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Officials: FSA kindergarten readiness program a success

Katie Jansen Oct 24, 2015

HILLSBOROUGH — The new kindergarten readiness program launched this summer is meeting its goals, the Family Success Alliance announced this week in conjunction with two local school districts.

The program rolled out this summer after the Family Success Alliance collected surveys and held community listening sessions to help in prioritizing the communities' needs.

"This is the start of multiple interventions which will carry these children on a pipeline to young adult success," said Michael Steiner, chairman of the Family Success Alliance advisory council.



The program, which was held at three elementary schools and served 66 families, hoped to provide academic, social and emotional support for underserved families and for students who didn't have previous school experience.

Of this summer's participants, about 48 percent didn't have prior school experience, and 70 percent of families qualified for free and reduced lunch.

The students were given pre- and post-tests to measure their level of readiness for kindergarten. By the end of the 15- to 16-day program, many of the students moved from the bottom two levels — beginning and in progress, to the top two levels — basic or full proficiency.

At New Hope Elementary, 63 percent of students exhibited basic proficiency — up from 0 percent during the pre-tests.

At Frank Porter Graham Elementary, 26 percent of students fell in the basic proficiency level and 48 percent of students were fully proficient — both up from 0 percent two weeks prior.

Magda Parvey, assistance superintendent for instructional services for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said the readiness program aligns nicely with other steps the district is taking to close the achievement gap the district has struggled with for years.

Some students entered the program with little to no English. At each of the three sites, the majority of students were Hispanic.

“Language and vocabulary put students at a deficit,” Parvey said. “So when you give them the exposure to read-alouds where they’re hearing language and learning to have that listening comprehension, it very much helps them in terms of school readiness ... Coming in with some language, coming in and understanding what school is about, that puts them on equal footing.”

Ambra Wilson, New Hope Elementary’s assistant principal and site administrator for the kindergarten program, said the program was not only about helping the students adjust to school, but about helping the parents feel comfortable, too.

“And really, we’re a family at New Hope,” she said. “So now (the students are) a part of that family, and we want the parents to feel a part of that family. And they did tell us at the end of this program 100 percent of them felt welcomed and ready to be a part of our school. So we really feel like the kindergarten readiness camp provided us with that springboard that we needed to really launch this school year in the right direction.”

Wilson also said that although some program participants needed behavioral interventions during the summer program, incidents have been few and far between since they've started school.



"The benefits to this program go outside the data that can be put on paper," she said.

Steiner said the Family Success Alliance hopes to continue offering the program in the future, as well as expand enrollment.

This year's program was funded by \$75,000 from the social justice fund, which was allocated by the Orange County Board of Commissioners. Steiner said the alliance plans to continue working with the commissioners and both school districts to secure future funding.

The organization is also working toward implementing other programs along the pipeline to continue working with these students.

Parvey said the district looks forward to working with the Family Success Alliance in the future.

"We have really appreciated the 'it takes a village' approach that Family Success Alliance provided, and we're honored to be a part of that," she said.


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