



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
**DISTRICT 1**  
**File #:** 21-076

Board Meeting Date: 1/26/2021

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors

**From:** Supervisor Dave Pine, District 1  
Supervisor Carole Groom, District 2

**Subject:** Establishment of Fund to Increase Learning Hub Spots for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Students in San Mateo County

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution:

- A) Approving an allocation of \$1,500,000 from the County's General Fund for grants to qualifying operators of learning hubs to expand the availability of additional learning hub slots for socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the County; and
- B) Authorizing an agreement with the Community Equity Collaborative and the SMCU Community Fund for the distribution and administration of \$1,500,000 from the County's General Fund for grants to qualifying operators of learning hubs to expand the availability of additional learning hub slots for socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the County, with a term ending December 31, 2021 and authorizing the payment of administrative fees in an amount not to exceed \$6,000.

**BACKGROUND:**

**A. The Opportunity Gap**

The COVID-19 public health emergency has kept many K-12 schools throughout the country in distance and/or hybrid learning modes and has severely and negatively impacted the academic performance and mental health of many students. While the current circumstances are difficult for all students, they have been particularly challenging for students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, many of whom face home environments with significant distractions, internet connectivity issues, the need to share devices among multiple family members, and reduced direct adult supervision.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a well-documented opportunity gap existed between socioeconomically disadvantaged (“SED”) students and their peers in San Mateo County. For example, according to California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (“CAASPP”) testing data for the 2019-2020 school year, only 26% of the County’s SED students (as defined by CAASPP) met or exceeded state standards for mathematics, compared to 69% of non-SED students who met or exceeded these standards. For English language arts, 36% of SED students met or exceeded State standards, versus 76% of non-SED students who did.

This opportunity gap has widened dramatically under COVID-19. Local school districts have seen a spike in failing grades and absenteeism among low-income students and other vulnerable groups. For example, in fall 2020, 29% of Sequoia Union High School District students earned more than two Ds or Fs, up from 20% last year. Fifty-five percent of these students were SED students, even though they represent only 36% of the district’s student body. Along similar lines, absences among Pacific Islander and Latinx students enrolled in the San Mateo Union High School District increased by almost 16% and 7%, respectively, during the same time frame.

While some of San Mateo County’s public schools and districts resumed in-person learning this fall, these schools largely serve middle- and upper -income communities. In fact, only 3% of the County’s SED students are enrolled in districts that have resumed in-person learning.

Moreover, even where students from middle- and upper -income communities remain in distance learning, they often have access to more support than SED students, including increased levels of supervision from parents who are able to work from home or in-home child care, reliable internet access, quiet spaces to study, access to informal parent-led study groups, and even private tutors, in some cases.

Without access to adequate support, the County’s SED students risk learning loss the impact of which will extend far beyond the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **B. Closing the Gap Through Learning Hubs**

In response to this ever-widening opportunity gap, many youth-serving organizations in underserved communities launched “learning hubs,” which are safe, supportive places for K-12 students to engage in distance learning.

Existing learning hub programs include those launched in the communities of east Menlo Park/East Palo Alto, South San Francisco, Redwood City, and San Mateo. Key aspects of these model programs include a partnership between a primary public agency (school district or city) and an existing afterschool program, and tuition assistance/subsidies for participating students.

Recognizing the critical role played by learning hubs for SED students, Thrive, the Alliance of Nonprofits for San Mateo County (“Thrive”), created the Out-of-School-Time (“OST”) Task Force, a coalition of learning hub providers, school districts, and community partners. Between June and December 2020, the OST Task Force convened bi-weekly to forge connections between school districts and learning hub providers, and to discuss providers’ facilities, staffing, and funding needs. In December 2020, Thrive joined with the Community Equity Collaborative and the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Response Team to launch The Learning Hubs Initiative of San Mateo County

(“Initiative”) to raise awareness about, advocate for, and support, learning hub programs in the County.

To date, San Mateo County’s learning hubs have been funded through a combination of federal, state, and local governmental resources, community-based contributions, and tuition/fees paid by participating families. Even with this braided financial support, however, learning hub programs are only resourced to serve a fraction of the estimated 32,000 SED students in the County who could benefit from such programs. In a recent survey conducted by the Initiative, 83% of learning hub providers that primarily serve SED students reported active waitlists and 58% specifically identified a lack of funding as a barrier to expansion.

