A MIDDLE SCHOOL FAMILY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM TO FOSTER THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND COLLEGE ATTAINMENT FOR LATINO STUDENTS: A GRANT PROPOSAL

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Introduction

- Latinos have a low high school graduation rate. In 2011, the high school dropout rate for Hispanics was 14% while the rates for Whites were 5% and Blacks were 7% (National Center on Education Statistics, 2013).
- When compared to other ethnic populations, Latinos fall behind in obtaining a bachelor’s degree (Pew Research Center, 2013).
- Various barriers affect the academic performance and educational attainment of some Latino students. Barriers include poverty, discrimination, educational inequity, immigration issues, language issues, general middle school challenges and parental factors (Becerra, 2010; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Gandara, 2010; Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008; McGill, Hughes, Alicea, & Way, 2012; Snyder & Dillow 2010).
- Family school involvement was identified as a way to promote high school graduation, academic success and college attainment for Latino adolescents (Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013; Hill & Tyson, 2009).
- This thesis developed and sought funding for a family involvement program for Vista Charter Middle School located in Los Angeles, California.
- The goal of the program is to increase parent involvement for Vista Charter students to promote improved school performance and support for postsecondary education.
According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW; 2000), the mission of the profession is to advocate for marginalized and vulnerable populations that do not have access to the same opportunities as other groups in society.

The rate of high school diplomas and enrollment in college is low for Latinos (Becerra, 2010). This lack of educational opportunity demands social work intervention since this disparity has direct consequences for the socioeconomic status and upward mobility of this community (Baum & Flores, 2011; Gandara, 2010).

This project provides a framework for school social workers to implement to encourage school achievement and higher education opportunities for Latinos at their schools.

This family involvement program may be used outside of the school setting at agencies serving Latino youth and their families to ensure that this population has access to valuable information that will foster success.
Cross-Cultural Relevance

• The disparities between the graduation rates and college completion rates of Latino students compared to students of other ethnicities are vast.

• This grant project serves to promote academic success and attainment of postsecondary education for a prevalent yet underserved population in the United States. It serves to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges Latinos face within the educational system and how a parent involvement program can ameliorate some of those difficulties.

• The NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) states that social workers should strive to understand the strengths found in every culture and provide culturally sensitive interventions.

• The purpose of this grant project is to understand the strengths found within the Latino culture that can assist this population to successfully navigate through the education system. The family involvement program will respect and promote the cultural values of Latinos while also providing for the needs of this underserved community.
Methods

Target Population

- Approximately 85% of the students enrolled at Vista Charter Middle School were Hispanic or of Latino ethnicity and 69% of the total enrollment of students were English Language Learners or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient Students for the 2012-2013 school year (California Department of Education, 2013). Therefore, the parents of the students enrolled are Latino and primarily speak Spanish.
- The parents who will participate in this program may be undocumented, low-income, may not have much knowledge of the education system, and may not know about the college process for their children.

Strategies Used to Identify Funding Source

- A thorough search of local, state, and federal funding opportunities for educational institutions and educationally-related programs were conducted through internet search engines and a national grant database.

Funding Source Identified: The Joseph Drown Foundation

- The mission of this foundation is to assist individuals in becoming successful and contributing members of society by allowing individuals access to opportunities that will allow them to grow and learn. The primary focus of this foundation is education. It supports K-12 private and public school programs as well as organizations that seek to diminish existing barriers in academic success for Los Angeles residents (Joseph Drown Foundation, 2014).
Methods

Sources Used for the Needs Assessment
- Vista Charter Middle School serves a predominately Latino and low socioeconomic neighborhood in Los Angeles where 91% of the students qualified for free or reduced priced lunch in the 2012-2013 school year (CDE, 2013)
- In comparison to all other middle schools in California, Vista Charter is the second lowest ranked school (CDE, 2013).
- Scholarly journal articles, government websites, contact with school social work professionals, education professionals, and continuous communication with the chief executive officer and principal of Vista Charter Middle School were utilized in designing this program to be comprehensive, fulfilling the interests of the families of the school.

