

Parents for Student Success Project

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of the activities of the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress' (the "Congress") **Parents for Student Success Project** funded by the Ministry of Education, Parent Engagement Office. The project aimed to increase the capacity of Portuguese-Canadian parents to become more involved in their children's education in the communities of Toronto, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo and to take action on the social and cultural factors that contribute to the educational challenges of community youth by:

- Raising community awareness of the importance of parental involvement in children's education.
- Increasing knowledge of parental best practices to achieve student success among parents.
- Increasing knowledge of the education system, parental rights, and of opportunities for involvement at the local level among community parents.
- Raising awareness of the academic challenges of youth among community members, including community media

This report provides a detailed summary of key project deliverables, successes and challenges, key learnings, outcomes, lessons learned, as well as a financial update. Overall, Congress staff and volunteers are pleased with project outcomes and are enthusiastic about the impact this project will continue to have in the participating communities for many years to come.

2 KEY DELIVERABLES

Highlighted below are key **Parents for Student Success Project** key activities, listed by activity type:

ACTIVITY: REGIONAL TRAINING AND INFORMATION SESSIONS WITH A POPULAR THEATRE COMPONENT IN THREE KEY COMMUNITIES

Distribute survey to determine the particular support and information needs of parents and barriers to participation in each community

- ☑ A multilingual survey was distributed in the participating communities of Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo and Toronto to determine the support and information needs of parents in those communities and to determine the content of the regional workshops. In total, 72 respondents filled out the surveys across all of the communities. A variety of questions were asked including what topics they would like to learn more about at the regional workshops. The main topics parents suggested wanting to learn more about included: curriculum expectations, secondary school course selection, and understanding the grading system.

Develop a Popular Theatre component to accompany the regional workshops

- ☑ A playwright was hired to develop a total of three (3) popular theatre skits performed by local community partners at the regional workshops. The skits were informed by the parent survey results and project staff discussions with local partners. They dealt with a variety of situations routinely encountered by parents and encouraged audience participation and discussion. The process was as follows:
 - Moderator introduces program.
 - Skits are acted out.
 - During or at the end of each skit, the audience can intervene and suggest a change to the behaviour of the characters. The audience member may choose to assume one of the roles, or just give suggestions from the floor and the actor/participants follow their lead. Each time a suggestion is made, the skit starts over, unless otherwise directed by the moderator. A few minutes were devoted at the end of each skit to discuss further action.

This intervention activity inspires discussion of the issues depicted and engages audience members in mutual reflection and problem-solving.

Develop a multilingual resource kit for regional workshop participants

- ☑ The multilingual resource kits to support the regional workshops were finalized and distributed at the regional workshops. Contents included: Congress and project information, Portuguese-Canadian Education Fact Sheet, parent engagement resources, school board calendars, Portuguese-Canadian Educators' Network information and workshop evaluation forms. The regional workshop resource kits were uploaded to the

Congress website (<http://www.congresso.ca/congresso/parentstudent.htm>).

Host one day regional information and training workshops in each of the communities of Toronto, Hamilton and Kitchener-Waterloo targeting Portuguese-Canadian parents and concerned community members

- Project staff worked with local partners in the communities of Toronto, Hamilton, and Kitchener to plan the regional workshops for parents. The workshops included a series of popular theatre skits, high school and elementary school information sessions, and, in Toronto, an internet safety presentation by local police officers. For each workshop, local volunteers assisted Congress staff in securing appropriate venues and guest speakers, as well as event promotion. Unfortunately, a workshop in Kitchener did not take place due to the inability to find suitable workshop facilitators. As an alternative, a meeting between Congress staff and local contacts took place to determine the most effective way to distribute the workshop resource kits. It was determined that the resource kits would be distributed to parents through the local Portuguese Language School and "Knowing More" tutoring program. Although Kitchener parents did not attend a workshop, they will still receive the resources to become more informed about and involved in their children's education. More details below.

(A) Toronto - Saturday, September 15th, 2007, Casa dos Açores (1:30pm – 6:00pm)

-32 participants attended the workshop.

