

Creating a College-Going School Culture in Northern New Mexico:
School-Based Program Models in Three Rural Communities

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Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American
Educational Research Association, April 22, 2003, Chicago, Illinois

This paper analyzes the first two years of a program called ENLACE (Engaging Latino Communities for Education) in three communities in Northern New Mexico. The study was conducted as part of the program evaluation of ENLACE and funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Background and Program Structure

The purpose of ENLACE is to increase high school graduation rates and college preparation and admission among Hispanic students. ENLACE is a community-based, four-year initiative funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. ENLACE in New Mexico is one of thirteen ENLACE sites in the United States. Northern New Mexico ENLACE is one of three sites in a statewide New Mexico ENLACE collaborative with sister projects in Albuquerque at the University of New Mexico and Las Cruces at New Mexico State University.

Northern New Mexico ENLACE encompasses a five county area. It is a partnership of three institutions of higher education (IHE's): New Mexico Highlands University (NMHU), a four-year institution in Las Vegas; and two-year colleges: Northern New Mexico Community College (NNMCC) in Española, and Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) in Santa Fe. The IHE's work with the public schools to develop high school based programs for students.

The goals of ENLACE in Northern New Mexico are to:

- Engage communities in plans and goal setting for increased Hispanic student graduation rates and college admissions,
- Create college preparation curricula in the schools, and
- Build community support and sustainability for college preparation curricula in high schools and increased college going rates

ENLACE in Northern New Mexico is led by site teams comprised of high school and IHE staff, parents, and students to design and implement college preparation programs that address student needs in each community. Leadership training and the use of students as researchers in their communities are woven into the school-based efforts to strengthen the academic support for students and provide tools for college planning. ENLACE goals are to create a rigorous academic curriculum for all students.

Site teams selected two models, AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and a community college concurrent enrollment curriculum. AVID is a program model developed in California to provide college preparation and support to students who are first generation

college going. Students are immersed in an academically rigorous curriculum. Research data show that AVID is successful in increasing college eligibility and enrollment rates of minority student populations. The community college concurrent enrollment model includes college preparation support, leadership training, and a various interdisciplinary courses taught by community college faculty. In all of the sites, the programs are delivered as credit courses, meeting one hour or one block per day. Four high schools in three Northern New Mexico communities are implementing the models; two chose AVID and two chose the concurrent enrollment curriculum. Two additional communities, Peñasco and Mora, are engaged in a community planning process to identify student needs and to select program models.

Theoretical Framework

The cultural theory of schooling provides the theoretical framework to study community-based processes that shape the culture of a school. The theory assumes a social constructivist view of reality and knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and a culturally based perspective of individuals' interpretations of meaning as causal for social action (Erickson, 1986). Scholars employ the cultural theory of schooling to examine the subtle and powerful ways that schools enact and recreate larger cultural struggles that define and limit individuals' roles in society.

Lipman (1999) documented community racism and teachers' ideologies as factors in the failure of school restructuring efforts in two urban junior high schools. Hubbard and Mehan (1999) describe the transfer of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a successful college preparation model developed in California, to a segregated community in the South. The distortion of the AVID model to sustain the established social order and its rejection by the community revealed the role of local traditions and beliefs in the control of schools. In a description of a successful transfer of the AVID model, Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Lintz (1996) found that working class parents provide support of their children's educational goals in significant ways without direct school involvement. School-based college preparation programs can bridge the gap between parents and schools, especially when schools are the source of alienation, conflict, and misunderstanding for parents who distrust schools based upon their experiences as students.

Methods

The study was ethnographic in design and conducted at four school sites in three Northern New Mexico communities. Data were collected by observation, formal and informal interviews, surveys, focus groups, and document analysis. As an interpretive study, the research methods

sought to determine “immediate and local meanings of action, as defined from the actor’s point of view” (Erickson, 1986).

Data Sources

In the first two years of a four-year study of the ENLACE program, data were gathered in communities and schools. High school classrooms, ENLACE staff meetings, community events, and school board meetings were observed in Northern New Mexico communities of Santa Fe, Española, and Las Vegas. Students, teachers, school administrators, and community members were interviewed formally and informally. New Mexico State Department of Education school-level data were examined and analyzed. High school students were trained in research methods and conducted interviews, focus groups and community surveys in their communities. Field notes were recorded during and after observations of meetings and community events.

Northern New Mexico Setting

Regional differences shaped the Northern New Mexico approach to programs and resource constraints. The ENLACE experience is characterized by leveraging of funds, community partnerships, and community-based planning.

