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Family and Community Engagement:

How one Chicago Program Makes the Grade



Back to School 2011!

In celebration of the start of the 2011 school year for students across the country, LULAC would like to use the September edition of the LULAC Education Newsletter to showcase education programs from across the country that are having a positive impact for Latino students. This month's edition will spotlight two programs making outstanding strides in the areas of Parent & Community Engagement and Expanded Learning Opportunities. We hope that the stories of these successful programs will inspire you to think about ways that your school and/or community can make an impact in the lives of a student this school year.

Located on the Northwest side of Chicago, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) has been in the national spotlight for its success in working with families in the community.

Comprised primarily of first-generation Mexican immigrants, the community has been recognized by countless media sources, Mayor Rahm Emmanuel, and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan as a model for family engagement. Currently working with nine public schools and still expanding, the initiative has been touted as a success story for engaging immigrant families—In the last two decades, schools have witnessed improved test scores, better school climate, increased family literacy, training and employment for parents,

and access to health care and other services (LSNA, 2006). Soo Hong, author of *A Cord of Three Strands* (2011), is currently touring the country promoting LSNA's work as a model for successful family engagement in minority and low income communities. In honor of the Back to School edition of the LULAC Education Newsletter, this article looks into what makes for successful family engagement and details the work of LSNA in an effort to identify possible strategies to engage parents in your own communities.

What is family engagement?

Despite a variety of perspectives on how to approach the subject, everyone has agreed that family engagement is absolutely beneficial in the development and education of a child. Proposals to foster family engagement have included community-based initiatives such as LSNA as well as federal and state programs—federal programs such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Head Start, Early Head Start, and Even Start all include parental engagement

Continued on next page



Family and Community Engagement: *How one Chicago Program Makes the Grade*

Continued from previous page

mandates. Florida has even gone so far as to attempt to pass a bill that would grade parents on their own involvement. Additionally, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which is funded under Title IV of ESEA and provides monies for afterschool programs, can use funding to support parental involvement.

Such proposals all draw from a large and growing body of research pointing to the many social and educational benefits of family engagement. It has been linked to improved school readiness, higher student achievement, better social skills, and a greater likelihood of high school graduation (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010). Furthermore, the benefits extend far beyond a child's early years—youth whose parents monitor academic and social activities have lower delinquency rates and higher academic growth and social competence (Catsambis, 2001; Falbo, Lein, & Amador, 2001). Youth with parents that are familiar with college preparation requirements and that are engaged in the application process are more likely to graduate high school and attend college (Auerbach, 2004). Studies have also found that academically high achieving Latino youth have had parents that provide encouragement and emphasize the value of education

as a way out of poverty (Ceballo, 2004). Last, family engagement is a cost effective way to see gains in student achievement. A study found that it would require schools \$1000 more in spending per pupil to see the same gains in student achievement that engaged parents brought (Houtenville & Conway, 2008).

What does family engagement look like?

The Harvard Family Research Project (2010) conceptualizes family engagement as containing three central concepts. First, family engagement is a shared responsibility. Schools, parents, community organizations, and peers all provide opportunities for learning. Schools and families must work to co-construct mutually agreed upon responsibilities that allow parents to support students' academic and non-academic learning. A central element of this is a relationship and clear lines of communication between the school and parents. Currently, Titles I and III, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, require schools to share information with parents in "multiple and meaningful ways," including translating documents for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and their parents/guardians. Lines & Miller (2011) also suggest more creative approaches, such as

providing joint opportunities for family and staff learning and embedding family engagement responsibilities into job descriptions. Furthermore, Warren et. al. (2009) argue that the parent's role should extend beyond that of support, and should be one of leadership—a central component of LSNA in Chicago.

Second, family engagement is *continuous across a child's life* and requires changing parent roles as children mature. In the early years of childhood, parents can help by creating literacy-rich home environments and stimulating students' interest in learning. In elementary school, parents can support their children through encouraging literacy, supervising homework, managing children's activities at home, school, and in the community. Parents' presence in school also helps students to see learning as a continuous process that does not stop with the school day. In the adolescent years, parents can support their children through communicating parental expectations about education's value and fostering students' own academic and career aspirations. The key at this developmental stage is to promote opportunities for students to take independent responsibility for their work and make their own plans for the future (Harvard Family Research, 2010).

