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Promoting Parental Involvement Among Latino Parents at Glen View Elementary School

Keywords: Latino parental involvement, children's academic achievement, coordinated comprehensive services

Abstract: Research has shown that students do better in school when their parents get involved. Therefore, this project was designed to increase Latino parent's knowledge about how to get more involved in their children's education by coordinating a field trip to the library and two presentations.

Executive Summary

The Santa Clara County School-Linked Services (SLS) program serves as a first point of contact between schools, county departments, and non-profit organizations providing health and social services to families and children. The SLS vision is to maximize the learning potential of students by increasing collaboration among agencies. Latinos, Asians, African Americans, and American Indians account for nearly 65% of students enrolled in the county's public schools. SLS does not discriminate against any minority group, yet most of the SLS social and health services are provided to Latino students.

Families and students from each school in the Santa Clara County District face different academic, health, and social problems. At Glen View Elementary School in Gilroy for example, there is low Latino parental involvement. It's important to explore the needs, barriers, and benefits of parental involvement. Research has shown that when parents participate in school-related activities, their children's academic performance improves (PTA, 2007).

This project was developed with the purpose of promoting Latino parental involvement through coordinated, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive services. According to the PTA (2007), parents can learn at least 100 ways to increase their participation in their children education. This project focuses on three of them: a field trip to the public library and two presentations, one on healthy habits at home and another on helping children with their homework.

The results of this project demonstrate that after the field trip to the library and the two presentations, Latino parents' knowledge regarding how to get more involved with

their children's schooling increased. They perceived some of the benefits of getting more involved and felt more motivated to do so.

Description of Agency

The Santa Clara County School-Linked Services (SLS) program was initiated in 1994 as a result of the lack of coordination across institutions and organizations serving families and children. In the past, the services available to families and children with complex or multiple problems did not always adequately meet their needs. This resulted in either fragmentation or duplication of services.

Therefore, SLS was given the responsibility of designing a process by which departments serving children and families, such as schools and community organizations, would work collaboratively with school districts in high need areas of the county to provide a comprehensive array of health and human services through a multi-service and case-management approach. In other words, the SLS acts as a single point of contact to maximize resources and minimize duplication of services and increases community involvement across systems as a result. Ultimately, the SLS vision is to maximize every student's learning potential. As of today, SLS serves over twenty-two school sites located in seven school districts at the elementary, middle, and high schools levels.

The SLS program employs over thirty-five staff members, including Social Workers, Psychiatric Social Workers, Community Workers, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, a Health Educator, and a Public Health Nurse. This professional team strongly believes that it's important to use specific guiding principals to achieve the desired vision by providing easily accessible, strengths-based, family-focused, culturally sensitive, comprehensive, preventative, coordinated and evaluated services to children and families in the Santa Clara County.

Literature Review

A report from the Child Trends Data Bank (2003) indicates that, “High levels of parent educational attainment are strongly associated with positive outcomes for children in many areas including school readiness.” Yet the same report indicates that in 1999, nearly 50% of Latino Students ages 6–18 had parents who lack a high school diploma. It’s not surprising then that Latino students are “more than twice as likely to be undereducated than all minority groups combined, and as a result, they have the highest dropout rate in the United States (Tinkler, 2002). School dropout rates among Latino students may be highly associated with their parents’ low participation in school at earlier stages in their lives.

Research has revealed that parental involvement may increase students’ academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Cooper, Jackson, Nye & Lindsay, 2001; Epstein, 1994; McCarthy 2000; Snow, 1999). The benefits of parental involvement include both students’ positive attitude towards school, higher grades and test scores, better school attendance, and lower school dropout rates (Tinkler, 2002). Parental involvement could be defined as the degree to which parents volunteer, cooperate, and participate in school meetings and events (Battle-Bailey, 2004; Child Trends Databank, 2003). This definition could also include parental monitoring of children’s homework (Snow, 1999). Interestingly enough, for more than a century, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA, 2007) has provided support, information, and resources to families focused on the health and education of children. The PTA has indicated that there are more than 100 ways parents can know and do more to increase their parental involvement.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that researchers and other educators continue to proclaim that students' academic performance will increase if parents become more involved in their children's education, one of the most critical issues for schools is how to actively engage Latino parents. As a group, Latino parents have school participation rates that have been described as low to nonexistent (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

Many reasons have been attributed to their Latino parents' low participation in school-related activities. Some examples are unfamiliarity with the school system, dramatic differences between what is expected of parents in the U.S. as to what was expected in the countries of origin, and parents' negative experiences at school due to the lack of school staff, teachers, and administrators who speak their language (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003; Greene & Tichenor, 2003). One of the most compelling reasons why Latino parents have low school participation rates is because they are often marginalized due to their race and social class. Their culture and life experiences have not been recognized (Barton, Brake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Crozier, 2001).

School Administrators and teachers have taken Latino parents' little involvement out of context; saying parents do not care about their children's education (Tinkler, 2002). For example, in an ethnographic study of a Latino community conducted by Delgado-Gaitan (2001), the researcher found that 98% of the teachers in the school viewed parental involvement to be very important, but most teachers believed parents were not working hard enough to help their children with educational achievement.

