

Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club

*Guilford Elementary School
Columbia, Maryland*

When the parents spoke, Guilford Elementary School listened – and responded. The school’s efforts paid off in big ways – in better grades and greater confidence for students and in increased parental involvement in school activities.

Although the school’s Hispanic enrollment increased markedly in the past two years, the number of Hispanic families attending school events did not. In fact, only a few of these families, many of whom spoke limited English, were participating.

At the initiative of the instructional assistant in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class, who is a Hispanic parent in the school, Guilford began quarterly meetings with Hispanic families in October 2005. Conducted in Spanish, the discussions focused on how the families can support their students at school and at home.

The gatherings produced two tangible outcomes. More Hispanic parents attended school functions, such as reading and math nights and parent-teacher conferences. Also, a free after-school homework club was started that targets Hispanic students.

This club, which parents requested, began in the 05-06 school year and continued in the 06-07 school year. From 4 to 5 p.m. every Monday and Thursday, 30 students receive help with homework. Some parents also attend the homework sessions to assist students. Students are responsible for bringing their homework assignments and for completing them. Students also help each other practice skills and complete homework. Through the parent liaison, families were able to inquire weekly about their children’s progress.

Two teachers were in charge of the sessions and high school students volunteered as tutors. They were supported by a local business partner, Conexiones. These students received

community service hours for their time.

The homework club was publicized through school newsletters, telephone calls and word of mouth, and at educational conferences and county workshops on best practices for student achievement.

Students, parents, teachers and community members all came together to make the club a success. The administrators worked with the PTA to find resources and funds to pay the teachers at each session. The Howard County Family & Student Outreach Center covered most of the \$400 cost.

Teachers identified students who needed help. Parents provided transportation home on club days and established routines at home to help their children complete homework on non-club days.

The results have been impressive. One-third of the students in the program increased their homework completion level noted on their report cards. One-third of the students also improved their report card grades in basic reading skills and math concepts. Parents reported that students’ confidence in approaching homework improved. Students talked about learning and looked forward to homework club days.

The club earned praise from outside the school, too. The Hispanic Achievement Specialist for Howard County Public Schools calls the club a model for other schools in the county. Guilford’s principal is seeking grants to support and expand the club in the next school year. The goal is to increase the frequency of club sessions from two to four days each week and to lengthen the sessions from 60 to 90 minutes. In addition, the school will analyze student data to pinpoint specific needs and to better target tutoring sessions.

The club and the Hispanic family meetings improved relationships between home and school. The Hispanic families designated May

11, 2007 as “Teacher Appreciation Day” at the school. They planned a moving tribute to the staff members by preparing a dinner of foods native to their countries, presenting student dance performances and reading poetry.

“The event reflected the welcoming, family-friendly spirit of Guilford’s wonderfully diverse school culture,” said one administrator.

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