PARENTS HELPING PARENTS: IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES THAT FAMILIES IN TRANSITION FACE IN NAVIGATING K-12 SCHOOLS

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USC RESEARCH/INNOVATION SUMMIT: GOING THE DISTANCE TO SERVE HOMELESS PERSONS IN LOS ANGELES
Friday, April 20, 2018
Prevention in Action
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Parents identify and problem-solve educational issues that are compounded by being in transition.

Compare how parents and teachers perceive student performance, in and out of the classroom.

Observe students’ abilities to problem-solve and advocate for themselves.

Evaluate the need and potential of a curriculum that teaches verbalization, problem-solving and self-advocacy.
STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT

• The principal of each school and two USC faculty members make up the research team.

• **PHASE 1**: 6 weeks of focus groups with parents at 2 schools.

• **PHASE 2A**: Researcher/caregiver complete an assessment of students’ communication (receptive, expressive, and written), daily living skills socialization and behavior.

• **PHASE 2B**: Using the same screening tool, teachers complete the assessment of the same students.

• **PHASE 3**: Age-appropriate problem solving vignettes presented to students.
PHASE 1 PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

• Communication is hard but important.
• Parents don’t feel that their children are able to take the initiative and advocate for themselves.
• Many of the participants in our group shared being molested as children/teens and how other family members colluded by not doing anything. They fear this for their children.
• Parents wonder how much of acting out in school is not having the right words to describe thoughts and feelings?
• Parents feel like they are the only ones dealing with these problems. Focus group discussion helped them feel like they are not isolated.
• Children's safety is a recurring theme.

• The group talked about how much anger the students carry. What is the "fight" all about?

• Is this particular to students in transition? Researchers heard repeatedly that the added trauma children have experienced may cause them to retreat, act out or not feel worthy of getting the help they need.
Families do not expect the schools to work for them.

• Being in transition is at the top of the list of stressors causing Latina participants to defer to the Maestra/o, not asking questions or making requests.

• African American families said they didn’t trust that the system works for their children. If things go wrong in school and they do not know how to solve the problem, they generally take things into their own hands.
Will intentionally teaching students to communicate and advocate for themselves help students become less vulnerable and address parent concerns?

- How can we help them build agency and learn resolution when that’s not what they see in their family and neighborhood? In some families, parents thought their children were afraid to ask questions since they don’t want to make things worse. The parents voiced that they thought their children had many unanswered questions.
The first school is becoming a K-8 Magnet in 2019.

• The principal plans to institute a Project-Based Curriculum, that focuses on communication, expression, problem identification, research, working with a group, building trust and finding resolution, while learning academic skills.
The second school

- Has new resources for K-2 ELA, K-5 Math and Attendance, and will add a Deanship that will have a Restorative Justice, Positive Based Intervention approach.

- We hear many of the same concerns that were voiced at school one (Twenty-one families attended meeting 1. Twenty-five families attended meeting 3).

- There are several grandparents in our School 2 group. These grandparents have custody of their grandchildren due to parents’ housing instability, sometimes compounded by substance abuse, or other lifestyle issues.

- Concerns for children’s attachment/feelings of abandonment, knowing who their “parent/caregivers” are and knowing whose rules to follow have been voiced.