

# CYFAR Partnering for School Success (PSS) Year 4 Evaluation May 2016

## BACKGROUND

CYFAR (Children, Youth and Families at Risk) PSS (Partnering for School Success) is a partnership of University of Minnesota Extension, Triton School (Dodge Center), and Faribault Middle Schools focusing on two of the major factors related to academic achievement for Latino families - family and school environments. CYFAR PSS includes three integrated components including: 1) Family Strengthening Education, 2) Family-School Partnerships (FSP) and 3) the use of Latino School Navigators who act as a liaison between parents, school and resources in the community.

The multi-faceted project design and a strong community engagement model calls for a community-based participatory evaluation that is fluid, timely and informs project improvements along the way. The CYFAR PSS evaluation team works closely with the project management team and core partners to implement the planned evaluations as well as support the design of “just in time” evaluation assessments- providing results back to the program staff to inform programmatic decision making. The following highlights evaluation processes and results for the three integrated components of CYFAR PSS during year 4.

## FAMILY STRENGTHENING EDUCATION

Education: Our Best Legacy - The school navigators co-facilitated the parent education, "Education, our Best Legacy," along with Extension Educator Silvia Alvarez to gain confidence in teaching and for project sustainability. Classes included 28 participants, (Faribault=16, Triton=12). This 2 hour session for 7 weeks included how to navigate the school system, self-efficacy for parents, 6 factors needed to support children in school to graduate from high school and seek higher education.



Parent booster sessions - “Choices, Chances & Challenges - Learning How to Make Decisions” was held at both sites. This session shared a four-step process for how to make decisions. There were case scenarios discussed while using the four step model to make a "life decision". Parents and youth attended together. Presenter was William (Tex) Ostvig, University of Minnesota Multi-cultural Center.

Social Emotional Learning, presented by Silvia Alvarez, provided information on how to use social skills to address behavior, discipline, safety, and academics to help kids become self-aware, manage their emotions, build social skills (empathy, perspective-taking, appreciating differences).

Open Doors with Higher Education, a two-hour, seven week session was conducted in Spanish by Silvia Alvarez and Antonio Alba. A total of 34 participants registered in the program; 25 in Faribault and 9 in Triton. After taking the class, parents are more knowledgeable about: financial aid, college entrance exams, college application, ways to finance college, state and federal financial aid qualification, investments that finance college, differences in length of programs and majors, and loans including interest. Parents feel they are more effective in finding college prep resources, volunteer/internship opportunities, and more conversations with children on money management and financing college. More participants responded that they looked for information on financing college at post-test than pre-test.

Responses to open ended questions suggest that parents are utilizing the strategies learned during the sessions at home with their children. These strategies include: financial management, school and community resources, established goals and developing a plan for higher education. More specifically, parents talked about the way to support their children's educational interests. For example, one parent described: "I learned that it is important to know how the school system works to help my children better."

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Latino families toured the Riverland Community College Austin and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities campus. The field trip helped families learn about what the University has to offer Latino students, namely, support, scholarships, and career opportunities that they were not aware of before. This experience allowed students and their parents to learn about planning for college and to hear stories of encouragement and motivation for Latino families who are seeking higher education. Presentations and tours were held both in Spanish and English.

The Field trip to Riverland Community College - Austin included 25 parents and 27 youth (52 total); (Faribault, 13 parents, 13 youth), (Triton, 12 parents, 14 youth). Participants were able to view classes in progress during the weekday tour and heard about careers that are in need of trained workers, such as carpentry and auto repair.

In Year 4, the field trip to the U of M was held earlier and both Twin cities campuses were visited, with the addition of a hands on breakout session in laboratories. In Year 3, (May, 2015) 33 parents and 22 youth participated with 55 total. In April 2016, 32 parents and 31 youth (63 total) visited the University of Minnesota (Faribault, 16 parents, 13



youth), (Triton, 14 parents, 18 youth). The campus visit included a motivational program in Spanish, the importance of higher education, and a tour of the Twin Cities campus. The Coordinator for Pre-Collegiate Outreach with the Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence at the University of Minnesota worked with the families to inform them how to achieve their goal of higher education. A Latino college student spoke to the families on her experience on campus and shared the support provided to Latino students on campus. 100% of participants said the visit helped them imagine their child as a college student and helped them understand the importance of their child doing well in school now.

Over a 60% of the students who joined the field trip reported that it was the first time they visited the University of Minnesota. The students rated the field trip experience an average of 4.2/5, meaning that the visit was very well accepted among the youth. We asked to the students if they would recommend this experience to a friend or family member, and over 95.7% (n=22) of students said yes. The most important take-away of the field trip was how the presentation helped a significant number of students (95.75%) understand the value of a college education. Youth had the opportunity to participate in two learning activities: “DNA in plants and DNA in you” and “Bugs, Beetles, and Bees”. These learning activities had great acceptance as well (4.1/5). Parents rated the experience 3.7/5, meaning that they had a good experience but there is opportunity to improve. For the majority of them (67.7%, n=21) it was their first time at the University of Minnesota. About 93% (n=29) of the parents would recommend this experience. For the parents this field trip was an opportunity to understand further the value of a college education.

