

PROPOSAL

1) Description of your organization:

This proposal is a unique partnership between the Oakland Small Schools Foundation (OSSF) and the Oakland Unified School District's (OUSD), Office of Charter Schools. These two unique entities share common values and deeply rooted convictions to education reform and positive change for Oakland school children, making them likely partners in this innovative endeavor.

The Oakland Small Schools Foundation, who is the grant applicant, is committed to *"promoting excellence in Oakland's public schools so that all students have the opportunity to achieve"*. The OUSD Office of Charter Schools, a partner in this project proposal, works within a mission framework of two parts. First, to ensure that *"quality schools are the established norm for Oakland's charter schools"* and second, to *"act as a vehicle so that charter school lessons can have a positive impact on the entire education system"*. This grant proposal serves to effectively engage and unify these purposes to achieve common goals of excellence and quality for Oakland public schools.

The Oakland Small Schools Foundation was born out of necessity. The need to sustain a reform effort seeking to radically change schooling for Oakland children was a catalyst for the development of OSSF. The work of OSSF has been to build capacity, establish networks, and to resource new schools with the tools necessary to effectively operate and thrive. This has primarily been through fund development and program development and evaluation. OSSF has additionally played a critical role in uniting new schools and promoting the ongoing public dialog about the need for better schools and system reform.

The OUSD Office of Charter Schools was also born out of necessity. The need to provide effective oversight and monitoring of Oakland's continuously growing portfolio of charter schools authorized by the Governing Board/State Administrator of OUSD was a catalyst for the creation of this department. Since the redesign of this office which began in 2007, the Office of Charter Schools has developed extensive policies, practices, and procedures for effectively evaluating new school petitions, navigating the political pendulum inherent in School Choice options, and overseeing and evaluating the effectiveness of charter school operators. The Office of Charter Schools has also played a critical role in the change management needed to negotiate the exchange of autonomy for strong accountability.

The Office of Charter Schools operates across six work-streams; five of which are described as follows.

- 1) The Office reviews and evaluates new school charter petitions focused on distilling high quality programs and high capacity operators for approval by the OUSD Governing Board as well as reducing the number of approved charter operators less likely to successfully implement their proposed programs.
- 2) The Office provides monitoring and oversight of charter schools authorized by the OUSD Governing Board, with special attention towards protecting school autonomies while implementing strong accountability that is meaningful and geared towards student achievement and viable school operation.
- 3) The Office coordinates an array of initiatives, programs, and activity between Oakland's charter schools and the District; which include new teacher induction programs, health services, state testing administration training, facilities, finance, attendance accounting, and special education; to name a few.

4) The Office acts as a resource of information for both internal and external inquiries regarding charter schools in Oakland and charter schools in general including the use of that information as applied to the overall district strategy of School Portfolio Management; with a particular goal of providing accurate, quality information.

5) The Office evaluates and inspects charter school performance and operations in its development of recommendations to the OUSD Governing Board regarding the reauthorization of charter schools; using practices that engage stakeholders and setting high quality standards and high expectations.

While the Office of Charter Schools is continuing to implement and reflect these practices seeking to ensure that the quality of charter schools in Oakland is high, it is focusing additional attention on the second part of its mission and its final work-stream **(6)** which is to see the lessons of charter schools positively impacting the entire school system. This effort involves the necessary art of creating windows of opportunity, while also seizing those opportunities that already exist. This area of work has proven to be the office's biggest success as well as its biggest challenge. The divide among stakeholders in the Oakland community of public education is evident when discussing charter schools. The Office has sought to bridge that divide in a transparent goal of accessing and exploiting charter lessons in an effort to inform and systemically improve the larger District. Strategies in this area have and will include, school site visitations, case studies, school site quality review reports, monthly charter network meetings, newsletters, and the exchange of policies and practices. To date the Office's biggest success and continues to be its biggest challenge has been the foundational work of bridging that divide by establishing trust and engagement of both the charter sector and those within the District.

2) Describe the proposed program and its purpose:

The project proposed herein is to engage five to eight school leaders from District schools and charter schools in a sustained, facilitated inquiry project for one year focusing on a specific educational program initiative that is **a)** innovative, **b)** likely to positively impact student achievement, and **c)** is of common interest to all participants. This facilitated project will apply a cycle of inquiry approach that identifies a problem or challenges associated with the innovative school practice, gather data germane to those challenges, analyzes that data, proposes actions steps to address the challenges, and re-evaluates new data gathered following the implementation of the proposed action steps. This facilitated inquiry cycle will conclude in a set of recommendations similar to those generated by a task force model, as well as a published "Field Guide" for use by other schools and school leaders to as a resource when seeking to implement a similar innovative practice as that of the inquiry's focus.

Following a year of school site visits and a half dozen extensive school quality reviews, the Office of Charter Schools has developed a list of common, innovative educational program practices that are promising in their potential to positively impact student achievement. This list has since been vetted through a series of dialogs with both District and charter school leaders to determine those practices which hold the greatest interest among leaders and for which schools have already begun implementation of the practice in one form or another at their schools. This dialog revealed a clear opinion on the part of interested leaders, that they are not satisfied with the results of their implementation and would value the opportunity to benefit from the lessons learned by other schools engaged in a similar practice.

This grant proposal, if awarded, would fund one year-long inquiry cycle on one specific Innovative School Practice, while also developing a model to engage continuous inquiry across a range of practices. In identifying the practice to be the focus of this first inquiry project, the goal is to ensure participating leaders are both deeply engaged in the inquiry process and can apply their learning during the course of the inquiry cycle.

