



# Engaging Families in SSHS

Project Director's Consortia Meeting  
TASs Mary Thorngren and Gwen Willis-Darpoh  
PDs Marina Bernheimer and Ben Franco

March 18, 2011  
Baltimore, MD

# Introductions

- **What is one thing that you would like us to know about your family?**

# We will discuss

- The importance of engaging families
- SSHS new family engagement guide
- How two sites engaged families
  - Donna, Texas
  - Nevada City, CA

# The case for engaging families...

- Creates a sense of community among the families and SS/HS
- Ensures clear communication between SS/HS and families, which fosters a shared understanding of SS/HS's purpose and goals
- Supports students and prepares them to succeed
- Ensures that families will participate in—and are therefore more likely to benefit from—SS/HS programs and activities

# Research shows parental involvement...

- is a major component of student success.
- helps to build healthier and stronger families.
- engenders greater connections between schools and communities, safer neighborhoods, and greater community pride (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2004).
- may be a key component in closing the achievement gap.

# Defining family involvement

Family Involvement	Family Engagement
“enfold or envelop”	“to interlock with or to mesh”
Leading with institutional self interests or wants	Leading with parents’ self interests (wants and dreams)

# Understanding families in the community

- Understand the diversity of families in your communities
  - Racial
  - Ethnic
  - Cultural
  - Linguistic
  - Religious
  - Other types of diversity

# Understanding families in the community

- Epstein's model has defined six types of family engagement:

## 1. Parenting:

- a) assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills,
- b) understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level.
- c) assisting schools in understanding families.



# Understanding families in the community

2. **Communicating**: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
3. **Volunteering**: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

# Understanding families in the community

4. **Learning at Home**: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.
5. **Decision Making**: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

# Understanding families in the community

## 6. Collaborating with the Community:

Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community

(p. 47).

# Understanding families in the community

Traditional	Non-Traditional
Assists families with parenting and childrearing skills and with creating home conditions to support learning	Develops reciprocal understanding between schools and families
Communicates with families about school programs with two-way communications	Places cultural strengths of family and community within the school curriculum
Includes recruiting efforts to involve families as volunteers and audiences	Provides parental education that includes improving family literacy and understanding the school community
Involves families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities	Promotes parental advocacy that informs and teaches parents how to advocate for their children
Includes families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through councils and organizations	Instills parental empowerment through parent-initiated efforts at the school and community level
Collaborates and coordinates with the work of community-based agencies, colleges, and other groups to strengthen school programs	Implements culturally and linguistically appropriate practices in all aspects of communication

Source: "Promoting ELL Parental Involvement: Challenges in Contested Times" by Arias & Morillo-Campbell (p. 14).

# **Nevada County Family Resource Centers (FRCs)**

Marina Bernheimer

# Nevada County, CA

- Rural community in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in Northern California
- Population 90,000 countywide
- Minimal ethnic diversity, small but growing Spanish-speaking community
- Hosts four FRC's countywide
- Strong mistrust of government

# SSHS Family Resource Centers

- Located on three elementary school campuses.
- Comfortable, supportive gathering space for parents
- Staffed by Community School Liaisons
- Reflect the culture of the local community
- Create linkage between 0-5 year olds and local elementary school
- SS/HS Element Five

# What does an FRC look like?

- Welcoming space
- Play space
- Informal gathering place
- Meeting space
- Computer Lab
- Lending Library
- Confidential meeting space
- Reflects community/neighborhood
- Co-located services



# Core Services

- Parenting Classes and Workshops
- Community Referrals
- Lending Library
- GED/Resume Assistance
- Behavioral Health Therapists on-site
- Computer Lab
- Drop-In Play Space
- Clothes Closet
- Food Pantry

# FRCs Reflect Principles of Family Support Practice

- Enhancing families' capacity to support their own growth and development
- Affirm families' cultural/racial/linguistic identities
- Ensure programs are responsive to emerging family and community issues
- Strength-based

# FRC Benefits

- Reduce Social Isolation
- Co-location of services de-stigmatizes service delivery
- A “first stop” for families
- Provide volunteer opportunities
- Create a physical space for coordinated service delivery
- Mitigate barriers to services

# FRCs Benefit Schools

- Strengthen home-to-school connection
- Address barriers to learning
- Connect families to needed resources
- Provide crisis prevention for families and students (vs intervention)
- Support teachers by addressing family needs
- Reduce problem behavior

# Challenges

- Staffing
  - Roles/Training
  - Boundaries
  - Sufficient staff to meet many needs
- Stretching LEA out of expertise
- Trying to do “too much”

# Success Stories

- Phone call from local jail
- Family in need of insurance accesses multiple services
- Supervised visitation



**Program Director: Ben Franco Jr.**  
**Donna, Texas**

# Demographics: Donna, Texas

- Donna, Texas, is located 7 miles north of the Mexican Border
- Over 16,000 residents of which 98% are Hispanic
- Only 46.4% of population has a high school diploma or equivalent
- US Census Bureau estimated in 2006 the total population of Hidalgo County was 700,634 of which 90% are Hispanics and 69% live in poverty and nearly 75% do not speak English at home.
- Poverty and rapid growth along the border has led to easy availability of drugs and the creation of gangs among our youth.
- High prevalence of gang activity, drug and alcohol abuse, high teen pregnancy rates, high dropout rates and violence are common in this area.



