

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center



Promoviendo Bienestar para Familias y Comunidad con Conocimiento, Confianza y Poder
Promoting Family and Community Well-Being through Knowledge, Trust and Empowerment

ABUELOS Y NIETOS JUNTOS DEMONSTRATION PROJECT L.B. JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

September 2008-May 2009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (La Fe PREC) and the Edgewood Independent School District (EISD) signed an MOA to implement the Abuelos y Nietos Juntos project as a one-year demonstration at L.B. Johnson Elementary (LBJ). The goal was to improve the “Bienestar” (well-being) of Mexican American grandparents and their grandchildren. Activities included: (1) initiating social support group services for grandparents; (2) developing a baseline profile of LBJ students being raised by grandparents, and; (3) linking grandparents raising grandchildren (GRG) to community resources.

The recruitment/outreach began in August 2008. La Fe staff presented to the LBJ teachers and participated in 4 school-sponsored family events, identifying 15 GRG. Five GRG registered for social support group services. To identify students each teacher developed a list of their students whom they knew were being raised by grandparents. Eight (8) Social Support “platica” Group sessions were offered, with varying attendance each month. Each two-hour session consisted of a “platica” focused on major issues related to learning disabilities, behavioral problems, physical and sexual abuse, advocacy for grandchildren within the school setting and caregiver stress and burnout.

All the grandparents were Mexican American and preferred speaking Spanish in the group sessions. They ranged in age from 41-65. Four reported an income under \$25,000, one under \$35,000. All were raising their grandchildren on a voluntary basis. The five GRG households included a total of 10 grandchildren. The grandchildren age ranged was from 3-9 years old.

Of the 20 students identified as raised by their grandparents, 45% received school-based mental health counseling but only 10% were enrolled in the Community in Schools Program. The majority (75%) were promoted or placed in the next grade. Twenty-five percent (all 1st graders) were retained. School data shows that 15 students were retained in the 1st grade in the 2008-09 academic year. Among the retained first graders, 33% were being raised by their grandparents.

The results from this small demonstration support the following recommendations:

- 1) To secure adequate funding to support more on-site staff time to provide for development of trust-based relationships with the grandparents and their grandchildren and teachers. Plus, target all EISD elementary schools with a central location to house the project.
- 2) To develop a tracking system and identify students who are either informally or formally being raised by grandparents or other kinship providers. EISD tracks its homeless students including some students who voluntarily reside with their grandparents. Students in CPS custody, placed with grandparents, are not considered homeless. Grandchildren being raised by grandparents have increased behavioral, health, and education risks (e.g. 33% of LBJ students retained in the 1st grade were being raised by their grandparents). As such, a much more efficient and effective tracking system is merited to identify these at-risk students for subsequent focused support.
- 3) To improve access to available services that benefit grandchildren. Research shows that GRG have a difficult time navigating institutional systems to gain access to services that will help their grandchildren be healthy and prepared to succeed in school.

Full Report

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (La Fe PREC) is a non-profit organization engaged in community-focused research, education, training, policy development and collaborative advocacy to address social and health inequalities. La Fe PREC is a subsidiary organization of Centro de Salud Familiar – La Fe in El Paso, Texas. One program and policy area of focus for La Fe PREC is Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG).

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Abuelos y Nietos Juntos project, implemented at L.B. Johnson Elementary (LBJ) in Edgewood Independent School District (EISD), was a one-year demonstration project, replicating a similar project at Neighborhood Place-Edgewood. The unique component of the LBJ initiative was its focus on both the grandparent and their grandchildren. It was offered only for LBJ grandparents. It was anticipated that co-locating within the school to offer support group services would increase participation and provide access to the grandchildren.

The project's goal was to improve the "Bienestar" (well-being) of Mexican American grandparents and the grandchildren they are raising. "Bienestar" refers to a holistic view of health that includes the family's physical, mental and emotional well-being. It also includes a living environment that is nurturing and safe. The project's assumption was that offering social support group services for grandparents would strengthen their resilience and family "Bienestar".

The project objectives were:

- 1) To identify unmet child development and general "Bienestar" needs among the targeted group of grandchildren
- 2) To ensure that children with unmet needs impacting their health and well being receive effective referrals and follow up
- 3) To seek out academic mentoring support services for grandchildren who are exhibiting behavioral problems in school that affects their academic achievement,
- 4) To provide social support services for grandparents raising grandchildren that strengthen their capacity to access resources that benefits their grandchildren and enhance their resilience and coping skills to face challenges and manage stress.

Because funding was not secured for the project, activities were downsized to: (1) initiating social support group "platica" services for grandparents raising grandchildren; (2) developing a baseline profile of the children at LBJ in kinder to 5th grade who are being raised by grandparents by socio-demographic, academic performance and utilization of community resources; and (3) linking grandparents with community resources to enhance the "Bienestar" of their family. A "platica" is defined as an intimate, friendly and mutually beneficial conversation. It addressed critical social, emotional, health, financial and educational issues and concerns affecting their family's "Bienestar" in a non-threatening, supportive milieu.

