

Disrupting Natural Born Leadership: a Call to Leadership Development in the Classroom

A Grant Application Submitted to the California Department of Education Teacher-Initiated Equity Grant Program

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Cover Letter

Leadership development has often been left out of the classroom. Promoting personal growth and fostering important skills has been left to out-of-school factors. These factors may be after-school programs and organizations, work, sports, and extracurricular activities. That leadership studies are omitted from the educational space creates an inequitable environment. Students who are limited in their abilities to participate in these out-of-school activities are being done a disservice. They are not given the proper resources or spaces to foster essential skills of leadership.

It is a misconception that leadership development is only essential in higher education or professional environments. It is at young elementary grade levels, during extremely formative years, that leadership exposure is necessary. Developing qualities of leadership allows students of any age to strengthen their collaboration and problem-solving skills and instills in them a sense of responsibility and self-confidence. Cultivating these skills at a young age allows students the opportunity to be empowered individuals who engage positively with the world around them. Allowing students to create a better understanding of self allows them to develop a better understanding of the contributions they make inside and outside of the classroom.

Some individuals may argue that children are “natural-born leaders,” but I have a strong belief that given the chance and proper resources, every child is capable of developing leadership qualities. No matter how young, every student deserves the opportunity to become an empowered individual. Students should be encouraged to create change in themselves, their communities, and the world around them. At an elementary level, young learners need to know that they have a voice in society. It is our responsibility as educators to guide this voice.

The proposed intervention of this grant proposal calls for implementation of leadership curriculum, workshops, and professional development. This proposal lays the groundwork for disrupting the concept of a natural-born leader and brings forth the ability to create leaders in every classroom.

As an extended practicum student at San Diego Cooperative Charter School, I am first-hand witness to the inequities of leadership development. San Diego Cooperative Charter School lacks the basic out-of-school programs and activities that leadership development is often found in. This includes school sports, student council, and school clubs. Furthermore, the school lacks leadership facilitation inside the classroom. Students at this school are given no opportunity to become a leader in any space. Consequently, students' lack in aspects of task initiation and independence, collaboration skills, effective communication, and advocacy. Students are at a significant loss with these factors. The interventions of this grant proposal are essential to creating a shift in school culture towards one that promotes leadership qualities in the lives of students. It would be a disservice to these students to not initiate this equity project. I believe that the proposed intentions of this project will ultimately create long-lasting and positive effects in the lives of these students.

Problem Statement

Traditionally, leadership development has been left to the responsibility of out-of-school factors; may that be after-school organizations, sports, work, or the long list of extra-curricular activities a student may partake in. Generally speaking, these leadership skills were assumed to be learned outside of the classroom. Yet, more than 30 percent of students are dropping out of college in their first year (Covey et al., 2014) because they lack skills to lead their lives, be independent, and interface with those around them (p. 7). It is evident, then, that students who are being left out of these spaces are not receiving the same opportunities for personal growth and development. Nor are these students receiving a level playing field to tackle higher education or the reality of the world surrounding it. This statistic cannot go unaddressed. Moreover, educators can no longer assume that qualities of leadership are naturally fostered in our students. As educators it is our responsibility to better equip our students with leadership qualities that prepare them for the future.

To combat this issue of inequity, Dr. Covey et al., (2014) suggests bringing the “7 habits of highly effective people” into the classroom and I suggest doing so as early as elementary years. That the founding principles of these habits are applicable “despite a student’s nationality, age, creed, ethnicity, health, or economic origins,” (Covey et al., 2014 p. 45) is more reason as to why students as early as elementary school should be called to strengthen and exemplify these characteristics.

The responsibility to develop these qualities in our students is left to us, and our call to action is one of direct intervention—a leadership studies program for elementary schools equipped with young leadership development workshops. This grant also proposes that accessible faculty trainings are provided to ensure that a school’s staff is well-equipped with

proper tools and resources. The purpose is to prepare our educators so that they may learn to better nurture our students. Through these interventions we are creating a world of opportunities for students to feel empowered and confident. We also open doors from them to advocate for themselves and those around them. Further, these interventions lay the foundation for their success.

Creating a leadership culture entails a responsibility to create a physical and emotional environment that is safe and empowering for students to feel that they can be a leader. The goal of this is for students to be able to become leaders in their own lives; work effectively with others; bring meaningful contributions to their homes, schools, and communities; and feel empowered and equipped to make effective decisions for themselves today and into their futures (Covey et. al, p. 39). This grant proposal works to accomplish this mission at San Diego Cooperative Charter School.