Third, effective family engagement does not only apply to supporting school work. It encompasses and reinforces learning in *multiple settings where children learn*, includ-

Continued on page 3

Family and Community Engagement: *How one Chicago Program Makes the Grade*

Continued from previous page

ing school, home, summer and after school programs, and other community programs. Visiting the library, reading with your children, or conversations about school-related issues all have positive impacts of reading comprehension. Such activities provide opportunities to reinforce what is being taught in school (Harvard Family Research, 2010). Title V, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provides funding for Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs). These centers help implement successful and effective parental involvement policies, programs, and activities that lead to improvements in student academic achievement and that strengthen partnerships among parents, teachers, principals, administrators, and other school personnel in meeting the education needs of children. Unfortunately, the U.S. Congress has held funding level for the previous ten years, resulting in few successful PIRCs being able to operate.

Parental Engagement Models in Action

LSNA has successfully encouraged parent engagement in the Latino community at all levels of its partner schools through an emphasis on community organizing. Parents work with teachers, mentors, and administrators to support their child's learning in a number of ways. Parents also have been integral members of the school community, advocating for changes within the system, running programs and supporting student achievement by in-class tutoring. Such a well-rounded approach to engaging parents has earned the program national recognition. The initiative involves the following programs:

Parent Mentor Program — (begun 1995, now in 7 LSNA schools.) — About 120 parents, mostly immigrant mothers, are hired and trained each year to assist teachers 2 hours per day in classrooms. Parents receive a stipend of \$600 per semester and weekly workshops. Most go on to further schooling or jobs. Their presence in the school has transformed school climate and built bridges to the rest of the families. The mentors themselves are personally transformed, become active participants in public life, return to school, learn English, get jobs, etc. LSNA has graduated over 1,200 parents in the past 16 years, who are able to be role models and effectively help their children. Parent mentors

typically assist the children who are falling behind. LSNA has helped replicate the program in other neighborhoods and schools in the Chicago area.

Program coordination at the school is provided either by an experienced parent or by a school employee, under the co-supervision of CPS and LSNA staff people. Many parent mentors also become involved in other LSNA activities and in neighborhood issues such as affordable housing, safety and immigration reform. Five work at LSNA to help residents access health insurance, low-cost clinics, food stamps, etc, serving more than 2,100 each year. Parent Mentor graduates also work as LSNA organizers and community center directors.

LSNA raises the money, pays stipends and parent coordinators and provides training and mentoring for parents. The cost is approximately \$25,000 per school plus LSNA costs of about \$20,000 per school. The total cost is approximately \$55,000 per school, which is funded through a combination of school, state agency, and private foundation contributions. LSNA provides ongoing training, mentoring of coordinators and parents, fundraising, reporting and financial management, and involves parents in neighborhood issues. Current funding comes from, Polk Foundation, Illinois Dept of Human Services, and others. Individual schools contribute. All this funding is year-to-year, and LSNA spends a great deal of time fundraising.

Literacy Ambassadors Program—Begun in 2003, some 40 teams of teachers and parents in five schools were holding house meetings on literacy. They helped parents devise reading strategies and build bridges from school to home. In 2005-06, 360 Literacy meetings were held with over 400 families.

Parent Tutor Program—Developed out of Parent Mentors, LSNA runs a federally funded AmeriCorps program, which places experienced Parent Mentors in 5 grade schools to tutor children intensively in reading. In 2010-11 24 Parent Tutors worked one-on-one with over 190 students in K-8th grades.

Community Learning Centers—Started in 1996, Community Learning Centers (CLCs) have been successfully established in 5 Logan Square schools. Free programs for the entire family are offered after-school and in the evening, including GED and ESL classes

for adults and homework help, sports, music and art programs for children. The Centers provide security and free childcare for participants. In 2010-11, 700 families participated on a weekly basis, and 100 adult students earned their GED.

