Proposal for an Umoja Education Center

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Introduction

Umoja is a need for the community; not just for fighting against injustices in society but for all aspects of our lives. This is why we created the Umoja Education Center (UEC). This education center will be tailored toward the educational needs of our community and has a heavy involvement of both the mothers and fathers of the community. The UEC will be primarily a co-operative endeavor. We will be working with parents who are required to do volunteer work for the purposes of court or for Employment and Human Services, or who need reliable childcare and are willing to “pay” with their time. Additionally, we will be utilizing high school aged children to assist them with the requirement of volunteer work for graduation. Embracing the each one teach one method, we will also incorporate youth of all ages to implement this methodology as a core part of the curriculum.

Umoja Educational Center will have different levels of education. It will begin with children ages 6 months to 5 years old. This daycare/preschool model will create the educational foundation that will maximize the future educational capacity of the students. Beginning at age 6 months learning will begin, from sign language and speech to mathematics. Education will always be the foundation to our success. We are starting so early because we know that the beginning of a child’s life is crucial to their feelings towards education in the future. Therefore, having that strong foundation will foster a bright education moving forward. We will stop the achievement gap before it starts.

The daycare/preschool will utilize community members to operate the center. The teacher/student ratio will be kept very low. For every teacher there will be at least one parent volunteer. We will coordinate and be cleared by the county Employment and Human Services Department to allow parents to work as volunteers to satisfy their volunteer and job skills training requirements. Our organizations will partner with the Rubicon Program
(www.rubiconprograms.org) to get parents in the community involved in the program as well as additional volunteers. In addition to having parent involvement, we also believe in assisting the youth as well. Since volunteer work is a requirement for graduation at many high schools, we will have a contract with Oakland School District to allow Juniors and Seniors in high school to volunteer at our community school as teacher assistants.

There will be a lot of hands on work and outdoor field trips as part of the curriculum, so having all these additional hands will be very helpful. We believe that learning opportunities are everywhere. Therefore, we will utilize our community as our classroom in the “World Is Our Classroom” model of the Oakland Community School. Additionally, we will have outside instructors to lead the students in activities such as yoga and sign language. The mission for this school is to have students continue their education with a love and passion for learning.

As we progress, we will be working on adopting a similar model to broaden our center to become a fully functional school. We are looking to expand to include students from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. We will apply to obtain our credentials from the State School Board to operate as a private school. In addition to our licensed educators, we will continue to rely on parent and student volunteers to assist us to assure that students receive the individualized attention that will allow them to thrive as they continue their educational journey.

Umoja means unity. The Umoja Educational Center will embody its name in full. One love, one people united together to bring a brighter future to our future leaders. Umoja Educational Center wants to encourage a holistic learning space for each student. We encourage an Umoja education with hopes of an Umoja future.
Problem Statement

There are several problems that the UEC is designed to address. There are 10 million single mothers that are raising their child without a father (up from 3.4million in 1970) (http://www.infoplease.com/spot/momcensus1.html). That means that to go to work or to school that they have to take their child to childcare. The difficulty in finding and keeping and paying for quality childcare is a major impediment to reaching educational goals and finding and maintaining employment as evidenced by the very high unemployment rate of 10.7 percent (June 2013) of single mothers (as compared to 6.8% for all adult women) (http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/4thanniversaryrecovery.pdf). Those needs are just from the educational and employment perspective of the parents. What about the children?

Preschool is very important because that's where children develop basic social skills as well as basic skills in numbers, letters, shapes and colors. The achievement gap among African-Americans is a well-documented phenomenon. In order to close that gap it is too late to start in high school when the gap is so large. It is necessary to close the gap when it is small, or better yet, before it even begins.

In the model of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords, to assess the true needs of single mothers we actually asked some single mothers what they needed and felt. One source that we talked with, TA, said: “being a single mother is life changing because I didn't choose to be a single mother. As my child gets older it hinders her more and more because she does not get everything she sees others get. And she will began to see others with their father and she notices it’s just me and her. Single mothers not only have it rough without the father, but they also go with being depressed half the time. Raising a baby up all on their own is really hard.”

Another source we talked to is KC who says, “I'm a single mother so I know how feeling alone and depressed it is. Although my child is a big comfort, it's hard to see her grow up with
an incarcerated father. I wish that there was more that I can do than just pray for better days. My child is very smart and does not attend school yet, but she does have Child Care Links while I attend school at Merritt College during the day. My journey as a single mother is not a mistake it's a lesson.”

In addition to the resilience, determination and courage displayed by these single mothers, two things arise from these poignant perspectives. One is the enormous potential from beginning early in life, and two is the need for psychological support for the mothers and the children as well. There is tremendous emotional, psychological and economic pressure on the parents from being alone, and the UEC will be structured to provide economic, educational and psychological/emotional support for both the parents and the children.

