantage because we aren't the ones listening. SFUSD's first Core Value is: Families are the first and most influential teachers of their children. We will not be able to fully engage with our students if we do not create spaces to listen. Only about 20% of our students are proficient in math and reading. We obviously need help.

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

When families are authentically engaged and listened to as active partners our students will be more likely to reach their full potential. The cultural divide that exists between the majority of our students and staff can only be lessened with strong, authentic family partnerships. Last year, over half the staff rode buses to visit the different communities our students live. This was an eye opening experience for the teachers, and one for students when they saw several teachers board the bus to ride. Teachers were able to identify the resources and community spirit in the students neighborhoods, as well as, resources that appeared absent.

Our teachers have identified several strategies for further engagement this school year. First, teachers heard that families wanted increased communication with the classroom teacher, so that are sending monthly newsletters out with learning objectives and classroom community events. Last year, several teachers did home visits which led to very insightful learnings to support students. Two third grade teachers visited a student at home last year because the family member was too ill to come to school. There was a remarked improvement in the student's behavior after this visit. At the beginning of this school year, the teachers agreed to make one positive phone call a week. The principal also initiated a positive behavior referral in conjunction with the Tiered behavior referral in order to ensure that positive messaging become a norm at John Muir. The families are quite surprised when they receive a call that is not disciplinary in nature and greatly appreciate it.

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

We have several support staff and a classroom teacher who are committed to this design process. Last year, as a school staff we identified Family engagement and empowerment as a strategy for raising the academic achievement of our students. We met for a retreat at the beginning of the school year in order to design strategies around engaging parents and creating two way communication.

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

Principal, 4th Grade Teacher, Lower Grade Level Representative, RSP Teacher, Social Worker, Family Liaison, Instructional Reform Facilitator, Family Member

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

I will remind them of the commitments we made at the beginning of the year at our retreat, and pay them for their time. I will also ask that they be involved in the planning process in order to be more empowered.

**Which Innovation bootcamp did your school participate in?**

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