Parent-to-Parent Attendance Program—Through LSNA parents have worked with the attendance office at Kelvyn Park High School to bring students back to school. These bilingual parents call and visit families and arrange meetings with school staff, including the principal, so that they can play an active role in keeping their children in school. In September 2006, Kelvyn Park won a CPS award for the most improved attendance record in the city.

Grow Your Own teachers, a community-based teacher training program—This successful collaboration with Northeastern Illinois University, begun in 2000, has 55 parents and community residents studying to be bilingual teachers; and 14 graduates (by the end of the year there will be 19 graduates). As a member of "Grow Your Own Illinois," a collaboration of Chicago community organizations, LSNA has successfully organized for replication of its teacher training program and 16 programs now exist throughout the state.

LSNA Education Committee—The LSNA parent-run Education Committee has worked on many issues over the years. Its first victory was the building of 5 school annex buildings and 2 new middle schools in 1994-97. More recently, the Committee spearheaded development of LSNA's Literacy Ambassador program, organized for expansion of pre-school programs in Logan Square and pushed for more state funding for education. One ongoing focus of LSNA's education work has been bilingual education; based on parents' experience in LSNA schools, LSNA has emphasized support for early grade bilingual students, especially those who fall behind as they struggle to transition to all-English classes.

For more information on the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, Grow Your Own Teacher, or for citations for this article please contact Iris Chavez, at ichavez@lulac.org or 202-833-6130 x108.

If you are a LULAC council or member wondering how you can replicate programs like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, please contact Iris Chavez, at ichavez@lulac.org or 202-833-6130 x108.

Expanded Learning Opportunities and the After-Zone Program

In continuing with our theme this month of highlighting successful programs, this article discusses expanded learning and follows with a description of Providence, Rhode Island's successful Afterzone's program.

What is expanded learning?

Over the last few decades, the time spent engaging in learning outside the regular school day has gone by several names and has been transformed to meet the ever-changing needs of our nation's children. The term afterschool was used to encompass such activities—programs were held from 3 to 6pm, primarily to provide day care to younger students whose parents were working. Its use gradually shifted in order to incorporate academic support and school-based extracurricular activities such as sports, the arts, or community service. As educators began to focus on improving academic achievement, the term afterschool broadened to include before school, weekends, holidays, and summer. To reflect this, many organizations switched to the term out-of-school time. Out-of-school time included school-based activities as well as programs offered by community-based organizations. In a gradual move to incorporate older youth, whose schedules were often full with work and family obligations, out-of-school programs began to adapt by offering services until 11 p.m. at times (AYPF, 2009).

Recently, the term out-of-school has been replaced by expanded learning opportunities (ELO), which is even broader. There has been little consensus on any standard definition of the term, which in cases means additional hours in the school day and in others means a 24/7 approach. The Campaign for High School Equity defines ELO as "the range of programs and activities available to youth that occur beyond the regular 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. school day, including weekends, summer, before school, after school, and extended day." Expanded learning opportunities, particularly for high school students, occur in a 24/7 environment, and in collaboration with partners such as CBOs, colleges, museums, and the business community. Expanded learning programs can include traditional after-school activities with an



academic focus, internships with employers, independent study in alternative settings, classes on college campuses, and wrap around services, such as health, social, and family support (AYPF, 2009).

Research on ELOs has found a number of benefits. George, Cusick, & Wasserman (2007) found that high quality after-school programs are related to a number of positive outcomes, including greater self confidence, increased civic engagement, better school attendance, improved academic achievement, and decreased delinquency. Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari (2003) found that high quality ELOs were associated with improved academic achievement, school attendance, time spent on homework and extracurricular activities, enjoyment and effort in school, and student behavior. According to a 2005 RAND study, programs that use

ELOs had a positive impact on credits earned and on graduation rates (Bodilly & Beckett, 2005). Rumberger (2004) demonstrated that after controlling for test scores and grades, a lack of student engagement can be a reliable predictor of whether a student will drop out of high school. It has become clear that high quality ELOs can do a great deal to engage students in meaningful learning activities. Unfortunately, those students who would benefit from expanded learning opportunities are the least likely to participate in them. According to a student survey commissioned by the YMCA of the USA, nearly 8 in 10 teens (79 percent) who engage in after-school activities are "A" or "B" students, but only half (52 percent) who do not participate in after-school activities earn these high marks. Youth

Continued on page 5

Expanded Learning Opportunities and the After-Zone Program

Continued from page 4.

not in after-school activities are five times as likely to be “D” students are those who participate in after-school activities (CHSE 2010).

