Delta Stars Educational Resource Services
A Business Plan
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Delta Stars Educational Resource Services is a place for students from underrepresented communities to either meet or exceed grade level in K-14 education subjects by assessing their learning style, assessing their current and ideal learning environments, developing a personalized educational plan, and facilitating the completion of that plan by providing human and material resources in a safe environment where the assertion that “There are no stupid questions,” is not just a platitude – it’s our fundamental attitude.

In the movie, A Knight’s Tale, starring the late Heath Ledger, the question is posed: “Can a man change his stars?” Delta is the scientific and mathematical symbol for change. Thus Delta Stars Educational Resource Services will be a not-for-profit organization devoted to one thing. It will be a way for students who think they cannot break out of the circumstances they were born into, to change their stars by helping them reach the same playing field afforded to the “haves” in our world. Anyone can be a knight.

There is a prevalent myth that everyone learns in the same manner. However, there are three main ways a person might take in and process information: seeing, hearing, and touching. People process information through these senses with varying levels of efficiency, and the most effective sense is not uniform from person to person. Therefore, giving a student the greatest chance of success includes evaluating how their brain takes in and processes information. They may be a visual learner, getting the most primarily from figures and pictures. They may be an audial learner where they are the most successful when material is presented through speech and they verbally repeat the information aloud. Kinesthetic learners learn by doing and manipulating things with their hands. Finally, reading/writing learners need to read the information and then write it down again in their comprehension processes.

If a student who learns kinesthetically has a teacher whose primary instructional method is lecture, they are less likely to succeed than an audial learner. Depending on the methods for grading, the student may appear slow, when the problem rests in the instructional method.

There are a number of learning style assessment methods, but I would use the following process as it has proven to show me a student’s actual learning style fairly accurately.

1. Ask the student to complete the VARK assessment on their website.
2. Interview the student about their educational experience
   a. What has been your favorite and why?
   b. Which teacher has been your favorite and why?
   c. Describe the best classroom you’ve ever been in.
3. Combine the interview information with the assessment to determine strongest 2 learning styles.
I have used the method with math phobic and math resistant students for almost a decade and the outcome has always enabled me to plan tutoring and academic coaching sessions which are effective and lead the student towards greater confidence in the classroom.

Additionally, the environment where learning takes place can have a huge impact on that efficiency of that learning. A classroom that is not up to building codes, as is the case in many disadvantaged school districts, is a distraction and potential health hazard. The environment may be too hot, too cold, or so humid that mold and mildew are present in the classroom. The structural integrity of the space may be in question. If any of those distractions are caused by faulty equipment, there may be significant noise from old machinery that needs to be updated or repaired. Providing students with such abhorrent conditions also sends the message that adults do not consider their learning to be a priority.

Even a clean, well maintained classroom may not be the ideal learning environment for every student. Some students do better with four walls and no windows, because there is little external distraction. Others may feel too closed in to think critically. Some students do well in table or groups style seating arrangements while other students are at their best in traditional rows. There are even students who will excel in completely organic, non-uniform style seating arrangements. Finally, with respect to learning environment, there is an issue of security. Students in disadvantageous situations often lack the security and stability at home or in their neighborhoods that enables them to study effectively. Sometimes the school isn’t even a safe place, as evidenced by the ever increasing security measures enacted at schools which are deemed to be “at risk”. A student needs a safe, consistent place to learn and study if academic success is to be achieved. It may turn out that what a student needs far more than tutoring, is a reliable place to do homework, and Delta Stars will be able to provide that.

Assessing the student’s ideal environment will start with the above question about the best classroom they’ve ever been in. Just as a furniture shopper knows the perfect chair when they’ve sat in it, students often know a good classroom for them when they’ve learned in it. Even if the ideal is hard for them to articulate, they will have no trouble describing a bad classroom. As a member of the tax-paying public, anyone can receive a guided tour of any public school. Utilizing that right, will allow for a general assessment of all public school facilities in a given region, providing background information about the places students using Delta Stars learn at most frequently.

