

QTEA Innovation Award Application - 2016

Application # 6

School Name: SF International High School

School Org Number: 621

Principal Name: Julie Kessler

Principal Email: kesslerj@sfusd.edu

Person submitting grant:

Submitter's Email:

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

A student's zip code, home language, or country of origin should not determine their educational outcomes. In San Francisco, we are committed to providing all of our students with high quality schooling that prepares them for college and career in the 21st century. However, we know that too many of our English learners, our Latino students and our students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) are not making it to graduation, to college, through college and into careers. Our design challenge is to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and from college, particularly our SIFE students. In SFUSD, 74% of English learners graduate in 4 years, but while the district does not have good data on tracking newcomers or students with interrupted formal education, we are aware that those two subgroups of English Learners are performing lower than the English learner average for the district. At SF International, 100% of our students are newcomers, 97% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 35% are SIFE, and approximately 30% of our students are unaccompanied minors who are here in the US without their families. We estimate that 15% of our students are working 30 hours a week or more.

At SF International, where all of our students are newcomer immigrants and English language learners, we know that many of the challenges we face are bigger than our school building. Many of our students have lived through war, some are non-literate in their home languages and others are self-supporting while attending school in the most expensive city in country. These challenges demand solutions of a magnitude beyond the classroom.

Year after year we see the transformative potential of school for even our most at-risk students. We see students who live alone and work two jobs earn straight As and become after school tutors. We see them parlay that work into a teaching assistant position in SFUSD summer school,

where they can earn enough to cut back on their hours cleaning office buildings at night and focus on their UC applications. We see school work for them. In district wide culture and climate surveys we see that SF International students are reporting significantly higher levels of positive learning environment and sense of belonging (18.7% and 19% higher than district average respectively). Despite the challenges presented by their lack of access to previous educational opportunities and economic demands they are invested and happy in school.

Although our school is unique for exclusively serving English Learners, students like ours make up 27% of SFUSD and 22% of public school students in California. However, students like ours are rarely centered in educational innovations and reforms. The landscape for English learners is rich with possibility and poses a critical opportunity to imagine new solutions and new ways to utilize current best practices.

Right now, the policy landscape in California is rich with potential. With the absence of an exit exam for our students we are able to focus our energies on supporting them in learning and college access instead of in passing a standardized test that was not designed for them. While the state makes its decisions about graduation requirements, we will plan with care how our students will become the self-reliant community engaged adults that we hope they will be regardless of what decisions the state may make about how they demonstrate graduation readiness.

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

We want our design to increase the number of students who graduate from high school at SF International and the number of our alumni who graduate from college. Particularly, we want to improve our graduation rate among students with interrupted formal education and unaccompanied minors.

Increased educational attainment at the high school and post-secondary level can have life-changing impacts for our students and their families. With their diplomas come the opportunity to earn a living wage, pursue careers about which they are passionate and care for their families in the future. For teachers in the school community who are supporting students both academically and socio-emotionally, watching them strive so hard to reach graduation only to drop out of college is a heartbreaking part of their work. Increased college enrollment and persistence rates for students will translate into greater teacher retention rates as well.

Beyond the potential impacts on individuals, working on this problem from a

design-thinking approach will maintain our graduates connection to our campus. This will allow their success to become a community asset through their role as mentors and role models for students and teachers who come after them. We have different ways of addressing this dilemma already, and we hope the design thinking process will help us integrate and refine our current practices. By the end of the design process, we hope to have developed new ideas to challenge what we think the problem is and what possible solutions exist.

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 we consider the SFUSD priorities around being social-justice focused and diversity-driven, our challenge presents serious equity implications for all English Learners in San Francisco. SFUSD has leveraged these essential shifts to improve outcomes for some of our most vulnerable students through highly personalized high school pathway options that include continuing education choices, alternative program design and flexible schedules. However, most English learners do not have access to these programs because they do not have a high enough CELDT level to be allowed to attend continuation schools in SFUSD. While SFUSD has committed to designing and supporting newcomer pathway options for students, there are large numbers of newcomers who are not being successful in our existing pathway offerings.

At the school level, principals and counselors across the newcomer pathway schools share the same worries about how to support students with interrupted formal education, how to compete with the pressure to drop out and work, and how to accelerate student learning so that a diploma in four years can be attainable for SIFE newcomers in our district.

At the district level, this challenge has implications for the way we structure our supports and services. Could every newcomer pathway school offer fifth year supports for students? Would it be possible to imagine continuation school options for English learners? What would it look like to collaborate on reimagining our responsibility to our newest Americans? This challenge impacts students far beyond the walls of SF International.

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

Much of our work revolves around this problem so we have developed many different responses, including our Span program, our Early College program and our acceleration program.