Prior to start up, La Fe PREC staff met with EISD administrators to discuss the project and select the target school. In summer 2008, LBJ was designated as the project site. On September 23, 2008, La Fe PREC and EISD signed a Memorandum of Agreement approving the

implementation of the Abuelos y Nietos Juntos Project at LBJ (on file at La Fe PREC). A new principal, Ms. Maria Inco, was assigned to LBJ at the start of the 2008-09 academic year.

DESCRIPTION OF LBJ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

L.B. Johnson Elementary School is one of eight EISD elementary schools in one of the most economically disadvantaged sectors of San Antonio, Texas. It is located at 6515 W. Commerce Street and offers Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5 classes. The facility was dedicated in the late 1960s. According to data provided in March 2009 by school staff, LBJ had a student enrollment of 559 during the 2008-09 academic year.

L.B. Johnson Elementary School Enrollment 2008-09			
Grade Level	# Of Classrooms Per Grade Level	# Of Students Per Grade Level	Average Size of Classroom
Pre-Kinder	2	44	22
Kinder	4	83	20.8
1 st *	5	108	21.6
2 nd	4	84	21.0
3 rd	5	103	20.6
4 th	4	69	17.3
5 th	3	69	23.0
TOTAL	28	559	20.0
* Includes 1-Kinder/1 st and 1 st /2 nd combined classes where the majority of students were 1 st graders			

According to the 2007-08 K-12 Guides, 99% of the students attending LBJ were economically disadvantaged, compared with 55% statewide. LBJ had 30% limited English proficient students and 4% gifted/talented students compared with 17% and 8% respectively statewide. The student body was 96% Hispanic, compared with 47% statewide.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS (CIS)

During the initial start-up phase of this project, La Fe staff met with Ms. Bonnie Ortegon, Community in Schools (CIS) Case Manager. At LBJ, CIS is housed in an adjacent portable building, behind the school. Ms. Ortegon provided meeting space, at no cost, for La Fe to host its monthly social support group. Space was very limited at LBJ. Without the CIS partnership, it would have been challenging for La Fe to find a consistent and private space to conduct its social support group “platicas”. In addition to providing the meeting space, Ms. Ortegon also provided supplies and equipment needed to host the social support group meetings. La Fe staff shared community resource information packets with Ms. Ortegon after each meeting. The partnership with CIS was invaluable in the successful implementation of La Fe’s project.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

The recruitment/outreach phase of the Abuelos y Nietos Project started with meetings in August 2008, with Ms. Maria Inco and her administrative staff. Based on their recommendations, La Fe staff presented information to all the teachers, providing them an overview and printed materials about the project. A follow-up meeting was scheduled with Ms. Maria Hernandez, Parent Educator, who also served as La Fe’s School Liaison. She recommended that La Fe staff participate in four school-sponsored family events (PTO meeting/Fall Fair/Community Health Advisory meeting/Christmas Party) to meet GRG and promote the project. The names of 15

GRG were collected during these events. Monthly invitations to the social support group “platicas” were mailed to these GRG.

It was not possible to do a direct mail recruitment of GRG because the school did not maintain a specific list that identified students being raised by grandparents. There is no State mandate to track which students are being raised by their grandparents from either the Texas Educational Agency or the Texas Legislature. A possible GRG proxy indicator could be the person listed as the emergency contact person on the registration card. However if a grandparent is listed, there is no way to differentiate if the grandparent is a formal/informal caregiver or a family support person for the parents who are raising their children.

To expedite the identification of students at LBJ being raised by their grandparents, Ms. Inco requested each teacher submit a list of students in their classrooms whom they knew were being raised by grandparents. The final list included 20 students. Outreach letters were sent to these 20 grandparents via the teacher and students. The letters were addressed “*To the grandparents of*” each of the 20 students. Teachers distributed the letters to these 20 students, asking them to take the letter home to their grandparents. Throughout the year, flyers publicizing the Abuelos y Nietos Support Group were also posted around the school and were sent to any GRG where a mailing address was identified.

GRADE LEVEL	# OF CHILDREN RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS PER GRADE LEVEL (Identified by their teachers)
Pre-Kinder (included 2 classrooms)	0
Kinder (included 4 classrooms)	2
1 st (includes 5 classrooms)	7
2 nd (included 4 classrooms)	0
3 rd (includes 5 classrooms)	6
4 th (includes 4 classrooms)	3
5 th (includes 3 classrooms)	2
TOTAL	20

By year’s end, although the outreach effort was extensive, only 5 GRG registered for support group services. Only one grandmother was recruited into the project as a result of the invitational letter sent home with students. The others were individually recruited. The most effective outreach strategy was direct 1-1 recruitment.

