

# Great Ideas for Great Public Schools

## OKLAHOMA

### Reaching out to Hispanic community helps raise student achievement

In 2007, NEA's Public Engagement Project and the Oklahoma Education Association convened the first of a series of community conversations about closing achievement gaps at Putnam City West High School, part of a school district with the same name located in Oklahoma City. The result was **Compadres in Education**, a hugely successful Hispanic outreach program—since its inception, the graduation rate among Hispanic students has risen by nearly 70 percent.

**Service-learning**, a proven means of motivating students and raising graduation rates, promises to bring further progress. Putnam City's student body of more than 1,600, which turns over at the rate of 40 percent per year, is 24 percent Hispanic and 17 percent English-language learners. More than 70 percent of the school's students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

#### Measurable success

According to assistant principal Melanie Pealor, since the inception of Compadres in Education in 2007:

- The number of graduating Hispanic students has risen by nearly 70 percent.
- The pass rate among Hispanic students on the End-of-Instruction Test has gone up 22 points in Algebra II (from 60 to 82 percent) and 13 points in English II (from 70 to 83 percent).
- The Academic Performance Index for Hispanic students, a broader measure of achievement, has risen by nearly 30 percent—from 893 to 1,151 (on a 1,500-point scale).

#### Meaningful professional development for teachers

- Addressing the needs of English-language learners has been a key focus.
- According to Jennifer Pasillas, a teacher at Putnam City West, effective techniques include presenting information visually, using hands-on activities, and creating an environment in which students who are still learning English are comfortable speaking it, even if they make mistakes.

#### For more information:

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NEA web site: *How the Union Helps Build a Better School*, <http://bit.ly/fLBJUA>



*Great Public Schools for Every Student*

#### Engaging parents and families, building community support

- Attendance at Noche de Padres Hispánicos (Hispanic Family Night) has gone from 50 people to 250 or more.
- The school has hired more bilingual staff and provides communications in English and in Spanish.
- Written course descriptions, in Spanish and in English, emphasize college entry requirements.
- Presentations demonstrate the economic value of college—for example, how much higher a college graduate's income is likely to be.
- Teachers help students and their families fill out complex federal financial aid forms and apply for state scholarship programs—for example, Oklahoma's Promise, which serves families earning less than \$50,000.

#### Service-learning

- Service-learning—using academic knowledge to solve real-life problems—is increasingly important, especially among students at risk of dropping out.
- A proven means of motivating students and raising graduation rates, service-learning also builds civic responsibility.