Leveraging ENLACE grant dollars enables the project to expand the scope to include multiple sites and to obtain supplemental staffing through the institutions of higher education (IHE's) and nonprofit organizations (NPO's) that are working in the communities. Northern New Mexico ENLACE is funded by a variety of community stakeholders. The IHE's contribute staff and funding, the UC/LANL Foundation provides support, the school districts have allocated funds for the school site programs, collaborations with other organizations, including SER/Santa Fe and La Jicarita Enterprise Community, have extended the reach of ENLACE.

Building strong community support is intended to insure the survival of ENLACE efforts beyond the period of grant funding. In the past, programs vanished when funding ended and staff was no longer available to provide services and support. The Northern New Mexico ENLACE staff are building local capacity through community partnerships during the four years of ENLACE funding.

The importance of an extended planning period is crucial in a multi-sited project. The planning process is shaped by differences in the politics and means of introducing new ideas and programs into local institutions. The number of IHE's in Northern New Mexico is also a factor. The ENLACE

partnership includes three IHE's. The number of counties, institutions and school districts extend the planning efforts.

Regional Identity

Northern New Mexico is often characterized as a distinctive region due to its physical remoteness and isolation. An arid, mountainous terrain defines it geographically as a high altitude desert. Its traditions and rural livelihoods create unique cultural forms within the state. Each school culture reflects its community, forming distinctive subcultures within the Northern New Mexico regional culture. These overlapping cultural worlds are the context of ENLACE in Northern New Mexico.

The school and community cultures pose the most formidable challenge to ENLACE in Northern New Mexico as it begins the process of communicating ENLACE principles of collaboration and leadership to achieve the goal of increased student graduation rates. How will the project follow ENLACE models, participate in a statewide collaborative, and also operate effectively in three communities with strong local traditions?

The selected communities are Española, Santa Fe, and Las Vegas. They were chosen for several reasons: their student populations are struggling academically as evidenced by low rates of high school graduation and college admission, the presence of the IHE's in the communities, an existing partnership with a GearUp program, and a pilot program of concurrent enrollment for underachieving students. The strong outreach effort of the IHE's in these communities was also a factor. The high schools are Santa Fe High School, Española Valley High School, and Robertson High School in Las Vegas. The schools met the W.K. Kellogg Foundation objective to select the most adversely affected student populations in New Mexico. By comparison to state averages for student achievement and access to required courses, students in the selected schools are underserved (New Mexico Department of Education, 2002).

Program Model Evaluation

During the fall of 2001, the ENLACE implementation team evaluated high school and community college program models for student retention, college preparation, and academic goal setting to reach college graduation. The team consisted of representatives of the IHE partners. Successful models of school partnerships and early academic outreach were identified at the University of California, Riverside (UCR). The ENLACE team also evaluated two programs designed to improve the retention and graduation rates of Hispanic students in California schools: Puente and AVID. Both AVID and Puente have a twenty year

history of success and have achieved national recognition for their sustained efforts with students in high schools and community colleges.

Program Selection

Two program models for student retention and college preparation were chosen, AVID and a community college concurrent enrollment program. Both models include key elements identified by Perna (2002) in a study of precollege outreach programs for historically underrepresented groups of students. She analyzed 1,100 precollege outreach and retention programs, identifying five critical components of successful programs: a goal of college attendance; college tours, visits and fairs; a goal of promoting rigorous course-taking; a parental involvement component; and programs beginning in the 8th grade.

AVID Program Model

The ENLACE team visited AVID and Puente school programs in California and met with program staff. They determined that the costs to implement were comparable in both programs. AVID has a strong support organization for teachers and students, its curriculum is established and lends itself to local adaptation in classrooms. The most compelling selection criteria was the strong alignment of AVID and ENLACE program goals for systemic change in schools. AVID is a model for systemic change through creation of a school culture of college going for all students.

A site visit to an AVID demonstration high school in Lubbock, Texas in January, 2002, convinced the high school staff that they could implement a similar program with one year of planning. The decision to proceed with the AVID model for Española Valley High School and Las Vegas Robertson High School was a major accomplishment for the project, using a community-based process to select a program model. Parents, teachers, and principals were part of the selection of the AVID model. Based on their recommendations, the selection of AVID was approved by the school boards in Española and Las Vegas.

Community College Concurrent Enrollment Program Model

In Santa Fe, the Santa Fe Community College and Santa Fe High School began a pilot program for students who had fallen behind in credits required to graduate from high school and were strong candidates for dropping out. The high school principal worked with the school district curriculum committee and the community college admissions staff to design a concurrent enrollment program for twelve credits that would assist in retaining the students in high school with the added incentive of

college credits upon high school graduation. This model was adopted by the ENLACE site team. ENLACE staff provide leadership development programs at SFCC, after school tutoring, parent training, school liaison, and guest speakers.

