

A Plan for Hispanic Parental Involvement

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In an effort to increase the parental involvement of our Hispanic student population the school counseling team has derived a comprehensive plan to best support this effort. This plan includes the sole responsibilities of the school counselor, principal, and school district in addition to the recruitment of community resources.

The first step of the plan is to identify the problem and contributing factors for the lack of Hispanic parental involvement in schools. According to *Multicultural Counseling in Schools: A Practical Approach* chapter 6 (Casa, Furlong, & Esparaza, 2003) the reasons identified for limited involvement included beliefs that their roles of home and school are sharply delineated. Mexican American parents see their role as being responsible for providing basic needs as well as instilling respect and proper behavior. They see the school's role as instilling knowledge (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). Casa, Furlong, Carranza, and Jamaica (1986) conducted a comprehensive study to better understand the educational value of Hispanic parents. This study was to clarify the stereotypical perceptions that Hispanic parents do not value education or their preference to have their children enter the workforce before graduating senior high school. It was concluded from the study that Hispanic parents actually expressed a high value in education, wanted increased levels of participation in their child's schooling process, and expressed a willingness to become involved. Navarette (1996) reported that while parents understand the importance of homework, they may not realize the academic importance of everyday activities like children talking to adult members of the family, reading and writing for fun, playing board games, or participating in sports. Other reasons for limited parental involvement includes Azmitia et al. (1994) parents had varying amounts of information about how to help them attain these aspirations. Hispanic parents also regarded their limited involvement in the schooling of

their children do to their perceptions of teachers and experiences with resistance and hostility on the part of schools relative to such involvement. Finally, studies show that Hispanic parents are more active when they feel “empowered” by the school. Hispanic parents are empowered with the knowledge of how to work cooperatively with school personnel to resolve issues pertaining to their children, they become more active in school.

The second step of this plan is to determine how the school counselors, principals, and teachers can contribute to Hispanic parental involvement. According to *Understanding Latino Parental Involvement in Education: Perceptions, Expectations, and Recommendations* (Zarate, 2007) we must first view educators’ perception of what constitutes parental involvement in education. The report states that teachers, principals, and counselors noted parent-teacher organizations as one form of parental involvement, yet no Latino parents cited those organizations when describing various ways of participating in their child’s education. Back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences were important and viable venues for parents and teachers to communicate about students’ academic progress. With this in mind, it can be fair to state that a lack of promoting or advertising of those various types programs are contributing to Hispanic parents non-involvement in their children’s education. For example, people in show business have to promote and advertise their events in order for people to (1) acknowledge the event and (2) develop an interest in the event. The report continues by describing how teachers, counselors, and principals did not hesitate to attribute high academic achievement to greater parental involvement. As one counselor reported, “The [academic] level of the student is indicative of the level of parental involvement.” Yet, on closer examination, it was evident that some teachers and schools involved parents of high-achieving children in more active ways than they did with parents of other students. Again, it can be safe to state that more

focus needs to be placed on our low academic achieving, tier level 3 Hispanic student population because they're the ones who would benefit from parental involvement most. We would also need to keep in mind that many Latino parents do not speak English and "are not comfortable speaking" at school council meetings. The use of translating school documents into Spanish and using English-Spanish translators during parental involvement programs would best accommodate and connect Hispanic parents to their children's school environment.

The third step of this plan is to figure out how the school district can support Hispanic parental involvement in our schools. According to *Minority Parent and Community Engagement: Best Practices and Policy Recommendations for Closing the Gaps in Student Achievement* (Outreach, 2010) there is a lack of clarity around education goals and priorities in many school districts. Most schools have a written statement on what their mission and goals are, often found in district documents and on websites. However, this may be different from what is actually implemented. Oftentimes, there is a lack of a shared vision and an equity agenda. Too many school staff and parents may be unclear about what the priorities are and what education levels should be achieved by all children. School leaders need to transform the way success is defined and send clear messages to all staff as to what the goals and priorities are for their district. This vision needs to be shared with all parents as well. The report also states that participants identified the important role school board members can play in education when they truly advocate for the interests of the entire community they represent and when they demand accountability from the district superintendent. However, sometimes school board members act on interests other than the children and community they have been elected to represent. The board should reflect diversity and be representative of the district. If the board has historically represented only the interests of some but not all groups, investigate if the district could benefit

from having district-elected board members. Consider redistricting if representation is not balanced. As educators we need to bring forth these concerns and issues, especially for our Hispanic population, to the school board to ensure all culturally diverse students' needs are being nurtured.

The forth step of this plan is to research appropriate and effective programs that will increase Hispanic parental involvement in our school. According to *Creating Programs to Help Latino Youth Thrive at School: The Influence of Latino Parent Involvement Programs* (Behnke & Kelly, 2011) parent involvement programs can play an essential role in the academic success of Latino youth. The Latino Parent and Family Advocacy and Support Training (LPFAST) targets parents of K- 8th grade students, and the Juntos Para Una Mejor Educaci3n (Together for a Better Education) program was created to serve 6th-12th grade Latino students and their parents. These two programs demonstrate innovative approaches to involve communities and schools in Extension programming. LPFAST is a six-session workshop series for parents, family members, or other involved adults of students of K- 8th grade students who want to learn how to help their child(ren) achieve success in school. LPFAST took a collaborative approach to determine what would be covered in the program by acknowledging that the members of SFC were not experts on parent/family involvement and advocacy, and instead looked to parents for input and expertise. Each 2-hour session addresses a different topic related to academic success. Sessions are held in a variety of community locations including, Cooperative Extension centers, public schools, and after-school centers, and are facilitated by two Spanish-speaking co-facilitators, some of whom are past LPFAST graduates. Several efforts are made to support parent participation in the program and include providing onsite childcare and dinner to all participants as well as providing transportation on a case-by-case basis. Unique characteristics of the program

that have contributed to the success of LPFAST include the provision of ongoing support and information to graduates, an annual family gathering for graduates, the option for graduates to participate in a more intensive leadership training program, the opportunity for graduates to participate in the SFC, and a newly developed ongoing Latino support group.

The Juntos program adopts many of the components of the LPAST program, including educating parents about the school system and encouraging communication between home and school, while adding additional information pertinent specifically to middle and high school students and their parents. Some of the adaptations that made to the program consist of including both parents and youth in each of the six workshop sessions, involving more experiential activities and games, involving school staff (e.g., guidance counselors, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, and representatives from community colleges) and using college age peer mentors to serve as role models. Parents and youth reported an increased understanding of NC graduation requirements, classes needed, higher education options, financial aid options, and necessary tests. Parents report a significant increase in their monitoring their child's homework, meeting with school staff, and increased skills and knowledge about the college application process. Youth reported significant increase in their planning for after high school and sharing those goals with their parents. It is recommended that the school counselor team develop programs similar to these two successful programs.

The fifth and final step of this plan is to understand and retain the importance of this issue. According to *Why Latino Parent Engagement in Education is Crucial* (Ramos, 2012) in the next 40 years, Latinos will drive 60 percent of the growth in the labor force. Most of the current labor force [regardless of ethnicity] will be either gone or on its way out. The combined

effort of every party invested in a child's development holds the key as to how that future plays out for our children... for our whole world.

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