Unlike such perceptions, other studies have shown that Latino parents do care for their children (Fitzsimmons, 2003). Most of the time, they have immigrated to the United States seeking better educational opportunities for their children. They often move

far from home and work long hours to support their families financially (Reading Rockets/Colorin Colorado, 2006).

Project Description

This capstone project is intended to increase the knowledge of Latino parents so that they can get more involved in their children's education at Glen View Elementary School in Gilroy. Melaville (1999) suggests that one of the best ways to support the success of families and children is to create a community approach by "seek[ing] out the wisdom and leadership of parents." In other words, listening directly to what parents have to say is crucial to address possible solutions for the issue implicated. More importantly, parents need to be part of the solution. According to the Interprofessional Education Consortium (IPEC, 2001), when the "strengths and expertise" of families are viewed as a primary source of the solution, any goal can most likely be accomplished. Human service providers "support and understand the family and practice honest two-way communication regarding decisions involving the process" (IPEC, 2001)

Latino parents from the English Language Arts Council (ELAC) at Glen View Elementary School have identified the reasons why they do not get more involved in their children's school activities. The reasons are very similar to how most Latino families feel in other parts of the country. They pointed out that due to the fact that they feel inferior to their children's teachers and to the lack of bilingual school staff and teachers, a language wall has been created. They would rather not attend school events or family and teacher conferences because there will not be a translator available for them. In addition, the lack of education parents have obtained has limited them from helping their children with their homework. For example, some parents only went to 1st or 2nd grade, but their children are in 4th or 5th grade.

Most importantly, ELAC parents pointed out three of the possible ways that might lead them to increase their participation in their children's schooling: (1) they wanted to learn about the following topics: healthier ways to feed their children, (2) service and resources available to them at the local library, and (3) ways to help their children with their homework.

Literature Review on the Proposed Project

According to the PTA (2007), 1 out of 100 ways parents can participate in their children's education to ultimately improve their children's academic achievement is by learning the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity. Due to the alarming childhood obesity rates and the health risks associated with obesity, it's important that parents share the responsibility of ensuring their children's health and well-being with the school and the community. In fact, parents are considered the first and most important teachers for their children (IPEC, 2001). When families practice good eating and participate in physical activity together, children are ready to learn in school, and their cognitive functioning is improved (Taras, 2005).

A second way parents can be more actively involved in their children's education is by visiting either the school or the public library (PTA, 2007). When parents are aware of how to use the resources available to them at the library, such as how to use a computer, check out books and movies, locate children's reading programs, and so on, children value education more. For example, when parents join Children's Storytime at the library, a program where both parents and children read together, children know that books are important, and they are more likely to become good readers (PTA, 2007).

Lastly, parental involvement does not only take place at school. Epstein (1994) suggests that a great deal of learning goes on in the children's home. It has been proven

that when parents help their children with their homework, children do better in school (Snow, 1999). Nevertheless, sometimes due to the little education that Latino parents might have had, they may find it difficult to help their children. Yet, regardless of the language barrier or the lack of understanding of their children's school material, there's always something parents can do to support their children. For example, parents can do some simple things, such as ask their children how school was that day, provide them a quiet time and place, and read to them in Spanish (PTA, 2007).

Project Results

The desired outcome of promoting Latino parental involvement was measured by survey evaluations at the end of two presentations and after the field trip to the Gilroy Public Library. The results from the evaluations for the first presentation titled "Healthy Habits at Home" indicate that there was an increase in knowledge among the 9 ELAC participants in regards to the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity. For example, parents indicated that before the presentation, they had an idea of how to read a food label, but that after the presentation, they found out that the way they were reading it was not correct.

The results from the second evaluations on the field trip to the Gilroy Public Library demonstrated that this field trip was significantly beneficial for the 16 participants. Even though all of them knew where the library was located, only 7 had visited the library before and had library cards. Also, only 5 participants out of the 16 felt that they knew about most of the library resources. More importantly, 6 parents were able to get library cards that night. Their answers also revealed that they had learned a lot about the library resources available and would like to come back and make use of them.

The results from the migrant elementary teacher's presentation on "Math and Reading Strategies for Helping Children with Their Homework" showed that the 17 participants felt it was very important to help their children with their homework every day. However, only 41% helped their children twice a week at the most. The participants' answers also indicated that some of the reasons why they do not help their children with homework are because they do not have time and/or they have little knowledge of their children's school material and often feel it is too complicated for them. Nevertheless, after the presentation, all of the parents indicated that the presenter gave them good, simple, and easy ideas that would help them be more active in their children's education by helping them with their homework.

Recommendations

The PTA (2007) indicates that there are more than 100 ways parents can know and do more about their children's education. I only researched 3 out of 100 topics, so any prospective intern can follow up on the 97 left. Moreover, in the last evaluations, parents were asked what other topics would be helpful to increase their participation in school, and overall they seemed to want to become more knowledgeable in as many areas as possible. They indicated that they wanted to have English as Second Language (ESL) classes at Glen View Elementary School, a computer lab where they could learn how to type and use the Internet, and Immigration Law and Citizenship classes. These requests are other important topics that anyone working with Latino parents might want to consider researching.

