

I. TOPIC/RATIONALE

Palisades Charter High School (Pali) has identified an achievement gap between its White and Asian populations and its African-American and Latino populations, with African-American and Latino students scoring significantly and consistently lower than their White and Asian peers. This long-standing gap requires Pali to examine our school practices through the lens of social justice—to identify and dismantle the root causes inequities within our school that contribute to the marginalization of Black and Latino student.

Pali's African American students have successfully narrowed the achievement gap. As a group, their API test scores averaged an increase of 20 points for the 2008-2009 school year and 6 points for the 2009-2010 school year. While test scores are a problematic indicator of student achievement, they do suggest an improvement in overall African American students' performance. One possible explanation for this rise in test scores is a series of interventions implemented in recent years by The Village Nation (TVN), a program adapted for use at Pali to promote the academic and social success of our African-American students. By contrast, the API test scores of Latino students declined by 6 points for the 2009-2010 school year. And with test scores of Latino students at Pali in decline, the question arises: Could strategies for enhancing the performance of African-American students through TVN be adopted for use with Latino students?

I hypothesize that incorporating Latino students into TVN will result in academic improvements similar to those seen within Pali's African-American student population. My goal is to use my TVN training and experience working with African-American students as a TVN elder to create a Latino elder team; sponsor an impact assembly for Latino students; and continue and expand sponsorship of the Latino Student Union (LSU); all approaches geared toward building a positive cultural, social, and academic climate for Latino students at Pali. Because my project will be completed this year, I am limited in my ability to assess the impact of this intervention on California Standards Test (CST) scores. However, I plan to use student- and teacher-generated data, as well as available school records to draw conclusions regarding the project's impact.

II. LITERATURE SUMMARY

The Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States, accounting for over half of the population growth from 2000 to 2007 (Gonzales, 2009, p. 9). Due to the growing social, political, and economic presence of this population, educational attainment levels of Latino students have become an object of scrutiny within educational and governmental research communities. According to Abrego & Gonzalez (2010), the overall dropout rate for Latino students in California is 40%, with some predominantly Latino high schools in Los Angeles reporting rates as high as 70% (p. 153). This dropout rate is double that of non-Hispanic students (Lockwood, 1996). According to the *Hispanic Dropout Project*, a two year study undertaken by the U.S. Department of Education in 1995, if we as a nation fail to keep

Latino students in school, “a large segment of the country’s soon-to-be largest minority group will be underprepared for employment, for making personal choices, and for engagement in civic life as is required for this democracy to grow and adapt as the founders intended it to” (Secada, et al., 1995, p. 9). To prevent this from happening, educators and researchers have sought to understand and remedy this educational crisis.

Research has shown that the Latino dropout rate is a symptom of institutionalized inequities that isolate these students and drive them out of the educational system. One major factor that contributes to low academic success rates is the disproportionate placement of Latino students in low-track classes that deprive them of access to challenging and relevant curriculum and instruction (Fairbrother, 2008; Malone, 2008; Mehan, 1997). Often Latino students cannot see the connection between these curricula and their everyday life and world of work, causing them to disconnect from school altogether (Lockwood, 1996; Mehan, 1997). Furthering this detachment, Lockwood (1996) argues:

is the degree to which Hispanic students suffer in schools that disparage and marginalize their culture and language. Rather than working with and celebrating the language, culture, and richness of ethnic experiences that Hispanic students bring with them into the classroom, many schools avoid even acknowledging these cultural differences (p. 2).

Within this context of unchallenging and culturally dismissive instruction, Latino students often lack the individual attention and encouragement from faculty needed to develop a sense of their future (DiCerbo, 2000, p. 2). According to Lys (2009), high schools often fail to reach out to new Latino students and their parents who are not familiar with the expectations and

requirements. Without personalized guidance, students and families do not successfully acclimate to high school, and students quickly fall behind (p. 2). Finally, Latino students are stigmatized by an *at risk* label that allows educators and society to blame outside factors like poverty, language difference, immigration, and gangs for low success rates rather than examine inequities within the school system itself (DiCerbo, 2000; Fairbrother, 2008; Lockwood, 1996; Mehan, 1997). Tracking, disparagement of Latino culture in the classroom, lack of personal attention and family outreach, and social stigma all converge, thereby discourage Latino students from succeeding in public schools.