The student will benefit greatly from having their learning style and ideal learning environment assessed, because Delta Stars will be able to cater educational services to that student. It will save the organization material and human resources, but more importantly, will allow the student to succeed faster and in easily measurable ways. Additionally, taking the time to get to know the student will help to engender trust between the student and the Delta Stars staff, which research shows is imperative to working with disadvantaged youth.
The individualized approach is not merely to make the student feel special and unique, but also a functional educational tool. As stated above, students learn in many different ways. This explains why extremely bright students underachieve in school settings. It also contributes to the fact that despite a teacher’s best efforts, their students will earn a wide variety of grades. Thus Delta Stars will be committed to providing students with the personalization the government cannot.

It’s important to note that when it comes to educational styles and preferences, efficacy assessments are ongoing processes that may require tweaking over time. For one, as staff get to know a student better, they will be able to hone in on the best practices for that students. Also, a student’s learning style can change as they age. It is not uncommon for adults returning to university after an education hiatus find they learn quietly differently than they did when they last sat in the classroom. Thus, the goal of the initial assessments will be to establish a base environment and instructional methodology to start from.

Additional complimentary services to be provided to members of marginalized groups include GED, SAT, and ACT test prep, college application assistance, scholarship search assistance, and personal finance support for young adults transitioning out of foster care. All of these are generally provided by parents with knowledge and financial means, but the number of students left out of higher education due to their family’s ignorance or insufficient financial resources, is significant.

Of course, there will be costs associated with providing these services even if the entire staff is made up of volunteers. Thus, a source of income for Delta Stars will be necessary. While services might initially be provided at a community center or by appointment at a public library, Delta Star Educational Resource Services will be most effective if a brick and mortar facility can be leased in communities with high numbers of at-risk youth. There will also be administrative costs associated with record keeping and data security costs required due to the private nature of educational information. Additionally, there will be materials costs for tutoring and personalized curricula. So it is necessary to consider how the necessary funds will be raised so that students pay little to nothing for these services.

There are two main ways of generating funds for this organization. First, philanthropic donations will likely provide the bulk of the funding -- especially at first. Corporations known to value education equity and STEM education would be logical benefactors. The second method of garnering funds is to charge students with the ability to pay for Delta Stars’ services. These costs would still be reduced compared to that of competitor learning centers in order to attract patronage and prove that educational resources are not luxury options. If the organization can obtain a storefront facility, it will be able to provide a study space for students utilizing various independent study methods of school attendance. Since there are a fair number of parents who would like their children to be home-schooled or use online charter schools but cannot afford to stay home as a study supervisor, this will allow a whole new group of students to explore these alternative school options. This service will be provided on a sliding fee scale as such a situation could benefit students from all socioeconomic backgrounds.
Finally, Delta Stars will tirelessly apply for grants. Using these methods of financial support, Delta Stars will be able to function with minimal human resource costs.

Delta Stars Educational Resource Services will provide internships and work experience to students at the high school and college levels in a number of fields including, education, accounting, business management, and information systems. With the organization’s success will come the ability to make these paid internships. However, there is a growing focus on community service in both schools and society as a whole. Therefore, volunteers from high schools, colleges, and retired education professionals will not be difficult to come by.

Finally, there are a number of reasons that give Delta Stars Educational Resource Services a high probability of success with myself at its helm. First, I am a mathematics major with an emphasis in teaching. Moreover, I became a mathematics major for the love of teaching math and not due to an amazing talent in the subject. I know what it is like to struggle in courses, to have my learning style conflict with an teacher’s instructional style, and I know what it is like to struggle with work, family, and classes, because my parents were not always able to help financially.

I also know that my K-12 education was in many ways far superior to the average educational experience in America. As long as this inequity remains, many students will have to rely on luck to truly succeed and change the direction of their lives. Upon realizing this, I made informing myself and working with social justice issue a top priority in my life. Of all the social justice issues, it is education equity that burns like a fire in the pit of stomach, and my drive to help as many students as possible surpasses all other ambitions in my life.

Finally, I am a successful networker. I have built a network of educators, cognition scientists, social justice advocates, and business leaders to draw on for advice, information, and additional contacts as will be necessary. I am not afraid to ask for help in general terms or with specific needs. I will work fervently to extend my network so that Delta Stars is in the forefront of the minds of educators, community business leaders, media journalists, and policy makers alike. While I don’t want to put anyone out of business, I will show everyone that education equity is affordable and the results are exponentially beneficial to entire communities, cities, and beyond.