San Mateo-Foster City School District

Project Proposal: Program Options for a New Elementary School in North Central San Mateo

Attention: David Chambliss

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Our Philosophy of Equitable Education

Strong teaching and learning are our greatest tools and metrics for measuring the impact of equity in schools. If schools are designed to eliminate social barriers and provide greater access to resources, the evidence of those efforts should be demonstrated through student learning. Therefore, evidence of learning becomes the most valuable data point that inclusive schools use to measure their progress.

Yet, research shows that learning outcomes are not simply a reflection of teaching efforts. Despite the large and growing body of research that shows that social and community issues outside of schools are reproduced in schools (Anyon, 2005; Rothstein, 2004), equity discourse in schools and districts is too often viewed through the narrow lens of skill and knowledge acquisition in core subjects, ignoring the social and cultural inequity that shapes students' lives, including their experiences and perceptions of and in schools. To be clear, there is no research that supports the idea that disregard for opportunity gaps, teacher-student gaps, and the unmet needs of students and families is helpful for supporting an equity agenda. On the contrary, research suggests that any dialogue concerned with an investigation into how to reduce or eliminate achievement or learning gaps between certain student groups must be informed by both an historical understanding of the experiences of those groups, and an examination of the correlation between their systemic exclusion from educational opportunities and the current state of their educational performance.

Evidence of learning, not proficiency, is a challenge and a joy to find. While state test data determines student proficiency, and NWEA data can measure progress, learning data is gathered daily by the people working most closely with students – their families, teachers, and school leaders. This daily data – the kind gathered through observations of learning, close analysis of student work, focused conversation, and collaborative problem solving – creates a baseline understanding of what students have learned, so we can celebrate it and raise it as a model, and provides the opportunity to identify what students have not yet learned, and which can determine our next steps. It also offers data about why some students aren't learning, what issues are surfacing as barriers to motivation and engagement, all of which can be used to inform discussions and decisions about equity, access, and inclusion.

Students want to learn – people, especially young people, are hard-wired to learn. Zaretta Hammond's (2014) book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching & The Brain*, includes six guiding rules about the ways in which students' brains are wired to learn best.

Hammond's Culturally Responsive Brain Rules:
1. The brain seeks to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others in community.
2. Positive relationships keep our safety-threat detection system in check.
3. Culture guides how we process information.
4. Attention drives learning.
5. All new information must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to be learned. 6. The brain physically grows through challenge and stretch, expanding its ability to do more complex thinking and learning (Hammond, 2014, pp.47-49).

By creating community responsive school environments that center relationships and humanizing practices, schools can minimize threats, foster healthy relationships, and demonstrate, through school practices, that student and family knowledge is valued, and that the school takes the work of systematically and courageously addressing inequities, both cultural and structural, seriously. We believe

that by doing so, schools can create the conditions that enable students to engage in deep thinking and critical learning – which are key to addressing school-level equity issues. Building schools like that requires risk. We all have to be willing to look at the ways we do and do not engage in practices and behaviors that support the success of the students and families we serve. Leaders, teachers, students and families have to be willing to look for evidence of where they created relationships, safety, and learning as well as where they did not, in order to develop a lens for the barriers that obstruct needed growth, and to clarify the commitments we all have to make to remove those barriers. Often, the barriers have been normalized in the systems, structures, practices, and processes that shape everyday experiences in schools, and they have been internalized by stakeholders. Eliminating them is not only a matter of rewriting policy, hiring new people, or adopting a new curriculum. Those are decisions that may contribute to a solution but being willing to look first at the root causes of the problem(s) is essential to building a culture of equity, rather than offering short term, symptomatic solutions.