Projected Budget Range
- The total amount requested from the Joseph Drown Foundation to carry out this endeavor is totaled at $157,288.43. The host agency will contribute in-kind donations in the amount of $19,000, for a total program budget of $176,288.43.

Projected Budget Categories
- The program budget includes salaries for a full-time School Social Worker, a part-time School Social Worker, 3 After School Tutors, and one English Teacher. It also includes costs for program supplies, office supplies, 12 computers for staff and parent participants, transportation, evaluation fees, administrative fees, and in-kind donations such as space rental fees.
Grant Proposal

Program Summary and Description

- The parent involvement program will provide five workshop topics that will be held twice a week for approximately one hour to an hour and a half for all Vista Charter Middle School parents and/or family members. The workshop topics provided will be family communication and healthy lifestyle classes, English classes, college awareness classes, informational sessions about navigating the education system and strategies to help their children succeed in middle school, and computer classes. These workshops will be conducted in English and Spanish.

- Each workshop topic will have two cycles during the year, the first cycle starting in the fall semester and the second beginning in the spring semester.

- The workshops will be held Monday through Friday on the school campus every other week. The same workshop class will be held twice in one day, one session in the morning and another in the evening, allowing parents and/or family members to attend either time that is the most convenient for them.

- Parents, who participate in the evening sessions, are welcome to have their child who attends the middle school receive after school tutoring from hired tutors on the school campus.

- Parents and their middle school children will also be offered opportunities to visit local college campuses throughout the school year. These parent-child field trips will be offered on Fridays four times a year in the months of October, December, February, and April.
Grant Proposal

Program Objectives:

• Design workshops to enhance the parent child-relationship, parent knowledge of the U.S. education system, the college attainment process, and life skills (i.e., computer classes).
• Recruit parents to participate in the workshops.
• Educate parents about strategies to support their child’s academic activities at home and school via an informational workshop.
• Provide parents and family members with information on their child’s educational rights.
• Provide parents with information about high school graduation requirements and the college application and enrollment process.
• Educate parents about different postsecondary institutions by providing information about various colleges and opportunities to visit several local postsecondary institutions with their children.
• Provide information on how the families can finance postsecondary education.
• Educate parents and family members on their child’s development.
• Educate parents on healthy communication strategies and how to implement effective communication techniques with adolescents.
• Educate parents on how to foster the goals, potential, and abilities of their children.
• Parents will be encouraged to take a more active role in their child’s academic success via workshop activities and discussions.
• Educate parents on how to motivate their children to be more engaged at school.
• Provide students at Vista Charter Middle School with tutoring to aid their understanding of challenging course material and to complete difficult course assignments.

Program Evaluation

• Grades and standardized test scores of the students whose parents participated will be reviewed at the end of the year. Parent participants will be given pre and post-test surveys and will be asked to participate in a focus group. All the information gathered by the focus group and surveys will be analyzed by an independent evaluator. The results will be compiled into a report to be provided to the school social workers and administrators to determine methods to improve the program.
Lessons Learned/Social Work Implications

Lessons Learned
• Grant search, selection and writing process

Social Work Implications
• Education promotes upward mobility and provides countless opportunities especially for underserved populations. The Latino population, which is projected to rapidly increase in the next few decades, currently encounters various obstacles when it comes to education (Baum & Flores, 2011; Gandara, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

• For social work professionals, it is imperative to be aware of the educational obstacles some Latinos experience and the benefits of parental involvement. Providing parent and family trainings, diminishes the academic achievement gap between Latinos and individuals of other ethnicities (Alfaro et al., 2009). Thus, the development of programs by social workers in a school setting or at other agencies that encourage family engagement in education for Latino clients is needed.

• On a macro level, social work professionals should bring awareness of the barriers some Latino students encounter in their educational experience by speaking to local district administrators, school boards, and city council leaders. Local policies can be established within certain districts that promote an equitable education for Latino youth and other underserved populations.
References


