Family/School Connection

2007 Process and Outcome Evaluation Report

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Family/School Connection
2007 Process and Outcome Evaluation Report

By

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Program Description, Rationale, and Intervention

The Family/School Connection (FSC) program is a collaborative effort between the Children's Trust Fund, Hands On Hartford, and the Junior League of Greater Hartford, and is located within the Family Resource Center at Betances Elementary School in Hartford. The program provides home visitation and support services for families of children who have been identified as having truancy, academic, and/or behavioral issues as these are indicators of educational neglect in the home. ***The goals of the program*** *are to improve parenting skills and help families become more involved with their children's educational experiences.*

Parental factors that support school success:

- Providing a safe and healthy environment with regular bedtime, breakfast, and homework routines.
- Showing interest in what their child does in school.
- Providing activities to enhance learning.
- Attending school events and getting involved in school governance.

Program Rationale: When children enter a school that is designed for someone else

Beliefs and expectations about how families work, about what children need to succeed in school, and about ways that parents and schools ought to relate to each other, are generally different across socio-economic contexts and cultural groups. At Betances School, many of the families are living in impoverished neighborhoods where they are constantly faced with unemployment and underemployment, social isolation, drug use, and lack of resources. For children and family participants of Family/School Connection, the child is likely to experience a discontinuity between home and school. Some of these parents may lack decent or adequate housing and may not even be able to provide the basics of safety and health. Parents may experience high levels of stress due to financial hardships and unpredictability and have little energy left for parenting. Some of the families may also be experiencing problems such as domestic violence, substance abuse, relational problems, and mental illness. Under these circumstances family members may have feelings of shame, fear, and anger, all of which increase the chances of child abuse and neglect. These factors, individually and combined, become the context for how the child learns, thinks, feels, and acts, and for what to expect for him/herself and from others.

Differences in economic backgrounds can also create a psychosocial distance between parents and teachers leading to misunderstandings. A parent may have experienced academic and social failure in their own past or their experience may be that the school assumes the responsibility to educate the child. While parents may feel uncomfortable or even alienated in their child's school, and inadequate to participate in their child's learning, school personnel may think that they have little interest in the education of their children.

Program Assumptions

- A child's early experiences in school sets the stage for long term adaptive trajectories and outcomes.
- A child's adjustment in school is closely connected to their development at home and the development of the family.
- A child's connection and comfort with school is influenced by the parent's connection and comfort with school.
- Parent involvement in their children's schooling is influenced by parents' confidence in their own abilities.
- Teacher and parent beliefs influence each other and, in turn, this influences the child's experiences.

Program Intervention and Creating Change

The first step in the intervention is to engage these families and develop a working relationship over time that is built on trust. Families are approached in a holistic manner: the focus is to learn more about the child and the family, and gain an understanding of their circumstances and what limits their involvement. In order to identify and help to solve issues, Home Visitors visit families on a regular basis. They work with the families to improve parenting skills, more generally, and specifically help parents to understand their role in their child's schooling. They also support families (and the school) by linking parents and families to the school's services and programs. Because of the multiple issues that these families often face, Home Visitors use a two generation approach - they emphasize support for the mothers' development issues as well as the children's - and they include support for other relevant family members whenever possible, especially the fathers. Therefore, a major role of the Home Visitors is to help the mother and individual family members obtain resources and connect to community services and agencies when needed.

Who are the mother and child participants?

Characteristics of children

- Altogether, there were 27 children who participated in the program since the start of this reporting period in Nov. 2005. Although children can enter the program at any grade (1st - 6th), more than three quarters entered during the 1st, 2nd or 3rd grades.
- Similar to the ethnic makeup of the school's entire student body, the majority of program participants are Hispanic, with 57% of the children identified specifically as Puerto Rican.

