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Padres Activos, Niños Creativos/Active Parents, Creative Children 2017

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Abstract:

There is a high percentages of monolingual Spanish speaking parents who do not know how to navigate the school systems, especially in the East Salinas. Therefore, it is very difficult for parents to collaborate with schools without having the basic information that each parent must have in order to navigate the school systems. I did my capstone project at Building Healthy Communities in Salinas, CA. In 2009 Building Healthy Communities became one of The California Endowment's 14 initiatives. BHC is a ten-year initiative with four focus campaigns where it collaborates directly with different non-profit organizations. BHC is committed to improve East Salinas residents' health, environment and education by transforming the places where residents work, live, and play into healthier places (The California Endowment, 2017).

The project that was implemented consisted of trainings, educational workshops and community/board meetings. The project purpose was to provide essential information to parents on how to navigate the school system and also provide them different skills and strategies on how they can get involved at their children schools. As a result of this project a parents' committee was created named "Padres Unidos Contruyendo Escuelas Saludables" in collaboration with BHC and parents. The benefits that this program brought to BHC and the community were more parent involvement, leadership development among parents, and the creation of a strong and united committee.

The committee consists of approximately 20 parents. Despite the time the committee has, we have had much success and many achievements thanks to the perseverance and dedication of the parents. One of our goals as a committee is to continue working as a team to achieve the success of our children in collaboration with districts, schools, teachers, parents and students.

Keywords: monolingual, school system, initiative, collaboration, committee, achievements.

Agency and Communities Served:

In 2009 Building Healthy Communities (BHC) became one of The California Endowment's 14 initiatives. The California Endowment project was to select communities with the highest percentages in health disparities and low-income families. Therefore, BHC is a ten-year initiative with four focus campaigns where it collaborates directly with different non-profit organizations. Each organization works towards a goal but all with a common purpose. BHC is NOT an organization, it is the nucleus that provides support to all the organizations that collaborate with them. BHC is committed to improve East Salinas residents' health, environment and education by transforming the places where residents work, live, and play into healthier places (The California Endowment, 2017). BHC primary population served are all ages Latinos, with very low incomes, and Spanish speakers which makes harder to communicate their needs.

The East Salinas is situated in the 93905 Zip Code, an area with the highest percentages on housing density, poor education, gang activities, violence and crime. However, it is proved that the root cause of crime and violence is related to the lack of opportunities affecting all families with disparities. Salinas has a population of approximately 59,000 residents, the majority are agricultural workers, making East Salinas the perfect place to make positive changes. In other words, it is important to find places that have needs in order to supply those needs with positive changes that help the community, based on the different people's necessities. Therefore, it is essential to create opportunities for all people to reach their full potential regardless of age, race, or gender (The California Endowment, 2017).

BHC mission "is to address the root causes negatively impacting our communities" (BHCCConnect, 2012). In other words, BHC is committed and dedicated to approach the negative impact in the communities by implementing different community programs. Also, according to

The Californian Newspaper, *Building Healthy Communities moves forward in Salinas* (2016), BHC implement some “nontraditional strategies to help the East Salinas residents to heal and overcome some of the long term standing disenfranchisement that segregated the east side from the rest of the city.” For example, they offer a program a traditional “circulo.” It is a traditional activity where people sit in circles and practice ancestors' rituals as a form of relaxation and healing of problems or traumas that people bring with them. Also, the “circulo” meetings’ goal is to provide a safe space from community members to share sensitive information in order to heal and empower them to stand up for change.

There are three primary areas that BHC is focused: First, to raise the voice and power of Alisal residents in the city’s decision making process. For example, BHC encourage Salinas residents to get involve in city meetings in order to have a voice in city’s decisions. Second, to promote equity in education for the youth by encouraging them to continue with their higher education. For instance, BHC provides youth workshops and events to inform them about their rights as students and to engage and keep them focused on their studies. Third, to establish the “economic equity in the Alisal by having a seat at the table when policies on land use, job development, urban planning, public safety and public improvement projects are planned and prioritized.” In other words, BHC advocates for the “economic equity” of the city, the development and planning of policies, and the improvement of community projects (The Californian Newspaper, 2016).

Problem Definition:

There is a high percentages of monolingual Spanish speaking parents who do not know how to navigate the school systems, especially in the Alisal Unified School District in East Salinas. Therefore, non-English-speaking parents, even if born in the U.S., are at a disadvantage

because most of them do not have the basic knowledge of the U.S educational system practices and behaviors that they are expected to know in order to help their children succeed in the U.S education system (Andrade, 2015). In other words, many Spanish-speaking parents face a lack of understanding of the education system, such as The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), the meaning of grade point average (GPA), the school priorities, the parents' rights, and the importance of education. It is very difficult for parents to collaborate with schools without having the basic information that each parent must have in order to navigate the school system.

