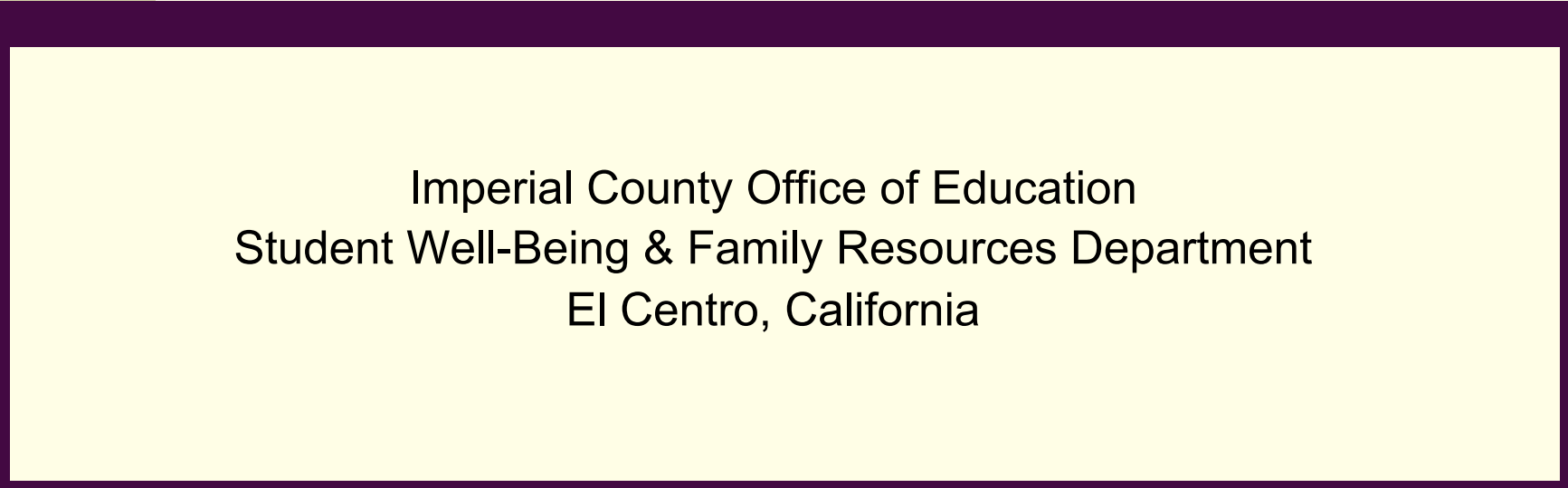




Proyecto Puentes/Bridges



Imperial County Office of Education
Student Well-Being & Family Resources Department
El Centro, California

Background- Geographical Location

IMPERIAL COUNTY, CALIFORNIA SHAPED BY THE FLOW OF IMMIGRANTS AND WATER

- Generations of impoverished residents of Mexico have crossed the border to work in the fields and make their homes in the Imperial Valley since 1902.
- 32% of Imperial County's population of 155,823 was born in Mexico (U.S. Census, 2001).
- Approximately 73% of the County's population is Latino.



Background- Migration Patterns

- Most immigrants came directly from farming regions of northern Mexico to agricultural jobs in the Imperial Valley until the 1960s.
- Foreign-owned manufacturing and assembly plants (maquiladoras) began operations in Mexicali, the state capital of Baja California, Mexico, adjacent to Imperial County. Poor residents from throughout Mexico moved north in search of industrial jobs.

Background- Migration Patterns

- Once in Mexicali, they learned that wages for farm work across the border in Imperial County were much higher than factory wages in Mexicali. Many families stayed in Mexicali long enough to find a way over the border and then immigrated to Imperial County. The pattern continues today.
- In recent years, mechanization of farm labor and changes in U.S. water policies have reduced the number of agricultural jobs in the Imperial Valley, but not the flow of immigrants.

Background- Migration Patterns

- The Center for Cross-Border Regional Economic Studies (CCBRES) estimates that:
 - 13,063 immigrants from Mexico moved to Imperial County between 2001 and 2004.

(The actual number is almost certainly larger because the estimate is based on data sources that undercount undocumented immigrants, e.g. tax returns and driver's license applications.)
 - Population projections estimate that the County's current population of 155,823
 - is growing at a rate of 3% annually
 - with immigration from Mexico accounting for at least half of the growth (California Department of Finance, 2005).

Communities to be served by Proyecto Puentes

CALEXICO

- is directly on the border separated from Mexicali by a 20-foot wood and wire fence.
- Calexico's population increased by 20% from 27,109 to 32,517 in 2003;
- Residents were 95% Latino; and
- 50% were born in Mexico (CCBRES, 2004).



1st Street Calexico seen through the fence from Mexicali, Mexico

Communities to be served by Proyecto Puentes (cont')

In 2004/05, Calexico Unified School District's 9,271 students were:

- 99% Latino,
- 71% English learners, and
- 2,201 students or 23% were enrolled in migrant education programs.

Communities to be served by Proyecto Puentes (cont')

HEBER

- unincorporated,
- six miles from the border,
- designated by the federal government as a “colonia”, an impoverished community located near the border with substandard housing and inadequate water, sewage and other infrastructure.

Residents have only had potable water service in recent years.

Communities to be served by Proyecto Puentes (Heber cont')

- An estimated 3,500 persons
- in 520 households live in about 800 acres
- surrounded by large tracts of farmland and irrigation system operations.
- Many residents are immigrant farm workers and their families. An assessment of colonia housing found that almost all the housing units in Heber are mobile and modular homes and most are in need of repair. (Imperial County Colonia Master Plan, 2003).

Communities to be served by Proyecto Puentes (Heber cont')

In 2004/5 Heber's K-8 enrollment of 721 students was:

- 99% Latino,
- 75% English learners, and
- migrant education enrollment was 312 students or 43%.

