

Transforming Public Education Analysis and Design

Class Size Case Study

Transformation is not an easy thing. The focus of this case study is to reframe the issue of class size as it relates to teaching and learning. The case study will examine the role of teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and business leaders from both a macro and micro point of view.

The overall purpose is to examine school innovation from three different perspectives and to identify the driving and restraining forces for school improvement. What is the role of school-community stakeholders? What new skills are required on the part of all parties? What are the risks and benefits?

Evaluate and discuss this case study from three different perspectives:

(1) A Traditional Approach: A zero sum game, deficit model, adversary perspective

(2) A Strength-Based Approach: Appreciative Inquiry, Positive Deviance, Personal Talents and Strengths

(3) An Organizational Culture Approach: What Values and Beliefs are in Play? How are they in Conflict?

INTRODUCTION

The Superintendent of America Unified City Schools (AUCS) has made a formal proposal to the America Teachers Association (ATA) to transform Unity High School. While Unity High School teachers and administrators have participated in numerous reform efforts no change initiative is as dramatic and transformation as the Superintendent's Proposal. The Association, which has had a very positive relationship with the District met last week to hear the proposal. While the proposal is clearly transformational and is likely to be viewed as *off the charts*, the Association leadership has determined that it can not reject the Proposal without serious consideration. According to the Chapter President: *We must do our very best to maintain strong ties with the District. This proposal is presented by the Superintendent with the hope that the Association will become a partner for school change* (The Association and the District have had a very successful bargaining history with the teachers being the highest paid in the county and with excellent health care benefits).

Therefore, the Association has called in key Unity High School teachers to review the Proposal with Association leaders and staff for the purpose of advising the Association on what the Association response should be to the Superintendent. As members of this

advisory group you are to identify restraining and driving forces regarding this Proposal. Restraining forces are defined as those forces that you believe prevent the Proposal from being seriously considered and driving forces are those forces that you believe support the Proposal. Once you have identified both the restraining and driving forces develop an outline for an overall plan to have the teachers at Unity High School consider the Proposal. How will the Proposal be presented to teachers? What will the teacher planning team look like? Who needs to be on the teacher planning team? What will the teacher planning team need to accomplish?

If it is your group's opinion that such a *plan* is completely unacceptable, be prepared to justify your reasoning to the Association President.

PROPOSAL

The following is the written Proposal sent from the Superintendent to the Chapter President.

This proposal is divided into three major parts. Each part should be considered as a draft and it is hoped that all school community stakeholders will seriously consider the Proposal as a major effort to close the achievement gap for our African American and Latino students. As you are aware, over 55% of our African American and 46% of our Latino students do not register and attend college compared with 14% of our white students. In addition, we have a serious dropout problem for our minority students. After 10 years of serious reform efforts at Unity High School we have not seen any improvement. I believe that this is not the fault of any individual or group. Rather, we have asked our teachers and staff to make major improvements in student performance without acknowledging that our world and communities have changed. As Superintendent I believe that a radical transformation of Unity High School is required. I also believe, however, that any change, regardless of how small or large, will not be successful or sustainable unless it is planned and developed by the teaching staff and supported by all school community stakeholders. I believe it will take our entire community to truly transform our schools. *Yes, it takes a village.*

Part One: Structure and Relationships

While this Proposal changes the role and responsibility of the classroom teacher, this Proposal in no way should be construed as suggesting that the value of the classroom teacher is any less important.

It is proposed that the math, English and science departments reduce their respective departments by 3 FTEs. The teachers that leave the math, English and science departments will be provided the opportunity to seek a different assignment at Unity High School or to place themselves on the voluntary transfer list. However, the intention is not to administer any RIF proceedings as it relates to this Proposal.

The reduction of staff in each Department would result in a general savings of \$330,000 for each department. The intent is to utilize this savings to create a new position for each Department – a **Teacher Facilitator**. **This Proposal also calls for the creation of a**

Teacher Coordinator for the three Departments. Based on seniority within the District, teachers within each Department will have the right of first refusal to become the Teacher Facilitator. The role and responsibility of the Teacher Facilitator is to create a highly rigorous, relevant, and personalized learning environment for all students. This can only take place with the direct involvement of school community stakeholders. The role and responsibility of the Teacher Facilitator is to recruit members from the business community, non profit organizations, parents, student tutors and mentors, community-based organizations, and higher education faculty members to assist in the instruction and delivery of their subject area.

Currently, there are 4 teachers in the English Department (120 students), 6 teachers in the Math Department (180 students) and 3 teachers in the Science Department (90 students). The class size maximum is 30 students. As stated above, a new position (Teacher Facilitator) will be created for each department. Ninety students will be assigned to the Teacher Facilitator.