AVID in Española and Las Vegas

Working in teams of a community college or university and a high school, the Northern New Mexico ENLACE staff began implementing the AVID program model at two high schools, Española Valley High and Robertson High in Las Vegas. AVID is a proven model for high school-based college preparation curricula using college student tutors and an AVID-trained teacher working with the cohort to teach the hidden curriculum of school including college preparation processes. AVID was developed to provide first generation college going students with knowledge to access higher education, habits of a scholar, tutoring, and academic goal setting. Using a model of family, peer and school support, AVID takes the form of one additional hour of instruction per day in a cohort of 15 to 20 students taught by an experienced teacher who works intensively with them to overcome academic, financial, and personal hurdles to achieve goals.

As part of the AVID model's commitment to changing a school's culture to a culture of college going for all students, teacher training is an important requirement. Teacher training in AVID Summer Institute is integral to the goal of systemic change. (AVID Center, 2002). The goal is to provide AVID support to all students, not just those in one classroom. The goals of ENLACE/AVID are to build community support for students, expose them to a rigorous high schools curriculum, and develop scholarly habits necessary to succeed in colleges or universities.

Community College Concurrent Enrollment in Santa Fe High Schools

In September of 2002, 16 students from Capital High School and 15 students from Santa Fe High School were recruited to be a part of the Santa Fe ENLACE cohort. A weekend retreat at Ghost Ranch in Abiquiu, NM provided student orientation and communication of high expectations of ENLACE. The retreat was the beginning of a commitment that each student made to improve his or her own academic success, and also to take a leadership role in increasing the graduation rates for other Hispanic students in New Mexico.

Santa Fe ENLACE students attend tutoring sessions two days per week where they learn to take Cornell Notes, to organize their schoolwork, and inquire about the content of their classes. They also participate in a youth leadership development class where they will learn leadership and facilitation skills that will prepare them to talk with younger students

about the importance of staying in school. In addition to the students' commitment, the parents of each student have agreed to commit the success of their young person by participating in a series of parent workshops.

Program Comparison

Public schools in Northern New Mexico offer limited classes for advanced placement and college preparation curricula to meet college admission requirements. At each of the four high school sites a student cohort of 16 to 25 students participate in one ENLACE period or block. The curricula are similar across program models with emphasis on college preparation, parental involvement, increased academic rigor, tutoring, and public speaking. At the non-AVID schools, AVID strategies have been woven into the program including Cornell note taking, Socratic questioning, journaling, tutoring, and weekly reporting on academic progress by teachers in students' other classes.

Site coordinators work together to provide activities to students, parents, and teachers across the sites. These cooperative events and sessions enhance student support and participation. Weekend and summer retreats, student leadership conferences, tutor training, parent and educator leadership seminars, and teacher training and networking are functions that are conducted collectively for all sites.

Findings

The work of ENLACE in Northern New Mexico is focused on forging a regional partnership, capacity building in three communities, and establishing programs to create change in high school cultures to improve graduation rates and college preparation. Results of these efforts are the participation of four high schools in school-based programs for college preparation and leadership development for students and educators. The findings in the first two years of school-based ENLACE programs are reported in two sections: (1) community processes and (2) student, teacher, and school effects.

Community Processes

The importance of local capacity building and community decision making.

Community processes, local histories and norms contribute to and strengthen efforts to change schools. Communication and planning take time. Each school and community has a set of priorities and commitment to projects which define the ENLACE timetable and people available to

work on new projects. Local consideration is crucial to acceptance of new forms of school practice. Each site developed programs according to school and community established schedules. The sites benefited from mutual support and collective experiences.

ENLACE site teams work with high schools and local school administrators to collaborate, plan, and initiate support for students' academic goals. Understanding the political issues that administrators have to negotiate is part of the ENLACE-initiated change. The ENLACE team is aware of past experiences where imported programs failed in their attempts to impose school reform programs because they did not take the time to develop strong collaborative teams and processes. These were examples of "doing to" students and schools as opposed to "doing with" them.

Institutional challenges.

The ENLACE sites discovered that they were often viewed as competitors for funding within and among their institutions. The IHE's monitor staff grant applications to local grantmakers to minimize internal conflicts. Learning to work as partners in search of funding has posed challenges in a state where local foundations and grantmakers have established funding patterns. ENLACE site teams work together to establish permanent legislative and institutional funding for ENLACE programs, reducing the dependency on soft money and the uncertainty of year to year funding.

Communication of ENLACE goals.

Because of its unusual community-based approach, misconceptions remain about ENLACE program goals, funding, and approach to social change. This is especially true in the commitment to leadership development and sustainability for the work at the end of the four-year project. The gradual phase-out of the ENLACE project staff will turn over the program to local stakeholders in the schools and communities. Communication of the finite nature of ENLACE with schools and other stakeholders is an important community relations effort.

Governance.

