

MOTHER-DAUGHTER COLLEGE PREPARATION PROGRAM

Families In Schools

Los Angeles, California

Families In Schools developed the Mother-Daughter College Preparation Program, using a model from the University of Texas, El Paso, to build college awareness among mothers and fifth grade and middle school girls. The program seeks to increase student academic achievement by encouraging mothers and daughters to build a partnership that would put the girls on the path to college. The mothers play a key role in the program to ensure that the girls receive family support in their endeavors.

To begin the program, Families In Schools created the Mother-Daughter Implementation Team of district leaders, university personnel, and Families In Schools staff. The Implementation Team designed program goals and activities and defined team members' roles. They designed the Mother-Daughter College Preparation Program to consist of monthly mother-daughter joint activities (university visits, conferences, communication workshops, meetings to develop an action plan for college, and overnight stays at a local university), monthly daughters-only meetings (led by a teacher and focused on college/career awareness and academic/life skills), and bimonthly mothers-only meetings (facilitated by a trained parent educator and centered on college awareness, college preparation, academic support, and the mother-daughter relationship).

Teachers and parent educators attended an orientation to introduce them to program goals, curriculum and activities, recruitment and selection of program participants, and outreach strategies. Following the orientation, each school selected its mother-daughter participants by requesting staff recommendations and inviting recommended students and their mothers to complete an application and participate in an interview. The program targets fifth grade and middle school girls and their mothers, who meet the following criteria: (1) the daughter would be the first in her family to graduate from college; (2) the mother or another adult is willing to participate in the program; (3) the participants would benefit from participating in the program; and (4) participants commit to taking part in all program activities.

Throughout the year, Families In Schools provides overall program coordination, develops program curriculum, plans all mother-daughter joint events, and facilitates monthly teacher and parent educator meetings. District leaders work with the schools to assist program implementation.

The university staff plans and conducts mother-daughter events at the university including a welcome brunch for new participants, a science day, and an overnight stay. Each participating school manages the day-to-day program activities including leading daughter meetings and mother meetings.

Families In Schools faced two major challenges while implementing the Mother-Daughter College Preparation Program. First, although every mother-daughter pair that was invited to apply for the program was enthusiastic about the program, many mothers were concerned that their work and family commitments would prevent them from participating. In response, it was determined that when a mother could not participate in the program, the family could designate another adult relative to participate with the student. Currently, grandmothers, aunts, older sisters and a few fathers are taking part in the program. Also, most of the meetings were held at times that would be convenient for the majority of the mothers including Saturday mornings and weeknights. Second, the program experienced substantial growth in its second year. At present, the program serves 17 schools and over 400 mother-daughter pairs. To accommodate this rapid growth, Families In Schools and the Mother-Daughter Implementation Team established monthly teacher and parent educators meetings to foster effective communication between the schools and Families In Schools.

Key stakeholders share the core expenses for the program. Families In Schools staffs a full-time program coordinator, funded by private foundation grants, to manage all seventeen schools. Teachers and parent educators receive a stipend funded by the schools, school districts, and private funds. Transportation for field trips to universities and program materials are paid for by the schools, school districts, Families In Schools, or donated by community organizations. District leaders and university partners contribute personnel and resources.

An external evaluation using surveys and focus groups determined that the Mother-Daughter College Preparation Program directly benefits the mother and daughter participants. Notably, participants increase their knowledge of college and college requirements, mothers and daughters increase their communications and discussions about academics and college, and the girls are more motivated to succeed academically. The program also benefits the participants' families because the mothers and daughters share their newfound knowledge with fathers, brothers, sisters, and other relatives. Finally, the program benefits the schools by increasing staff understanding of the importance of beginning college awareness in elementary and middle school and the value of working with families.

As the program continues to develop, Families In Schools is creating other college awareness programs to serve more students and families. Selected schools have organized Family College

Nights where students and parents learn about goal setting, college preparation, and strategies for achieving academic success. Additionally, a Families and Sons program is being developed.

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