

Programs to Engage Parents and Other Family Members

SNAPSHOT

Program:

Hispanic Parents Council

School:

Capt. James E. Daly Jr. Elementary School

District:

Montgomery County Public Schools

Location: Germantown, Md.

Grades: PreK-5

Enrollment: 580 (2011-2012)

Free/reduced-price lunch: 62%

ELL: 30%

Creating a community of trust and cultivating parent leadership

Hispanic Parents Council

Capt. James E. Daly Jr. Elementary School

Germantown, Maryland

When Nora Dietz became the principal of Daly Elementary in 2007, she found a growing number of English Language Learners from low-income families. Many of these students were at high risk for school failure, so she was determined to connect with their families. Together with faculty, staff, and Assistant Principal Susan Zimmerman-Orozco, Dietz began several initiatives that led to the creation of the Hispanic Parents Council: a summer program that encourages rapport with parents, afterschool programs that involve community partnerships, and monthly workshops for parents, conducted in Spanish. Dietz's next goal is to create an African American Parents Council.

In a county known for its affluence, 62 percent of Daly Elementary School's student body is eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and 30 percent are English Language Learners. Nearly 40 percent of students are Hispanic, 35 percent are African American, 12.5 percent are white, and 8 percent are Asian.

"Parent outreach is...much more than ticking off a checklist of prescribed action steps for building home-school connections," wrote Zimmerman-Orozco in a recent *Education Leadership* article about the school. "At its most meaningful, parent involvement is about creating a community of trust, a school culture in which families want to give back to the school as much as they may need to take from it."



How the program works

The Hispanic Parents Council evolved from grassroots efforts run by the school. Teachers, school staff, administrators, and others volunteer their time in a variety of ways. For several summers, the school offered a weekly evening of literacy activities, arts and crafts, computer activities, and sports at a county recreation center near the trailer park where many Hispanic students live. Many parents attended along with their children, which helped establish strong rapport and trust between home and school.

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The current closing of the recreation center for a two-year renovation presented a challenge. The school responded by arranging scholarships or tuition waivers for the neediest students to attend a regional summer school program hosted by the school for students from Daly and other schools in the county. To maintain contact with the Hispanic families, school administrators and teachers hosted a meet-and-greet event in the parking lot of the trailer park in May and again shortly before the start of the 2010-2011 school year. Several bilingual parents volunteered as interpreters.

During the school year, Daly Elementary offers monthly workshops, in Spanish, which address topics suggested by the parents, such as reading and math instruction, state assessments, bullying, gang prevention, and Internet safety. The school offers free pizza and child care to families that attend.

These workshops have evolved into the Hispanic Parents Council, organized by Hispanic parent leaders. The council is now becoming a full partner in school improvement efforts. For example, when parents expressed an interest in computer literacy, one of the Hispanic parents volunteered to teach a computer class in Spanish. Parents also identified a need for afterschool programs during the winter months. The school arranged for afterschool karate and Latin dance fitness instruction on campus, with scholarships arranged through partnerships with instructors in the community. In addition, afterschool instructional programs run by teachers include extended study twice a week, January through March, to help students prepare for state testing

Evidence of effectiveness

- ▶ Although Daly Elementary did not fully achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2010, the school did reach its targets for Hispanic students and all

other subgroups except special education and Free And Reduced Meal Service (FARMS) students.

- ▶ More than 90 percent of parents responding to a survey indicated that the school does a good job of welcoming and respecting diverse families. <http://bit.ly/nXJU9U>
- ▶ The administration reports significant behavior improvement—the number of referrals dropped from more than 300 in 2009-2010 to only 98 in 2010-2011.
- ▶ Administrators report significant growth in the participation of Hispanic parents in all facets of school life, from volunteering in the classroom to accompanying their child's class on field trips and attending parent-teacher conferences.

Exemplary practices

Adopting a culturally sensitive approach

- ▶ School leaders recognize that Hispanic culture and values emphasize personal interaction, a relaxed sense of time, and an informal atmosphere for communication. At meetings with Hispanic families, parents and staff share their hopes and dreams for the children and discuss how to make them a reality.
- ▶ The leadership team at Daly has been proactive in making home visits to greet parents and listen to their concerns. Teachers sometimes intervene in situations that put a child's health or safety at risk.
- ▶ Hispanic Parents Council meetings are conducted in Spanish, and parents set the agenda and topics for discussion.

Creating an inclusive climate

- ▶ The school believes and acts upon its core commitment to "creating a welcoming school climate and nurturing personal relationships." Sharing this commitment is a condition for being a teacher there.

Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0

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- ▶ Adults at the school get to know the children and their families on a personal level. If a child has missed several days of school, they check in with the family.

Drawing on community support

- ▶ The afterschool karate and dance-fitness classes were arranged with community partners in response to a concern expressed by Hispanic parents about the need for more activities after school in the winter.

Outlook

Daly Elementary School's success at cultivating parent leaders to engage fellow parents sets an inspiring example for other schools. In July 2011, Dietz and two parents of Hispanic students at Daly were invited to a Community Leaders Forum at the White House.

Association perspective

Montgomery County Education Association President Doug Prouty sums up the success of this program: "What makes this program work is the incredible trust it generates between families, educators, and administrators. MCEA is proud of the level of engagement by our members at Daly Elementary School and their contributions and commitment to improving student outcomes."

Local contacts

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Related information

Report card: <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/about/MCPSResultsBook.pdf>

"A Circle of Caring: Success in engaging Hispanic parents depends on creating a school culture that welcomes all," article by Susan Zimmerman-Orozco, assistant principal at Daly, accessible to ASCD members at www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may11/vol68/num08/A-Circle-of-Caring.aspx



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