Context

The 1970's was the dawn of a new era. Otherwise known as the "Information Age," this period of history was defined by the ability to "access information and knowledge easily" (Covey et al., 2014, p. 4). In the world of education, the Information Age brought about schooling environments whose priorities were ensuring that individuals had the highest exam scores, were admitted to the best universities, and propelled themselves into the corporate workforce (Covey et al., 2014). This belief created a long-lasting culture in schools that valued knowledge over any other skill. As a result, classrooms lacked room for soft skills, such as those found in leadership. Dr. Covey (2014) states that society is beyond the Information Age, and we have shifted now into the age of the knowledge worker. However, as Howard Gardner (2014) writes, "current formal education still prepares students ... for the world of the past, rather than ... the possible worlds of the future" (p. 7). Essentially, schooling systems are continuously focused on emphasizing factual knowledge as power rather than equipping students with the necessary skills to survive in the 21st-century world.

It is true that in this newfound era, "factual knowledge alone" as Dr. Covey describes, "is no longer the great differentiator between those who succeed ... and those who do not." (p. 4). We must, then, look to new solutions to prepare our students for this new era. Daniel Pink (2014) suggests that those who exemplify skills of problem-solving, creativity, foresight, design, listening, team building, and empathy are those who go on to thrive in this developing society. At its very core, leadership is a culmination of the skills described by Pink.

There is a misconception that people are born as "natural leaders," and that those who do not go on to accomplish high-end success in leadership roles lack the necessary abilities. I challenge this idea by stating that every individual has the capability to become a leader in their

own lives. This capability is inherent in us and requires a proper nurturing environment that allows those qualities to flourish. More than 30 percent of students are dropping out of college in their first year (Covey et al., 2014) because they lack skills to lead their lives, be independent, and interface with those around them (p. 7). If all students were given the chance to develop these skills and to become empowered in their lives and decision-making, one might wonder how this statistic might differ.

In education, leadership is saved to a select few who have either proven themselves “worthy” of responsibilities or were elected by peers. More often than not, these leadership opportunities are limited to after-school clubs and organizations, Student Council, or sports teams. While these organizations are extremely supportive in strengthening those involved, it is important to bring to light those who may not have the same opportunity for involvement. In my own case as a middle-school student, I was involved in Student Council at a very young age. Being at a small school and part of a close-knit community, I was given every opportunity to be involved through peer elections and teacher support. Upon entering high-school, I was faced with the challenges that came along with student elections and when I was no longer given the opportunity to be a part of these formal leadership settings, I felt lost. I had created this understanding that this organization was my only source of leadership development and I had become reliant on it for empowerment and self-confidence. I overlooked the fact that I could still become a leader in my school and community despite not holding a formal position with the council.

For students who never enter these spaces, their sense of empowerment and self-confidence dwindles as the years go by and as their skills go unnourished. Further, these exclusions go beyond the walls of the school. When students turn to outward communities for

opportunities of involvement, these communities are looking to hand-pick individuals who exemplify leadership skills. These skills are often defined by lists of involvement in school co-curriculars and organizations. Through this interconnectedness, students who are being denied opportunities in school also see the same denial outside of it.

This proposal calls for the need for direct intervention of leadership development workshops at elementary school years to empower students to strengthen qualities of listening, problem-solving, relationship building, innovation, and inspiration. These workshops will teach students what it means to be responsible, how to inspire others, and, most importantly, how to find their voice. By doing so, every student is given the opportunity to become a leader. For a developing student, being repeatedly referred to as a leader is a powerful language that can have behavior-changing outcomes. As stated, doing so does not require students to be in formal positions of leadership.

According to Dr. Covey (2014), the best way for students to learn to be leaders is by seeing adults modeling leadership (p. 76), which draws attention to the need for proper staff facilitation training. This grant proposal integrates direct interventions of professional and in-house leadership facilitation training for faculty and teachers. Easy in-house and on-site accessibility ensure that staff need not worry about traveling for professional development. Stronger funding for outside seminars and workshops alleviates fiscal responsibility that often falls in the hands of faculty and staff. Proper training is essential to this grant proposal because it brings all those involved to a unified understanding of the goals being made and the outcomes needed to attain them. Undergoing such a large shift towards leadership facilitation requires a change in school culture. A culture that cultivates student leadership in all aspects inside and

outside of the classroom invites students to be empowered individuals capable of leading their lives.