Table 2. Mother Participants

Mother Characteristics	*N*	
Mean Current Age	27	39 Years
Marital Status	**27**	
Single, never married		**52%**
Married, but separated		**7%**
Married		**33%**
Divorced		**7%**
Education	**26**	
8th grade or less		**23%**
Less than h.s. degree		**15%**
High school degree or GED		**38%**
Some college		**19%**
College degree		**0%**
Some graduate work		**4%**
Currently in School	**27**	**19%**
Currently Employed	**26**	**50%**
Employed full-time		**26%**
Employed part-time		**16%**
More than one job		**4%**
Race/Ethnicity	**27**	
Puerto Rican		**48%**
Hispanic, not Puerto Rican		**22%**
African-American		**22%**
West Indian		**4%**
Multi-racial		**0%**
Other		**4%**
Average # of Children	**27**	**3.4**

Table 1. Child Participants

Child Characteristics	*N*	
Grade Child Entered FSC	**27**	
1st grade		**22%**
2nd grade		**26%**
3rd grade		**30%**
4th grade		**11%**
5th grade		**7%**
6th grade		**4%**
Gender	**27**	
Male		**48%**
Female		**52%**
Race/Ethnicity	**27**	
Puerto Rican		**57%**
Hispanic, not Puerto Rican		**15%**
African-American		**15%**
West Indian		**7%**
Multi-racial		**4%**
Other		**4%**
Primary Caregivers	**27**	
Mother		**96%**
Father		**26%**
Maternal Grandmother		**4%**
Other		**7%**

Primary caregivers

- Mothers have a primary (i.e., active) caregiving role in all but one family; 26% of the fathers have a primary parenting role.

Characteristics of Mothers

- Fifty two percent of the mothers have never been married while thirty three percent are currently married.
- They have an average of 3.4 children.
- Although the majority of the mothers have at least a high school education and 23% have even gone to college, it is important to note that 23% have no more than an 8th grade education.
- One-half of FSC mothers are employed at least part time or more.

Family and Household Data

Characteristics of Fathers

- We have data for those fathers who either participate in the program or are more involved with their children (N=13); most of these fathers reside with the family.
- Sixty four percent of the fathers (7 out of 11 fathers that we have data on) are employed at least part time.
- Ten of the 13 fathers (77%) have at least a high school education; one father has less than a HS degree while 2 of these fathers have no more than an 8th grade or less.

Table 3. Father Participants

Father Characteristics	*N*	
Mean Current Age		**37 years**
Marital Status	**10**	
Single, never married		**20%**
Married, but separated		**0%**
Married		**70%**
Divorced		**10%**
Education	**13**	
8th grade or less		**15%**
Less than HS degree		**8%**
High school degree or GED		**69%**
Some college		**8%**
College degree		**0%**
Some graduate work		**0%**
Currently in School	**12**	**0%**
Currently Employed	**11**	**64%**
Employed full-time		**36%**
Employed part-time		**18%**
More than one job		**0%**
Race/Ethnicity	**11**	
Puerto Rican		**45%**
Hispanic, not Puerto Rican		**27%**
African-American		**0%**
West Indian		**18%**
Multi-racial		**9%**
Other		**0%**
Average # of Children	**12**	**3.5**

Table 4. Household Data

Household Characteristics	*N*	
Average # adults in house	**27**	**1.6**
Avg. # children in house	**26**	**2.6**
Annual income	**25**	
No income		**12%**
Under $5000		**16%**
$5,000-$14,999		**28%**
$15,000-$24,999		**16%**
$25,000-$34,999		**12%**
$35,000-$44,999		**12%**
$45,000 and above		**4%**
Type of housing child	**27**	
Apartment/rental unit		**82%**
House owned by mother		**7%**
Owned by relative		**4%**
Shelter		**7%**
Medical Insurance	26	92%
HUSKY		85%
Medicaid		4%
Medicare		4%
Other Gov't Assistance	**27**	**59%**
Food Stamps		**56%**
SSI		**22%**
General Assistance		**11%**
SSDI		**7%**
TANF		**7%**

Data on Households

Data on the households in which these children live give us more insight into the risk factors of Family/School Connection families.