Future research should also investigate what forms of parental involvement are most effective when working with diverse population groups because what might work

for Latinos, might not work for Asians. Perhaps taking into consideration how poverty and parents' education levels may influence parental involvement might be helpful.

Lastly, when promoting parental involvement, it's particularly important to treat parents with dignity and respect. It's critical for school administrators, teachers, and staff to be culturally sensitive. Therefore, preparing and educating them how to be proactive rather than reactive when working with minority groups might also be valuable research.

Academic Application

The California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) is a vision-driven university. By integrating its vision statement into my project, I was able to demonstrate that I highly "value... serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and historically undereducated and low-income populations...by commitment...of coordinated community service" (CSUMB Vision Statement, 1994). By coordinating an array of comprehensive services that helped the ELAC parents at Glen View Elementary School get more actively involved in their children's education, I demonstrated my commitment "to be a productive citizen." I wanted to contribute to California's high quality work force...and meet statewide and regional needs" (CSUMB Vision Statement, 1994). The way I did it was by sharing my educational skills, experience, and abilities with the ELAC parents in Gilroy

Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs)

This capstone project is a reflection of the following Collaborative Health and Human Services MLOs: Collaboration, Professional Communication, and Cross Cultural Competency.

"Collaboration is the ability to work in teams in inter-professional settings across traditional lines to establish and achieve common missions and purposes and to

collaborate with others in decision making” (CHHS, 2006). This project would not have been possible without collaboration with the Glen View [Elementary?] School’s principal and teachers, ELAC Coordinator, SLS field mentors, Gilroy Public Librarian, and migrant teachers from Salinas. The only reason this project was carried out was because I worked closely with all of these people. We all shared the vision of promoting Latino parental involvement with the ultimate goal of maximizing Glen View Elementary School students’ academic performance.

Professional Communication was key for collaboration. “Empathically and critically [communicating] in both oral and written contexts, including writing, listening, and speaking” is an important aspect of professional communication (CHHS, 2006). For me to have kept everyone on the same page, I had to e-mail, call, and sometimes check in once a week with all stakeholders. I was able to distinguish that informal communication is not the same as formal communication. Every time I had to communicate, I had to be clear and assertive to avoid misunderstandings.

Lastly, the CHHS Program (2006) defines Cross Cultural Competency as “The ability to be comfortable with differences between self and others, to engage in a process characterized by mutual respect and sensitivity, to assess the needs and capabilities of culturally diverse populations, and to communicate effectively across cultural groups to deliver appropriate health and human services.” [It’s best not to end a paragraph with a quotation. Actually, almost the entire paragraph is a quotation.]

Being culturally sensitive was also a very important element to the success of this project. However, when I was giving the presentation on “Healthy Habits at Home,” I found myself in a difficult situation. When I got to the part on food portion sizes and physical activity, I knew I needed to change carefully consider my wording. I was aware

of some of the Latino attitudes towards food and physical activity, yet I still needed to get my point across.

The way I did this was by focusing on the health benefits of making small changes. We talked about how to increase physical activity. For example, if the participants indicated that they watched 10 hours of TV a week, I suggested that they could cut it off by 20–30 minutes a week. Then they could use that extra 20-30 minutes a week to exercise. Also, instead of taking the elevator, I suggested that they could take the stairs and park their car a little further away from their destination. According to the majority of the parents, these were reasonable suggestions that would help them reduce heart attacks, strokes, cancers, etc., and more importantly, they would be modeling to their children how to stay physically active.

Project Impact and Conclusion

Overall, I feel this project was very successful. To me education is very important, and I am very passionate about sharing with my community some new ideas to increase parental participation in children's education. I feel that Latino families are not involved enough in their children's education, not because they do not care, but because their needs have not been met. I found it was very important to listen and validate parents' reasons for why they do not get more involved. Asking them what they needed to be more active was key to this project's success. I made a list of the topics they wanted to learn about and then due to internship time-limits, I narrowed the list down to only three topics. The ELAC parents' responses indicated that after the presentations, they felt likely to get more involved with their children's schooling.

I am glad I was able to share with parents three other ways for getting their participation to increase in school. I had a wonderful experience working with the ELAC

families. Things kind of work out differently from what I expected. At first, I thought that parents were going to be the most benefited from this project, yet I was greatly benefited as well.

Last week, I was interviewed at Santa Cruz Educational Partnership for the ELAC Parent Coordinator Assistant. A day after the interview, I received a call from the ELAC Coordinator at a middle school in Castroville. She called me to notify me that they would like to offer me the position. She told me she liked I had experience working with the ELAC families and asked me if I could implement the same project with the ELAC families in Castroville. Next Monday we will discuss the details.

I am very thankful to Gilroy ELAC families because they let me worked with them. I learned skills that not only got me this job, but that will also helped me throughout my personal and professional life.

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