Our team engages in equity work guided by a wide range of research on human and child development, social and cultural change, the transformation of schools, and capacity building, however, in this project we would be guided most by research from the University of Chicago on the five essentials of school transformation (Bryk, 2010), which highlights the need for (1) a coherent instructional guidance system, (2) a clear plan for professional capacity building, (3) strong parent-community-school ties, (4) a student-centered learning climate, and (5) leadership that drives change. San Mateo-Foster City School District, like nearly every district we work in, has a large population of low-income families and English language learners. In 2019-2020 nearly a third (32.7%) of students qualified for free and reduce priced lunch. Misunderstandings about poverty and its effects often informs deficit views of students and families, communities, and cultures. Hammond (2014) argues that it is important not to conflate the effects of poverty with cultural or community attributes, however, because schools often misunderstand the impact of poverty or how to address it, it is not uncommon for a culture of low expectation to manifest when it comes to serving students who face socioeconomic barriers, have special education needs, language needs, and Communities of Color – what has also become known as the "pobrecito syndrome". For example, English language learners (or "emerging bilinguals" as they might be described from an asset-oriented perspective) are often subject to low expectations coupled with low level instruction and teacher expertise. Research tells us that such a culture, encompassing the beliefs, mindsets, and ideologies of educators, as well as the structures and practices they use, are precisely the barriers to better learning and the kind of equitable education that interrupts the historic impact of poverty. This is the starting point for determining what changes must be made if we are to create schools that truly serve our communities. In this sense, the creation of or transformation toward community responsive schools is about mobilizing communities, and in that way, it is both a democratic exercise and an intervention.

Our Experience
Our team of consultants have been involved in ongoing review and school transformation work across the US for multiple years. Coupled with our strong facilitation and organizational ability, we believe that this experience and the knowledge of what makes a school successful makes us excellent partners in the process of creating new schools. In recent projects in South Central Los Angeles, Inglewood and across the states of Louisiana and Alabama our consultants have shown that when educators transform their mindsets about student learning, one of the first shifts is to acknowledge that all students can and do meet high expectations. One of the obvious next steps for teachers is to begin designing learning opportunities to help them meet these expectations. These two premises are the only foundation on which to build schools that function for the ultimate success of all students. Each of our projects is aimed

at this kind of change process; cultivating the mindsets, practices, and rigorous reflection that are required to engage honestly in the work of educational empowerment. Taking a brief walk through some of our most recent projects, we can begin to show the relevance of our learning that has a direct impact on future school design. The following examples share highlights to support our suitability as a partner for San Mateo-Foster City School District in its aim of school creation:

Oxnard Equity Reviews

Our team led district-wide equity reviews of all schools in Oxnard High School District as part of an effort to center equity as the guiding principle for school and district development and improvement. At the district and school site level, our team evaluated relevant quantitative data, observed student learning, and interviewed teachers, students, and school leaders in order to provide the schools and districts with findings and recommendations intended to support community-responsive change, and improve equity for all scholars. One of the key equity findings was about the use of data and the ways in which schools do and do not ground their policies, practices, and decision-making processes in relevant data.

Project Learning Tenant #1 – Authentic Data Must Drive Decisions

Schools that do not promote collective responsibility among staff to fully know and understand their students do not ensure all students believe that they can succeed and develop the skills to succeed. In many schools, stakeholders express a misunderstanding of and/ or lack of access to relevant student data. Because data analysis is not a regular practice within schools, teachers do not understand the needs of their students or how their approach to teaching often fails to meet those needs. This is especially true for students with additional needs due to homelessness, learning differences, and English language needs. Furthermore, teachers and staff have limited understanding of how the supports they offer are impacting students. Additional structures must be put in place to collect, analyze, and collaborate around data.

Louisiana Teacher Preparation Provider Reviews

Our team is conducting evaluations of every university and preparation provider throughout the state. All of the universities, colleges, and organizations charged with the important, ambiguous, and essential task of deciding which people are ready to teach and which are not. Of prime concern to the Louisiana State DOE is the need to diversify the LA teacher workforce. Issues of equity are central to this concern, both for candidates seeking to join the teaching profession and the students they will teach.

Our consultants have worked closely with the LDOE to create the evaluation rubric for this project. Our work has involved stakeholder inquiry, policy alignment and partnership with a core team of teacher prep providers to ensure clarity and focus. Our teams have visited more than half of the universities across the state in order to understand the inner workings and impact of their teacher preparation programs. The findings are mixed, but the process is strong and gets stronger with each review and is dynamic DEI work. In the past year we have organized 17 teams with four to five members each to implement 5-day evidence gathering reviews. Each review considers in excess of 50 policy and practice documents, involves multiple stakeholder groups and holds daily conversations with the leaders who are impowered to make choices. More than half of our reviewers identify as people of color, all of our reviewers have been teachers in urban districts, most have also been principals, district leaders, and community organizers as well. They have a keen eye for evidence, not because the rubric describes it, but because as educators we've been hard wired to find it.