Yet high-poverty communities of color are underserved by expanded learning opportunities. One study compared the availability and use of community resources for young adolescents in an inner-city Chicago neighborhood with those in a suburban community. Researchers found that both the quantity and variety of programs were dramatically higher in the suburban neighborhood (71 activities and 42 facilities per 1,000 youth) than in the urban one (23 activities and 9 facilities per 1,000 youth), even though the population of the urban neighborhood, which contained more low-income and students of color, was six times as dense.

What does expanded learning look like?

An essential component of ELO for older students is its ability to restructure the learning environment to cater to more complex schedules and provide nontraditional learning experiences. Activities such as community service, internships, leadership exercises, civic engagement activities, college preparation work, and mentoring opportunities provide enrichment that cross a variety of domains and often ground academic learning in students' lives. It is extremely important that ELOs provide youth the options that meet their needs and interests simultaneously.

In implementing such options, a 2007 review of afterschool programs suggested major points to consider ensuring that youth benefited. The study identified four central themes that successful programs had in common—sequential activities that linked over several days; active involvement of youth; a focus on personal and social skills; and explicitness when identifying what skills were to be learned (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). While a wide variety of choices should be available, this study makes it clear that in addition to choice, activities must incorporate a great deal more.

Finally, a key component of successful programs that has been highlighted in a number of studies is the relationship between the students and adults on the staff (Weiss, Little,

et. al., 2008). Youth are more likely to benefit if they develop strong relationships with staff. Arbretton, Goldsmith, & Metz (2008) found that positive adult relationships correlated with better outcomes for youth and increased participant retention. Supportive staff include those that model positive behavior, promote student mastery of skills, listen attentively to students, provide individualized feedback during activities, and establish clear expectations for mature, respectful peer interactions (Weiss, Little, et al., 2008).

The AfterZone consists of a series of neighborhood-based networks of after-school programs that are divided into unique “campuses”, which are anchored by two or three middle schools.

were from a racial/ethnic minority group, and 92% participated in the Free/Reduced Price lunch program. Consequently, this program description is really about how one city-wide program can positively affect academic and social outcomes for low-income and students of color.

The AfterZone consists of a series of neighborhood-based networks of after-school programs that are divided into unique “campuses”, which are anchored by two or three middle schools. Youth enroll in after-school programs within their network, which

relies heavily on off-campus and community-based facilities. Programs are run Monday through Thursday in fall, winter, spring, and summer. Youth are offered a variety of choices in one of three categories: arts activities include studio arts, writing, design, and performance art; skill enhancement activities offer youth academic enrichment that differs from the school day curriculum; and sports provide opportunities for physical activity (Kauh, 2011).

The AfterZone has been a success in many regards, but one of the most notable is development of a successful *city-wide* afterschool program when none had previously existed. Through centralized schedules, grant application systems, and data collection The AfterZone has managed to work with community based organizations in the area that involves the entire community. Among many successes, the program dramatically increased student participation, developed and implemented quality standards, and provided professional development to educators. The most recent study found that participants showed improvement in behavior, attendance, and grades compared with non-program peers (Kauh, 2011). The program has expanded since its inception to include a Summer Scholars Program and has been identified as a replicable model for cities interested in developing an ELO program.

For more information on The AfterZone and other successful ELO models see <http://tiny.cc/e0bec> <http://tiny.cc/nvj2>

For information article citations or LULACs federal policy recommendations on expanded learning opportunities please contact Iris Chavez, ichavez@lulac.org or 202-833-6130, or visit www.lulac.org.