In an effort to remedy academic underachievement among Latino youth, researchers have identified and analyzed schools successful in educating these students and have published recommendations for solutions. The *Hispanic Dropout Project* (HDP) used its findings to make extensive recommendations for schools to support Latino students and their families. As described by Secada, et al., (1998), the study described two major findings regarding Hispanic students:

Schools and their staffs must connect themselves to Hispanic students and their families, provide Hispanic students with a quality education based on high standards, and provide backup options to move past obstacles on the way to achieving those high standards...Students and their families deserve respect...In many cases, this means fundamentally changing people's conceptions of Hispanic students and their families. This country's Hispanic students are *ours* and they are *smart*. Hispanic families have social capital on which to build. (p. 13).

In practice, these findings called for adult mentoring; challenging and relevant curriculum; placement of Hispanic students in pro-social roles; and safe, culturally-inviting, and nurturing environments (p. 16-18). For working with parents, the HDP recommended empowering parents to advocate for their children, aggressively building school-parent partnerships, and helping parents envision and plan for their children's future (p. 23-25). These HDP recommendations mirror the successful educational strategies found in other research addressing the needs of Latino children.

Caring, respect, and community are the common themes that weave through the various intervention programs found to be successful in working with Latino students. The HDP recommendations and other researchers reflected what Lys (2009) described as "the additive model of acculturation," which encourages schools to embrace Latino student's heritage language and culture by incorporating it into the school environment (p. 3). After surveying 74 Latino 8th grade students, Lys (2009) developed the following recommendations for supporting Latino students: collecting more detailed data about students who are failing or not attending school, providing transition support for incoming 9th grade students and their parents, specifically reaching out to Latino males to improve their self-perception about completing high school, strengthening the home-school connection, and providing teachers and staff with professional development in culturally responsive teaching (p. 8-9). Lockwood (1996) surveyed teachers, staff, and administrators at another school that successfully supported Latino students and found the following elements to be critical factors: building a sense of cultural pride among students, helping students to develop a sense of future, and designing culturally relevant curricula (p. 4).

Adults at this school focused on building a caring community through the mentoring of students and outreach to parents (p. 4). Through observations, interviews of faculty and students, Fairbrother (2008) found the following elements of a high school alternative program to be successful with Latino students: a high degree of commitment of faculty and staff to supporting Latino students, high academic expectations, continuous assessment and feedback in a caring environment, and small class sizes (p. 593-607). Surveying the research, a variety of elements can be drawn upon to create a support program for Latino students.

This action research project seeks to build a caring, respectful, and community-based support network for Latino students within Pali. Each element of the program reflects strategies and attitudes recommended in the research. The Spanish-speaking parent meeting seeks to activate a partnership between the school and parents. The goals of the meeting are to inform parents of academic expectations, including the requirements for advanced coursework and college, as well as to connect parents with Spanish-speaking faculty and staff able to answer questions and provide support (Lockwood, 1996). In creating an elder team, this project seeks to build a committed, culturally supportive group of adults who can act as mentors and advocates for Latino students. As Lockwood (1996) said, “If students can connect to adults, they begin to see that adults are resources, not the enemy” (p. 5). Also, this team can model for other teachers and staff the culturally responsive teaching methods necessary to support Latino students (Lys, 2009). Both the Latino Student Union and the Impact Assembly offer opportunities to celebrate, honor, and promote understanding of Latino culture and academic achievement (Lys, 2009; Secada, et al., 1995). They also help build homogenous peer networks for Pali’s Latino students,

which Goza & Ryabov (2009) argue lead to higher academic performance for Latino students (p. 1275). Meetings, focus groups, and assemblies will incorporate HDP recommendations geared to remedy what may be missing in the Pali culture, including: high teacher expectations; a caring attitude toward Latino students and families; respect for Latino culture and language; and a connection between school, families, and community (Fairbrother, 2008, p. 591). As part of the program design, research findings will be communicated to the elder team and to administrators to legitimize and solidify the Latino student support program.

III. STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT ISSUE AND PROPOSED LEADERSHIP PROJECT

In general, the Latino student population at Palisades Charter High School is not performing academically as well as their White and Asian peers. As a group, their API scores dropped 6 points for the 2009-2010 school year, evidence of a widening achievement gap. My proposed research addresses the following question: *To what extent can The Village Nation program, adapted to address the specific issues of Latino students, enhance academic achievement of Latino students at Pali?*

TVN has used various strategies to develop a supportive community for African-American students including: impact assemblies held to address specific issues of our African-American school community; increased adult sponsorship and guidance of students through the Black Student Union; and the creation of a team of “elders” who act as advocates for these students. I believe these strategies can be recreated within our Latino community using the already established TVN model. As a part of my research, I will attempt to identify which

specific issues would need to be addressed at an impact assembly to positively affect Latino students' academic performance and attitudes about school. I believe that adapting TVN strategies for Latino students will foster a positive sense of community, cultural identity, and support that could enhance student achievement.

To complete this project, I will work with the current TVN elder team to create a bridge between our Black Student Union (BSU) and Latino Student Union (LSU) and incorporate Latino students into TVN activities when possible. I will also work with two teacher sponsors of the Latino Student Union to design an impact assembly for these students. I will not only work with students to plan and assess the effectiveness of the assembly, but act as a LSU sponsor as well. As the project leader, I will communicate with school administrators about our events; oversee assembly logistics; provide new elders with opportunities to learn about TVN; participate in elder meetings and activities; and gather data to assess the impressions, attitudes, needs, and goals of Latino students throughout the year. If possible, I would like to include parents in the assembly.

IV. LEADERSHIP PROJECT PLAN

The leadership project I propose is a multi-dimensional support system for Latino students modeled after The Village Nation program. The goal of this project is to involve our students in a supportive, caring, and culturally relevant school community made up of teachers, staff, parents, and community members who will encourage academic and social success. To accomplish this, I will work with the current LSU sponsors, Myrna Cervantes and Sandra

Martin, as well as Monica Iannessa, Director of Student Services, to establish and train a team of teachers and staff committed to supporting Latino students and families as members of a collaborative elder group, plan and implement an impact assembly, participate in a mandatory Spanish-speaking parent meeting, and help organize Latino Student Union meetings and focus groups. Parents and students will then be introduced to identified “elder” teachers who act as mentors, club sponsors, and advocates for Latino students.

The mission, philosophy, and objectives of the leadership project will be adapted from those of The Village Nation program developed by teachers at Cleveland High School and already adopted for use with Pali’s African-American student population. The following are TVN's stated mission, philosophy, and objectives:

Mission Statement: To create a small learning environment for underrepresented students utilizing a wide array of test prepping and test taking skills, attitudinal adjustments, academic strategies and historical reviews through seminar, workshops and small group meetings, geared toward academic and social success.

Philosophy: Our philosophy is taken directly from the old African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.” We want to pool our resources, experience and expertise to better prepare these children for their challenging future.

Objectives:

To establish a higher level of trust and rapport with the students and their parents.

To be viewed as approachable African American adult role model.

To be motivators through love and discipline.

To create an atmosphere of positive peer pressure for achieving academic success.

To build a climate where knowledge of their cultural contributions are positively challenged with music, video, poetry, and other art forms.

To reveal the naked truth as it **stands on its own** be it beautiful or ugly.

“If you know anything about our history, then you know that the “Blackest” thing you can do is to pursue an education.”

http://www.thevillagenation.com/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=61&Itemid=96)

On December 10, I will hold a meeting of teachers and staff who are interested in participating in the program. During this meeting, I will present these staff members with a summary of my research regarding Latino students and the challenges they face; the historical background of TVN; and an overview of TVN's stated mission, philosophy, and objectives. Following this meeting, I will organize a January meeting of committed teachers and staff. Together we will create a vision for the program that is culturally relevant for Latino students, inventory all teachers and existing programs focused on the support of Latino students, and organize a calendar of meetings and events for the remainder of the year. My role in the elder team-building process is to support the teachers and staff in their on-going efforts to address the needs of Latino students and to showcase TVN as a potential model for improving our current efforts through collaboration.