- Over one-half of households earn less than $15,000 per year.
- The majority of these families rent their home (82% or 22 out of 27 families).
- Almost all of the children receive medical insurance through the HUSKY program, and 59% of these families receive other forms of government assistance (mostly Food Stamps and SSI).

Program Participation

Program Retention

Table 5. Average Time in the Program	*Sample*	
All families	**27**	**18 months**
Families Who Left Program	**10**	**9 months**
Why Families Left the Program	**7**	
Goals were met		**29%**
Family moved		**71%**

- Twenty students and their families began services in November of 2005, at the start of this reporting period. Since then, seven more students entered the program.

- Altogether, families have remained in the program for 18 months. Families who are no longer participating in the program (10 of the 27 families) either moved out of Hartford or have met their goals. Inactive families participated, on average, for nine months. At of the end of 2007, there were 17 participating families.

Table 6. Program Participation	*Nov 2005 - Oct 2006*	*Nov 2006 - Oct 2007*
Number of Families Who Received Services	24	20
Total # of home visits completed	600	393
Average # of attempted home visits per month	4.0	4.0
Average # of completed home visits per month	2.6	2.1
Average length of time per home visit	52 minutes (46-55 min)	48 minutes (45-52min)
Average # of individual contacts outside the home per month	2.0	1.1
Average length of time per individual contact	19 minutes	17 minutes
Average # of groups attended per month	0.8	0.5

- Home Visitors document all contacts with families on the Monthly Activity Log. Since the weekly home visits are the core of the program, this is where we expect to see the most frequent contact with families. Program expectations are that families are to be seen in the home a minimum of two visits per month and as much as one time weekly. All home visits include the use of parenting curricula. Staff vacancies accounts for the decrease in visit frequency over the past year, although families were still seen in the home, on average, twice per month with each visit lasting an average of 48 minutes.

School's Family Resource Center

- The program is located in the Family Resource Center at the school, and families can drop in to talk with their home visitor and/or to get help with connecting to community-based services. Families were seen on an individual basis outside of the home once per month.

- Program services work in coordination with the school's Family Resource Center. Participants are encouraged to access these services and get involved in these school activities. Virtually all FSC families access at least some of the services and programs with the extended day program being utilized the most often.

Table 7. Participation in activities at the Family Resource Center	*Nov 2005-Oct 2006*	*Nov 2006-Oct 2007*
# of Families Accessing at Least One Service	24	19
Average # of extended day sessions attended by FSC children/month	5.5 (1.6-9)	5.3 (0-11.3)
Average # of parent/child activities attended per month	1.0 (.33-1.92)	1.6 (0-4.42)
Average # of "Parents as Teachers" playgroups attended per month	0.1 (0-.67)	0.1 (0-.40)
Average # of field trips attended per month	0.6 (0-1.33)	0.8 (0-2.1)

Program Outcomes

There are three measures used to assess change among FSC participants: Parenting Stress Index- Short Form (PSI-SF), the Parent-School Involvement Survey, and the Updated Baseline Form. All outcome measures are administered when families enter the program, and after six months and one year of program involvement.

(1) **Parenting Stress Index- Short Form (PSI-SF):** A self-report, standardized instrument that measures parenting and family characteristics related to child development and functioning.

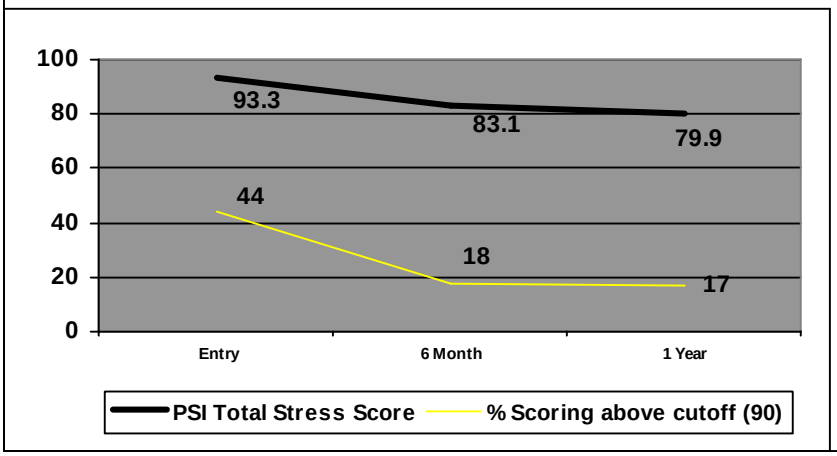
Table 8. Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (N=22)	*Entry*	*Six Month*
Parental Distress	32.2	29.1
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	27.8	23.9*
Difficult Child	29.4	27.7
Total Stress	89.4	80.9*