### **YOUTH AFTER SCHOOL SESSIONS FOCUSED ON STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS)**

Youth after school sessions included Clay Boats and Junk Drawer Robotics, presented by Patrick Jirik, Extension Youth Educator and local 4-H Coordinators. A session on “Mixing Oil and Water: The Science behind Salad Dressings and Oil Spills” was held in Faribault, presented by Carleton College students. Participation in each class (n=63 not unique youth) increased 8.6% from year 3 (n=58).

“Save Native Pollinators”, a 4-H youth program was made available for Faribault youth. This opportunity was an excellent way to partner with the 4-H program, combining resources to meet joint project objectives. A Latina college student who was a program participant family member, was hired to work with and mentor the Latino youth in this summer program, 9 youth participated in this program with a STEM focus that supports the creation of pollinator friendly habitat to enhance and regenerate the ecological, agricultural, economic and cultural health, vitality and well-being of people, pollinators, and places. This type of program has the potential of to increase youth engagement in STEM learning. This program was a partnership with the University of Minnesota, Department of Entomology and the Horticulture department, with Patrick

Jirik, Extension Educator, and Youth Development working with the program director to bring it to the CYFAR site. In Faribault, funds were available for STEM related sessions partnering with the summer school program, using the Project WILD curriculum.

### **FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS (FSP)**

Leadership Workshops were held for teachers, administrators and Latino parents at the end of program Year 3, therefore not included in that year's report. The goal of this component of the project was to positively influence the school environment, build capacity for Latino parents to advocate for their children and for school staff to better understand Latino families. A total of 40 parents and staff participated (60% parents) at both sites. Those who attended learned how to set agendas for meetings, lead meetings, cultural assumptions of both parents and schools, how to develop an action plan and then how to work together to advocate for changes in the school. One outcome, as part of year 4 in Faribault, was the initiation of an Open House and orientation held in Spanish at the beginning of the school year - planned with involvement of both parents and school staff. In Triton, more Latino parents are now involved in bringing school-related issues and opportunities to school staff.

In mid-May of Year 4, a session was held in Triton with 8 parents and 3 staff members. University staff facilitated the conversation between parents and staff to discuss the progress of the agreements and actions discussed in previous years to enhance the Family School Partnership.

- **Communication:** The school hired a part time secretary to help with Spanish interpretation. However, the parents showed great interest in a full time interpreter. Parents wanted to be able to have communication about their children's school on a full-time basis. School staff highlighted some initiatives that have been implemented for building a more welcoming environment such as: Spanish announcements, identification signs and bulletin board.
- **Communication between parents and teachers** - Parents' main concerns were related to communication channels, such as: Facebook group, SMS communication, alerts in bilingual written communications. The school principal highlighted the importance of having more parents involved in the monthly meetings. However, the parents are having time conflicts with the time that meetings are scheduled.
- **Homework Support** - Homework support has been provided to children in the morning before school starts. Even though parents suggested starting homework support in the afternoons, there is a challenge to fit it into the schedule with after school activities.
- **Parent Education:** It is ongoing. Parents did not make any suggestion for this part of the program.



Overall, the Family School Partnership is ongoing but it has some challenges to overcome. Language is an important barrier in terms of enhancing

communication between parents and the staff. School meetings could have greater participation of parents, but if the staff and the parents cannot communicate effectively, the initiative will not accomplish its goal. Also, it is important to work with the school staff in order to make them aware of the importance of nonverbal communication. Non-verbal communication is part of any culture, and it can contribute to building the relationship between parents and staff or make it more distant. Finally, during the conversation it seemed that there was a disparity in terms of the importance of which initiatives should be undertaken and prioritized; more work needs to be done in order to align the interests of parents and staff.

Recommendations that came out of the meeting included greater cultural sensitivity and diversity training for school staff and adding a Spanish speaker to the staff committee.

At both sites, there is discussion to partner with Fernando Burga, Assistant Professor, Urban and Regional Planning Program with the U of M Humphrey School of Public Affairs to work with the families. He has observed some of the programming and discussion with parents in the program to move forward the action plans in the final year of the project.

### **LATINO SCHOOL NAVIGATORS**

A school cultural specialist was used to assess our work with the cultural navigators and provide training to both the navigators and grant project staff. Training focused on cross cultural discussions and the development of case studies to recognize and discuss positive and negative cultural stereotypes. As a result, the team gained confidence and ability to improve cross cultural communication within our team and the schools /communities implementing the program. Another outcome of the training resulted in the navigators teaching the parent education, "Education, our Best Legacy," to gain confidence in teaching and for project sustainability. The cultural navigators will remain in the communities that have hosted the CYFAR project sites and this training will help provide the capacity to continue the work when the CYFAR funding ends.

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