# Donna Schools Community Alliance

- Ben Franco Program Director, DISD
- Ram De Leon Police Chief, City of Donna
- Officer J. Soto Juvenile Court Truancy
- Don Crist Police Chief, Donna ISD
- Eddie Trevino EGT Institute
- Trooper Johnny Hernandez Texas Highway Patrol
- Deputy Sheriff J. Del Angel Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office
- Sylvia Abrego SCAN (recognized nationally)
- Mary Leal Texas A & M CHUD Colonias Program
- SFC Rodriguez National Guard Anti-Drug Task Force
- Pattye Navarro Consultant/Therapist
- Terry Crocker CEO-Tropical Texas Behavioral Health
- Rick Gonzalez Tropical Texas Behavioral Health
- SFC Gonzalez Community in Schools
- Antolin Garza AAIM Consultant
- David Rodriguez RGV Council
- Sylvia Tovar ARISE- South
- Eva Carranza ARISE- South
- Lucerdas Sierra ARISE- Muniz
- Carmen Garza ARISE- Muniz
- Richard Guerrero Probation Office
- Agent Stephens Border Patrol
- Lupita Cano SEE
- David Simmons Mayor (City of Donna)
- Fidencio Mercado Palmer Drug Abuse
- Sylvia Mercado Mujeres Unidas



# Services Provided

- Donna Coalition Committee
- Annual District Parent Conferences (35-40 community agencies)
- Parental Sessions/Trainings
  - Elementaries, Middle Schools, High School
  - In the Community (ARISE North, ARISE South)
  - District Boardroom (ie, US Assistant Attorneys & Internet Safety)

# Services Provided (cont'd)

- 4-hr Mini Parent Conference (providing parents information about the critical time period between birth to 5 yrs. of age & how parents can set a strong foundation for their children)
- “Train the Trainers” (training parents who in turn will train other parents with the Second-Step curriculum to supplement the curriculum being taught to their children in school & to reinforce at home what is being taught in school)
- Parental Support (i.e., referrals to community agencies such as Mujeres Unidas for domestic violence, UTPA for free counseling, Shrine to assist with utility bills)

# Challenges



- Many parents never went to school (cannot read or write)
- Lack of transportation
- Parental fear of police, border patrol (being deported), school administration
- Because of fears, trust is an on-going obstacle
- Services that take place in the community are a danger for presenters/school staff due to gang activity/shootings
- Large number of parents are undocumented





# Success Stories

- Parental sessions have helped some women identify/understand anger triggers as a result of abuse. They are learning to take better care of themselves which in turn allows them to respond to their children in healthier ways.
- Parents are reporting less fighting in homes and more cooperation/support.
- Parents are learning to take responsibility for their children instead of blaming school personnel.



# Success Stories (cont'd)

- They are learning that practicing communication skills leads to positive results with their children/ spouse/ schools.
- Increased self-esteem/self-confidence is reflected in higher levels of parental participation at the trainings.
- Parents are acquiring skills they can (ie, communication, anger management, problem-solving, how to work with school personnel).



# Lessons Learned



- Parents are willing participants if services are rendered in their neighborhoods
- Meeting parents on their home grounds reduces fears and apprehensions
- Need to build positive rapport between educators and families
- Due to parents illiteracy, visual aids must be comprised of more pictures than words; surveys must be read aloud in a step-by-step fashion.



# Lessons Learned (cont'd)



- As school personnel, our concerns revolve around student success; parental concerns revolve around day-to-day survival (ie, poor living conditions, lack of running water/electricity, lack of clothing/shoes, gang activity).
- Presenters must be sensitive to cultural beliefs (religion, parents from Mexico).
- Parents are predominantly Spanish speaking.



# Living Conditions



Refrigerator located outside of residence; residence is a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel w/ small room built on

3 separate homes; each has wash machines outside;  
homes are slightly bigger than the vehicle





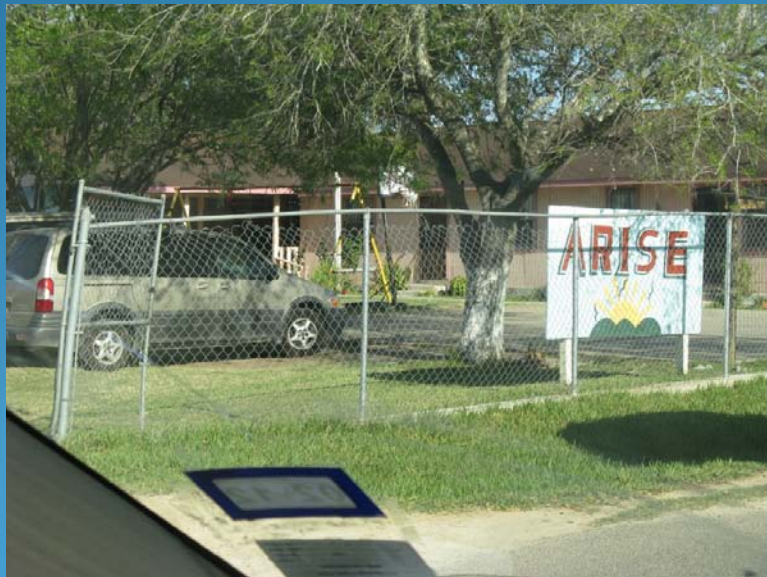
Family sold vehicle to help pay for bills- vehicle shown belongs to neighbor; SS/HS staff was able to have a family member declared disabled so they will receive a check of about \$700 monthly (for a family of 6- only household income)



Family of 4 from Mexico lives in bus.



## Pattye Navarro, Parent Educator/Therapist



Antolin Garza, Parent Educator



**How does your SS/HS initiative currently engage families?**

**What barriers need to be addressed?**

**What opportunities do you see to begin or expand your engagement with families?**



.....Time for your questions, reflections and some discussion about your experiences and what you have heard.....



The NCMHPYVP has released a new brief on this topic that can be found on the center's website:

*Engaging Families in Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiatives, 2011*

[www.promoteprevent.org](http://www.promoteprevent.org)