

Michelle Seijas

Oakland Executive Director, The Surge Institute

A passionate career educator, Michelle Seijas, Ed.D., served as an educator and school and district leader for fifteen years before joining the Surge leadership team as the Oakland Executive Director. Inspired by her grandmother and mother, Michelle spent her undergraduate years serving in migrant communities around the University of California, Davis. She would support reading and writing instruction and taught puppetry workshops.

Upon graduation, Michelle wanted to continue working in multilingual and multicultural communities. She taught in bilingual and English-only classrooms, always focused on family and community partnership. She believes that students and families have a wealth of knowledge and experience that must be a part of the fabric of our schools.

Michelle chose to focus her master's thesis on English Language Learners and the empowerment of their families to partner with school districts. Her deep dive into the practices of her school district and development of a handbook and training for district parents, led to a position as an English Language Learner Specialist. Her first year supporting the elementary school site with the largest English Language Learner population in the district, led to significant gains in state test scores for that subgroup. A shared school mission to increase their knowledge of ELLs and intentionally increasing their use of language development instructional strategies led to these gains. During this time, as Michelle was evolving as an educational leader, she was fortunate to have mentors that coached her to greater success and confidence. Site and district leadership positions followed where Michelle was known to build team culture and partnership between the local community and programs that supported students.

Always a life-long learner, Michelle had a desire to pursue her doctorate. This desire deepened as she learned that less than 1% of Latinas have completed doctoral studies. She wanted to be an example to others that we are capable and belong in those spaces of higher education. She also knew that the years of deep study into her field and practice would expand her effectiveness. Her dissertation focus was the systemic devaluation of Latino students and how this wears on their self-concept and sense of possibility. Between her experience, studies and research, she led high schools to higher test scores, lower suspension rates and increased staff retention.

A proud participant in multiple professional fellowships over the years and a mentor to participants in fellowships, Michelle believes in the power of the cohort experience to build knowledge, collaboration, network and confidence to be an impactful leader. Michelle was drawn to the Surge Institute from a shared mission to increase the number of leaders of color at the decision-making tables within education reform. Michelle is passionate about serving youth and communities of color, and couples that passion with her shared mission with Surge to elevate and empower Oakland's emerging education leaders.

