

GFS Summary Report: Yes We Can...Read[™] Program Parent Focus Groups

June 2009

- Study Participants: 100 Parents with children in the Alum Rock School District
- Number of Focus Groups: 7
- Study Locations: Dorsa Elementary School, Cesar Chavez Elementary School, Adelante Dual Language Academy, and Grail Family Services

Purpose

The study was to reveal the perspectives and opinions of the parents of the community in regards to their children's education and literacy levels. It was determined that these stakeholders are crucial for the success of the Yes We Can...Read[™] Program.¹ As stated by a parent, **“without parents on board and committed to their child's education, even the best school is challenged.”**

Topics Discussed

This is a list of common themes that reoccurred in all of the focus groups.

- Parents' hopes for their child to hold a “professional career”
- Parents' sense of inadequacy because of their low level of formal education
- Language and literacy barriers that parents confront
- The importance of parent and school teamwork: parent-teacher communication
- The concept of motivating children to study and read more, consistency
- The parent serving as the child's first teacher

Highlights of the Parents' Responses

These statistics were derived from the 100 parents' responses.

- 41% of the parents expressed hope for their child to have a “good career” or a “profession” when prompted to think of their child at age eighteen.
- 23% of the parents expressed hope for their child to pursue college or university when prompted to think of their child at age eighteen.
- 51% of the parents recognized the importance of their role as a parent in their child's achievement of their hopes and dreams.
- 70% of parents recognized the importance of both the school and the parents in a child's learning work as a team.
- 80% of parents identified themselves as “the most important”, “critical”, or “support” piece of their child's education when prompted to explain what role they play in their child's education.
- 52% of parents called for a change in the parents' role to solve this literacy challenge, while the others suggested changes in other areas of the community such as the schools or surrounding organizations.

¹ The focus groups were facilitated by Grail Family Services' staff. Yes we can...Read![™] is a trademark of Grail Family Services.

- 82% of parents were unaware of the fact that 75.6% of second to fifth graders in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District are not reading at the State's standard of proficiency (as stated in the 2007-2008 LEA Program Improvement Report released by the California Department of Education Policy and Evaluation Division in 2009).
- 43% of parents were able to identify specific proactive actions for them to increase parent involvement
 - Of these 43%,
 - 17% suggested an increase in attendance for informative events, meeting, and participation in school-run programs.
 - 16% suggested conducting a meeting with the teacher and better informing themselves.
 - 8% suggested an increase in helping with or checking their child's assignments
 - 5% suggested taking their child to the library to improve their reading skills.

Prominent Quotes

The following quotes were found in the parents' responses and reflect three of the general themes present at the parent focus groups.

- *"My hopes for my child are that she would go to a university. I think she will accomplish this with the help of her teachers and most importantly her parents." (Parent from focus group conducted at Adelante Dual Language Academy)*
- *"I think that both the school and the parents are critical for a successful learning process for my child. The school and the parents are a team. We both have the same goal, the education of our children." (Parent from focus group conducted at Dorsa Elementary School))*
- *"I think that when people hear the urgency of the problem, parents will organize to solve this problem. If the school makes parent involvement mandatory, the parents will be more likely to do it." (Parent from focus group conducted at Cesar Chavez Elementary School)*

Conclusion

It is evident that the parents recognize themselves as playing an important role in their child's education, as stated by 80% of the parents that participated in the focus groups. On the other hand, only 43% were able to provide specific actions that they could take to support their child's literacy development. With a high percentage of parents recognizing the importance of the school-parent partnership, an important step for the parent-engagement strategy of this initiative would be for the schools and the community to strengthen this partnership by providing parents with more opportunities that offer more information on how to become more involved in their child's education, by creating meaningful opportunities in and out of the classroom, by listening to their needs and concerns, and by honoring their contributions.