

Southern California Nonprofit University Joins Nationwide Effort to Build Pipeline of Equity-Focused K-12 School Principals

As part of an \$8.2 million grant, Fresno Unified School District and National University's Sanford College of Education join an effort to develop equity-driven school leaders



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National University 

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LA JOLLA, Calif., Oct. 20, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- National University, a nonprofit university with a 50-year history of serving working adults and home to one of the largest schools of education in the United States, today announced that its Sanford College of Education has been selected by Fresno Unified School District and the Wallace Foundation to participate in [a \\$102 million nationwide initiative](#) focused on building a pipeline of school leaders dedicated to supporting equity in K-12 classrooms. With funding from Wallace Foundation, the five-year Equity-Centered Pipeline Initiative will support eight large and socio-economically diverse school districts across the country, including California's Fresno Unified School District.

"At a time when our nation is grappling with profound questions of social injustice, weaving the principles of equity into school leadership is one of the most powerful levers we have to address issues of educational access and outcomes," said Dr. Donna Elder, associate dean of National University's Sanford College of Education. "This work is about helping aspiring school leaders build the equity mindset to understand systemic barriers facing students and communities—and design the teams and supports needed to ensure every learner's needs are met."

As part of an \$8.2 million grant awarded to the district, faculty and leaders from National University will team with Fresno Unified School District to evaluate and evolve current practices as part of a multi-year initiative to develop the next generation of effective, equity-centered school leaders. Beginning with the current fall semester, National University will work with Fresno Unified School District to define the characteristics of an equity-centered leader and provide mentoring and training to current and aspiring school administrators.

With a team of more than 60 full-time faculty and 935 adjunct faculty, serving more than 11,000 active students, the Sanford College of Education brings to the project a unique blend of faculty expertise—as well as deep experience in developing district partnerships and supporting in-service professional development for educators.

The new school leader pipeline initiative comes at a time when schools across the country are working to address a shortage of experienced principals and school leaders. Consistent research on K-12 school leadership has found effective principals have a strong, positive impact on schools and student outcomes. A [comprehensive literature review](#) from the Wallace Foundation, covering 20 years of research on principals and school leadership, found that an effective principal has a positive impact on student achievement comparable to that of an effective teacher but across an entire school.

"Preparing school leaders to engage with and understand the unique history, demographics and aspirations of the people and communities they serve is essential for meeting the needs of the whole student," said Dr. Robert Lee, dean of the Sanford College of Education at National University. "This is about building a community of practice of current and aspiring school leaders committed to integrating the principles of equity into the day-to-day work of leading a school."

The initiative also builds on a rich history of engagement between National University and Fresno Unified School District. For the past ten years, aspiring educator candidates studying at National University have participated in pre-service practicum and rotations in Fresno Unified schools, working under the tutelage of experienced mentor teachers to prepare for the experience of classroom instruction.

The Sanford College of Education joins a select group of partners—which includes community-based organizations, teacher preparation programs and the [California Department of Education](#)—selected by Fresno Unified to participate. Fresno Unified is one of eight major school districts across the country—including Baltimore; Columbus, Ohio; Washington, DC; Jefferson County, Kentucky ; Portland, Oregon; San Antonio; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina—awarded funding through the grant to participate in the initiative.

About National University: National University, a veteran-founded nonprofit, has been dedicated to meeting the needs of hard-working adults by providing accessible, affordable, achievable higher education opportunities since 1971. As San Diego's largest private nonprofit university, NU offers over 75 online and on-campus programs and flexible four-week classes designed to help students reach their goals while balancing busy lives. Since its founding, the NU community has grown to over 30,000 students and 185,000 alumni around the globe, many of whom serve in helping industries such as business, education, health care, cybersecurity, and law and criminal justice. Learn more at [NU.edu](#).

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