SOCIAL SUPPORT “PLATICA” GROUP SERVICES

Eight (8) Social Support “platica” group sessions were offered. Attendance by GRG fluctuated: one GRG attended one session, two GRG attended two sessions, one GRG attended three sessions and one GRG attended four sessions. Two sessions, the first and last, were cancelled because no one attended.

Month	# of GRG in attendance	Month	# of GRG in attendance
October	0	February	2

November	2	March	2
December	3	April	1
January	2	May	0

The social support “platica” group was structured as a therapeutic social support group, led by a licensed, bilingual Jungian therapist/social worker. Each two-hour session consisted of a “platica” focused on topics of interest identified by the grandmothers. At each session, the Project Coordinator distributed a packet of community resource information. Unmet needs identified by the grandparents were noted so that community resource information could be gathered and distributed at a subsequent session. Major issues discussed related to learning disabilities, behavioral problems, dealing with anger rooted in abandonment, physical and sexual abuse, advocacy within the school setting for their grandchildren and caregiver stress and burnout. Throughout the project, the grandmothers were informed that there was an on-going La Fe-sponsored social support group for GRG at Neighborhood Place-Edgewood. They were encouraged to join that support group starting in September 2009.

Feedback from the GRG who participated in the support group was very positive. The GRG shared with the therapist very confidential information regarding issues affecting their grandchildren. These issues were discussed in depth and appropriate referrals were made. There were “platicas” focused on how GRG could become stronger advocates for their grandchildren within the school system, especially if their grandchildren demonstrated behavioral problems or faced academic challenges.

PROFILE OF LBJ GRANDPARENTS ENROLLED IN PROJECT

During the 2008-09 academic year, a total of five LBJ grandmothers were recruited into the Abuelos y Nietos Project. No grandfathers enrolled. The GRG were all Mexican American. They were bilingual but preferred Spanish for their social support “platicas”. Three GRG were the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. One lived with her daughter, providing childcare for her grandchildren while the mother worked. One lived in a multi-generational family that included the single father of the grandchildren.

The GRG ranged in age from 41-65. Four reported income of under \$25,000. Only one GRG reported an income of under \$35,000. All were raising their grandchildren on a voluntary basis. Only one GRG reported CPS involvement with her grandchildren. Only one GRG was raising a special needs grandchild. She is the only GRG who indicated an interest in adopting her grandchild. In two of the households there was a grandfather present. The five GRG households included a total of 10 grandchildren. One GRG was raising 4 grandchildren; two GRG had 2 grandchildren and two GRG each had only 1 grandchild. The grandchildren ranged in age from 3 to 9 years old. Most were males (80%).

One GRG assumed a strong advocacy role when LBJ staff recommended that her grandson transfer to an EISD special needs elementary school. She discussed her concerns during the social support group, receiving guidance/encouragement from the therapist about assuming a more proactive role in the decision-making process related to her grandson. She visited the alternative school and met with the principal and teachers. After discussing her situation during a subsequent support group, she accepted the LBJ staff’s recommendation, understanding the benefits her grandson would gain from transferring to the alternative elementary school.

DESCRIPTION GRANDCHILDREN BEING RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS

La Fe staff was unable to work directly with students at LBJ who were being raised by their grandparents. Because of confidentiality rules, direct access to the grandchildren required written consent from the grandparents. La Fe's contact with students was limited to those of the GRG enrolled in the project. Additionally, ascertaining the actual number of students who were being raised by their grandparents was difficult.

The living arrangement of many of the students at LBJ changes throughout the school year. Sometimes they live with their parents; other times with their grandparents. The changes in student's living arrangement often were associated with the disintegration of their primary family unit. The contributing factors to this disintegration were CPS involvement, drug use, and unemployment and immigration status.

La Fe used the list of 20 students being raised by their grandparents, provided by LBJ, to create an educational status profile of students grades Pre-Kinder through 5th grade. Throughout the school year, LBJ teachers and staff were supportive of this project and open to sharing whatever data they had. The information on students raised by grandparents was gathered from both LBJ staff and CIS staff. To ensure confidentiality, student names were not listed. Instead each was assigned a student identification code number, according to grade level (See Attachment 1).

Of the 20 students identified by teachers as being raised by their grandparents 45% received in-school mental health counseling, as per data provided by LBJ staff. Among these students, 10% were enrolled in the Community in Schools Program that offers tutoring and other support services. The majority (75%) of these students was promoted or placed in the next grade. Only 25% (all first graders) were retained. As per data provided by LBJ staff, 15 students were retained in the first grade in the 2008-09 academic year. Among the retained first graders, 33% were raised by their grandparents.

