Parent Services and School Choice: 2010-11

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At a Glance

The Parent Services and School Choice department at the Dallas Independent School District (Dallas ISD) was funded by Title I, part A, and strived to increase parental engagement and participation through various activities. Parent Services activities included providing trainings, workshops, and resources to parents. The grant also funded technical assistance, staff training, and resources for schools to increase parental involvement, as well as special programs such as college fairs and parent resource rooms.

The focus of the 2010-2011 Parent Services and School Choice evaluation was to describe the Fall and Spring Las Llaves del Exíto events and examine exit survey data.

Las Llaves del Exíto, Fall

In the fall 2010, Dallas ISD hosted the Las Llaves del Exíto College Fair, where colleges and universities presented information about their programs. After attending the college fair and before leaving, some 87 parents and 504 students completed an exit survey. The Las Llaves fair primarily attracted parents of high school students.

The majority of attendees, 97.7 percent of parents and 95.0 percent of students, agreed that Las Llaves helped increase their understanding of how to prepare for college. More parents than students reported that the information presented helped them realize that college was financially attainable (96.5% vs. 81.0%). While 37.1 percent of students reported that their family depends on them for at least some financial support, just 10.5 percent of parents agreed. Some 78.0 percent of students and 97.6 percent of parents reported that they learned something useful about financial aid at the Las Llaves fair.

Both parents (96.4%) and students (88.0%) agreed the information about how to complete college application forms was helpful. Most parents (98.8%) and students (92.2%) reported learning something useful about the admissions requirements. When asked about the information they received to complete scholarship applications, both parents and students reported the information was helpful (93.0% and 83.3%, respectively). Parents were more likely than students to realize that one’s immigration status was not a barrier to college admissions (96.2% vs. 79.3%, respectively). A greater percentage of parents than last year agreed that they could see a way for their child to attend college (97.2%, compared to 86.6% in 2009), and 100.0 percent of parents indicated that college is an important tool to help their child to achieve success in his or her life. Also, 87.2 percent of students reported that their parents agree that they could find a way for them to go to college. Overall, 90.6 percent of students and 96.2 percent of parents agreed that the student planned to attend college after high school graduation.

The approval rating for schools concerning the delivery of college preparation information was higher for parents than the year before (63.1% vs. 55.1% in 2009). The rating remained the same for students (75.4%) who reported that their school was a consistently helpful provider of college preparation information. When asked if the school emphasized the importance of taking the right courses in preparation for college, only 71.4 percent of parents and 82.3 percent of students answered in the affirmative. Ninety-one point one percent of parents (91.1%) and 79.8 percent of students learned new information at the session on college entrance testing. Both parents and students reported the session on getting college credit while in high school would help them plan for college (95.2% and 84.8% respectively). When asked when they were first given information about college, 25.2 percent of students and 30.6 percent of parents reported it was during elementary school, and 23.6 percent of parents and 39.0 percent of students reported it was during middle school. Some 45.9 percent of parents and 35.8 percent of students report high school as the first time they received college preparatory information from the school. The general findings from the exit survey suggest that the fall 2010 Las Llaves del Exíto College Fair was a successful event.

Las Llaves del Exíto, Spring

Dallas ISD and the Dallas Community College District (DCCCD) hosted Las Llaves del Exíto in the Spring of 2011. The fair was organized along three complimentary pathways. The parent path offered...
sessions in English and Spanish on financial aid, how to prepare one’s child for college, and information on Texas state law governing graduation requirements. At the same time, juniors were offered sessions on writing essays for scholarships and admissions, SAT and ACT testing strategies, finding and applying for scholarships, and earning college credit while in high school. Seniors were offered sessions that included on-site help with applying to college, understanding the educational system, college survival tips, and financial aid information including applying for financial aid (FAFSA). All students had access to a college fair where they could meet representatives from local colleges.

Students and parents were asked to complete an exit survey during the final sessions of the day. Some 52 parents and 171 students complied. The fair attracted more parents of juniors (65.4%) than seniors (34.6%). More than one third of parents (38.5%) reported that their child had taken the SAT or ACT college entrance exam, which may reflect the high number of juniors who attended. Less than a third of parents (25.0%) reported at least one of their child’s parents was a college graduate.

The majority of attendees, 96.2 percent of parents and 93.0 percent of students, agreed that Las Llaves helped them prepare for college. A large percentage of parents (88.5%) found the session that provided information about paying for college helped them to realize they could afford to send their child to college. The majority of parents (84.6%) stated that the hands-on help they and their child received to submit the FAFSA application online was helpful, and 74.9 percent of students agreed that the assistance they received completing the FAFSA and TASFA was helpful. Parents (88.5%) and students (78.9%) indicated that the session on scholarship resources and how to apply for scholarships was very helpful. Although both parents and students reported that the assistance they received to complete community college and university applications was helpful, parents reported a greater percentage than students (86.5% and 80.1%, respectively). Most parents (75.0%) found the hands-on admissions area helpful.

When asked about reasons they or their child may not go to college, parents and students generally differed on some constraints with one glaring exception. The exception was evident when parents and students reported similar percentages when asked if college was needed in order to be successful. Some 9.6 percent of parents believed college was unnecessary for their child’s success; a similar 9.9 percent of students reported the same view. Almost 16 percent of students and 19.2 percent of parents believed that their child’s legal status in this country would prevent them from attending college. Only 14.0 percent of students and 17.3 percent of parents suggested they or their child may not go to college because they thought it would be too hard.

Parents and students had very different perspectives on other barriers that could prevent them from going to college. While only 7.6 percent of students reported they may not attend college because their parents did not want them to, 11.5 percent of parents reported this belief. Students also were more likely than their parents to report that they may not go to college because their family depended on them for financial support (14.0% of students vs. 9.6% of parents). Similarly, students were more than three times as likely as their parents to report they may not go to college due to plans to enter the military or a technical school (12.3% of students compared to 3.8% of parents). The most drastic disparity in responses regarding barriers to college attendance was evident when one-half of the parents and less than one-third of the students (50.0% and 29.8%, respectively) reported they may not go to college due to lack of funding.

The general findings from the exit survey suggest that the spring 2011 Las Llaves del Exito/The Keys to Success College Fair was a successful event. It is especially relevant that the information and assistance regarding financial aid was helpful because half of parents and nearly one-third of students stated the cost of higher education may prevent them from attending college. It may be important to target parents with the intent of making them more aware of the district’s college readiness efforts. The result may prove to be rewarding if there is an increase in parental confidence that their children, when adequately prepared, can attend college and be successful regardless of the difficulty of the curriculum.

**Recommendations**

Some findings regarding schools’ effectiveness at providing college-related information are cause for concern. The perception among parents and students that they did not receive information about attending college until the student’s high school years is problematic. Apparently the information delivery mechanism for college readiness information is not reaching a sizable proportion of elementary and middle school students. It seems reasonable to begin exposing students to college readiness information in the early years and have this process continue through the high school years.