Expanded Learning in Action: The AfterZone

In 2003, more than 75% of the students in the Providence Public Schools District came from low-income families and the majority of schools were in need of improvement under NCLB (McCombs et. al., 2010). Former Mayor David Cicilline, with the help of several community leaders and federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding, chose to emphasize ELO as a means to improving student outcomes across the city. The Providence After School Alliance (PASA) and The AfterZone, Providence's signature ELO program, were formed in response.

The AfterZone in Providence, Rhode Island has been receiving attention following a recent evaluation by Public/Private Ventures. Providence's successful afterschool program was created in 2005 under the vision of PASA. The program, used as a model for other cities in a recent RAND Study, was Providence's first effort to build a city-wide ELO program, available to all middle school students—59% of which were Latino as of SY 2008-2009 (Kauh, 2011). It has focused on many of the city's most disadvantaged youth through partnerships between program providers, community-based facilities, city officials, the Providence school district and most of the district's middle schools. 95% of students participating in The AfterZone

What's Up in Washington

Four years overdue, progress toward a rewrite of the 2001 No Child Left Behind law has been slow in Congress.

No Child Left Behind Waivers

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in a move to provide states some flexibility under the law in the absence of any movement toward a comprehensive rewrite of NCLB by the beginning of the 2011–2012 school year, has made clear that the Department of Education will offer waivers to schools for the 2012–2013 school year (For details on state applications for waivers see the Center for Education Policy's Waiver Watch at <http://www.cep-dc.org/>). Under NCLB, 100% of students should be proficient in math and reading by 2014—a goal that seems far out of reach, judging by current performance benchmarks. In his testimony to the House Education and Workforce Committee in March, Secretary Arne Duncan cited a study in which 82% of schools would not meet their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals in 2011. Although many criticized the validity of the study, data from the 2011 standardized assessments shows that a large percentage of schools are failing to meet AYP goals (See <http://tiny.cc/ud5n3>). Governors across the country have been asking Secretary Duncan for some relief from NCLB's AYP requirements that if not met lead to corrective action and eventually school restructuring¹. As the bar, or Annual Measurement Objective (AMO), for AYP gradually rises until 2014 (when it should be at 100%), Duncan has been accommodating to states looking for a way out of the accountability measures. Montana and Idaho recently announced that they would not raise their AMOs despite stern federal warnings that the state might lose millions in federal aid. After Montana's continued insistence that NCLB is broken and holding students to unfair expectations, Duncan allowed the move (Dillon, 2011). Department officials stated that they were looking to give breathing room prior to the release of waiver details next month.

While exact details of the waiver plan will not be released until mid-September, Duncan has announced that waivers will come with conditions—a point that has been scrutinized by Representative and Chair of the House Education and Workforce Committee John Kline (R-MN) and others. While much of NCLB remains inflexible, including the 2014



100% proficiency benchmark, the law does allow the ED some flexibility. Built into NCLB is a provision that authorizes the ED to issue waivers if necessary, which it has used in the past—351 waivers were issued in calendar year 2009. As long as the ED can “[develop] an adequate record regarding its decision to grant a waiver and [ensure] that the waiver is granted consistent with the statutory purposes and procedures set forth in...the law,” it is allowed to make a broad range of adjustments (Department of Education, 2011).

However, exempt from waivers are provisions related to the allocation of funds, paren-

tal participation and involvement, civil rights requirements, and others. Furthermore, many have questioned whether NCLB allows for the addition of conditions that must be met in order to receive waivers, such as acceptance of common standards, value added assessments, and new teacher and principal evaluation policies. Duncan has made it clear that waivers will come in the form of a take-it-or-leave-it package deal. Many fear that such a move would set the precedent for implementing legislative changes through back-door dealings that subvert political consensus.

