QTEA Innovation Award Application - 2016

Application # 9
School Name: June Jordan School for Equity
School Org Number: 757
Principal Name: Jessica Huang
Principal Email: huangj5@sfusd.edu
Person submitting grant: Matt Alexander
Submitter's Email: alexanderm@sfusd.edu

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

The critical challenge we intend to tackle is low academic performance among ninth and tenth grade students. Our innovative approach to this problem is to address it through the leadership and actions of students themselves.

June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE) serves many students who struggle academically, including over 25% students with IEPs. Our students' GPAs are lower than many other high schools:

Spring 2016 Average GPAs

9th Graders
JJSE - 2.38
SFUSD - 2.9

10th Graders
JJSE - 2.42
SFUSD - 2.8

11th Graders
JJSE - 2.56
SFUSD - 2.9

12th Graders
JJSE - 2.76
SFUSD - 3.0

As you can see, the average GPAs of JJSE freshmen is 0.52 lower than all SFUSD high

schools. The gap narrows by senior year, which shows that students are improving the longer they attend JJSE, but more needs to be done.

This challenge has existed for several years, and we have made attempts to address it, but GPAs have not changed much. What makes this effort different is that it will be led and implemented by students themselves. We believe that young people are best positioned to understand why their peers are not succeeding and to provide their peers the support they need. We already have several student leaders who have been interested in this idea since last year; they are calling themselves the Youth Leadership Team.

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

If this program is successful, it will feel like a second home. Many of our students do not have parent presence at home, either because they have to work or they don't have the education to help the student. We want every ninth and tenth grade student to have a place where they automatically go to and know they have someone for support.

We envision a school where all struggling students have a close relationship with at least one older and more academically successful student. We want the students to feel confident to approach someone for help, another peer who has gone through similar experiences as them.

This program will also benefit the older students who serve as mentors by developing their leadership skills and confidence as they move through high school.

Our quantitative goal is to get JJSE's student GPA average to meet SFUSD average GPA at each grade level.

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?

Academic success in high school is an equity issue because it translates directly to economic opportunity after high school. According to a recent study by the University of Miami, a one-point increase in high school GPA doubles the chance that someone will complete college and translates to a 12-14% increase in average adult earnings (Jonelle Marte, "Here's how much your high school grades predict your future salary," The Washington Post, May 20, 2014).

This challenge is also an equity issue district-wide because average GPAs for Latino (2.4) and African-American (2.1) students are significantly lower than for Asian (3.3) and White (3.2) students. If we can develop a program at JJSE which helps all of our students (the majority of whom are Latino or Black) get higher GPAs, than it can be replicated in other high schools to address this opportunity gap.

Our challenge aligns with the Vision 2025 shifts of Personalized Pathways and Reimagined Space and Time. We are reimagining a traditional support program by having students lead it. Through this process, we hope to build strong peer-to-peer mentoring relationships which personalize the learning journey for each student.

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

Our Youth Leadership Team piloted a small peer mentoring program last school year. In this student-led program, we often had a mentor with two mentees. They would meet every Thursday during their advisory/study hall. Students would bring assignments that they needed help on, and they would check about how they can improve or problems they are having in life.

Although the program was small and took a little while to get started, it was working well by the spring semester. Of the 10 mentees who participated in both fall and spring semesters, there was an average GPA increase of 0.13.

After taking a look at surveys that mentees and mentors submitted, we noticed that mentees and mentors both said they had formed a bond. This bond was from academic life such as help with homework, but also advice with personal problems. Mentees said that they got more work done during this time and had someone to help with writer's block and someone keeping them on task. They also said they appreciated the mentors being role models and sharing their experience about the assignments or teachers. Mentees said they would like to meet with their mentors more than just once a week.

The program also benefitted mentors. Mentor Jaime Soriano said in an interview, "I've learned to have more of an influence on another person." He also said, "I see somewhat of my younger self in [my mentee], where I was just kind of lost," and he wished that he had this kind of program when he was a younger student.

Through starting the peer mentoring program, we learned that the program could be expanded, and we also think it could have more impact and increase GPAs more. We

need to re-design the program and want to use the design thinking process to help us.

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

The JJSE staff is familiar with the design process and has been very supportive of our past innovation design processes for our internship program and our 1-1 computing pilot.

The staff also supports addressing the GPA challenge since it has been a frequent topic of our data conversations. When we piloted this mentoring program last year, the Youth Leadership Team President and Treasurer presented to the teachers during a staff meeting. During this presentation, they identified the need for peer support in our community and shared with the staff that from their personal experiences it was helpful to hear from a peer rather than an adult. Teachers were very supportive of the program and provided referrals of potential mentees.

The Extended Day Program supported the Youth Leadership Team in the development of this initial design by providing the Youth Leadership mentors with goal setting sheets, growth-mindset trainings, and leadership style trainings. Moving forward, support will continue from the teachers, the Extended Day Program staff, and other adult allies within the school.

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

Isaiah Paz, JJSE 12th grader
Maria Zaragoza, JJSE 12th grader
Alejhandro Jordan, SFSU student & JJSE Class of '16
Bailey Fan, Extended Day Program Director & JJSE Class of '07
Matt Alexander, Leadership Director (Assistant Principal)

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

We will make sure the design team will commit to the time needed to succeed by scheduling and maintaining weekly check-in meetings that will be held before the innovation sessions at the iLab. The consistency will build 'buy-in' from the members of the design team. We will also provide a schedule of the dates and times well in advance to ensure availability. There will be email reminders sent out as the dates get closer.

Which Innovation bootcamp did your school participate in?

8/26 with Brian Fox & Jenny Hoang