-Featured presentations by High School Teachers Ana Fernandes and Filomena Silva, Elementary School Teacher Ana Rodrigues and City of Toronto Police Officers.

-Included facilitated popular theatre component where local community members acted out scenarios and parents were asked to participate.

- Favourable feedback was received, as highlighted by the following key evaluation results: (a) 73% of respondents gained a lot of new information; (b) 73% found the new information very useful; (c) 36% felt they were able to contribute a lot and/or a fair bit, and 55% felt they were able to contribute sufficiently; (d) 90% felt the facilitators were clear and easy to understand; (e) 82% enjoyed the workshop a lot.

(B) Hamilton - Saturday, September 29th, 2007, Vasco da Gama Portuguese Association (1:30pm – 6:00pm)

-12 participants attended the workshop.

-Featured presentations by High School Teacher Sergio Cacoilo and Elementary School Teacher Helena Rodrigues.

-Included facilitated popular theatre component where local community members acted out scenarios and parents were asked to participate.

- Favourable feedback was received, as highlighted by the following key evaluation results: (a) 66% of respondents gained a lot of new information, and 33% gained a fair bit of new information; (b) 66% found the new information a fair bit useful, and 33% found it very useful; (c) 66% felt they were able to contribute a lot and/or a fair bit, and 33% felt they were able to contribute sufficiently; (d) 100% felt the facilitators were clear and easy to understand; (e) 100% enjoyed the workshop a lot.

ACTIVITY: CREATING RELEVANT AND TRANSLATING EXISTING RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Translating relevant materials

- A translator was hired to translate material using a Portuguese Plain Language Assessment Tool. In total, ten (10) tip sheets were translated and included in the regional workshop participant kits. The documents were taken from a number of sources including settlement.org, People for Education, and the Ontario Ministry of Education. The translated materials were included in the regional workshop resource kits and uploaded to the Congress website (<http://www.congresso.ca/congresso/parentstudent.htm>).

Developing a 2007-2008 Calendar identifying key school board dates for both the public and catholic school boards in each of the participating communities

- A calendar highlighting key school year dates was created and included in the regional workshop resource kits. Dates included p.a. days, parent-teacher interview nights, local parent council meetings, report card distribution dates, registration deadlines, etc. The calendar also included tips and best practices on parental engagement. The calendars were included in the regional workshop resource kits and uploaded to the Congress website (<http://www.congresso.ca/congresso/parentstudent.htm>).

Creating a plain language Fact Sheet in Portuguese and English on the educational situation of Portuguese-Canadians and best practices for student achievement

- A Fact Sheet was developed in consultation with Prof. Fernando Nunes, from Mount Saint Vincent University, who is conducting a research study in partnership with the Congress entitled "Uncovering Barriers & Support Mechanisms in the Education of Portuguese-Canadian Youth." The Fact Sheet includes stats and facts, reasons for academic underachievement and a plan of action. The Fact Sheet was included in the regional workshop resource kits and uploaded to the Congress website (<http://www.congresso.ca/congresso/parentstudent.htm>).

ACTIVITY: SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Connect with community media to promote the project and the importance of parental involvement

- Congress staff and Advisory Committee members worked with local media to promote the project and parental best practices. Project press releases were printed in local newspapers. As well, project promotional materials were distributed by local media

outlets and Project Advisory Committee members appeared on local television (FPTV) and radio (CIRV FM) to promote the regional workshops. Finally, OMNI News covered the Toronto workshop.

ACTIVITY: DOCUMENTATION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND IMPACTS

Disseminate learnings through a final report to community members, partners, organizations with an education mandate, etc and share project resources.

- The project final report will be distributed amongst like minded organizations and groups; uploaded to the Congress website; posted on the Congress's national listserve, and the Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network national listserve.

Establish an advisory committee, including representatives from the Congress, Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network (PCEN), partner organizations and community members.