Table 9. Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (N=15)	*Entry*	*1 Year*
Parental Distress	34.1	28.4*
Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction	27.9	23.3
Difficult Child	31.3	28.2
Total Stress	93.3	79.9

The PSI-SF has been significantly correlated with measures of parental neglect and abuse, and attempts to identify parents who are at risk of dysfunctional parenting. Total Stress Scale scores range from 36-180; lower scores indicate more healthy parenting attitudes. For the three subscales, Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, and Difficult Child, scores range from 12-60.

Results: While all subscales and the Total Stress Scale show change in the desired direction, the Total Stress Scale and the Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction scores showed significant ($p<.05$) change after the first six months, and the Parental Distress score showed significant ($p<.05$) change after the first year. The Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction subscale measures parents' perceptions of whether their child meets their expectations and the degree to which parents feel their children are a negative aspect of their lives. The Parental Distress subscale measures the level of stress around the parental role as influenced by personal factors related to parenting. Parents scoring high on this subscale often feel a lack of support, some depression, and a lack of competence. The Total Stress score is a measure of overall parental stress; according to the manual, a score above 90 indicates significant stress.

Figure 1. PSI-SF Total Stress Scores: Parents Who Completed Entry, 6 Month, and 1 Year Administrations



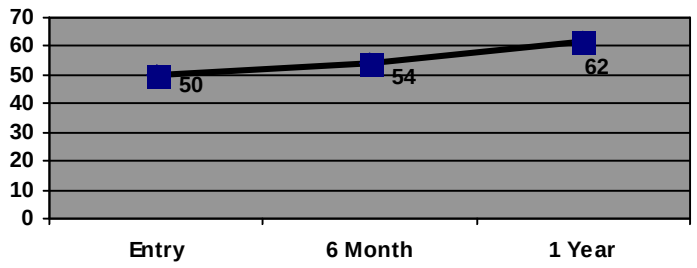
The Graph shows the Total Stress scores of the PSI-SF as well as the percentage of parents scoring above the cut-off score at program entry, six months, and one year.
While all subscales and the total Stress Scale show change in the desired direction, only the Parental Distress subscale showed significant change. Parents who score 90 or above on the Total Stress score are experiencing significant parenting stress. The lack of significance on the other scales is most likely due to the small sample size.

(2) **The Parent-School Involvement Survey:** This self-report instrument examines both parents' and teachers' perception of family/school involvement. The sections designed to measure parents' perceptions of their child's school, and the time they spend with their child doing school-based activities such as reading, helping with homework, or volunteering at the school were utilized for this evaluation. The Parent-School Involvement survey produces a total score ranging from 18-72 with higher scores indicating more parent involvement in their child's academic life. Twenty-one parents completed the Parent-School Involvement Survey at program entry and six months and twelve parents at program entry and one year.

Table 10. Parent-School Involvement Survey	**Entry and 6 mo** *(N=21)*		**Entry and 1 yr** *(N=12)*	
Total Score	49.8	54.5*	50.3	62.0*

Results: There was a significant ($p<.05$) change in the desired direction at six months and one year, indicating that as parents participate in the FSC program, they become more involved with their children's education, both in and out of school.

Figure 2. School Survey Total Scores for Parents Who Completed the Entry, 6 Month, and 1 Year Administrations (N=12)



An itemized analysis indicated that parents showed the most change on: reading to their children, listening to their child read to them, helping their children organize time for homework and chores, meeting with their children's teacher, and checking to make sure their child completed their homework.