Continued on page 7

What's Up in Washington

Continued from page 6

Duncan has stressed that waivers are not being implemented as a replacement for comprehensive legislation. The Department of Education and Congress's main education priority remains a reauthorization of NCLB. Waivers are merely a temporary solution—one which states are eager to embrace. Given what seems the inevitable use of waivers through the ED, LULAC and other civil rights organizations, including many within the Campaign for High School Equity and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, have submitted a letter to the ED outlining concerns over waivers and pushing the ED to ensure that Title I and minority communities are not punished through the waivers. LULAC and The Campaign for High School Equity's recommendations are as follows:

1. The waiver, regulatory, and implementation processes should be fully transparent. The ED should call on states to engage community stakeholders in the development of waiver requests by requiring states to provide public notice of the intent to apply for a waiver and to consult with stakeholders in the development of the waiver request. The ED should require evidence from states that they reached out to community based organizations, low-income communities, parents, and other interested parties before the states submit waiver applications to the department. Further, the ED should post state waiver requests on the department's website immediately upon receipt, as well as reviewer comments and any other information related to the ED's decision to approve or deny state waiver requests. Additionally, we would request the ED to publicly identify the reviewers of the state applications.

2. Any state that applies for waiver or regulatory relief must address all low-performing schools, especially those with graduation rates of less than 60%. A comprehensive, evidence-based reform strategy should be targeted to the lowest performing

schools. To address the almost 2,000 high schools responsible for half of all dropouts, we ask that all schools with graduation rates of less than 60% be prioritized for school improvement strategies and education reform.

3. Any state that applies for a waiver or regulatory relief must address the performance of all students, including all subgroups of students. All schools, including those within a state that receives a waiver from ED, must continue to be held accountable for meeting state performance targets on an annual basis for all students and each student subgroup in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v) of current law.

4. The ED needs to perform stringent oversight to ensure that waivers result in meaningful reform and community involvement. The ED should articulate how it will oversee the implementation of waivers, including how it will track and make publicly available information regarding the impact of waivers on student achievement.

5. Ensure broad representation on all peer review panels from communities of color and Native communities. As the ED develops its peer review process, all peer review panels should contain representatives from the civil rights community that represents students of color and Native students, especially at the secondary school level.

6. Any state that applies for a waiver or regulatory relief must ensure that communities of color and Native communities are meaningfully engaged in waiver and related reform implementation. The state process must include a high-quality local implementation process that consists of civil rights community representatives and secondary school reform experts on implementation teams.

Debt Ceiling Implications on ED Funding

The recent debate over raising the federal debt ceiling has led to a few developments in education funding for the next few years.

The compromise included a \$2.4 trillion debt ceiling increase over ten years and \$7 billion in cuts for FY2012. In addition, the new bipartisan congressional committee ("Debt Supercommittee") will also be in charge of \$1.5 trillion in cuts over the next decade. If the supercommittee fails to come to consensus, automatic cuts of \$984 billion will spread across agencies, with the exception of a few. Unfortunately, it is too early to tell whether the congressional committee will push for cuts in the ED's funding and what they might look like. The Committee for Education Funding (a voluntary, nonprofit and nonpartisan coalition) estimated that automatic cuts would result in 6.7% in most agencies—the Department of Education would be estimated to lose \$3 billion annually (McNeil, 2011b).

Amid all of this budget cutting, one program actually received an increase, the Pell grant program. As Obama fought hard to keep education on the agenda, the \$23 billion program received an extra \$10 billion in FY 2012 and \$7 billion in 2013, allowing the program to continue to serve all eligible students. The extra funds will come from \$18 billion in savings from cutting subsidized loans to graduate and professional degree students. It will also eliminate \$3.6 billion in rebates for students who make on-time loan payments. The extra \$4.6 billion in savings will be used to offset general deficit reduction (McNeil, 2011a).

Although there are no explicit cuts to education programs that are specific to the Hispanic and Title I communities, the cuts will hurt school funds for at least another three to four years. What is certain is that big cuts to federal spending would exacerbate current strains on state education spending. FY2011 ED spending already reflects \$1.25 billion in cuts, resulting in financial issues in a number of states. Further cuts to federal spending would force states to contribute considerably more.

For continuously updated information on Federal education budget and policy news, please visit the LULAC National website at: www.lulac.org



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