Project Learning Tenant #2 – Teachers Really Do Matter

One of the core issues we bump up against is the cyclical problem of finding competent, qualified teachers in a state where most schools don't meet basic quality standards. Historically, universities measure potential teacher candidates' readiness by their GPA and standardized test scores, but those measures often recreate the same issues of inequity. Also, those measures represent only some of the qualities needed to be a strong teacher. Through the review process we are creating new measures for the kind of knowledge and mindsets that actually make good teachers.

Transformational Change Partner

The Critical Design and Gaming School (CDAGS) is a high school in South Central Los Angeles. The majority of students at CDAGS (88.76%) qualify for Title I funding support, and nearly a third of students are classified as ELD or LTEL. PAN consultants have supported the school's improvement efforts under SIG funding for the last four years. PAN coaches initiated support work via a Collaborative School Quality Review (CSQR) process, intended to develop the capacity of all participants in highlighting priority focus areas, developing long term strategy and creating measurable action steps. Our first CSQR team was created from existing school leaders, each paired with a PAN coach. At the end of the CSQR, PAN coaches facilitated work groups in which the ILT members worked with their teams to analyze the data in the CSQR report and develop action-steps to address the areas of concern. Out of these planning sessions the coaches and leadership team members developed two powerful sources of data and input from all staff on how best to set about designing a process of improvement. The CSQR has been used annually to seek stakeholder opinion and involve a wider engagement in improvement work.

Project Learning Tenant #3 – Strategy, Action and Predicting the Future are Vital to Success

PAN set out to create a quality improvement plan; we wanted to ensure that efforts were student-centered, addressed all areas of concern from the CSQR, reflected the input of all staff, and established systems that were focused on ongoing, sustainable improvement for students. Over time, improvements have been tangible, because the balance of responsibility and accountability has strengthened for all. In addition, strong team members have risen to the challenge of being champions of change, making decisions that are guided by data and thinking ahead proactively. Each year the strategic plan has evolved more relevantly aligned to necessary course revisions. Current foci include:

- Building leadership capacity - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Shared understanding of best practice - Effective Learning Observations (ELOs)
- Collaborative Planning and Data Analysis – Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

Each of these project examples provides evidence of PAN's work in collecting, collating and responding to varied and multiple data sources to provide clear findings that lead to firm decisions.

Our Team

Joaquin Noguera

Joaquin Noguera has a PhD in Social Science and Comparative Education with a specialization in race, ethnic, and cultural studies. He is a former school leaders and teacher, and has worked as a consultant to schools, districts, and other learning organizations for the past ten years. As a consultant and coach, he works in a variety of capacities to support the development and improvement of learning systems, structures, practices and processes – through strategic planning, vision and mission development and alignment, leadership coaching, in-class engagement support, evaluation and organizational review, curriculum design, workshops and trainings, and as a thinking partner - typically with a focus on equity,

culturally sustaining/revitalizing practices, social justice, and healing. As a researcher, Dr. Noguera's work examines education and schooling as mechanisms of social and cultural reproduction, and their potential to support transformation, healing, and revitalization. His most recent study examines how a school that was deliberately designed to counter the adverse conditions in a low-income Black and Brown community meets the social-emotional and academic needs of students while working to revitalize the broader community and support individual and collective healing.

Miguel Casar
Miguel Casar is a PhD candidate at the University of California Los Angeles, an adjunct professor at California State University Dominguez Hills, and a doctoral researcher at the Center for the Transformation of Schools at UCLA. Miguel has worked with school districts, educators, and school communities for more than 9 years. His work, which is grounded in participatory and action-oriented principles, focusses on the role of building power, voice, and participation in marginalized communities to reshape the discourses, practices, and policies around school improvement and school transformation. As a consultant, he has led and supported projects of multiple scopes and scales across the country, including district, school, and community quality review and assessment processes; strategic planning and implementation projects; and capacity building and professional development around family and community engagement and partnerships, culturally sustaining pedagogies and practices, and Youth Participatory Action Research among others.