CHALLENGES

When the anticipated funding did not materialize, La Fe drastically downsized the scope of project activities. This resulted in a reduced presence of La Fe staff on campus to interact and build rapport with GRG as well as with LBJ staff and teachers. This made it more challenging to recruit GRG for social support group services. Although there was interest among GRG at other EISD elementary schools to join the social support group, the project was specifically designed to target LBJ. So recruitment and enrollment were limited to GRG at LBJ.

Not having a centralized tracking system to document which students are being raised by their grandparents made it difficult to identify the target group for this project. Self-reporting by teachers was the method used to identify these students. Because of confidentiality regulations, the names and addresses of the grandparents of these students could not be released to La Fe staff. So letters inviting grandparents to join the social support group had to be delivered via the teacher and student to the GRG. This made recruitment efforts a challenge since there could be no verification that these letters actually reached the grandparents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To more effectively implement the Abuelos y Nietos Juntos Project in EISD would require full funding of the project. This would allow for the establishment of a strong, more consistent presence on the school campus to promote development of trust-based relationships with the grandparents, their grandchildren and teachers. If replicated, the project should target all EISD elementary schools and be housed in the school that can commit space for the social support group “platicas” that is consistently available and can protect confidentiality.

Although EISD has a Homeless Program that tracks homeless students, which includes students who are voluntarily residing with their grandparents, a broader tracking system is needed. The Homeless Program tracks various types of homeless students but students who are in CPS custody and placed with grandparents do not meet the criteria of homeless, as per the federal McKinney-Vento Act. Research shows that grandchildren being raised by grandparents deal with issues and concerns that can affect their academic success (e.g. 33% of LBJ students who were retained in the 1st grade were being raised by their grandparents). Since EISD is concerned about children raised by grandparents being at risk of not reaching their full potential, it is recommended that a more comprehensive tracking system be developed to identify students being raised by grandparents or other kinship providers either informally (voluntarily) or formally (involuntarily-involving CPS).

Once EISD can track which of its students are being raised by grandparents, it is recommended that a concerted effort be made to ensure that GRG enroll in all available services that can benefit their grandchildren. This would include EISD-sponsored services like mental health, health and social work services and services provided by community partners like Communities in Schools, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Boy/Girl Scouts and the San Antonio Food Bank. Research shows GRG have a difficult time navigating institutional systems to gain access to services that will help their grandchildren. The community needs to rally around these grandparents so their grandchildren can have the opportunity be healthy and prepared to succeed in school.

ATTACHMENT 1 SCHOOL DATA				
PROFILE OF GRANDCHILDREN RAISED BY GRANDPARENTS				
@ LBJ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DATA COLLECTION - MAY 2009				
Student Code # & Grade Level	Received Mental Health Counseling	Promoted/ Retained/ Summer School	Enrolled in CIS	Academic Information <i>TEJAS-LEE/Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) K – 2nd grade</i> <i>Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) 3rd – 5th grade</i>
K-1 Kinder	NO	Promoted	NO	N/A
K-2 Kinder	NO	Promoted	NO	N/A
1-01 1 st	NO	Promoted	NO	N/A
1-02 1 st	YES	Retained	NO	N/A
1-03 1 st	YES	Places in next grade	NO	N/A
1-04 1 st	NO	Retained	NO	N/A
1-05 1 st	YES	Retained	NO	N/A
1-06 1 st	YES	Retained	NO	N/A
1-07 1 st	NO	Retained	NO	N/A
3-01 3 rd	NO	Promoted	NO	Reading – PASS Math PASS
3-02 3 rd	NO	Promotion, pending Summer School	YES	Taken in Spanish Did not PASS Reading or Math Retaking reading for 3 rd time
3-03 3 rd	YES	Promoted	YES	Taken in Spanish Reading – PASS Math – High PASS/commended
3-04 3 rd	YES	Promoted	NO	Reading – PASS Math – High PASS/commended
3-05 3 rd	YES	Promoted	NO	Did not PASS modified reading (for special education students). Now has transferred to Roosevelt.
3-06 3 rd	NO	Promotion, pending Summer School	NO	Reading – NO PASS/ Math – PASS Third attempt on Reading Test – will be going to summer school.
4-01 4 th	NO	Placed in next grade	NO	Reading/Writing – NO PASS Math – Pass Accommodated for special ed.
4-02 4 th	NO	Promoted	NO	Reading – PASS/Math - Pass Writing – PASS
4-03 4 th	YES	Promoted	NO	Reading – PASS/Math – Pass Writing (accommodated –special ed.) did not PASS
5-01 5 th	YES	Promotion, pending Summer School	NO	NO PASS: Reading/Math/Science Took test in English. Will go to summer school
5-02 5 th	NO	Promoted	NO	Reading – PASS, Math – PASS Science – High PASS/Commended