

## Alameda Community Learning Center: Charter School Dissemination Grant Concept Paper

**Description of Applicant:** The Alameda Community Learning Center is located on the Encinal High School campus in the City of Alameda. The school was developed originally in 1996 as a “school within a school” by the Alameda Unified School District as a result of their visioning process to create a prototype “School of the Future.” In 2001 the program became a dependent charter school and is in its fourth year of operation. It was planned and executed as a district-wide resource for 150 twelve through eighteen year old learners<sup>1</sup> interested in an alternative educational experience that encourages educational equity, experiential learning, collaborative learning, and learner voice in a technology-rich environment. The program now serves 200 Alameda learners in grades 6-12. For the 2002-3 school year, the ACLC received an API rating of 10, putting it in the top 10% of all schools in California, and has a similar schools rating of 10.

**Project Description:** For this dissemination grant we will focus on five features of ACLC’s community that we feel are transferable to other schools either as a system or individually. In the grant narrative we will present the themes of **Learner Empowerment, Facilitator Empowerment** and **Parent Empowerment** as they relate to the following:

**Participatory governance:** The ACLC’s governance incorporates the learners, families and facilitators in legislative, judicial and executive organizational functions. Learners, facilitators, and parents serve on the school’s Governing Board and on all committees with equal rights and responsibilities, and the Contemporary Community Citizenship collective – a weekly “town meeting” of all learners – participates in decision and policy making. Learners play the primary role in enforcing school rules, mediating disputes and deciding on consequences for infractions.

**Structure of school day and learning space:** The ACLC eschews traditional high school classrooms and schedules in favor of an open-plan approach – the Community Learning Center. This modern one-room schoolhouse features areas for learning subjects from chemistry to history, combined with communal space where learners can work individually, on team projects, and/or with facilitators. There are no private offices for facilitators or for the Lead Facilitator. Everyone is out in the open together, interacting closely throughout the school day. Classes are held on a college-type schedule. Direct instruction that uses both dialogic and traditional lecture approaches takes up approximately 60% of a learner’s day, with the remainder devoted to experiential, project-based learning, often in teams. Classes are not necessarily grade-specific – students who have talent in one area may accelerate their learning and work with older students, while those experiencing difficulty may take extra time to master a subject.

**Unique Personnel Management system:** For teachers, working as an ACLC facilitator involves a radical shift in perspective. The ACLC culture is democratic, fluid, and inquiry-based. In keeping with this approach, learners participate in every level of personnel management. Learner feedback on facilitators is the foundation of facilitator performance evaluation. Learners participate in the standing Personnel Committee and in hiring committees, including interviewing prospective facilitators. Peer and parent evaluations are also key elements of personnel management. Since there is no “administration” at the ACLC, facilitators and learners share responsibility for managing school operations and leadership. This participatory structure empowers facilitators to be leaders at the ACLC and prepares them for a career path of school leadership at the ACLC or elsewhere.

**Instructional Model:** While syllabi may look similar to those of traditional schools, the actual process of learning is very different. Learners are encouraged to set their own goals and determine a large portion of their learning, and a facilitator’s job is to create an environment for learner discovery, rather than for a one-sided transfer of information. The approach is constructivist, where learners “explore possibilities, invent alternative solutions, collaborate with other students (or external experts), try out ideas and hypotheses, revise their thinking, and finally present the best solution they can derive.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term “learner” replaces student in the language, philosophy and practice of the ACLC program. In much the same way “facilitator” replaces teacher. This reflects a fundamental shift in the locus of the learning process from a teacher-driven to a student-driven modality.

<sup>2</sup> Definition from North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, <http://www.ncrel.org>

**Technology Integration:** Current information technology is integrated into every aspect of the learning community. Computers are available to students at all times. The learning environment is Internet and intranet-based, with project work and research results posted on the school Web site. Learners use both Internet and non-Internet sources to collaborate on projects, and teams present a “Learner-Led Conference” to their parents, facilitators, and peers, in lieu of final exams. Learners gain competency in using Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint in materials preparation.

**Dissemination Strategies: Product Development (Phase I)**

**Goal: Conduct evaluations, document best practices** (Spring – Fall 2005)

An external consultant will design, collect and evaluate surveys from learners, facilitators, and parents to validate the practices that the ACLC community believes really works to produce academic success and develop high quality, independent learners. The consultant will produce a report on the identified best practices and the community’s ideas for how best to disseminate them.

**Goal: Develop Curricular Materials** (Summer – Winter 2005)

**Goal: Develop Materials to Improve Student Performance in Other Schools** (Fall 2005 – Spring 2006)

The entire school community will participate in producing high quality materials, integrating the development and production process into the work of learning, in keeping with school philosophy. Materials include a CD-ROM with ACLC best practice documents; a video/DVD describing how ACLC operates and its success in multiple domains; an improved website that would serve other charter school developers or traditional schools interested in adopting best practices, and a brochure describing how the school operates and its success.

**Dissemination (Phase II)** (Spring 2006 – Winter 2007)

Facilitators, Parents, and Learners will give presentations at Charter School Conferences and traditional public schools that have expressed interest in the ACLC model and/or best practices. The ACLC will host a “School of the Future Conference” in the fall of 2006 and provide School Day Tours. ACLC will also work closely with the Charter Schools Development Center (CSDC) to coordinate and help present statewide workshops on parent, student, and staff empowerment; give presentations at the March 2006 Charter School Leadership Summit, and connect with other parent, student, and staff groups across the state.

**Mentoring (Phase III)** (Winter 2006 – Spring 2007 and Beyond)

**Goal: Develop Partnerships with Other Public Schools (Charter and Non-Charter) to Improve Academic Achievement**

**Goal: Assist with Planning, Start-up of New Schools or Schools that Want to Adopt our Model or Best Practices:**

Facilitators, Parents, and Learners will work with groups wanting to start new charter schools using our model. Our teams will also work with existing charter schools and traditional schools who want to convert to our model or adopt our practices. The CSDC will assist in identifying schools and groups for mentoring. The Dublin Unified School District, Far West High School in Oakland, CA, and Gateway Charter High School of San Francisco have already expressed interest in mentoring.