Parent and Community Participation

- Members of Concilio Consejero Regional De Padres Migrantes, Imperial County's parent advisory council on migrant education.
- *Padres Unidos de Heber (United Parents)*, a community group of concerned citizens
- Calexico Neighborhood House
- Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, the community clinic system serving Imperial County, conducted an assessment of mental health needs in Imperial Valley communities.

Parent and Community Participation

- Representatives from Heber School District and Calexico Unified School District.
- Imperial County Department of Behavioral Health Services

Collaborative Activities have included the following:

- Written surveys
- Structured focus groups
- Interviews with key stakeholders
- Intimate knowledge of our population



**Concerns and issues expressed
by
parents and community members**

Mental Health Stressors: Immigrant students and families struggling on “this side”

- **Isolation:** Immigrant families leave behind extended family and community support networks when they move to Imperial County.
- **Family conflict:** Adult and adolescent respondents reported conflicts between less acculturated parents and children who are adopting U.S. norms and values.
- **Limited activities for children and adolescents:** Parents and students lack information about activities. They also cite language barriers and costs as obstacles to participation in activities they do know about.

Mental Health Stressors: Immigrant students and families struggling on “this side.”

- **Extreme weather:** Summer temperatures that are almost always over 100 degrees and frequently reach 110 to 115 degrees exacerbate stress and emotional difficulties. Many immigrant families do not have air conditioned housing or use air conditioning only sparingly because of high utility costs.
- **Depression and anxiety:** Identified as the most common mental health problems in all age groups.

Mental Health Stressors: Immigrant students and families struggling on “this side.”

- **Economics** - Imperial is the California county with the largest percentage of children and youth living in households with incomes below the federal poverty level (33%) and below 200% of the federal poverty level (65%).
- Annual average **unemployment rate** for Imperial County was **16%**, the highest in California and more than three times the statewide rate of five percent. Fluctuates with agricultural operations.
- **Disruption of family unit-** Many fathers travel to work elsewhere during the summer months and leave mothers and children at home.

Interagency Support

- The Interagency Steering Committee (ISC) - The ISC is composed of public sector agencies, including agency or department directors, with representation from community and faith-based organizations serving children and families.
- The ISC has been instrumental in improving coordination among agencies, eliminating duplication of services and developing policies that maximize effective use of public resources.



**Our response to parents
and
community members**

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

- **Proyecto Puentes will employ** culturally-focused principles and practices of community health promotion to reduce mental health access barriers for immigrant children and youth.
 - **1) Student Assistance Representative (SAR)/ Promotoras** will help students and families access services
 - **2) Culturally-informed prevention and early intervention** will help students and families build resiliency and support networks

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

■ **SAR/ Promotoras:**

- Are trained lay workers who share the language, culture and life experiences of immigrant students and families.
- Receive training on communication, support group facilitation and community resources, immigration, stress and mental health; mental health systems and services; and culturally informed prevention and early intervention for students and families.

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

- **SAR/Promotoras** training will be based on a model developed by the University of California's California-Mexico Health Initiative to educate Promotoras about the connections between immigration, stress and mental health and prepare them to assist immigrants to get access to mental health services.

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

Training will be provided by:

- Imperial County Behavioral Health Department staff on mental health services, including programs, eligibility and procedures.
- Calexico Neighborhood House on effective communication with immigrant students and families and formal and informal community services and supports.
- Student Well-Being on identifying vulnerable students, conducting brief interventions, support group facilitation and making referrals to needed services.

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

- **SAR/Promotoras** will educate immigrant students about social-emotional wellness in support group settings or *Platicas* (which translates as talking groups) conducted in Spanish.
- **Student Platicas** - " Asi Somos, Asi Cambianos" (this is how we are, this is how we change).
- **Parent Platicas** - " Como Manejar Las Emociones de Nuestros Hijos" (how to deal with the emotions of our children).
- **SAR/Promotoras** will engage group participants in culturally-based games and activities. For example, "loteria de emociones" to teach participants about identifying mental health stressors and activities to reduce stress.

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

- **Goal 1: Reduce linguistic and cultural barriers that limit access to mental health services for immigrant students and families through culturally appropriate services and policy strategies**
- Recruit, hire and train two Student Assistance Representative/
Promotoras
- Provide information on mental health stressors, problems and services students, parents and teachers
- Provide advocacy and assistance to help students and their families get access to mental health services
- Provide information to inform policies to reduce access barriers and racial/ethnic disparities in mental health.

Proyecto Puentes Program Design/ Implementation

- **GOAL 2: Increase opportunities for students and families**
- Provide Voces de Jovenes (Youth Voices) group activities for students
- Provide Platicas para Padres (Talking Groups for Parents) activities for parents/caregivers
- Provide Madres e Hijas Juntas (Mothers & Daughters Together) group activities for students and their mothers

Monitoring Outcomes

- Partners will meet as needed but not less than every 3 months. We anticipate a higher frequency of meetings during the first six months of the grant.
- SARs participate in weekly supervision meetings.
- Collect and maintain data on outreach contacts, student and parent participation in group activities, and analyze satisfaction surveys

Monitoring Outcomes

- Collect and maintain data on barriers encountered as well as resolutions associated with such barriers.
- Track, record and follow service referrals.
- Collect data on attendance and disciplinary referrals of students participating in the project.

Monitoring Outcomes

- GRIOT, a specialized relational database, supports collection and analysis of data for process and outcome evaluation purposes. The system allows us to monitor whether activities to support objectives are completed as planned in a timely manner.
- GRIOT is designed to manage specific data elements and measures for individual SWB&FR programs. Specific data elements are collected and analyzed to measure progress toward each program's outcome objectives.



■ The End