

Joanna Vazquez Zelaya

Project Manager, Measure N, Oakland Unified School District

2018 Surge Fellow

Joanna Vazquez Zelaya has been described as a connector, an advocate, authentic, and a change agent. Joanna serves as the Measure N project manager and is leading Oakland's charge in designing Linked Learning high schools across the city in order to transform the experience of students within the classroom to engage students in contextualized and relevant learning.

The oldest of four siblings, Joanna took the role of educator, mentor, translator, and connector between the world and her family as she helped them navigate and translate systems and experiences from a very young age. As a first-generation high school graduate and a product of the public education system,

Joanna has first-hand knowledge and experience of what it is like to be an underserved student with high aspirations and immense cultural and aspirational wealth and capital. Subsequently, as a first generation college graduate, Joanna has first-hand knowledge and experience of navigating complex systems and structures.

Joanna is committed to fulfilling Oakland's hope of preparing students for college, career, and community in more intentional and responsive manner that is conscious of the complex interests of young people. She continues to use her strengths to work with school and district leaders to challenge themselves to reimagine and redesign the high school experience of Oakland youth. Joanna continues to hone her skills and abilities to discuss complex educational theories and concepts and translate them into tangible strategies and processes that can be operationalized.

Joanna holds a BA from the University of California, Los Angeles in Psychology and Chicana/o Studies with minors in Education, Gender Studies, and Labor Studies. Joanna currently serves as a mentor through the East Bay College Fund and is a member of the Surge Institute's Inaugural Oakland Fellowship (2018). Joanna embodies her cultural traditions as a storyteller who shares her journey and experiences within her intersectional identities and is currently working on a podcast to do just that with a larger audience.