Theory of Change

As Dr. Stephen Covey (2014) states, “leadership is communicating a person’s worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves” (p. 39). The theory of change that undergirds this specific project is that students are capable and empowered individuals who can create change in themselves, their communities, and the world around them. This asset-based understanding posits that it is no longer the case that only some students are natural born leaders, rather that all students can be leaders when given equitable opportunities to be. There are two general ways to be a leader: to be a leader of self or a leader of others (Covey et al., 2014, p. 38). The former calls for a student’s ability to be self-reliant, forward thinking, and oversee their own choices and actions. The latter, being a leader of others, goes beyond occupying formal leadership positions, rather it is seen as sharing one’s own knowledge or talents with others in a way that expands others’ talents or thinking; being a role model and inspiring others to rise to their potential; and guiding others toward a meaningful goal (Covey et al., 2014 p. 38).

Students who are empowered to be a leader of self find empowerment in creating change in themselves and in the world around them, which is also best understood as being a leader of others. The hope of this grant project is that communities are affected by these changes. With these changes, there is an aim for an increase in good citizenship, community involvement, and volunteering. Further, school can have an impact on what happens in the home. Teaching students proactive behaviors, empathy, and self-care translates directly into homelife. Overall, creating leaders in school directly benefits the communities of these students, the families of these students, and the students themselves.

Synopsis of Intervention

The proposed grant project aims to seek improvement in academics, culture, and leadership while impacting faculty, students, their families, and the outside community.

At a faculty and staff level, this grant proposes on-site facilitation training and professional development for all staff. Often, opportunities for professional development are overlooked due to financial constraints, limited resources, or travel concerns. These inequitable reasons can be eliminated. This proposal seeks funding to alleviate these qualms and open up accessibility to professional development for faculty and staff members alike. Proper training allows staff members to become well-trained, aware, and certified in leadership facilitation. This proposal also calls for the introduction of two new staff members to the San Diego Cooperative Charter School team. These two staff members are dedicated Leadership Coaches who will be on-site consultants for faculty and staff to utilize as a resource. They will also serve as Leadership Specialists who are trained for consultation and intervention for Tier 2 and Tier 3 (small group and individual) support for students who would benefit from additional time outside of designated *Leadership* courses. Ensuring that all faculty and staff are appropriately trained and prepared to nurture students into leaders creates a supportive culture that directly benefits the community as a whole.

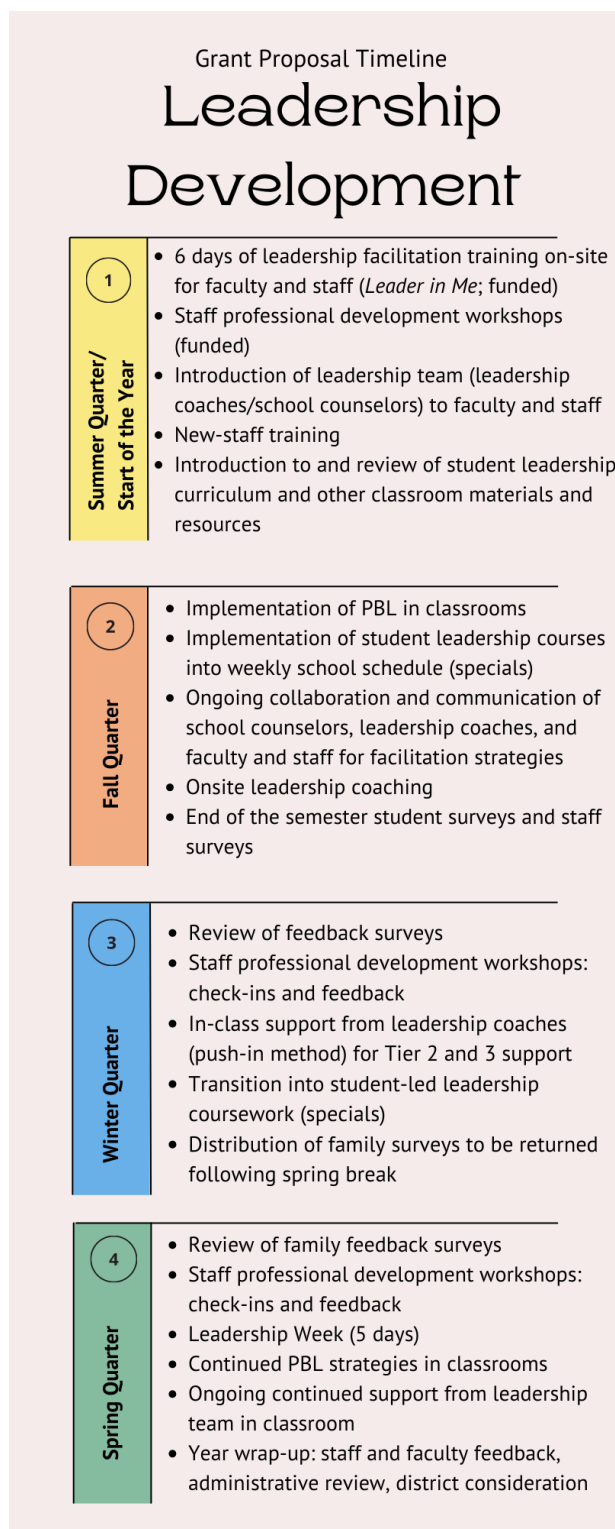
At a student level, leadership is often left out of the classroom and falls into the hands of outside activities and curriculars. Students who are not given the opportunity to participate in such curriculars are being done a disservice. It is no longer the case that only some students are natural born leaders, rather that all students can be leaders when given equitable opportunities to be. This grant proposes direct instruction for leadership facilitation through student leadership curriculum implemented once a week for every grade-level. At San Diego Cooperative Charter