**TIMELINE FOR ACTION**

- **2014**
  - 4th Quarter
    - Finalize Concept
    - Recruit a Founders Committee to implement Concept
    - Recruit An Advisory Committee
- **2015**
  - 1st Quarter
    - Begin to recruit the founding families
    - Find potential locations or homes to host the initial setting
    - Investigate licensing and training requirements.
  - 2nd Quarter
    - Launch prototype of a babysitting/educational co-op
    - Utilize a small number of families (6)
    - Designate a lead parent
    - Finalize Volunteer Application Forms
  - 3rd Quarter
    - Investigate background check requirements for volunteers
    - Connect with local schools to get on the radar for volunteers
    - Continue to publicize and recruit parents
    - Conduct a formal assessment of the program and make refinements
  - 4th Quarter
    - Look for expansion sites beyond single home
    - Appoint a volunteer development director to formally fundraise
- **2016**
  - Move to Larger location
  - Stabilize and refine all elements of the school
  - Evaluate financial needs and requirements
• Look to hire first full time paid staff
• 2017
  o Continue Stabilization and enrollment expansion
  o Begin Accreditation process to start a kindergarten class
• 2018 First Kindergarten Class Begins
• 2019 First 1st Grade class begins
• 2020 First 2nd Grade Class Begins and search for a full time space is launched
• 2021 Move to a larger space while looking for a Permanent home for a K-8 School.
• 2026 First 8th Grade class begins
• 2027 First 8th grade class graduates

Volunteer Component

The Umoja Education Center will utilize volunteers. Volunteers will be an important part of the nonprofit education center we are working to develop. It will harness the enormous potential of single mothers who are unable to find jobs or attend school and still care for their children. By working cooperatively they will help their children get a great start, and also create productive time and space for themselves, collectively, to be employed outside of the school or to attend school while other volunteers are on their shift.

Almost all organizations started with an idea. The Umoja Education Center started with the ideas of several people. Many organizations operate solely with volunteers. Others use volunteers to expand their programming efforts. The vast majority of nonprofit board members are volunteers. We realize volunteers can pose a risk to an organization if they are not well managed in the areas of recruitment, training and supervision. The volunteer component will be at the core of the UEC and the volunteer component will be managed professionally and legally.

Umoja Education Center will require a written volunteer application to help our organization obtain information on an applicant so that the best use can be made of the applicant's experience and talents. In addition to the applicant's name, and basic contact information, a volunteer application will collect information on the applicant's education, work experience, previous volunteer experience, and support for the organization's mission. Of course, not every volunteer is right for every organization. Umoja Education Center will require a
mandatory background check of any volunteers who will be working with children, handling money or driving a vehicle. Safety is extremely important. So we will check the applicants criminal, credit, motor vehicle and child protective services records to the extent such reviews are permitted by state law. Background checks can now be done quickly and inexpensively on the internet. A volunteer application should include a notice that the organization will conduct a background check, the type of background check to be conducted, and a place for the applicant to authorize it. At Umoja Education Center special care should be taken with volunteers who drive vehicles as part of their duties. They will be asked to provide a copy of their driving record.

Our organization will also check with its insurance carrier to see which insurance policy, the organization's or the volunteer's, will be primary in the event of an accident. If volunteers need any skill certifications or licenses to perform their volunteer duties, a copy of their certification will be kept in the organization's file. Examples of skill certifications are first aid, CPR and lifesaving. Licenses will be required for professionals such as nurses, doctors and veterinarians. At Umoja Education Center someone will regularly check to make sure all volunteer certifications and licenses are current.

All volunteers will receive orientation. The orientation program will be customized to fit the needs of the volunteers. At a minimum it should include a brief history of the organization, a review of the mission and current strategic goals, and a review of the volunteer handbook. The orientation should also provide information to each volunteer about what they will be doing for the organization and how their role fits into the organizational structure and meeting the organization's mission.

A volunteer handbook will help to quickly integrate volunteers into an organization. It will also help to reduce or eliminate potential legal problems. Our volunteer handbook will clearly communicate to the organization's volunteers what they can expect from the organization
and what the organization expects from them. All volunteers will receive a copy of the Umoja Education Center handbook.

**Financial Component**

Initially the UEC will start very small and will almost resemble a cooperative babysitting service, albeit with a strong and directed educational objective. This will keep start-up costs very low. Volunteer teachers will be recruited to establish curriculum and learning outcomes. As the operation grows the center will look to support from the community, local churches, from established foundations, and even from governmental grants. As the financial support grows, this will allow the center to grow.

**Summary**

The Umoja Educational Center is designed to solve the problems of lack of early childhood education while simultaneously solving the problem of safe affordable childcare to allow single mothers to work or attend school. The Center will provide not just educational resources, but also psychological and emotion support to the children and to their parents. The school will use the community as a learning space in "the world is our classroom" model of the Oakland Community School. Volunteers will make the center viable; from the co-op requirements demanded of the parents to the community volunteers from the high school, the non-monetary contributions will be the backbone of the center. The beauty of this school is that it transforms the previously unemployed hours of the volunteers into critically productive hours which not only provide education to the children, but also frees others to pursue employment and education resulting in a true win-win situation.
Knotted Line Contribution

In the fall of 2015 the Umoja Educational Center was launched. First conceived and organized in the fall of 2014, the center launched in the home of a single mother, and started with just 6 children in a co-operative form of childcare and early childhood education. The parents worked at the school in shifts to allow other parents to go to school and obtain employment. By 2017, the school had grown to 40 pre-schoolers and moved to a larger location. In 2018, the school began its first Kindergarten class with some of the toddlers who had started in the very beginning, and with the commitment to expand one grade per year. By 2025 the UEC had moved to expanded facilities and was a fully accredited daycare/K-8 institution with over 400 students, with an extensive before and after-school program. Imbedded in the program was a commitment to close the achievement gap before it starts, and to support the children and parents educationally, emotionally, and spiritually. Those first Umoja babies graduated from the 8th grade in 2027 with admissions to top area high schools.


http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/survival_programs/oakland_community_learning_center.html


http://theworldisourclassroom.org/about-us/