Causes and Contributing Factors:

There are different causes that contribute to the parents lack of knowledge on how to navigate the school systems. One of the most frequently reason for low parental involvement and communication with schools was a lack of time, the result of demanding and inflexible work schedules. Many Non-English Speaking Latino parents are agriculture workers limiting their time for active involvement at their children's school. In most of the cases, the parents felt their employment would be at risk if they frequently request time to leave the job early. In addition, most parents in the East Salinas area are farm workers. Most of them work for long hours and when they leave work and come home the only thing they want to do is to eat, take a bath and sleep. The next day is the same and the same, the same routine for the simple purpose of bringing an income to the home to support their families.

Another of the most prominent and apparent barrier of non-English Latino parent involvement is the language difference (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lee et al., 2012). In other words, the lack of English language limits an effective connection and communication between parents, teachers and school staff. Because of the lack of language and the lack of understanding on the education system parents found very difficult to help their children in the school and also to be

part of a school council or committee. In addition, the lack of English language impacts their ability to help their children with school work.

Parents who do not speak English are less likely than other parents to attend a general school meeting, school event, to volunteer or serve on a committee. For example, some parents may feel embarrassed with their language skills, making them feel uncomfortable participating in school and talking to the personnel (Mao Thao, 2009). In addition, most of the schools' personnel speak only English and also most of the school paperwork is not offered in other languages than in English. This makes communication even more difficult between parents and school personnel.

In addition, cultural differences are powerful barriers regarding parents' involvement. The role of the parents in education varied across different cultures. This can lead to parents from different cultural backgrounds being labelled as hard-to-reach or disengaged while they may not be aware of the expectations of parental engagement. In many cultures not only are teachers highly respected and considered experts in their field, it is also considered disrespectful to question them or interfere in their work (Understanding Barriers, 2017). Therefore, in order to work effectively with families from diverse backgrounds, schools' professionals need to understand the culture of the families they work with and hire more bilingual personnel for the benefit of the school and the parents as well.

In other words, Spanish speaker parents face different barriers to stay actively involved at their children schools however they play an important role in their children's education. It is well known that if parents are not actively involved at their children schools, it does not mean that they do not care about the education of their children. In contrast, most parents work long hours to give their children a higher education so they can have a better future.

Consequences:

Lack of parents' involvement is one of the main consequences. For example, a parent who works 10 to 12 hours in the field, does not have the time available, does not speak English, does not feel welcome by the school personnel, and does not know how to navigate the school system the least this parent will want is to get involved in his/her children' school. According to a survey from the Public Agenda website (2012), "Almost two thirds, 65 percent of parents surveyed said they wished they could be doing more when it comes to involvement in their child's education and only 34 percent are satisfied with the way things are." In other words, most of the parents want and have the desire to get involved in the education of their children, unfortunately as I explained on the above part there are different factors that do not allow parents to be involved in their children school education.

Another consequence of the lack of parental involvement is the cultural background. For example, the majority of Hispanic parents did not have a high level of education. Therefore, they are not aware of the importance of parent involvement in the children education. Many of these parents do not believe in education because of the beliefs that were inculcated to them or because since they were very young they had to go to work to bring an income to their homes. Also, most of Hispanics bring dragging their beliefs and customs that in some times can affect to them more than benefit them.

According to Mao Thao (2009), "Immigrant parents see education as the means to "making it" in the United States; i.e. having what it takes to succeed in America, such as English language proficiency, a good-paying job, and being able to navigate U.S. systems. Education is also highly valued among immigrant parents for their children because parents may not have had that same opportunity in their native country." In other words, some parents have a high

expectative about education based on their cultures. They have a lot of respect for the school staff and they think it would be an interference and disrespectful if they get involve at school.

Disconnection between parents, children, and school personnel is another consequence of uninvolved parents. For example, school personnel attitudes can be one of the barriers in parental involvement. According to Onikama (1998), “School staff interest may vary in terms of commitment to family involvement, and may generate mixed messages to parents” (p.2). In other words, these attitudes may make parents feel they are not welcome in the school. Also, due to the disconnection between parent and school, the parents do not understand the way school expect them to be involved and as a result of that parents choose to not get involved at school.