Table 11. Changes in Living Circumstances After 6 Months and 1 Year of Program Involvement

	N	*Entry*	*6 Month*
Mother has at least a HS education	19	68%	74%
Mothers in school	19	16%	11%
Mothers employed	19	53%	47%
Child covered by medical insurance	18	89%	94%
Receive government assistance	18	61%	67%
Families living in rental units	19	95%	95%
	N	*Entry*	*1 Year*
Mother has at least a HS education	12	67%	75%
Mothers in school	15	20%	20%
Mothers employed	15	47%	33%
Child covered by medical insurance	15	93%	87%
Receive government assistance	16	63%	69%
Families living in rental units	16	81%	94%

(3) **Updated Baseline Data Form:** Documents changes in families' demographic characteristics. As shown, there has been no significant change in FSC families' living circumstances while they were in the program. There was a small increase in the percentage of mothers who received a high school degree, but a small decrease in the percentage of mothers employed and those enrolled in school.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Program demographic data show that the Family/School Connection families struggle with a number of social and economic issues. Over one-half of the households earn less than $15,000 per year, the majority of the children receive medical insurance through the HUSKY program, and fifty-nine percent receive other forms of government assistance such as food stamps and SSI. Although many of the parents have a high school degree and a few have a college education, there are also a number of mothers and fathers who have an eighth grade education or less. The majority of the households are headed by single parents and twenty-two out of twenty-seven of these families live in rental units.

Although the program is currently serving a relatively small proportion of the school community, and there was a period of time when there were a number of staff vacancies, overall, the data on the program are promising. The Family/School Connection program at Betances has been successful in engaging and retaining families in the program over time. Moreover, program participants show statistically significant change on both the Parenting Stress Index- Short Form and the Parent/School Involvement Survey after six months and one year of program involvement. These data indicate that parents show less stress around their parental role as well as more involvement with their children's academic lives. In addition, the program has recently gone from one full-time and one part-time Home Visitor to three full-time Home Visitors and a new Program Supervisor. Furthermore, funding has been approved to expand to four other school communities for the 2008-2009 school year.

Next Steps

- The four new FSC sites that are scheduled to begin during the 2008-2009 school year will need to work out arrangements with school administrators and teachers to develop verifiable selection criteria and practices within the new schools, engage and retain families, establish program curricula, and address the range of family and child needs. Process evaluation will include an analysis of efforts to engage families in order to identify successful and unsuccessful strategies, and examine whether certain subgroups (age, race, reason referred) are more or less likely to engage in services.
- Establish a Continuous Quality Improvement team (CQI) as the structure for bringing the network of providers and other involved agencies together on a regular basis and getting input from staff at all levels. The CQI team will review policies and procedures, and make recommendations for additions and changes. Incorporate a research-practitioner model in which evaluators participate in CQI and work closely with the program staff in informing and refining program practices.
- Include measures of child outcomes: use the Devereux Elementary Student Strength Assessment to monitor progress in the social-emotional domain made by FSC children. In addition, redouble efforts for collecting school data and getting measures of academic, school attendance and behavioral outcomes.

Recommendation

- In order to get a measure of the impact the program has on parental factors within the home that leads to school success, consider adding the Home Observation For Measurement of the Environment (HOME). HOME is designed to measure stimulation in the home, both in terms of the physical organization of the home as well as interactive stimulation between the mother and child. It is comprised of six subscales: 1) Parental responsivity, 2) Acceptance of Child; 3) Organization of the Environment; 4) Learning Materials; 5) Parental Involvement; and 6) Variety in Experience. Since the HOME requires extensive training and skills to implement, it is suggested that program supervisors and/or independent evaluators will be trained to implement the instrument for a random selection of families for each of the home visitors at the five different program sites (e.g., three randomly selected families for each home visitor). Similar to the other standardized instruments being used, the HOME will be administered at the time services begin, at 6 months, 1 year, and then annually.

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