

Nesman, T. M., Batsche, C., & Hernandez, M. (2007). Theory-based evaluation of a comprehensive Latino education initiative: An interactive evaluation approach. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 30, 267-281.

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Theories of change with accompanying logic models are becoming increasingly more common in children's mental health, and other related fields. They are a requirement now for grant sites in the system of care grant program of CMHS, and are a part of the implementation model for systems of care, developed by the Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health. The present article provides a case example of a theory-based approach to building a logic model to increase Latino student access to higher education and describes school-based prevention and intervention activities, public and policy education strategies, and collaborative efforts across stakeholders. Qualitative and quantitative data support the theory of change that guided the 5-year initiative.

The Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) in Hillsborough County, Florida (ENLACE-HC) program formed community partnerships with the local community college and four-year university, the school district, and the Hispanic Services Council to develop, implement, and evaluate programs that would encourage and increase Latino student participation in higher education. Using an ecological, theory-based evaluation approach, ENLACE-HC developed a logic model that helped focus stakeholder goals and move theory to action while having the flexibility to change as monthly meetings, focus groups, and other data informed the project.

During the first year of the initiative, a Concilio (council) was formed to develop a strategic plan for guiding the implementation phase of the initiative, and included representatives from the public and private sectors, and parents and students from participating schools. The Concilio reviewed information collected through a needs assessment process (including focus groups) and determined that the following needs were of critical concern: (a) lack of access to financial aid; (b) limited transition services at all academic levels studied; (c) limited awareness and appreciation of Latino cultures among educators and service providers; (d) a lack of

The vision of ENLACE is to enhance the academic success of Latino students and to enable them to achieve their full potential as role models, mentors, and community leaders. This vision will be achieved by building a strong alliance within the community to develop, enhance, and expand educational programs and transition services leading to post-secondary and graduate education; by promoting sustainable advocacy and support through community outreach, leadership development, and systemic change; and by developing a culture of opportunity for Latinos. (p. 271).

Latino role models for college and professional careers; (e) limited parental involvement in and understanding of college preparation, entrance, and financial aid applications; and (f) limited cultural and linguistic competence between families and service providers. Based upon the logic model that guided the efforts of the Concilio, a vision statement was articulated (see text box).

In Hillsborough County, Latino students composed 18% of the school population but had disproportionately high rates of dropout (20%), with the highest rates in the eighth, ninth and tenth grades. Truancy rates (28%) and non-promotion from one grade to another (25%) were also disproportionately high.

Interventions for students and their families included: (a) community and family outreach through various

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media presented in the Spanish language; (b) leadership development through the establishment of student Concilios and student/parent leadership training; (c) policy analysis and advocacy by, for example, changing college admission standards to include bilingualism as a skill and providing high school-based financial aid workshops in Spanish and English, and; (d) critical transition points by linking students with existing services as they transitioned from one academic stage to the next.

“In the logic model, the ultimate impact of ENLACE-HC was to be measured by the number of Latino students who successfully transitioned through the educational pipeline and entered and completed college degrees” (p. 274). While it was not possible to attain these goals during a four-year implementation period for all students (e.g., middle school students), data analysis revealed that the number of Latino students in high school increased from 5.7% to 7.6% during the four year implementation period; thus, fewer Latino students dropped out of high school during this time when compared with prior enrollment data.

Latino enrollment in community college campuses increased, but so did the overall enrollment for the community college, and enrollment at the local university increased as well (from 9.4% to 10.6%); however, multiple factors contributed to this latter finding. For example, overall Latino applications increased, but “there was not a proportional increase in the number of Latino students being accepted and enrolling at the university” (p. 274). It was determined that higher standards on the SAT admissions test interfered with Latino acceptance, and as a result, ENLACE-HC representatives worked harder with the university and Latino applicants to take SAT preparation courses. Also, at this point ENLACE-HC representatives convinced university admissions officers to accept bilingualism as a valuable skill for college admission. According to the authors, a theory-based evaluation approached was “found to be best suited to developing and documenting the impact of strategies targeting Latino students” (p. 279). A theory-based approach makes use of a logic model that can be refined and clarified as gaps in services and understandings are discovered and articulated and as solutions are put into action.

In a related study (Batsche, Nesman, Hernandez, & Watts, n.d.), ENLACE and non-ENLACE high school students were compared over a three-year period. In this study, “ENLACE students had significantly higher grade point averages, enrolled in more honors and advanced placement courses, and received more college scholarships than non-ENLACE students” (p. 275). Although the current article does not address emotional and behavioral problems among Latino youth and their families, high dropout rates place these youth at risk of later life problems. Community-based programs such as ENLACE-HC provide cultural and linguistic competency as primary foundations for interventions that can help Latino students bound for college achieve academic success.

Reference:

Batsche, C. J., Nesman, T., Hernandez, M., & Watts, M. (under review). Impact of academic and social support services on academic performance and college transition behaviors of Latino students. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*.