Problem Model

CAUSES	PROBLEM	CONSEQUENCES
1. Language	There is a high percentages of monolingual Spanish speaking parents who do not know how to navigate the school system within the Alisal District schools.	1. Lack of parents involvement
2. Literacy		2. Children with bad academic record
3. Lack of time		3. Insecure children with low self-esteem
4. Beliefs		4. Rebellious children
5. Culture		5. Disconnection between parents, children, and school.
6. Lack of communication between parents and teachers		6. Low percentages on school graduations

Project Title

Padres Activos, Niños Creativos/Active Parents, Creative Children 2017

Introduction/Purpose/Justification

The project that was implemented consisted of trainings, educational workshops and community/board meetings. This project started by recruiting parents at the different schools of

the East of Salinas to inform them about the importance of knowing how to navigate the school systems. Recruitment was made through school events, presentations at the schools “Cafecitos,” distribution of flyers and knocking from door to door in order to promote the importance of why parents should learn how to handle the school systems. As a result of this project a parents’ committee was created named “Padres Unidos Contruyendo Escuelas Saludables” in collaboration with BHC and community parents.

We have about a year developing and working on this project in collaboration with my mentor Alma Cervantes and my colleagues Maria Parra and Janelle Garcia. We started doing weekly meetings for the development of our committee and over time we changed to biweekly meetings. The workshops, meetings and trainings aim to inform and train parents on how to navigate the school system and how to develop leadership so they can be part of a school council or board of their children school.

For example, we as a committee participated and presented in several of the Alisal District Board meetings. Also, we had the opportunity to facilitate a community meeting that was about the LCAP process. We also had the opportunity to meet in person and get to know more closely all the trustees from the Alisal District. The project was implemented to provide essential information to parents on how to navigate the school system and also provide them with different skills and strategies on how they can get involved at their children’s education. That is why it is necessary that BHC continue supporting the committee with the resources that parents need to develop their leadership and knowledge on how to navigate school systems and how to be part of different school councils in order to have leaders in our schools and communities.

The method used to implement the project was educational intervention. The project was developed by my agency Building Healthy Communities, my mentor Alma Cervantes from the

Education program, the community parents, Maria Parra (intern), Janelle Garcia (intern) and myself (intern). In collaboration with Building Healthy Communities my role at the committee is to facilitate the skills and tools to parents so they could have the ability and confidence to navigate the school system on their own. During the planning and implementing process, I worked very closely with my mentor and the other two interns. Our responsibilities were recruiting parents, contacting the community speakers, making reminders to parents about the workshops and meeting, and planning everything for the workshops such as power points, agendas, food, child care and raffles.

The parents' committee was formed during the parent recruitment process in the different Alisal District schools. The committee consists of approximately 20 parents. Of those 20 parents 10 are very active and the other 10 are a little less active but all of them support in all events where parents' participation is needed. To achieve the strong and united committee that we have now we had to go through a process of parents' recruitment, presentations at different schools, community outreach, going out to the community to knock door to door, and participating in Board meetings.

Additionally, BHC played an important role in logistical aspects. For example, assuring the place where the workshops were facilitated, making friendly reminders such as phone calls, messages and voice mails to parents about the workshops, encouraging parents to participate in the workshops, facilitating child care, snacks, and raffles, and also providing materials for parents such as notebooks and pencils.

Scope of work and timeline

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines
Research	Database	June 1, 2017 / June 30, 2017
Networking	Budget	July 1, 2017 / July 31, 2017
Recruitment	Schools	August 15, 2017 / August 31, 2017
Workshops	Power Points	Sep. 1, 2017 / Oct. 31, 2017
Trainings	Experts	Sep. 1, 2017 / Oct. 31, 2017
Presentations	Speakers	Sep. 1, 2017 / Oct. 31, 2017
Evaluation	Pre and post surveys	Nov. 1, 2017 / Nov. 30, 2017

Challenges/Obstacles

I think the biggest challenge will be to convince the parents about the importance of learning how to navigate the school system in order to get involved in their children education. Also, I think the period of time will be a challenge because I will have to plan, implement, and evaluate the project in a short period of time. In addition, keeping parents motivated and active on the committee was and has been one of the greatest challenges since it is very easy to lose focus but we must always remember what we are fighting for and what we want to achieve as a committee.

Assessment of the Project Outcome:

- As parents and community be prepared and be there in the decision making of the allocation of funds, implementation of resources and monitoring of effectiveness
- Collaborate with school districts to adopt a more cultural and healthy school climate for students and parents

- We want our children to be directed to the success of their future and that school funds be allocated to meet their needs
- Increase involvement and preparation of parents in the school system

The success assessment of the project was determined by comparing the pre and post surveys. The surveys were developed in order to determine how much experience parents had and have in navigating the school systems and to collect data to evaluate the effectiveness of the project. Also, tracking the number of parents that attend more frequently to most of the meetings was very beneficial on the program evaluation. In addition, I was reflected with my mentor and asked her for a feedback in order to improve in future programs.