Student participants will include any students identified as Latino in our system or who self-identify as Latino. Participation in focus groups, LSU meetings, and service projects will be voluntary; attendance will be based on teacher invitation student interest. The impact assembly, however, will be held during the school day, and students will be summoned out of class. Monica Iannessa and I will handle the logistics of the assembly; the elder team and students will be consulted in the planning of the assembly. We have tentatively scheduled the assembly for March 2; the requisite planning will take place throughout January and February. The LSU leadership group, which meets every other Tuesday, which would be a good resource for enlisting student help and input. Operational issues associated with coordinating a large

assembly that must be addressed include: informing parents by letter of the event with the option to opt out; communicating the plan with teachers; booking space; arranging the speaker; ensuring that the necessary technology is in place, and creating the appropriate summons ahead of time. The major ethical concern is that of student privacy. For each focus group, meeting, and during the assembly itself, norms will have to be established that respect students' privacy and the confidentiality of data.

V. STRATEGY FOR FORMATIVE FEEDBACK AND ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

I plan to triangulate my research by using multiple sources of data to assess the outcomes of this project including school records, student-generated data, and faculty-generated data.

Richard Thomas, Director of Instruction, will provide me with baseline data drawn from CST data for 9th and 10th grade Latino students which I can compare to enrollment numbers in honors and AP classes. Sophia Chock, a counseling office staff member, will provide me with 10th grade History rosters I can use to calculate the percentage of Latino students entering higher-level classes after 9th grade. I will survey parents and students to both gain a sense of student and family involvement at Pali and gauge their level of awareness regarding available resources and their comfort level within the school community. To gain a sense of the barriers that students face when taking and succeeding in upper-level classes, I will conduct student and teacher interviews to elicit their perceptions of the experience of Latino students in honors and AP classes. I will conduct a pre- and post- impact assembly climate survey to 9th grade Latino students in my Pods and LSU students to assess their reaction to the assembly. To elicit the most

accurate and honest survey responses, surveys will be anonymous. The following is a timeline of data topics and collection:

Questions	Action	Timeline	Resources
<i>How involved are Latino parents at Pali?</i>	Have parents fill out survey at mandatory parent meeting.	November 13, 2010	Parent Engagement Survey
<i>How aware are Latino students of academic requirements and resources?</i>	Have LSU and 9 th grade students fill out survey.	December 2010	PCHS Student Survey (Students' awareness and access of school resources)
<i>What percentage of Latino students go into Honors or AP History classes in the 10th grade?</i>	Look at 10 th grade Regular, Honors, and AP History rosters to determine percentage of Latino students in each level.	January 2011	Ann Davenport, Director of Instruction; Class rosters from Counseling Office
<i>How comfortable, welcome, and supported do Latino students feel at Pali?</i>	Give LSU and 9 th grade students pre- and post- impact assembly climate surveys.	January 2011 (Pre-Assembly) March 2011 (Post-Assembly)	Climate Survey
<i>What obstacles to Latino students face to being successful in Honors and AP classes?</i>	Interview 10-12 grade LSU students in Honors and AP classes.	January 2011	Discussion, Interviews
<i>What aspects of the leadership project were helpful, could be improved, or not helpful?</i>	Survey 9 th grade Pod students and LSU students.	April 2011	Survey

As I collect evidence, I will share it with the elder team and school administrators. LSU student leaders will be invited to help create and/or review surveys to make sure they are relevant to the students. The results of surveys and interviews will be used to reshape the program as it

continues next school year.

VI. RELATIONSHIP TO CALIFORNIA PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS (CPSELS) AND FIELDWORK

This leadership project is a large part of my 2010-2011 fieldwork plan, which will guide me in meeting the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSELS) and gaining experience in school leadership. Specifically, this project will help me develop my ability to build teams and facilitate collaboration between various stakeholder groups. Also, this project will hone my research, assessment, and evaluation skills necessary for continued participation in action research as I take on leadership roles at Pali.

Building a multi-dimensional support program for Latino students will give me an opportunity to promote a vision of equity and social justice at Pali and to generate conversation and debate about inequities that exist at our school. In view of last year's decline in API scores of Latino students, I suspect that the Pali community will be more open to exploring systemic barriers to academic success for our Latino students. This project also seeks to build social capital within our Latino community that enables parents and students to better advocate for equitable opportunity within the school.

