Listening and Learning Sessions Draft Proposal [en español]

Navigating special education services can be challenging for many families: technical language and acronyms, rigid legal and administrative processes, IEP meetings with large groups of specialists and unfamiliar faces, immense amounts of data and test scores, all on top of the emotions that come with advocating for a child with disabilities and learning differences. Many BIPOC and immigrant families also encounter cultural, linguistic, and systemic barriers to meaningful participation in their children's special education programs. Any strategy the district takes on to address these challenges must be grounded in families' lived experiences. This proposal is designed to facilitate that grounding.

The district will identify a project lead - either an outside consultant or internal staff member experienced in cross-cultural facilitation and empathy practices - to organize and execute a **series of listening and learning sessions that uplift the voices of families from various BIPOC and immigrant communities with children accessing special education**.

The **project lead will work with district leadership** to shape the scope and focus of the empathy-based inquiry, map out the different identity groups represented within special education in Corvallis schools, and identify potential families to engage in a listening session. The project lead will also advise district leadership in the recruitment and selection of its "listening and learning team."

The project lead will collaborate with SEAC, DELTA, Familias Unidas Para Inclusividad, culturally-specific parent groups, community-based organizations, tribal authorities, and faith communities to further refine the empathy-based inquiry and identify **spaces within families' existing support networks** where listening sessions can take place.

The project lead will **design various formats for listening sessions** that are responsive to families' needs and safety (e.g., public panel presentation, closed small group discussion, recorded empathy interviews, anonymized interview transcripts). Audiences for listening sessions will include a **"listening and learning team"** of select district leadership and staff, school leadership, special education teachers, EAs, specialists, and others.

Following each listening session, the project lead will hold a **learning session with the team to reflect** on what they heard from families' stories and experiences, what aligned with patterns they notice in their positions, what was new information, and what strategies might emerge in response to family experiences,

At the conclusion of the session series, the project lead will create a **final report** that summarizes the process, highlights key insights and patterns, and makes recommendations of concrete actions that respond to what was learned (including the potential role of a permanent SPED Equity position in the district). In addition to a written report, the project lead will present findings to the school board.

This proposal and its companion proposal for Familias Unidas Para Inclusividad were co-created by families, community organizers, the Lincoln Elementary PTA DEI Committee, and the Corvallis Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), with input from school staff. The proposals were submitted to district leadership along with a letter from the SEAC on February 8, 2022. Unlike the Families Unidas Para Inclusividad proposal, a budget is not included here. Decisions about timeline, number of listening sessions, and whether the project lead is internal staff or an external consultant will impact the cost of the work. In consulting with other district leaders across Oregon, they identified opportunities to braid federal and state funds - including Title I, Title III, and Student Success Act dollars - to support this kind of family engagement effort.