

**Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**February 14, 2013  
Preston Smith, CEO and President  
Rocketship Education**

Founded in 2006, Rocketship Education is a public charter school network for grades K through 5. Our mission—and it's bold—is to eliminate the achievement gap in our lifetime. Today, we have a network of seven schools serving 3,800 students, or Rocketeers, in low-income school districts in and around San Jose, CA. Rocketship is expanding rapidly, opening between one and three new schools each year. In the fall of 2013, we will expand into Milwaukee. In addition to Wisconsin, we have been approved to open schools in Tennessee, Indiana, and Louisiana. By the year 2017, Rocketship will serve over 25,000 low-income students.

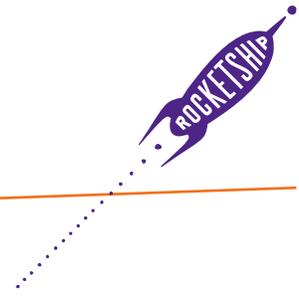
Rocketship's students come from the poorest of poor families. Many students receive federally funded school lunches. Often, both parents work two jobs just to stay afloat, and in many families, English isn't even the primary language spoken at home. Despite these hardships, our students achieve outstanding performance on standardized tests. For example, on the 2012 California math test, 80 percent of our students scored at proficient or advanced levels, on par with the highest-income districts in the state.

Rocketship achieves our success with public funds just like traditional public schools.

There are three core beliefs, or pillars, that contribute to our success: personalized learning, transformational teachers and engaged parents.

**Personalized Learning**

First, we believe that every student has a unique set of needs. Rocketship's objective is to deliver the right lesson, to the right Rocketeer, at the right time. We customize each student's schedule with traditional instruction, technology, and tutoring. An extended school day ensures that in addition to state-mandated seat time requirements, each child spends at least an hour or more, working on a computer with a personalized learning program, or in small groups with a tutor. Online learning and tutors provide engaging basic skills instruction so that our teachers can focus on higher-order skills such as critical thinking, reasoning, and creativity. They also free up time for teachers to conduct more in-depth remediation and targeted intervention with individual students or small groups.



When we founded Rocketship, we knew that in order to achieve our mission we would need to innovate aggressively and continuously in order to provide the type of public education that we believed our students and communities deserved. Our theory was simple yet radical, in the idea that technology, tutoring, and enrichment—a Learning Lab—could be integrated purposefully into the school day to support the efforts and accomplishments of teachers and better personalize learning for students.

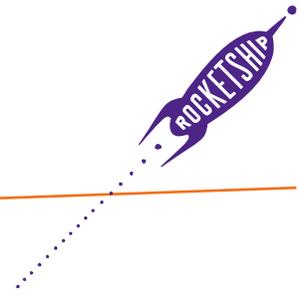
For our first five years, Rocketship purposefully divided classroom instruction from our Learning Lab. Our intent was to learn how to realize personalized learning in a systematic manner before making it the responsibility of the teacher. We also knew that online learning was still in its initial stages, but again, as we began to explore content we discovered that this learning modality again granted us the opportunity to meet the unique needs of students and further personalize learning while also better maximizing our teacher’s expertise and time.

We then further invest in the instructional expertise of our teachers as they build customized learning plans for our students. Progress is monitored in eight-week cycles, at which point teachers analyze student data and then refine and adjust these plans to guide further innovation. This means that we can continually tailor instructional methods—independent online learning practice, tutor-led small group remediation, and teacher-led instruction and practice—to ensure that each student is learning at his or her own pace in the optimal environment.

A suite of online learning programs allows us to provide engaging content and practice for students of different ages and skill levels. Consistent across all of our programs is that they are interactive, standards-based and linked to the Common Core, and adaptive or assignable.

Placing these tools in the hands of great teachers can accelerate student learning. When used in such a targeted manner, these adaptive and assignable online programs can greatly boost student achievement through basic skills acquisition and practice.

In addition, more and more at Rocketship, we are focusing on how we are able to integrate data from the online programs, maximize small group learning time, and structure our Rocketeers schedule in a manner that ensures we customize each student’s schedule with traditional instruction, technology, and tutoring. Currently we are exploring the next iteration of our instructional model that will focus on integrating all of these instructional modalities (online learning, tutoring, traditional classroom instruction, small groups, and more) so that the amazing things that happen each day in each space can now come together under the guidance and instructional leadership of our incredible teachers and school leaders.



We believe our unique approach allows students to achieve an average of 1.5 years of growth towards grade-level proficiency each year and the results bear this out as Rocketship is the highest performing low-income elementary school system in California.

Finally, giving children access to online programs enables them to achieve computer literacy – an essential skill for anyone living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our students' involvement with Learning Lab is a valuable means for them to leap over the “digital divide” even if they do not have computers at home.

### **Transformational Teachers**

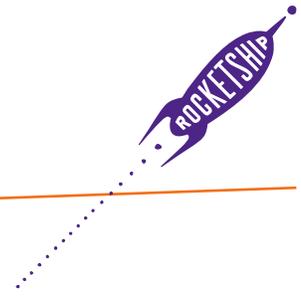
The second pillar is about transformational teachers. Rocketship strives to make teaching the best job in America. We hire great teachers, we pay them an average of 30% more than the school district, and we surround them with on-the-job professional development, support and coaching. Each year, the teacher, school principal and the academic dean create a professional growth plan, with revolving seven-week objectives. Every week, each teacher is observed (and often videotaped) in class by the academic dean. The dean and the teacher then review the video together to see what can be improved. Sometimes, feedback occurs in real-time: the teacher wears wireless ear buds, while the dean speaks quietly into a microphone in the back of the class, making suggestions to improve the lesson. This means our teachers get very, very good at what they do, very, very quickly. It also fosters collaboration and community. Our teachers feel part of a team and enjoy helping each other. With our rapid network expansion, Rocketship teachers have many professional growth opportunities – they can move into leadership roles as deans or school principals, or as regional superintendents.

### **Engaged Parents**

Rocketship's third pillar is about engaged parents. Rocketship supports parents as leaders at home, as leaders within our schools and as leaders within their communities. Each year, every family receives a home visit from the Rocketship principal and the student's teacher. The home visits give Rocketship a crucial sense of context for the student; they also foster a collaborative partnership with parents. Parents are welcomed into the schools as volunteers, although volunteering isn't required. Parents also take part in the hiring process of new teachers and hold monthly community meetings, which average over 75 percent attendance. We support our parents in building strong support networks at our schools and we are proud that they go on to advocate for community-wide change to improve educational options for all children in their communities.

### **A Proven, Repeatable Success Story**

Rocketship is continuously innovating in all three pillars—excellent teachers and leaders, personalized learning, and engaged parents. Our continuous innovation is core to our success.



We believe that every child has the potential—given a great foundation—to go farther than previously imagined.

We also believe the Rocketship model can be adopted by other schools across the country. Since our founding, Rocketship has welcomed visitors and observers to our campuses, and we believe that our three pillars can be applied broadly to public education. In fact, the scalability of the Rocketship model is allowing us to grow rapidly and open new schools each year. That's why we believe we are fulfilling our mission to eliminate the achievement gap in our lifetime.