

Press Release

Media Inquiries

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Orenda Education Awarded \$4 Million Education Innovation and Research Grant from The U.S. Department of Education

The prestigious grant enables the organization to scale its highly effective, data-driven education equity model, Teach Lead Counsel (TLC), by transforming it into an accessible digital platform

Santa Ana, Calif. (Mar. 1, 2022) [Orenda Education](#), the school improvement division of [Think Together](#), California's leading nonprofit provider of afterschool, expanded learning and school improvement programs, announced it has been selected as an Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Grant recipient from the U.S Department of Education.

The prestigious grant awards Orenda with \$4 million over five years to innovate their highly effective, data-driven school improvement model, Teach Lead Counsel (TLC), by developing an online platform that can transform their approach into a digital format that is equally impactful and highly scalable.

TLC provides equity-based systemic changes to schools, so improvement is continuous and sustainable.

- TEACH builds a powerful teaching and learning system by designing grade-level curriculum, common assessments and instructional strategies while enabling educators to reflect and reassess their methods.
- LEAD builds the capacity of site and district leaders through a scholarly and technical approach to support the school conditions for staff and students to reach achievement targets.
- COUNSEL builds the student support services division of the school community where staff use actionable data via an early warning and monitoring software to measure student progress.

"We are thrilled to be awarded this EIR grant, which allows us to accelerate our work to ensure every student, regardless of circumstance, experiences the premium education that only some have historically received," said Dr. Robin Avelar La Salle, Orenda CEO & Founder. "School systems want to provide a true, right and just education for all kids and this new platform will help do just that."

The TLC model currently serves schools with a high-impact, in-person, systems-driven approach to improve academic achievement for underserved students. The methodologies use data to guide teachers, administrators, and school counselors to ensure that students are mastering grade-level curriculum and are on-track to graduating high school, prepared for college and career ready.

The TLC approach uniquely targets interventions to all levels and professions within a school, district, or charter, not only to teachers, which is more common in the field. This "nested" approach is one of the keys to success towards sustainable, systemic improvement for the entire district.

"The pandemic cast a spotlight on the need to improve student outcomes, especially for our most vulnerable communities who have been hit hardest over the last two years," said Think Together Founder and CEO Randy Barth. "Teachers, administrators and counselors have the best shot at ensuring these kids have a bright future and I am so proud that Orenda's refined approach has been vetted through this grant to help all educators serve students in a way that gives youth an equitable education."

With the number of districts performing below standards, especially in light of the learning loss following COVID-19's impact to schools, the time is right for a school improvement platform that can reach schools that need less-intensive interactions or those that require geographic flexibility. Orenda will roll-out the new TLC platform to a select group of

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five “treatment school” cohorts each year, reaching over 5,000 students in year one of the grant and more than 16,000 students by end of year five. To support these cohorts, Orenda plans to digitize the TLC model into a multilayered learning management system, to alleviate the need for intensive staff support.

In partnership with Orenda, the San Diego, Ventura, and Monterey County Offices of Education have committed to help identify and recruit schools compatible to test the platform for this newly funded initiative. Dr. Paul Gothold, Superintendent of San Diego County Office of Education, was an early adopter of Orenda’s work as the former superintendent of Lynwood Unified School District.

Under Gothold’s leadership, Lynwood Unified worked with Orenda to improve students’ math and English test scores, increase graduation rates to 90.8%, and decrease student drop-out rates to 2.5%. Lynwood Unified was named the 2017 National AP District of the Year and Lynwood High School was ranked a 2020 Best High School by U.S. News and World Report.

“Orenda provides the technical expertise for true district turn-around. The systems approach and professional development modules to build staff capacity ensures all leaders have the tools and resources to be equity leaders for all students,” said Gothold. “Through our work together, we were able to achieve incredible outcomes for students and we’re thrilled to continue working with them on this pivotal program.”

To implement this program, Orenda is looking to immediately hire a Head of Product, Orenda Software, to develop and lead a plan for taking Orenda’s existing software tools to a single solution that any school, district or charter can access. The organization will also be recruiting for data/technology leads, education software developers, data collection analyst and achievement specialist as the work continues to scale.

As the pandemic forced school closures, Orenda seized the unique opportunity to work with schools in a virtual environment, laying the foundation for digitizing the TLC model. Orenda has since increased its impact from 49,000 students reached in 2019-2020 school year to more 90,000 students reached in 2020-2021. In addition, Orenda has steadily grown across California and now partners with districts and schools in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, Kern, Sonoma, Imperial, and Santa Barbara counties.

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About Orenda Education

A Think Together affiliate since 2014, Orenda Education’s primary focus is to support school and district leaders to provide the right conditions for all students to experience a world-class education, so they are prepared for college and career. This group of highly experienced educational equity warriors partner with school districts to identify research-based equity-grounded solutions for closing the Achievement Gap. Orenda’s proven approach dramatically improves student outcomes and creates paths for college and career opportunities. For more information, please go to orendaed.org.

About Think Together

Think Together partners with schools and communities to pursue educational equity and excellence for all kids. As a nonprofit organization, Think Together innovates, implements, and scales academic solutions that change the odds for hundreds of thousands of California students. Think Together’s program areas include early learning, afterschool, school support services and leadership development for teachers and school administrators. For more information, call (888) 485-THINK or visit www.thinktogether.org.