



BRIGHT SPOTS

LONGMONT, COLORADO

After choosing “parent engagement” as a key school readiness strategy, Longmont, Colorado’s grade-level reading campaign mobilized to offer not one but two parent education programs.

“Families have different needs and capacities so we wanted good parent education in a variety of flavors for our most vulnerable families,” explains Linda Kopecky, coordinator of Bright EYES, a longstanding early childhood initiative of the City of Longmont’s Children, Youth & Families (CYF) division and the local GLR community lead.

Getting each program off the ground in Longmont and working, soon after, to expand them to other Boulder County locations “has been a big learning process,” says Kopecky. During 2014, about 100 families participated in one of two national programs, each offering weekly sessions plus dinner and child care:

- **Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors**, a 10-week program developed in California by and for Latino parents with children up to age 5, is designed to enhance their skills as their child’s first teacher. In a support group, parents learn about school readiness components, how to navigate social services and school systems to find readiness resources and how to advocate for their children.
- **Nurturing Parenting**, a 12-week program headquartered in North Carolina for families with children up to age 18, is designed to build nurturing parenting skills, promote positive brain development and prevent child abuse. Parents and school-age children attend separate groups that meet concurrently, with the curriculum based on each group’s particular needs as determined from an initial assessment.

Abriendo Puertas was offered four times and Nurturing Parenting twice, both drawing between 10 and 25 families each time. Run by CYF, they were funded by Boulder County’s housing and human services department as part of its child abuse prevention work. The start-up involved bringing in trainers from the programs’ home offices to train newly hired Longmont facilitators.

In 2015, the effort will expand to serve 130 families. About seven community groups will each host a program, working with CYF to determine which one best suits its families’ needs.

“Families have different needs and capacities, so we wanted good parent education in a variety of flavors.”



Bright Spots showcase the work that Grade-Level Reading communities are doing to make progress on school readiness, school attendance and summer learning by 2016. They are written and produced by the Campaign. You can nominate a Bright Spot in your community by emailing Betsy Rubiner at brubiner@gradelevelreading.net.

Among the discoveries, to date, during the start-up and expansion process:

- The programs created cohorts of families “who want to continue with other learning opportunities together,” says Kopecky. So a group that completed Abriendo Puertas may return for Nurturing Parenting, which offers different content.
- The programs’ emphasis on addressing children’s social-emotional development broadened families’ thinking about what else children need to be school-ready.
- Nurturing Parenting was the most appropriate for meeting the needs of Longmont’s particular population. Because some Latino parents have long lived in Longmont and have an informal resource network, they wanted deeper programming beyond Abriendo Puertas, which works very well with newly arrived immigrants, says Kopecky.
- The “ongoing struggle” to reach families not yet connected to the social service system or schools prompted recruiting for the programs at groceries, laundromats and tortillerias.
- Families with children who have special needs were interested in the programs, which was a surprise but “makes sense” because they are often stressed and need peer support and resources, says Kopecky. As expected, nonprofits interested in offering the programs included those serving families who are low income, recent immigrants and/or involved with safety-net organizations.
- Several nonprofits wanted to offer the programs but didn’t have the staff, which prompted CYF to alter its expansion plan and training.

“It’s been a longer capacity-building process than anyone imagined,” says Kopecky.

Equipped with additional county funds to build capacity, the newly trained CYF facilitators will train staff from the new participating community groups, as planned.

But CYF received permission from both programs’ national offices to shorten the training orientation and add opportunities for trainees to observe existing programs and receive coaching. “Looking at implementation science, we know this can be far more effective,” says Kopecky. As for participating parents’ feedback, she adds, “They loved it. They’re interacting with their children differently and have increased their skills and knowledge about parenting and advocating for their families.”

For more information, contact Linda Kopecky at 303-774-3762 or Linda.Kopecky@longmontcolorado.gov.