School, students attend a Specials class for one hour every day. These Specials include Dance/Music, Art, P.E., and Science. Through this project, *Leadership* would be added as a Specials curricular course, giving students the opportunity to have dedicated class time to strengthen skills of collaboration, creativity, public speaking among many others. As the year goes on and each phase rolls out, these *Leadership* courses will transition from teacher-led to student-led workshops, allowing all students the opportunity to develop and nurture their leadership skills. Further, this course will prepare students to facilitate a *Leadership Week* during the fourth phase of this process. *Leadership Week* will be a student-centered week dedicated to showcasing students' abilities to their families and the outside community. This may manifest in the form of projects, shows, rallies, or community events. The events and curriculum open opportunities for every student to benefit from learning to be a leader without relying on extra-curriculars. These interventions directly tie into the proposed theory of change: *students are capable and empowered individuals who can create change in themselves, their communities, and the world around them.*

To ensure that best practices are implemented through our project, the use of feedback surveys regarding *Leadership* curriculum, Leadership Coaches, staff and faculty training, and student at-home behaviors will be sent home at the end of every phase and evaluated to understand how to modify or enhance the current plan of action.

Empowering students to be leaders allows them to find empowerment in creating change in the world around them. As students continue throughout the school year, we expect to see our communities affected by the changes being implemented in our school. Our hope is to see an increase in good citizenship, community involvement, and volunteering. Further, teaching students proactive behaviors, empathy, and self-care translates directly into homelife.

Timeline



The proposed timeline for this project follows the course of one year, split into quarters, beginning in the month of July. The first phase of this project is Training. The Training portion of this proposal will consist of 6 days of training from Dr. Franklin Covey's *Leader in Me* program. These 6 days of training prepare faculty and staff to become certified in *Leader in Me* content to be able to deliver and facilitate leadership amongst their students. The training process will include 2 days of *The 7 Habits*, a day of *Launching Leadership*, a day of *Creating Leadership Culture*, a day of *Aligning Academics*, and one day of *Empowering Instruction and Curriculum*. This phase will also include on-site professional development workshops to discuss PBL unit planning and implementation of student leadership curriculum. This portion gives current faculty and staff the opportunity to review best practices for PBL lesson planning for them to implement during phase 2. Lastly, this phase of the proposal will introduce two new staff to the team. These two staff members will be leadership coaches who are dedicated to enhancing the school community through

in-class support, counseling and intervention, and facilitation strategies.