Each element of this leadership projects meets several CPSELS as follows:

Spanish Speaking Parent Meeting

1.1 Facilitate the development of a shared vision

1.4 Identify and address barriers to accomplishing the vision

2.2 Promote equity, fairness, and respect among all stakeholders

- 2.5 Provide opportunities for stakeholders to develop collaboration skills, shared responsibility, and distributed leadership*
- 4.1 Recognize and respect the goals and aspirations of diverse families and communities*
- 4.2 Treat diverse community stakeholder groups with fairness and respect*
- 4.3 Incorporate information about family and community expectations into school decision-making and activities*
- 5.9 Encourage and inspire others to higher levels of performance, commitment, and motivation*

Latino “Elder” Meetings and Training

- 1.1 Facilitate the development of a shared vision*
- 1.3 Use the influence of diversity to improve teaching and learning*
- 1.4 Identify and address barriers to accomplishing the vision*
- 2.2 Promote equity, fairness, and respect among all stakeholders*
- 2.4 Guide and support professional development of staff to improve the learning of all students*
- 2.5 Provide opportunities for stakeholders to develop collaboration skills, shared responsibility, and distributed leadership*
- 5.4 Make and communicate decisions based upon relevant data and research about effective teaching, leadership, and equity*

“Homeboy to Harvard” Impact Assembly

- 1.4 Identify and address barriers to accomplishing the vision*
- 1.6 Leverage and marshal resources to implement the vision for all students*
- 2.2 Promote equity, fairness, and respect among all stakeholders*
- 3.3 Establish school processes that support student learning*
- 4.1 Recognize and respect the goals and aspirations of diverse family and community groups*
- 4.2 Treat diverse and community stakeholder groups with fairness and respect*
- 4.3 Incorporate information about family and community expectations into school decision-making and activities*
- 5.2 Protect the rights and confidentiality of students and staff*

6.6 View oneself as a leader of a team and also as a member of a larger team

Latino Student Union Sponsorship

2.1 Shape a culture in which high expectations are the norm for each student

2.2 Promote equity, fairness, and respect among all stakeholders

2.5 Provide opportunities for stakeholders to develop collaboration skills, shared responsibility, and distributed leadership

2.7 Utilize multiple assessment to evaluate student learning

4.2 Treat diverse and community stakeholder groups with fairness and respect

5.1 Model personal and professional ethics, integrity, justice, and fairness, and expect the same behavior from others

IV. APPENDIX

Artifact A: Sample Communication with Elder Team

October, 14, 2010

Hi everyone,

I'm attaching the first section of my project proposal for you to look at. My hypothesis is that the intervention model created by Village Nation will lead to similar gains (increased CST scores, academic achievement, increased self-efficacy) for Latino students when adapted to the specific culture and needs of Latino students.

I am currently analyzing the research to see which topics are most important to the Latino population and which intervention and support strategies are most effective. You two probably know intuitively and experientially what works for these kids, but I think having research to support our efforts will garner more outside support. Themes so far include:

**Need for parent involvement (which you are working on)*

**Need to let students know that we CARE about them (I think that our assemblies will be a great opportunity to do this)*

**Need to question our TRACKING system and the way our Latino students are disproportionately represented in lower track classes.*

**Need to create a sense of future, explicitly show students how Latino students can afford and succeed in college*

**Need to acknowledge the way that the system in general has not supported these students and create a space for political organization*

I will send you my Literature Review when it is completed.

On Friday, I held a focus group in my room of Latino students. We discussed some of the barriers at Pali to success of Latino students. A major issue was the sense that to be successful on much "check your culture at the door" when you step onto campus. There was also a sense that there is no space allotted to Latino culture outside of Spanish classes. The kids had a great idea to have certain teachers donate one corner of their rooms to modern, relevant Latino cultural issues, events, etc.

I'm very excited about everything that we are doing. I'm hoping that we can have a solid "elder team" created by December that will be devoted to working specifically with Latino students.

*Best,
Marike*

Artifact B: Parent Survey

ENCUESTA

1. ¿Qué sabe usted acerca de las metas y requisitos académicos del grado de su hijo/a?

