

Family Leadership for Education, Culture and Health Access (FLECHA): *Helping Parents of Pre-School Children Master Their Roles As Learning Advocates*

The Challenge:

In New Mexico's economically disadvantaged communities – both urban and rural, where there often are large educational achievement gaps – many parents do not seek help when they encounter problems with their children's development, health care or education. As a result, they often do not do the best possible job advocating for their children's interest.

The Goal:

Help parents in targeted communities become better advocates for their children – building on child development knowledge and making available educational and health care resources.

Where To Learn More

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An Innovative Solution:

A facilitated peer-to-peer curriculum to develop parents as learning advocates for their young children. Adopted and implemented by a state-wide parent and family advocacy organization and early childhood advocates across the State of New Mexico.

What It Is

- An eight-hour program that helps parents of children up to five years of age learn the importance of their role as advocates for their children over the transition to school and beyond.

What It Does

- Developed with an emphasis on cultural strengths, the curriculum covers educational and health disparity issues, parenting and infant/child mental health, learning style and parents' rights and responsibilities in health and educational systems. It uses indigenous facilitation and group dialogue methods, such as the Native American talking circle and storytelling, to promote peer to peer learning, strategizing and group process. It is available in both English and Spanish.
- Families find their own strengths, discover what they have to offer their children, and consider options for improved relationships and communication with their children and with their children's health care providers and educators.
- Parents are taught to see themselves as family leaders and as advocates for their children's wellbeing, based on the cultural and spiritual values they bring to childrearing, despite various hardships.

How It Stands Out

- Parents involved in the program demonstrated a higher level of engagement with the early childhood transition to kindergarten and also demonstrated greater ability to know where to get help when their children experienced problems with other children, with educators or in using information from doctors, nurses, community organizations and social services agencies. In a follow up survey:
 - 80 percent said they were thinking and feeling differently about their child's preparation for school and learning than they did prior to FLECHA training, for example:
 - more aware of the importance of basic health and nutrition to learning
 - more aware of the importance of preventive health and dental care
 - more aware of their child's unique temperament and learning style
 - better able to ask questions to support their child's health and learning experiences
 - 81 percent said they had done something different for their children as a result of the training – such as reading together more often, spending more time discussing the child's day and making bedtime consistent and improving family nutrition.
 - Samples of specific comments included:

“We’re trying to give them more fresh vegetables – we weren’t doing that, and now it’s like teaching them to try new things.”

“We’ve tried – even though it’s hard – getting home at a decent time. We were staying out later, we were getting home at 10 or so; now we are trying to have him going to bed more like at 7.”

“I’ve been asking every day how she does in school, trying to pay more attention to her diet and rest.”

“We usually look at 1-2-3 and ABCs as readiness, but now I think it’s about language skills, and I liked that part about getting the parents involved. But the health, home visits, everything – that stuff is all very important for readiness.”