The new student configuration for each department would be as follows:

English Department

Teacher A – No change – 30 Students
Teacher Facilitator Position – 90 students

Math Department

Teacher W– No Change – 30 Students
Teacher X– No Change – 30 Students
Teacher Y – No Change – 30 Students
Teacher Facilitator New Position – 90 Students

Science Department

Teacher Facilitator New Position – 90 students

The Teacher Facilitator Position will be on a 12 month contract and receive a salary of \$140,000. Four weeks vacation is provided. The benefits will remain the same as delineated in the collective bargaining agreement. The student calendar will remain the same. The District has the right to remove the unit member from this position at anytime.

The Teacher Coordinator Position will be on a 12 month contract and will receive a salary of \$100,000. Four weeks vacation is provided. The benefits will remain the same as delineated in the collective bargaining agreement. The District has the right to remove the unit member from this position at anytime.

Additional Funding: As a result of Administrative retirements, the District will provide an additional \$400,000 annually to support this proposal.

A School Community Advisory Committee will be established to provide curriculum and instructional support. Participating teachers will be provided a stipend that is consistent with the collective bargaining agreement. **The Facilitator Teacher and Coordinator will oversee this Committee.**

Part Two: Infrastructure

This Proposal will provide every student immediate attention and support. From this Proposal, each student will have a positive and supportive relationship with adults and other students. The teacher facilitator is responsible for insuring that each student is provided a rigorous and relevant learning experience. With the assistance of the **Teacher Coordinator**, an individualized instructional program will be provided for each student. **The Teacher Coordinator and the teacher facilitator will develop a calendar of volunteers, including, paraprofessionals, business and corporate participants, community mentors, student tutors, and student teachers to work with students. This group will represent an orchestra of support.** Workshops and training programs (with the support and involvement of outside consultants) will be provided to the orchestra for each Department. Each teacher facilitator will be provided a \$25,000 budget to recruit and support volunteers. The orchestra will be responsible for working with students with the goal of engaging students in the learning process.

Our high schools have been organized around an *industrial-deficit model* that is no longer relevant in an *information – rich society*. Historically our high schools were designed to prepare students to become *workers* with a very small percentage destined to attend a college or university. In our industrial society there was no need for a large portion of our students to attend college. In fact, our society and economy would have suffered greatly if the majority of our high school students remained in high school or continued on with their education. Today, as a result of major societal and economic changes, things have reversed. Our economy is no longer based on the manufacturing of *things* but rather, requires a population that is highly literate, flexible, and creative. In the past, society required citizens that were compliant, passive, and conforming. Today, citizens must be more active, resilient, have a strong tolerance for ambiguity, have conviction, and self-actualized. As a result, our high schools require a learning environment that encourages student engagement – a place where they can have success to build real self-esteem and the conviction that their actions matter. One person –one teacher—can not do this. However, one teacher can provide the necessary leadership, passion, and conviction for such a learning environment to become a reality.

Part Three Accountability and Responsibility

The Teacher Facilitator has the primary objective of establishing a very specific pathway for the success of each student. To begin this process, benchmarks need to be established. These benchmarks need to be part of an overall learning success profile to insure high school graduation and the application and acceptance in a 2 year or 4 year college or university.

To continue as the Teacher Facilitator, 95% of his or her students must graduate high school and attend a post high school academic or vocational institution. The Teacher Facilitator has three years to accomplish these two objectives. It is expected that the Teacher Facilitator and Coordinator will work with all Unity Teachers to accomplish these objectives. If the teacher facilitator does not meet this standard, the teacher facilitator will be assigned to a position he/she is qualified.

Proposal Assumptions

- (1) All students can be successful and achieve great things. A major responsibility of the teacher facilitator is to create a learning environment with the support of school community stakeholders that encourages a positive, asset-based environment. Prior to the start of the school year, the teacher facilitator will create a social and academic profile for each student. The coordinator will work with each teacher facilitator to create a composite profile for each student.
- (2) The current teacher-student classroom structure is not working. Evidence is overwhelming that minority and students of poverty are doing poorly in our high schools. This Proposal suggests that we need to reorganize the classroom and transform the teaching and learning process. Teachers alone cannot present a rigorous and relevant learning environment for all students. What is required is a total school community effort.
- (3) The community, including parents, community leaders, business, and higher education teachers and administrators are ready and willing to become more involved in our high schools. The challenges faced by public education are grounded in societal issues and concerns and can only be resolved when the total community is involved.
- (4) The role of the classroom teacher has become too narrow and limiting in meeting the challenges presented by the current student population. Societal, technological, economic, and employment changes require a dramatic transformation of the learning process.
- (5) Teachers represent a powerful force for change. Through the teacher facilitator and coordinator, teachers can drive school innovation and change. Top down, external change efforts have not been found to be successful for closing the achievement gap for minority and students of poverty.
- (6) While the Teacher Facilitator will provide the basic foundation for the overall educational program, members of the total school community will provide additional instruction, reinforcement, remedial, and special assistance for students. This community school support can take place in a number of ways, including small group discussion and one-on-one direct instruction. Members of the school community bring unique expertise, skills, knowledge, and experiences to enrich the classroom environment.

