



East Side Union High School District
Yerba Buena High School
1855 Lucretia Ave, San Jose, CA 95122 408-347-4700

"RAISING THE STANDARD"

7/3/2014

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to recommend the Firehouse Gang Intervention Program of San Jose, CA and the work of Pastor Sonny Lara for any additional financial support available through grants or awards. I have known the work of Pastor Sonny and Firehouse for over three years. I have seen the work they have done in the community through various community centers, alternative schools, and within my own classroom. The authentic care, focus on building up youth, and mentorship they provide youth as well as the workers within their agency is truly inspiring and ground breaking.

Within my classroom members of the Firehouse staff have come to give various workshops, one-on-one interventions, as well as speaking engagements. Personally Pastor Sonny has spoken to three different classes of mine while I was teaching at Yerba Buena High School. I have seen him share honest and open reflections about his life, his struggles, and his accomplishments and it always leaves youth wanting more. Two breakthroughs in particular have changed not just youth, but me as an educator.

One involved a very quiet student in my 180 degrees class. He was respectful, always paid attention, and never disrupted others, but he was very closed off to the class and getting him to speak and share was always a challenge. When Pastor Sonny came to speak not only did he open up, but he actually admitted to wanting to join a gang. That day he declared standing in front of the class and in tears that he had been pressured for years and finally was going to get jumped in, but because of this presentation he chose not to. After that class I have built with this student and his family and have been able to learn more about his struggles and support him better as a teacher.

Another breakthrough happened in one of my classes where a student whose father was involved in gangs and was in prison, decided to change his life after Pastor Sonny spoke. That student is on track to graduate and wants to become a teacher to as he says, "follow in the footsteps of teachers like Mr. Fowler and Pastor Sonny." It's amazing the dialogue Pastor Sonny is able to open up in the classroom where normally marginalized students feel empowered by his presence and care.

Pastor Sonny is an asset to this community and the work of Firehouse is instrumental in dismantling the overarching problems of community violence, underachievement in schools, and divestment in our communities. He is part of a force that is rebuilding our communities and I am blessed to know and work with him. As I became teacher of the year for ESUHSD in 2014 it is in no small part due to learning from community experts like Pastor Sonny and his dedicated staff. Please consider supporting him and his program to better engage youth, family, teachers, and community members in the betterment of our community

Sincerely,

Charles Fowler

180 Degrees Program and Social Sciences Teacher

Yerba Buena High School

E.S.U.H.S.D Teacher of the Year 2014

M.A. Urban Education Social Justice, University of San Francisco

Chris Funk
Superintendent
ESUHSD

Tom Huynh
Principal

Paul Landshof
Associate Principal

Jesus Rios
Associate Principal