Mucho Algo Un poco Nada

2. Indique cuáles:

Cuando mi hijo/a saca una D o F en una de sus clases yo:

<input type="checkbox"/> llamo por teléfono al maestro o le envió un correo electrónico	<input type="checkbox"/> le exijo a mi hijo/a que vaya a tutoría
<input type="checkbox"/> llamo a la consejera	<input type="checkbox"/> castigo a mi hijo/a
<input type="checkbox"/> hablo con mi hijo/a acerca de la mala calificación	<input type="checkbox"/> nada
<input type="checkbox"/> reviso sus calificaciones en Teacherweb.com	<input type="checkbox"/> otra cosa
<input type="checkbox"/> tengo una junta con el/la profesor/a	

3. ¿Cuántas veces falta su hijo/a a la escuela?

Una vez por mes Más de una vez por mes Una o dos veces por semestre Nunca

4. Indique las razones por las que su hijo/a falta a la escuela:

<input type="checkbox"/> enfermedad	<input type="checkbox"/> visita a la familia
<input type="checkbox"/> cuida a sus hermanos	<input type="checkbox"/> citas con el doctor o dentista
<input type="checkbox"/> vacaciones	<input type="checkbox"/> otra razón, escríbala

5. ¿Qué idioma se habla más en casa?

inglés español otro idioma _____

6. ¿Ayuda Ud. a su hijo/a con la tarea?

Casi todos los días Una o dos veces por semana Menos de una vez por semana

Nunca

7. ¿Cuántas veces se comunica con los maestros de su hijo/a?

Más de una vez al mes Una vez al mes Varias veces al año Una vez al año

nunca

8. ¿De qué manera prefiere comunicarse con el/la maestro/a de su hijo/a?

Por teléfono Por correo electrónico Una reunión en la escuela

9. ¿Asistió a la “Noche de regreso a la escuela”?

Sí No ¿Por qué no? _____

Queremos saber su opinión sobre cómo la escuela involucra a los padres en ella. Para las siguientes indique con el número si la escuela está haciendo un trabajo muy bueno, bueno, medio, malo, muy malo, no sé.

1. MUY BUENO

2. BUENO
3. MEDIO
4. MALO
5. MUY MALO
6. NO SÉ

La escuela

- les brinda a los padres oportunidades de hacer trabajo voluntario en ella. _____
- patrocina eventos para que los padres participen con sus hijos. _____
- proporciona un ambiente donde los padres se sienten bien recibidos. _____
- valora y respeta la diversidad de las familias de la comunidad. _____
- toma en cuenta el horario de trabajo de los padres cuando fija la hora de una reunión. _____
- ofrece traducciones para los padres que no hablan inglés. _____
- les da información a los padres sobre los logros de su hijo/a. _____
- deja saber cuando hay reuniones. _____
- informa muy bien a los padres acerca de los programas y actividades escolares. _____
- informa a los padres sobre planificación para la universidad y carreras. _____
- contestan las preguntas y responden a las dudas que tengan los padres. _____
- toman en cuenta las ideas de los padres con respecto a los programas y política escolares. _____
- les da información sobre el progreso de su hijo/a con respecto a su capacidad en el idioma inglés. _____

Artifact C: Sample Questions from Student Climate Survey

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

1. I feel like I belong at this school.
2. This school is preparing me well for what I want to do after high school.
3. I am treated with respect by teachers.
4. I am treated with respect by other students at this school.
5. The people most responsible for what I learn are my teachers.
6. The work at this school is challenging.
7. I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life.
8. I feel successful at school.
9. School is fun here.
10. I like this school.
11. I think this is a good school.
12. I like the students at this school.
13. Doing well in school makes me feel good about myself.
14. I am doing my best in school.

15. Participating in extracurricular activities is important to me.
16. Students at this school respect other students who are different than they are.
17. I make use of the tutoring offered here.
18. I make use of the college center here.

My teachers:

19. Expect students to do their best.
20. Are understanding when students have personal problems.
21. Care about me.
22. Make learning fun.
23. Are excited about the subject they teach.
24. Give me individual attention when I need it.
25. Challenge me to do better.

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