

## Statement of Purpose

If admitted, I intend to pursue the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership while working full time in education.

My ultimate goal is to complete my doctorate so that I can effectively lead as a school administrator, actively engage in research that focuses on addressing equity gaps, and specifically contribute to the social, emotional, and academic improvement of foster youth and homeless special populations. Over the past seven years, I have worked as a special education paraeducator, substitute teacher, general education teacher, and as an administrative services credential candidate to gain experience as an educator and teacher leader. The importance of continuous learning and self-development motivated me to obtain a Master's Degree in Education with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction including a multiple subjects teaching credential. With my curiosity and passion for teaching, my goals have shifted into educational leadership. I started taking leadership roles at my school and eventually decided to enroll in the MA in Educational Leadership and Administrative Credential Program at Concordia University Irvine. Understanding the capability of all students to learn, the importance of building relationships, the incorporation of social-emotional learning in curriculum and instruction, the preparation of students in consonance with the 21st-century learning skills, and the effective employment of collaborative leadership in education are my educational philosophies which have been guiding me in all my work as an educator and teacher leader. Moreover, I will continue to use these throughout the process of becoming a school administrator and a doctoral student. By completing a doctorate, I plan to improve my capacity as an educational leader through the use of research and practice to address the inequities California schools are facing today.

Being an orphan myself allowed me to experience first hand the challenges that many of the foster youth and homeless students in our schools deal with. I was placed in an orphanage in the Philippines when my mother abandoned me and my father was nowhere to be found. Despite all the emotional distress, I moved on and used my life story as a motivation to pursue my dreams. With the help, encouragement, and support from the people around me, I continuously strive to be the best version of myself. To engage in research and apply best practices to address the equity gaps involving foster youth and homeless students is one specific way I can pay it forward as an educational leader. This is also one of the reasons why I became interested in applying to the doctoral fellowship for youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness at San Jose State University.

There are about 262,766 homeless students enrolled in the California Public Schools which is about 4.3% of the state's student population during the 2017-2018 school year (National Center for Homeless Education, 2020), and 49,695 foster youth in the California public school system have been recorded by the California Department of Education in the school year 2018-2019 (California Department of Education, 2020). Many legislations have been passed such as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to support the special needs of our foster youth and homeless students, but these efforts are still insufficient in providing them with equitable access to public education as

the number of students in these populations continue to increase and their unique needs keep expanding.

In order to take action, it is imperative to understand the importance of equity and equity-centered leadership. According to the Association of California School Administrators (2018), “equity focuses on closing achievement and opportunity gaps and fighting implicit bias. Equity means recognizing that power imbalances exist within both historical and modern contexts of race, ability, gender, sexual orientation, financial background, upbringing, etc., and accounting for these differences in order to improve the education and daily life of the maximum number of students. Equity-centered leadership is essential because, through a sharp equity lens – i.e., the process to diagnose and assess equity within the culture, policies, programs, practices and processes within a school [district, system] – leaders model and set direction; they shape an environment where equity and excellence are the standard for everything; they develop people personally and professionally; and they make the organization “work” so that teachers and school-site staff can engage in effective teaching, learning and support (Leithwood, 2004).

It is important for schools especially for the leadership to look at data and analyze them to help figure out areas that need special attention. It is the responsibility of an equity-driven leader to identify these equity gaps together with their school staff to support specific student groups at their schools. Accordingly, these inequities need to be discussed in Professional Learning Communities in order to gain support from all stakeholders. The school administrator shall facilitate these PLCs and allow school staff to contribute to the analysis and action plans to close the identified equity gap. Ultimately at a school level, we need to look at funding, high-level curriculum, good teachers, discipline policies, extra academic supports for low-performing students, access to technology both in school and at home, comprehensive family services, mentorships, and trained counselors, and more to determine action plans (Center for Public Education, 2016).

As educational leaders, we need to find ways to help and support these students to be successful in school and their lives by creating positive relationships and fostering student motivation (Roehlkepartian, Pekel, Syvertsen, Sethi, Sullivan, & Scales, 2017). Professional learning opportunities to develop relational skills are vital to creating a positive learning environment (Cookson, 2017). This is particularly important for students who have to overcome challenging childhood experiences. Data show the more positive relationships that students have, the more likely they are to be successful in school and their lives.

Teachers are given this powerful role to make an impact with each of their students and they can contribute a lot to help direct these students to the path that will help them be successful in the future. Thus, educators need to take advantage of this opportunity. I believe that California schools need equity-driven leaders. With my philosophy of education as my guiding principles, I can, as an evolving equity-driven leader, lead educators to work towards the common goal of closing the equity gaps starting from the classrooms with the dream of progressing to the whole educational system.

## References

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