

Impact

Sharing the difference CSU Extension makes in people's lives and their communities.

Closing the gap between home and school

A Southwestern Colorado-based program helps students, teachers and parents find common ground, gain skills and succeed.

Issue

The diversity of people living in the Four Corners region of Colorado and New Mexico has led to cultural differences and a history of misunderstanding. Over the years, these two factors have complicated relationships between families and schools. Concern that this dynamic was limiting children's ability to succeed in school led Colorado State University Extension educators to build a 'bridge' of communication between parents and teachers.

Extension's Response

The *DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridges* program seeks to strengthen family-school relationships and support children's success in school. *Bridges* is a researched-based component of CSU Extension's *DARE to be You 4-H Youth Development* programming. The program focuses on children in kindergarten through second grade, their parents and teachers.

CSU Extension piloted *DTBY Bridges* from 2001 to 2005 as part of a research study funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. The program took place in several Navajo Nation communities surrounding Shiprock, New Mexico, and in a multi-ethnic community located in Southwestern Colorado. Both sites had high rates of school dropout and substance abuse.

DTBY Bridges brings parents and children together with their teachers in an 11-week curriculum. Each week DTBY facilitators guide participants through 2.5 hours of activities that help develop children's self-esteem and enhance parent and teacher self-confidence. Ultimately, participants learn better ways to communicate, solve problems and make decisions that benefit the entire family.

In particular, parents learn to create positive home environments that support academic success. They also learn the benefits of volunteering at their child's school and attending events. Teachers learn that they have a lot in common with families and gain insight into different cultural values. Youth activities develop self-responsibility, empathy, communication, problem-solving and decision-making skills. Parents and teachers spend a portion of each session working together under the guidance of a trained adult program facilitator. Youth break into separate but concurrent workshops led by a child program coordinator and trained teens.

In each year of the study, *Bridges* facilitators recruited teachers to participate. Classrooms were randomly chosen to participate in weekly classes and take surveys, or to only complete surveys. Overall, 346 adult family members, 305 children ages five to seven, and 80 classroom teachers from both study areas participated.



The Bottom Line

- *DARE to be You Bridges* is a researched-based program that raises awareness of the strong link between educational success and future achievement.
- *Bridges* increases parent engagement in schools and builds their skills in creating positive home environments that support educational success.
- In 2006, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National 4-H Council awarded *DTBY Bridges* the *FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Award* for giving children in rural communities what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families.

Impact

Extensive evaluation of *DARE to be You Bridges* participants confirms that the program successfully generated several positive outcomes. Parents witnessed teachers having an improved commitment to their child. They also learned to effectively communicate their expectations for the parent-teacher relationship. At the same time, teachers found new inspiration in parents' commitment to their child's progress in school. They also reported a new appreciation for parents' strengths and say they understand more clearly the challenges that some families face. Parents and teachers agree that parent involvement is important—teachers alone do not always know what is best for children and families have more responsibility than teachers for teaching children to be respectful and polite.

All evaluation instruments followed rigorous social science protocols that generated statistically valid and reliable data. Evaluation of *Bridges* included several components:

- External evaluators conducted individual interviews with parents, teachers and children at 6-, 12- and 18-month follow-up intervals.
- Teachers, parents and children completed self-report surveys which measured parental efficacy, child-rearing practices, depression, perceptions of school and family relationships, teaching efficacy, perceptions of families, personal efficacy, and perceptions of school.
- Teachers and parents also completed surveys on youth.

Other findings include:

Parents

- Are more confident and satisfied with parental role;
- Learned and used new and effective home management skills;
- Reported becoming more engaged with the schools.

Teachers

- Saw families in a more positive light;
- Felt more positive about their relationships with families and students;
- More able to empathize with cultural differences;
- Improved spirit of collaboration with parents.

Students

- Showed less aggressive classroom behavior;
- Increase their social skills;
- Improve their perception of school.

Previous research shows that effective communication between families and schools is linked to increased educational success for children. According to CSU Extension, academic success during the early school years is one of the most compelling factors that keep children from adopting risky behaviors later in life.

The success of the Bridges pilot study warrants further study to see if these positive changes can be replicated with new populations and different communities. Findings from such studies may hold important keys for understanding the nationwide crisis of decreasing success at school in youth.

“Making schools work takes an ongoing commitment on the part of parents, teachers and children. We give them the opportunity to get in a room together, to get to know one another and to find the motivation to work towards a common goal: ensuring the best education possible for their children.”

– Jan Miller-Heyl

program director DARE to be You Bridges (DTBY)

DARE to be You

In 1979, Jan Miller-Heyl created *DARE to be You* to generate positive youth outcomes through early prevention education for parents and children. The acronym DARE stands for:

Decision-making
Assertiveness
Responsibility
Esteem

DARE to be You has several researched-based components, such as *Preschool Families*, *Care to Wait* and *Peer Educators*. *DARE to be You Preschool Families* is listed on the *National Registry of Effective Prevention Programs* and has a 'Model Family Program' designation for substance abuse and delinquency prevention. Program director Jan Miller-Heyl and colleagues from CSU's School of Human Development and Family Studies adapted and merged curriculum from *Preschool Families* and *Peer Educators* to create *DTBY Bridges*.

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