Span at SF International provides advocacy, academic counseling and leadership development for recent graduates enrolled full-time in college who face significant barriers to post-secondary achievement. Span Scholars meet as a group on their college campuses with the Span Coordinator and key on-campus personnel to build support networks that allow them to successfully complete college. In addition, Span Scholars receive one-on-one counseling and assistance from the Span Coordinator on campus at SF International. The Span program focuses primarily on our first year college students. However, Span continues to support and advocate for SF International alumni as they progress through college. The program is building a safety net of post-secondary support across the Bay Area facilitated by SF International. Span has taught us that students need their peers just as much as they need adults as they navigate universities for the first time. Span has also taught us that students need more access to college (and the opportunities a college degree or certificate can bring) earlier. Many of our students do not make it to the Span program because the pressure to work is too great. In response, we are piloting an early college program this year.

Through our early college program, all of our 12th graders will take two courses at City College of San Francisco in one of four career concentration areas: child development, bioscience, information technology and visual design. The purpose is for students to gain exposure to college while still receiving the full support of our high school and for students to make significant strides toward high-yield certificates that will allow them to earn a living wage while continuing their education. Our early college pilot has taught us that our educational programming has to be immediately responsive to our students' economic needs while still building a foundation for intellectual curiosity and 21st century skill development.

Our acceleration program begins when new students enter SF International and our literacy teacher conducts an in-depth interview to determine their academic history. This process allows us to identify students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), many of which are non-literate in their first language. Once students are identified, they receive specialized instruction through academic literacy classes offered in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. These classes are designed to meet the unique needs of students with interrupted formal education and to prepare them for success in our college-prep curriculum. Our acceleration program has taught us that our most struggling students require a great deal of academic and social-emotional case management in order to be successful in school. Having a safe environment to build a connection with an adult and other classmates is an essential, but insufficient, step for them to succeed in school. Many of these students are able to thrive in school only with the support of a case

manager who supports their attendance, helps them build positive habits and assists them as they balance work, family and school obligations.

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

As a small school by design, our school community collaborates and communicates at a deep level. The dilemma of SIFE student success impacts nearly every department or team in our school. Developing our understanding of the diverse needs of these students is important to being able to identify changes in our instructional approaches that lead to more inclusive classrooms. The needs of SIFE students are varied, but at the core it is important to recognize that their attachment and connectedness to the school community is essential to their long term academic success. This means that students need to be able to identify supports at all levels of a school to develop an understanding that they are held up by a community that is invested in their long term success.

Collectively holding these students pushes teachers to expand their practices and develop a holistic understanding of student support that extends beyond academics and includes social-emotional learning, self-determination, skill development, and fostering student agency. Intentional planning and thinking around supporting these students pushes staff to think about embedded supports in curriculum that provide multiple access points for students to input information they have learned that supports the diverse learning needs of all students. It also allows teachers to plan ahead to think about alternative assessments that allow students to demonstrate their mastery of content through varying outputs.

Over the last eight years of working through this in our school community we continually bump up against the realization that the dilemma we are exploring is larger than our school building. Members of our school community from all levels have demonstrated that they want to think bigger than our classrooms and take in the big picture. We want to empathize deeply with our students in order to explore the full landscape and come up with radical new solutions. We would like to expand this thinking to our program offerings at the school and district level.

Our proposal has been reviewed and approved by our UBC chair Paul McCarthy.

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

Julie Kessler - Principal - Brings a perspective of whole school needs and scope

Kyle Halle- Erby - 5th year Program Coordinator - Brings a perspective of 5th year program experience

Chris Maldonado - Student Support Coordinator - Brings perspective of SIFE supports

Ben Neumann - Assistant Principal - Brings SPED perspective

Davina Goldwasser - High School Director - LEAD team - Brings perspective of district

Nicholas Chan - 9/10 math teacher - Brings perspective of our lower school students' needs

Amanda Chui - Senior team teacher - Brings perspective of our upper school students' needs

Eric Perez - Alum - Brings student perspective

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

The teachers and staff who will be joining our team represent a committed and passionate group of educators. If given the parameters of the work and paid for their time, we have no doubt of the commitment of our team. Already, there are several dedicated time blocks in our school structure for the pre-work of the design meetings to happen and folks are opting into the design team by choice. If anything, our struggle will be to keep their thinking and dreaming to a manageable scope.

Most of the people on our design team are already collaborating in other leadership groups at our school. The teacher team coordinators group that Julie and Nick participate in designs agendas for team meeting time for all teachers. The student support team that Ben, Chris, and Amanda participate in helps structure interventions and support for struggling students school-wide. The Span program team that Kyle and Amanda run shapes our continuing offerings for students beyond graduation. By choosing these members for our design team, we are creating opportunities for the design process to spread to many corners of our school community.

Which Innovation bootcamp did your school participate in?

Met with Jenny on 8/31