Innovative School Practices	Interested Leaders (<i>n=13</i>)
• Early College	10
• Interim and Benchmark Assessments	7
• School Administrator Classroom Walkthrough's	6
• Advisory Programs	5
• Writer's Workshop	5
• Data-driven Teacher Planning	5
• Mathematics Intervention	5
• Student-led Parent Conferences	4
• Portfolio Assessment	3

Based on the number of interested leaders, this proposal will likely focus the first inquiry project on Early College. Early College is the practice of enrolling high school students concurrently in college level courses, typically with a local community college where courses are offered either at the school site, or on the college campus. Additionally of interest, this practice has in the past been less common among schools in general and therefore less is known about effective Early College programs. Therefore this topic is likely to generate the engagement among leaders necessary to sustain and support the project. The need for effective Early College opportunities for Oakland public school students stems from the low percentage of students completing high school, pursuing college, and successfully completing college.

Early College provides students with experiences and success in college courses at a critical time as students are making decisions about considering higher education. Additionally, when smaller schools are challenged to provide higher level and diverse curriculum options to students, Early College provides a unique expansion of the course offerings these schools can provide. The project itself will be documented through artifacts, photographs, quotes, and observations. This documentation of the inquiry project will serve to allow both the participants to reflect on the experience, as well as allow for the publication of the learning process in addition to the learning outcomes specific to the topic.

Inquiry Group Project Scope:

- Survey of leadership
- Prioritizing High Leverage ("High Interest" topics)
- Soliciting and Convening Inquiry Group
- Setting Outcome Goals
- Developing Essential Questions
- Conducting Site Visits, Research, Dialog, Data Analysis, Action Planning

- Action Steps and Evaluation
- Development of Recommendations
- Development of Field Guide

3) Describe the evaluation and outcomes of the proposed program:

The goals of the project are to establish guidance and recommendations for participating schools and future schools seeking to effectively implement an Early College program. Additionally, the project will produce a Field Guide with information about successful strategies, important contacts and community partners, tips for supporting conditions, and actual tools and instruments used by schools to effectively implement an Early College program. This Field Guide, which will include a description and documentation of the inquiry process, will be published and a minimum of 25-50 copies produced for either fundraising sales or distribution. The primary goal of the project is fundamentally to improve pupil learning through effective programming. This will be demonstrated by an increase within one year of the inquiry project in either the participation rates of students in the Early College courses at their respective schools and/or an increase in the passage rate by students in their Early College courses.

Additionally, the project seeks to establish a successful model for meaningful partnerships in the future between the District sector and charter school sector. The project seeks to establish a network among school leaders that will foster further collaboration and innovation. School leaders, particularly those who engage in unique and innovative practices, as well as new schools and charter schools in general consistently acknowledge the isolation they experience and the need for a community of learners and leaders with whom they can engage in critical dialog about how to move student achievement. By using structured protocols throughout the inquiry process, the project intends to model best practices for adult learners and encourage school leaders to practice and adopt these approaches to professional learning in their own schools.

Table II represents the evaluation plan for the project.

Goal	Instrument/s of measure	Target
Continuous, active participation by leaders from both District and charter schools in the Inquiry project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign-in sheets • Observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85 - 90% attendance by ALL leaders. • Contributions made by ALL participating leaders during at least 85 – 90% of all inquiry sessions.
Satisfaction by leaders in the facilitation, contributions of others, and results of the Inquiry project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 85% of responses by leaders will report that they Agree or Strongly Agree that they were satisfied with the facilitation, contributions of others, and results of the Inquiry project
Publication of a Field Guide that represents the recommendations and cumulative findings of the Inquiry group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published Field Guides 	At least 25-50 published Field Guides will be produced within four months after the completion of the Inquiry project.

Students at each participating school will demonstrate an increase in either the rates of participation and/or the pass rate of courses taken through their respective early college programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance reports • College transcripts 	Schools will show a minimum 20% increase in either participation rates or pass rates in their Early College courses over a one year period following the completion of the Inquiry project
Participating leaders will form a professional network that will be advantaged to support their ongoing work in their respective schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Inquiry Survey distributed 6 months after the completion of the inquiry project. 	80% of leaders will report experiences where-in they contacted or were contacted professionally by other participating leaders

Possible challenges or pitfalls to this project are as follows;

- 1) The competing roles and responsibilities of participating leaders that may lead to difficulties in achieving the target participation rates.
- 2) The inherent challenges in forming a learning community among adults which requires trust-building, shared interests, and an investment in each others' learning.
- 3) Identifying a strong and effective facilitator to help shape and guide the learning process and the Inquiry Cycle.
- 4) Creating a user-friendly resource that can be influential in supporting schools in the future to successfully implementing Early College programs.

While there are a myriad of responses available to address each of the aforementioned challenges and pitfalls, it is important to note the capacity that exists within the partner organizations.

Oakland Small Schools Foundation works directly with District leaders operating new schools. The OUSD Office of Charter Schools works directly with leaders in charter schools. These relationships will ensure a meaningful cohort of participants. OSSF currently works with graphic artists and relatively low cost printing service organizations that can be accessed to assist in the development of the Field Guide product. The leadership of the OUSD Office of Charter Schools has extensive experience as a school leader, a facilitator of professional development for school leaders, the use of Cycles of Inquiry and has worked as a school design coach for a number of years. That experience and background will assist in ensuring the identification of a strong facilitator for the project as well as contribute to the over-all effective design of the project. Both partnering organizations have available space for use by the Inquiry Group, should alternative spaces become difficult to procure. Both organizations foresee substantial organizational capacity in effectively implementing and overseeing the successful completion of the proposed project at this time.

- Following the successful completion of this project, the Office of Charter Schools intends to pursue a collaborative Public Charter School Dissemination Grant to further develop the meaningful partnership of engaging District and charter leaders in cycles of inquiry centered on the growing list of Innovative School Practices.