- In total, there were nine (9) members of the project Advisory Committee representing the participating communities. The Advisory Committee was made up youth and parents, Congress representatives, PCEN representatives, partner organization representatives and local community members. There were a total of three (3) meetings throughout the life of the project. Those outside Toronto joined the meeting by teleconference and decisions were made by consensus. Evaluation forms were distributed to all Advisory Committee members. Four (4) of the nine (9) members completed evaluation forms, representing a 56% response rate. Advisory Committee meetings were well received by members, as indicated by the following key evaluation results: (a) 40% of the respondents felt they were able to contribute a fair bit during meetings; (b) 60% felt the meetings were well organized; (c) 60% felt the meetings met their expectations a fair bit; (d) 80% felt the project met their expectations a fair bit or sufficiently; (e) 80% felt the all the project deliverables were met a fair bit or a lot; (f) 60% felt they were able to sufficiently contribute to the project; (g) 60% of the respondents would like to participate in future Congress project Advisory Committees.

3 OUTCOMES

The indicators of project success include:

- ☑ 44 parents participated in the regional information and training workshops.
- ☑ 100 regional workshop resource kits were developed and distributed at the regional workshops and to local community organizations for their use.
- ☑ 10 tip sheets were translated into Portuguese and included in the workshop resource kits.
- ☑ 5 additional parents signed up for the Portuguese-Canadian Parents Network (and initiative of the Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network). This will ensure continued community attention to education matters beyond the project lifespan.
- ☑ Increased capacity of community parents to participate in their children's education and knowledge of parental practices to achieve student success.
- ☑ Increased knowledge among parents of the Ontario education system, including the ability to engage with the education system.

Due to the short time frame of the project, it is difficult to ascertain long-term impacts. However, several outcomes from above indicate the likelihood of increased levels of parental involvement, including additional parents joining the Portuguese-Canadian Parents' Network, the regional collaboration and increased knowledge of parents and youth involved in the planning of this project, and the information and resources made available to workshop participants.

Furthermore, the project was systematically evaluated and strengths and weaknesses of the project determined.

- ☑ Project has been evaluated throughout its lifetime, through evaluation forms and informal surveys.
- ☑ Strengths, weaknesses, successes and challenges have been documented throughout, and discussed at regular Project Advisory Committee meetings.
- ☑ Congress Executive and Board have been informed of evaluation results.
- ☑ A final project report was prepared and will be shared with project volunteers, Congress Board and Executive, and the community at large.

4 SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

The project enjoyed a variety of successes over its lifetime, key among them:

- Dedicated staff and project volunteers committed to contributing to project implementation. Regional training workshops were successfully organized in Toronto and Hamilton and parent participation was satisfactory. The workshops were planned and executed according to the action plan and within budget. They brought together project staff, Congress and Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network representatives, parents, youth, educators, and other interested individuals.
- Strong media coverage was obtained throughout the life of the project, including articles in community papers, radio and television interviews related to project activities.
- A variety of resources were developed and translated through the life of the project and shared with parents. Resources developed include: education fact sheet, parent engagement tip sheets, and school board calendars.
- Staff witnessed definite increased interest and energy both in the Portuguese-Canadian community in general, and amongst Congress and project partner representatives across the participating communities throughout the life of the project. Steering Committee members were very enthusiastic throughout and proved instrumental in ensuring the project was successful.

Project success, however, rarely comes without challenges of project implementation. The following illustrate challenges experienced over its lifetime:

- The main challenge faced in carrying out project activities related to the project funding timeline; specifically, that the bulk of the project planning took place over the summer months. Although staff and volunteers were able to successfully organize an information and training workshop in both Toronto and Hamilton, they found it difficult to organize the workshops over the summer months when schools and community tutoring programs were closed and community members were vacationing abroad (thus our main access to parents and teachers was limited). This was the foremost reason why the Kitchener-Waterloo community workshop did not occur as project staff and volunteers were unable to find suitable facilitators.
- The fact that a workshop was not organized in the community of Kitchener-Waterloo also resulted in fewer parents taking part in the project than originally anticipated. As indicated above, parents in this community still received a variety of parent engagement

resources, but it would have been more effective had they been able to participate in an information and training workshop.