

Bringing Parents to the Forefront of Student Wellness

Urban Promise Academy – Oakland, CA

2013

WHY FOCUS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT?

Urban Promise Academy (UPA) thinks big – both in terms of academic achievement and student health. When UPA decided to take on student wellness in 2010, they included a broad range of topics from healthy eating and physical activity to student safety and social and emotional health. Early on, school staff recognized that they wouldn't be successful in addressing wellness unless parents were engaged to the fullest extent possible. School Wellness Champions, understanding that parents play a key role in promoting the health of their children, set to work identifying activities that would create excitement about wellness among parents and recruit them to be a part of the school's wellness process to improve student and community well-being.

DEMOGRAPHICS

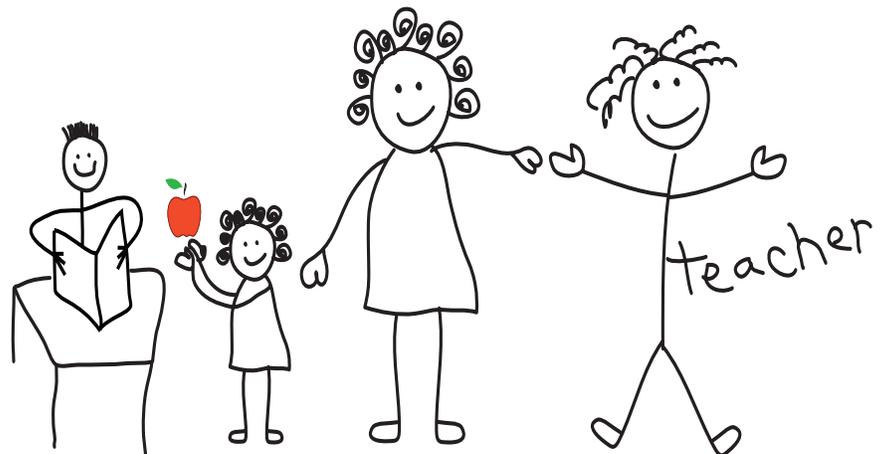
- 6th-8th grade
- 315 students
- 100% of students qualify for free/reduced-price meals

Ethnicity:

- 92% Hispanic/Latino
- 3% African American
- 5% Other

ACTION STEPS

Over the past four years, UPA has developed a number of successful strategies for parent outreach and involvement that have not only informed parents about how health impacts their families, but have also allowed school staff to learn from parents in the process. In order for parents to feel engaged at school, UPA Wellness Champions knew that parents had to feel involved and that their voices were being heard. UPA's wellness team took steps to fully engage parents by creating a welcoming family resource center where parents and staff can interact and parents feel that their input is valued. In addition to helping parents feel heard, UPA generated momentum for parents to be healthy too, by creating parent nutrition and fitness classes. UPA hires and trains parent champions to engage in a variety of school wellness activities, including running the lunch salad bar, supervising activity time in the gym before



school, and overseeing garden maintenance. Parent champions further engage other parents by training and organizing parent volunteers to support these activities and other school events. According to the principal, the wellness activities are often the hook that initially gets parents involved in the school.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

While UPA has successfully created an environment that feels very welcoming and comfortable to Latino parents (the majority of the school community), engaging parents of different ethnicities has been more challenging. UPA Wellness Champions have worked to address this challenge by creating open and clear channels of communication for all parents. Parents are invited to many school events and teachers and staff even share their cell phone numbers with parents in an effort to create a sense of accessibility for all families.

IMPACTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

According to UPA's principal, "The wellness work [at UPA] has been transformative for our school." With parents engaged and involved in their children's wellness and academics, UPA has seen attendance rates increase, office referrals decrease, and student test scores that place the school among the highest achievers in the entire district. Parents are truly invested, providing real leadership within the school. Promoting open communication and parent engagement has paid off, resulting in a healthy and tight-knit community.

"Family engagement has changed the culture of the school and it is a warm, wonderful place to be."

Principal

ADVICE FOR OTHER SCHOOLS

Creating a culture where parents and school staff help and learn from one another was critical to successfully implementing parent engagement activities at UPA. Providing a welcoming space for parents encourages their involvement and gives them a reason to come to school regularly. In addition, having a Wellness Champion that knows and is truly available to the parents helps foster a sense of support and community among parents and school staff. UPA's principal summed up the school's success by saying, "Health and wellness is a community thing – if you target only students it misses the holistic approach."

For More Information:

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