### **DISCUSSION:**

Though San Mateo County school districts remain focused on returning to safe, in-person instruction, the learning hubs infrastructure will remain critical for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year, and possibly beyond. Indeed, most districts are planning to transition to in-person learning through a “hybrid” model, with students alternating between in-person instruction and distance learning. Moreover, the recent surge in COVID-19 cases in the County and throughout California will likely impact plans to return to in-person learning.

We therefore, propose that the County create a grant program to support and expand the learning hub system (“Learning Hubs Expansion Fund”). In addition to providing critical short-term financial support, this program will help strengthen the collaboration between public and community agencies, a collaboration that will remain critical post-COVID as SED students attempt to overcome pandemic-related learning loss and recover academically, socially, and emotionally.

The proposed grant program, detailed below, was developed by staff in collaboration with child care, out-of-school care, and youth-facing experts and advocates throughout the County, and is modeled on the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Relief Fund established in July 2020.

#### **A. Partner-Based Strategy Serving the Greatest Need**

The County will contract with both the Community Equity Collaborative (“Collaborative”) and SMCU Community Fund (“Community Fund”) to administer the grant program with input from the Learning Hub Initiative Advisory Committee, which includes representatives of the Board of Supervisors, County Manager’s Office, and the San Mateo County COVID-19 Child Care Response Team (which includes representatives from First 5 San Mateo County, San Mateo County Office of Education, Child Care Partnership Council, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, 4Cs of San Mateo County, and Build Up for San Mateo County’s Children). The term of the agreement will be through December 31, 2021, with \$1,500,000 in grant funds to be disbursed and administrative fees totaling \$6,000 payable to the Collaborative and the Community Fund.

#### **B. Eligibility & Allocation**

Eligibility for grants from the Learning Hubs Expansion Fund will be limited to non-profit providers and public entities (such as cities and school districts) that commit to using grant funds to expand the number of available learning hub slots for SED students and that meet the following threshold requirements:

- Currently operate a learning hub (or operated a learning hub during the 2020-2021 school year) in San Mateo County;
- Serve K-12 students whose schools are expected to remain in distance learning (including in hybrid models that include a distance learning component) due to COVID-19;
- Operate during traditional K-12 school hours;
- Provide students free access to WiFi;
- Include on-site adult supervision to support learning and assist with student technology needs;
- Allow for safe socialization with peers in compliance with existing state and local COVID-19 guidelines;
- Serve primarily (50% or more) SED students, defined as students whose annual family income is less than [80% of the Area Median Income](https://housing.smcgov.org/sites/housing.smcgov.org/files/2020x%20Income%20Limits%20.pdf) (i.e. \$139,400 annual income for a family of 4); and
- Will increase the number of available learning hub slots for SED students, as defined above.

Grant funding will be distributed broadly throughout the County according to a weighted point system that prioritizes applicant programs that meet the following criteria:

- 75% or more of the students served in the program are SED students, as defined above;
- 75% or more of the students served in the program are in grades K-8;
- A significant number of the students served in the program are English-language learners, students with special needs, students in the foster care system, and/or students experiencing homelessness;
- The program is operating with the support of the local school district that serves students who participate in the program;
- The program provides participating students with meals and/or other supports (such as mental health services);
- The program currently has students on a waitlist; and
- The program currently has access to the staffing and facilities required to expand hub learning slots.

Applications will only be accepted online during a limited time period (which is consistent with processes put in place for other County-sponsored grant programs during COVID-19), and there would be no application fee.

Grant amounts will be based on the number of additional learning hubs slots proposed to be added by the successful applicants. Based on a sample size of 15 learning hubs programs in San Mateo County, the average hourly expense per student is approximately \$7. Using this hourly rate, \$1,500,000 would be sufficient to add learning hub slots for an eight hour day for three months for approximately 460 additional SED students in 100% distance learning or slots for 920 students in hybrid mode (i.e., half time in person, and half time remote learning). However, these figures are just an estimate of how many students will be served by the program; exact amounts will be determined based on applicants' budget submission.

Applications will be reviewed by the Learning Hub Initiative Advisory Committee, as described above.

At the end of the grant period, all grant recipients will be required to submit a written report detailing their expansion of learning hub slots using grant funds.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

The Learning Hubs Expansion Fund (\$1,500,000) and contract to administer and distribute the Fund (\$6,000), which combined total \$1,506,000, will be initially funded with County General Fund monies, subject to the application of and potential reimbursement from state and/or federal funds that may be made available in connection with the County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.