



EXTENSION

OSU EXTENSION REACHES OUT TO HISPANIC AUDIENCE

Oklahoma State University Extension continues its effort to provide family based programming for Oklahoma's Hispanic youth and their families. The ¡Unidos Se Puede! (United We Can!) program focuses on Hispanic youth in sixth through eighth grade.

Ron Cox, OSU Extension family science specialist, said demographic projections suggest 88% of the U.S. population growth over the next 50 years will be due to immigration or descendants of immigrants.

"Hispanics will make up the largest segment of this population growth," Cox said. "In Oklahoma City and Tulsa, our two largest metropolitan areas, Hispanic students make up 52% and 34% of school districts, respectively. As a result, the ¡Unidos Se Puede! (United We Can!) program began focusing on Hispanic youth and their families at two Tulsa schools - Nathan Hale and East Central."

Data-driven impacts from the program show a 29% increase in students' grade point averages, 33% decrease in absences and 95% of participating parents attend parent/teacher conference. Other findings from the ¡Unidos Se Puede! program show how an emphasis on improving students' academic performance "spills over" into other areas that affect youth, their families and society such as significant reductions in substance use from the 7th to the 10th grade.

Cox said there are three main components to the program, including family engagement, youth personal agency and positive peer affiliations.

"Family engagement is very important for the success of the program. Families attend one meeting per week for five weeks in which parents learn strategies to become more involved in their child's schooling, general parenting skills and how to advocate for their child's success within the educational system in the United States," Cox said. "In addition, the meetings also bring other parents together to help combat social isolation and develop new social networks. The youth attend sessions that encourage a growth mindset and new vision for their future."

Second, youth are provided a specially trained success coach who works with them to develop a personal success plan focused on educational goals and critical life skills. Coaches monitor students' academic progress. The coaches also keep in contact with parents to help foster strong parent-adolescent relationships and to encourage and empower their involvement in their child's academic achievement.

Third, youth participate in activities that provide a place in which they can bond with each other, be exposed to potential STEM activities and receive training in entrepreneurship. Participants also have an opportunity to travel to OSU's main campus to experience life as a student at a major land-grant university.

The program was such a success over a span of six years that it has grown to include three more schools and has served more than 500 families. Cox said while the program started with Hispanic families, they have partnered with Langston University and working to adapt the program for African American youth. Future plans include launching programming for rural populations targeting school districts in southeastern and southwestern Oklahoma.

The success of ¡Unidos Se Puede! (United We Can!) is made possible due to a number of federal grants from the National Institutes of Health, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Children Youth and Families at Risk Program, as well as continued support by the George Kaiser Family Foundation and numerous other community partners.

