

To Whom It May Concern:

The Bedford Public Schools seeks funding for operating expenses and ongoing expansion of our LA2 Tenacity Challenge, a capacity-building academic scholarship competition for teams of Latinx and African American high school students from multiple Massachusetts public school districts in the Greater Boston, Lowell and Springfield areas. We think that this project is very well aligned with your organization's mission to support underserved populations.

THE CHALLENGE: Team Competition Builds Academic Capacity and Intellectual Risk-taking

Working towards a full day of academic competition in five different subject areas, (literature analysis, history argument, art challenge and math/science quiz bowl) teams spend approximately three to five months in intensive preparation. Most of the research, writing, and preparatory studying is conducted outside of normal school hours, thereby significantly extending learning time. During this period of protracted preparation, consistent with the findings of achievement-gap research, students:

- Build academic capacity in the subject areas and in 21st Century, higher order thinking skill development
- Engage in cooperative learning
- Develop lasting relationships with faculty coaches
- Actively transform college aspirations into practical schema for college preparation
- Engage in positive ethnic identity formation based upon intellectual endeavors
- Strengthen a culture of academic achievement that positively impacts non-participating peers

By combining the incentive of an achievable academic scholarship, the team-building experience of preparing together over many months, the excitement of the full-day competition (live academic performances, high intensity quiz-bowl, defending one's work before a panel of judges) and the power of participating with scores of other Latinx and African-American students from a wide range of urban and suburban districts, the Tenacity Challenge provides a uniquely multi-faceted approach to closing achievement gaps. Through their sustained hard work and intellectual risk-taking, the students actively fulfill the **Tenacity Challenge's mission: the creation of a compelling, college-focused, peer-shared culture of academic achievement for Latinx and African-American students.**



MEASURES OF SUCCESS Three years into the Tenacity Challenge, we already had significant signs of success:

- Enrollment by the 3rd year increased by over 100% amount, largely due to student and faculty word of mouth (from 66 students to 132 students)
- Several districts doubled or tripled their number of teams, thanks to teacher and student enthusiasm and active peer recruitment
- Surveyed teachers have noticed increases in students' in-class participation and confidence. Surveyed students report higher motivation and academic performance
- Students have turned their Tenacity Challenge teams into academic peer support groups. Teachers have built new relationships with students, recognized previously unrecognized academic potential and recommended students for higher level classes

With the program's expansion, we will establish other metrics, including grades, test scores and participation in upper level classes.

"I want to thank you for organizing this," said a young man from Lawrence High School. "Where I'm from, there aren't a lot of other students who take their work as seriously as I do, and it was a great experience to be here among so many similar kinds of kids. Can't wait for next year."

BRIEF BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Bedford High School, which serves students from the town of Bedford, Hanscom Air Force Base, and Boston through the METCO program, worked with the Greater Boston Students of Color Achievement Network (GBSOCAN) three years ago to create the first annual Tenacity Challenge. For the past five years, the Bedford Public Schools and GBSOCAN have worked together on academic achievement gap-closing efforts that include tutoring and academic support programs, professional development initiatives, and student leadership conferences. The Tenacity Challenge is the most comprehensive, innovative and multifaceted example of these important endeavors.

BRINGING URBAN AND SUBURBAN STUDENTS OF COLOR TOGETHER

We have embarked on this initiative because extensive research (e.g., Ferguson 2008) clearly establishes the persistence of academic achievement gaps in suburban districts as well as urban. Indeed, our own empirical data (lower average standardized test scores and unequal student distribution in honors classes) confirms the research findings. The Tenacity Challenge is a novel gap-closing approach that serves a combination of urban and suburban students in Greater Boston. Two years ago, our first annual, nine different public school districts participated. This past year, 15 different districts- Arlington, Bedford, Brookline, Cohasset, Lincoln-Sudbury, Lexington, Lowell, Melrose, Natick, Needham, Sharon, Springfield, Waltham, Weston and Westwood - and 22 six-member teams participated. Many of the participating high

schools come from METCO districts, and therefore, we serve a significant number of Boston resident students. This year we expect to include several Boston public high schools.

LOW COST/HIGH IMPACT

Relative to its modest annual cost, approximately \$9,700 (excluding in-kind contributions) the Tenacity Challenge has a far-reaching, dynamic and growing impact. The program's structure allows the costs to stay relatively constant while we continue to expand the number of districts, high schools and student participants. The excitement generated by the competition has radiated outward from the scholarship winners to the other contestants, and then again, to their non-participating peers. The participating teams' enthusiasm and hard work have combined to foster a "can-do" academic culture and a "permission to excel" that are usually absent from achievement gap-closing initiatives that simply provide additional study time or academic support. In this light, the Tenacity Challenge's doubling in size in two years is particularly significant. The 132 students who prepared for this year's competition represent a developing leadership cohort among a combined Latinx and African-American student population of approximately 3500 students.

"Can you tell us what the topics are for next year. I want to go home and start studying right away...." -Tenacity Challenge Contestant, 2012

At both last year's and this year's events, over fifty faculty members volunteered their time either as coaches, judges, event-organizers or fundraisers. Teachers who participate as coaches and judges engage in a professional development process that strengthens their cultural knowledge base and helps them to create more culturally proficient classrooms. This latter aspect is particularly potent in light of traditional textbooks and curricula that oversimplify African-American and Latinx history and culture.

LOCAL SUPPORT AND FUNDRAISING GOALS

During our first two years, we received financial support from Bedford High School, the Greater Boston Students of Color Achievement Network (GBSOCAN), Progress Software, Inc., the Bedford High School Parents Association, Bedford's First Parish Unitarian Church, and Bedford's St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and we charged a \$50 per team registration fee. Many districts created stipends for their faculty advisors. Our goal is to expand the project to include 30 teams annually from 20 different school districts (approximately 180 students) and to help others to replicate the model in other states. Simultaneously, we seek to increase the scholarship amounts to \$1000 per first place team member, \$500 per second place team member and \$250 per third place team member, for an annual scholarship cost of \$10,500.

While intending to continue to draw on local contributions, volunteer labor and registration fees, we seek funding that will offset operating costs and support the annual scholarship portion of the project as well as the creation of a web page and manual to facilitate regional expansion and replication in other urban/suburban centers.

We request the opportunity to submit a full proposal for your review.

Sincerely,
Jon Sills
Tenacity Challenge Executive Director

“One thing we do know, however, is that many high-achieving students from all racial and ethnic groups are beneficiaries of extensive formal and informal supplementary educational opportunities over time, many of which are provided directly or paid for by their parents. We also know that some of the most academically successful groups in our society have created a network of supplementary opportunities for their children that might best be described as a parallel educational system.” (College Board, 1999, Project Excite)