



It Takes a Community to Build Good Schools

Two community initiatives in Dona Ana County that are building the foundation for good schools and student success are:

- 1) The Children's Reading Foundation of Dona Ana County and
- 2) Building Community Capacity for Educational Excellence (BC²E²).

The Children's Reading Foundation of Doña Ana County: is a community driven, county-wide project that promotes the message -"Read to a Child Every Day"- and focuses on improving literacy throughout Doña Ana County. It is a local chapter of the National Reading Foundation Program, a highly successful research-based program. The Doña Ana County chapter was started by Senator Steve Fischmann with the assistance of the Institute for Community Engagement and McCune Foundation. The program partners with the other 20 organizations that serve literacy needs in the county. The Reading Foundation is currently focusing on three major programs:

Books for Babies (a partnership with Memorial Medical Foundation) - Parents of newborn babies receive a bundle of materials in a carrying case to take home and use with their newborn infants. The program will start in the Fall of 2011 and each carrying case includes the following:

- A bib that says "Read to Me" that encourages parents to read to their newborn infant
- A "board book" which is a very basic book with sturdy pages and simple stories to read to the child
- A brochure with reading tips for babies and toddlers
- Brochures from the public library about programs available to parents of the very young

Ready for Kindergarten - is a parent education program for parents of children from birth to 5 years old. In addition to interested parents, the program is offered to day-care providers and social service organizations, such as Tresco, Inc., that go into the homes of families with small children. The program includes:

- Lessons that teach parents to read to their children 20 minutes a day
- Lists of activities for the parents to build skills with their children from birth to 5 years old in order to be successful in kindergarten (5 to 10 minutes a day)
- Classes are provided to the parents 3 times a year and each parent gets a kit of materials
- Parents who do not know how to read are connected with the Literacy Volunteers' organization and are also taught how to tell stories to their children through pictures
- Costs are funded through the Chamber of Commerce, but the program is organized by the Reading Foundation volunteers

Community Reading Program - is a summer program where Reading Foundation volunteers read to elementary school children at community centers throughout the county.

Reading Foundation Website: www.readingfoundation.org/dona_ana/home

Building Community Capacity for Educational Excellence (BC²E²): This program was Launched in the January 2011. It is a project of the Borderland Center for Educational Studies (BoCES) in the College of Education (COE) at New Mexico State University. Dr. Rudolfo Chávez and Dr. Hermán Garcia are the project directors and Michelle Valverde is the coordinator. BC²E² is funded by the New Mexico Public Education Department LOGRAR Institute and sponsored by the COE.

Nearly half of all students in New Mexico schools that enter 9th grade fail to graduate from High School. BC²E² focuses on strategies to close this achievement gap as well as other persistent academic achievement gaps through the accomplishment of two over-arching program goals.

Two Over-arching Program Goals of the program are:

1. To establish and foster a broad spectrum of business, school, and community partnerships that *build capacity in Las Cruces for increasing educational excellence.*
2. To develop processes by which students, parents, and community members *take greater and more effective ownership of education.*

Three Best-Practices Components - of the program are:

1. Parent Leadership Workshop - Parents of school age youth enroll in a series of interactive workshops which consist of 2 hour segments on each of the following topics:

- a) The achievement gap: what it is and why it exists
- b) The structure and function of the education system in the United States
- c) The importance of valuing culture and language
- d) Parents rights and responsibilities related to education
- e) School policies and procedures
- f) Introduction to Special Education
- g) Preparing for college
- h) Advocacy in the education arena

2. Youth Leadership Workshop - High school age youth participate in this interactive workshop exploring the following topics:

- a) History and purpose of public education
- b) The role of young people in helping communities improve educational outcomes
- c) Opportunities in higher education

3. Cross Cultural Learning and Sharing Dialogue - At this event the parent and youth leadership participants from the parent and youth workshops are joined by a wide variety of community stakeholders including teachers, administrators, business and nonprofit representatives, elected officials, and other interested community members in a number of cross cultural learning and sharing dialogues. The dialogues are similar to a World Café convening, whereby participants will have an opportunity to discuss important questions pertaining to fostering greater educational success in our community.

These series of workshops and dialogues occurred throughout the first six months of 2011 and will be repeated in the Fall of 2011. Graduates of the Parent workshops become “education promoters.”

The LOGRAR Institute is a statewide initiative funded by the NM Department of Education that identifies and works with selected communities with high Hispano/Latino student populations and correspondingly high drop-out rates with the goal of eliminating the achievement gap for Hispano/Latino students.