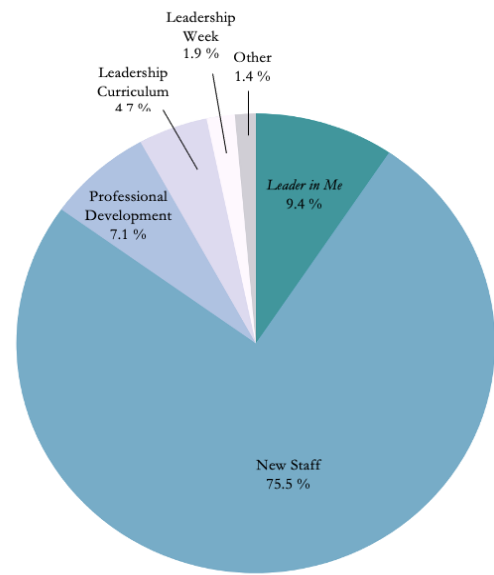
The second phase of this project is Implementation and will begin with the start of the school year. The Implementation phase is dedicated to the implementation of PBL, student leadership courses as Specials, and active leadership coaching. Student leadership curriculums will be used to introduce the course into the weekly schedule for students during Specials, which is an hour once a day dedicated to either Dance, Art, P.E., or Science. Student leadership development courses will be added as a Special into the weekly schedule. Toward the end of this phase, a feedback survey regarding student leadership courses, effective faculty and staff strategies, and leadership coaching will be sent out to staff and students and set to be returned following the winter break.

The third phase of this project is the Transitional phase, which begins following the Fall Quarter. The start of this phase will require review of student and staff feedback. Additional on-site professional development workshops may be offered as refresher and check-in courses. Any alterations and enhancement to PBL unit planning, leadership curriculum, and coaching should be made during this phase. This phase will consist of Tier 2 and 3 support from leadership coaches. Tier 2 and 3 supports are responses to intervention as part of a multi-tiered system of support (Dominguez 2022). These interventions are small group support and individualized support, respectively. These interventions will be dedicated for students who would benefit from additional leadership facilitation. This phase will also introduce the transition into student-led coursework/workshops during the dedicated Leadership Specials. This transition helps prepare students for Leadership Week, which will take place during the 4th phase. Lastly, similarly to the Implementation Phase, feedback surveys will be sent out at the end of the Winter Quarter to students, staff, and this time, family. The surveys will aim to be returned following the Spring Break.

The last phase of this project is Continuation. This phase will take place after Spring Break into the end of the school year. This phase will consist of review of feedback surveys, additional staff professional development workshops, continued PBL strategies, and continued ongoing support from the leadership team. Additionally, this phase of the process will host Leadership Week. Leadership Week will happen over the course of 5 days. This week will be dedicated to showcasing different leadership skills, student projects, and student-led workshops. The final portion of this phase is the year wrap-up. This will consist of all faculty and staff feedback and review of hard data from PBL units, Leadership coursework, and surveys to better understand the effectiveness of the program. Further, the wrap-up will move towards the district consideration to decide whether or not to begin implementation to schools in the San Diego Unified District area based on the results from San Diego Cooperative Charter.

Budget

This estimated budget is proposed for a one year implementation at San Diego Cooperative Charter School. The proposed total budget for this project ranges from \$212k-\$222k. The largest portion of the budget will be dedicated to new staff. Two Leadership Coaches will join the team at San Diego Cooperative Charter School. Having Leadership Coaches on-site allows for individual and group intervention for students who benefit from additional support, as well as immediate support for current school faculty and staff to continually develop and enhance their facilitation skills. The choice to have two new staff members as opposed to one lies in the fact that implementing a new program comes with a lot of responsibilities. To split these responsibilities between two individuals sets the program up for success as to not overload or burnout a lone staff member. It may seem that a smaller portion of the budget is dedicated to direct instruction and curriculum for Leadership coursework, however, programs through *Leader in Me* are cost effective and affordable to implement.



Itemization:

i) 2 Full-time Staff Members \$160k-\$170k

(1) \$60k-\$70k salary (*varied based on experience*) + \$20k benefits x2

ii) *Leader in Me* \$20k

(1) 6-day on-site training for faculty and staff

iii) Professional Development \$15k

(1) \$5k for professional development consultant per day (3 days)

(2) 3 on-site, one-day professional development workshops (Summer, Winter, Spring Quarter)

iv) Leadership Curriculum (*Leader in Me*) \$10k

v) Leadership Week Resources and Materials \$4k

vi) Other Curriculum Resources and Materials \$3k

References

Covey, S.R.; Covey, S.; Summer, M.; Hatch, D.K. (2014). *The Leader in Me: How Schools Around the World Are Inspiring Greatness, One Child at a Time* (2nd ed.). Simon & Schuster.

Dominguez, S. (2022). *Week 9: Policy & Equity*. [Powerpoint slides]. SOLES, University of San Diego.