Amber Leage
Amber Leage, M.Ed., provides leadership for statewide initiatives, working alongside Department of Education in Louisiana, Nevada, and Utah. Projects provide on the ground data collection to measure the impact of policy decisions and to inform future decision-making, resource allocation and collaboration. She has served as an educator and instructional leader in inner-city public, charter, bilingual, private, and international schools. Her work includes leading professional development, school reviews, and facilitating school improvement here in the states as well as in South America, Central America, and the Middle East. As a school leader her work led to three schools adopting the International Baccalaureate model, establishing a university partnership, and creating school improvement plans to drive student gains. She has guided schools to adopt new mission and vision statements, establish data-informed instructional programs, project-based learning, Reader and Writer's workshops and the Common Core.

Jo Cheadle
Jo holds a British Honors Degree in Education with a focus on culture and linguistics. From a position with the Office of Standards in Education for the UK DOE, Jo came to the US over 12 years ago and has developed her knowledge of what makes a great school as teacher, principal, chief academic officer and school improvement project lead. Jo is now the VP of Class Measures Inc, partnering with Dr. Pedro Noguera on many transformation projects. She is a passionate and knowledgeable educator with experience in over 20 states across the US. Jo specializes in school and district transformation, with a drive to ensuring equitable access for all students. She is confident and articulate and a builder of strong and effective teams. Jo's vision, strategy creation and divergent thinking motivate and drive change.

Proposed Scope of Work, Timeline and Budget

The following timeline assumes project initiation in early-December and will be adjusted accordingly to fit the district's adopted start date. It is assumed that all project work will happen remotely during this period.

Workscope	Timeframe	Activity Detail	Cost

Project Design & Management	December 7-11, 2020	• Initial meetings with San Mateo-Foster City district leadership
		  ○ Clarification on vision and long- term goals
		  ○ Overview of past work
		  ○ District status discussions
		• Coordinate data collection, research and analyses
		• Ongoing communication with Superintendent	

Presentation of Program Options & Stakeholder Involvement	December 14-18, 2020	• Program options devised from initial meetings, data review, research • Organization of stakeholder involvement	
Phase 1	**December, 2020**	**Research and Program Design**	**$18,400**
Advisory Committee Presentation	January 11, 2021	• Initial findings/needs • Potential program solutions	
Organize Stakeholder Participation	January 12-15, 2021	• Remote arrangements and communications	
Implementation of Stakeholder Involvement Plan	January 18 - February 5, 2021	• 12 to 18 facilitated meetings • Collate stakeholder feedback findings	
Phase 2	**January-February, 2021**	**Stakeholder Engagement**	**$26,400**
Advisory Board Consultation	February 8-12, 2021	• Present findings • Prioritize input • Develop recommendations	
Draft Report Presentation	By March 19, 2021	• Presentation to Board of Trustees	
Final Report	By March 31, 2021	• Delivery of final written report	
Phase 3	**February-March, 2021**	**Recommendations and Final Report**	**$22,400**
Total Budget*			**$67,200**

*Proposed costs assume all activities are remote. Total cost will be adjusted if travel is required.

Project Contact

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References

1. Antelope Valley Union High School District, Educational Services
   Greg Nehan. Assistant Superintendent
   (661) 948-7655, Ext 230

2. Oxnard Union High School District
   Dr. Tom McCoy. Interim Superintendent/ Assistant Superintendent Educational Services
   (805) 385-2527

3. Santa Monica Malibu Unified School District
   Sandy Lyon, Superintendent (Current: Superintendent of Palm Springs USD.
   (760) 416-6003

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Bryk, A. S. (2010). Organizing schools for improvement. Phi Delta Kappan, 91(7), 23-30.

Hammond, Z. (2014). Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students. Corwin Press.

Rothstein, R. (2004). A wider lens on the black-white achievement gap. Phi Delta Kappan, 86(2), 104-110.