For instance, when the committee just was created some of the parents surveyed another parents and they found an alarming number of Non-English Speaking Latino with students in Alisal Unified School District who had never heard about the LCAP. However, we as a committee have been educating other parents about what the LCAP is and how the process is for each school and now we can proudly say that the members of the parent committee are more informed as to what it is the LCAP thanks to the training and workshops we have had from the agency.

My capstone consisted of a few different Major Learning Outcomes (MLOs) from the Collaborative Health and Human Services major such as Collaboration that was a key point in my capstone because I was able to work with my mentor and co-workers to develop the parents' committee. Leadership was another key point because my coworkers and I were in charge of facilitate committee meetings, present at Board meetings, contact community members, among others. Also, personally Professional Development was essential because I was able to develop my leadership and as a result I was able to facilitate some of the parent meetings, develop weekly

agendas, take notes during the meetings, and develop different spread sheets with the parents' committee information.

Project Results/Findings:

One of our greatest successes was that we were able to meet with each of the trustees of the Alisal School District, we were able to create a certain relationship with each one of them and we made them known our work, our goals and above all let them know our desire to collaborate with them to achieve the success for our children as a common goal.

One of the goals that were not achieved this academic year was that the Alisal District do not included the suggestions of the community and parents on the LCAP because we started very late in the time line that they had to adopt the LCAP. However, we asked the Alisal District to be given a timeline for the next academic year so we could start on time with our suggestions that we want to be included in the LCAP next year.

The greatest strengths of the committee were that parents learned how to handle the school system, understood the meaning behind parental engagement and learned the positive impact of using social media as an outreaching tool to bring awareness to other parents.

Personal Reflection/Final Thoughts:

By doing this capstone project I was able to learn about school systems and how to form and maintain a committee. Our committee is a strong and united committee that will continue to work as a team to achieve great changes in our children's schools. We will continue to recruit more parents and collaborate with the Alisal District in order to achieve great changes together. I will continue as a committee member to continue learning more about school systems and the parents' engagement in schools so that I can promote other parents to join our committee.

I recommend BHC to continue supporting this project and to continue providing the necessary resources to the committee to remain as a strong committee in order to achieve great changes for our children's schools and the community. If I was to do this capstone again, or if someone else was going to do a similar project, I would change a few things during the process. One of the biggest things would be to start earlier. Then there would be enough time to evaluate the project. Overall I think that my capstone project was a success.

Also, at the beginning of my internship I realized that I was very shy to speak in front of people. However, with the passage of time I was able to present and facilitate in different meetings in front of people. That was thanks to my mentor Alma Cervantes who always encourages me to take new risks. Being able to communicate with people helped me create relationships with leaders and well-known people in the community and develop my leadership.

In addition, during my personal and professional growth, I learn a lot about my self awareness. I discovered that self awareness is a fundamental factor and it involves discovering new truths about myself. Therefore, personal development starts at a point of self awareness. For example, I started discovering talents and skills that I did not know I had such as honesty, integrity, patience, self confidence, strategic thinking, decision making, goal setting, strategic planning, time management, collaboration, good communicator, good listener, respect among others.

Broader Social Significance:

There is a high percentage of violence in Salinas one of the biggest problems especially in the East Salinas where the majority of people are Hispanics, low income, farm workers, and people who do not speak English. This problem is very connected to my project, given that the lack of parents' involvement in the education of their children is one of the primary factors on

violence and gangs. Therefore, it is proven that if parents are involved in the education of their children from an early age, they are less likely to end up in gangs. That is why it is very important to encourage parents to participate and be involved in the education of their children to prevent these problems from growing in our community.

Violence and gangs is a huge problem that may be difficult to eradicate in our community, fortunately we have resources and programs to inform us on how we can be part of the violence and gangs prevention. As I already mentioned, one of the first and best steps to prevent violence and gangs in our future generations is being involved in the education and development of our children since they are small. It is never too late to get involved as parents in the education of our children and our "parents' committee" project is the perfect step for those parents who are looking to be part of the change in Salinas schools.

One tip I can give to future capstone students is that they look for a project of their interest so that they can make a big change in their community and above all that they go out to listen to the needs of the community so that they can achieve positive changes for their community. Finally, getting involved on the community is not hard and with a little of time you can make a big difference.

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APPENDIX



**Comite de Padres Unidos
Contruyendo Escuelas Saludables**