Each of the three IHE partners and school districts face separate governance challenges. The elected boards of the school districts establish funding priorities and instructional policy for their institutions. Coordinating efforts with three IHE governing boards and three school boards is the policy level challenge of ENLACE and its successors.

Networking and collaboration.

When partnerships are forged the resulting collaboration reinforces program goals. The ability to counter the isolation and frustration of working alone defines the value of ENLACE. Teachers and students have experienced the advantages of working across community boundaries as ENLACE teams.

Multisitedness.

Social change in rural areas poses particular challenges including the need to serve three communities and address issues of marginalization and exclusion. Multisitedness defines the work with schools in Northern New Mexico by recognizing the struggle for survival of rural communities. The variety of school sites also challenges the ENLACE model to be more adaptable in all areas from student goal setting to leadership development and sustainability. Connections among the sites has strengthened their school programs and increased local capacity for change.

Perceptions and expectations.

The cultural realities of a tradition-bound and rural region are often problematized. The characterization of Northern New Mexico as resistant to change, inefficient, provincial, and far beyond the mainstream of the broader American culture increases its isolation, obscuring its realities. The ENLACE project has a unique opportunity to directly address these perceptions. The perceptions are mutually sustained by insiders and outsiders and have the power of myth when used to explain low expectations for students' academic goals by citing a lower value placed on education by Hispanic families in comparison to the general population.

An important task of ENLACE is to educate the public and policymakers on issues of resource imbalance, access restrictions, lowered expectations, and weak support systems that contribute to low student achievement. The Northern New Mexico ENLACE staff are ideologically committed to community education as fundamental to changing schools. One way that they are making these changes is by actively confronting cultural deficit modes of thinking, replacing them with strong, locally-defined models of Hispanic student success. Descriptions of students as "at promise," "underserved," and "historically underrepresented" are preferred to labeling them as "at risk" and "disadvantaged."

Collaboration among Northern New Mexico communities.

In addition to outsider perceptions of difference, there are differences in styles, expectations, and accepted patterns of collective work among communities in Northern New Mexico. ENLACE site teams recognize these differences and adapt program models in each community. Cross-community collaboration is a significant part of the ENLACE effort in Northern New Mexico. Working together, students and parents from all the sites conduct training sessions, attend conferences, and lobby the legislature in support of educational policies affecting their schools.

Rural isolation.

Distances between communities require extra time and more meetings. Collaborative efforts take more time to reach agreement than single site efforts. Organizational flexibility is required to strengthen the ENLACE project's ability to respond to local communities. The ENLACE staff spend a majority of their time in the field working with local groups and individuals in the communities. Community participation provides essential support to the development of new school-based programs to improve student achievement.

*Student, Teacher and School Effects**Student effects.*

- When asked and supported, ENLACE high school students will meet the challenges of difficult academic work required of them.
- Effective student cohort selection balances academic need with ability to commit to ENLACE intervention programs. Often the students who are most accessible and willing to participate are not those with the greatest academic needs. Student turnover in the cohort is the result of changes in levels of expectations, increased academic workloads, personal adjustment problems, and family support. Parents of struggling students are counseling as well as the students before a decision is reached to stay in the cohort or leave.
- Students' personal lives are complicated by poverty, family unemployment, substance abuse, and violence that affect academic progress in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Teacher effects.

- Teachers are further challenged to meet student needs when basic classroom materials (eg: textbooks) are not provided by the schools.

- Effective communication of program objectives among teachers, administrators, program managers, and evaluators is essential to support ENLACE goals.
- The level of staff commitment and availability is an indicator of program effectiveness, and may vary from year to year, depending on school resources.

School effects.

- Changes in program organization are often necessary to adapt to local school conditions. Flexibility is essential to successful transfer of program models. For example, tutor availability varies at each site and from semester to semester, frequently changing the tutoring schedule in the classrooms.
- Systemic change in support of academic excellence for Hispanic students requires consistent support and leadership training of teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Pockets of resistance to ENLACE were encountered at the sites. ENLACE staff worked around the obstacles and resisting staff. Many skeptical teachers and administrators have joined the ENLACE efforts.
- ENLACE school interventions are intended to increase academic rigor. By engaging in partnerships with GearUp, local community colleges, and university support, ENLACE models the practices of "distributed leadership" in schools.
- ENLACE supports parents, teachers, and students to create the political will required for systemic change in schools. The ENLACE site teams are trained to become advocates for students.
- Leadership in high schools may not be strong enough to support change without intervention and support of ENLACE.

Educational Importance

The Northern New Mexico ENLACE project challenges school bureaucracies with historically low expectations for students. The program evaluation reveals the process of change in rural schools including teaching practices, institutional structures, school culture, the role of the community. It seeks to explain the ways that students, parents, teachers, and administrators contribute to increasing the number of college-eligible Hispanic students who gain admission to and succeed in college.

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