

Evaluation of the 2006–2007 Implementation of *Conquista Tus Sueños (Realize Your Dreams)*

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Background

The Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) recognizes the importance of parent involvement in building a learning community that provides family outreach and promotes the achievement of all students. Therefore, the MCPS Division of Family and Community Partnerships (DFCP), in conjunction with the Hispanic Alliance of Montgomery County, developed a Spanish language program - *Conquista Tus Sueños (Realize Your Dreams)* - aimed at empowering the Latino parent community by teaching strategies to improve communication, parenting, personal goal setting, and family relationships. This is in alignment with the MCPS strategic plan, Goal 3: Strengthen Productive Partnerships for Education.

The Department of Shared Accountability (DSA) is conducting an evaluation to assess the implementation of *Conquista Tus Sueños*, a parent-training program, delivered in Spanish, for Latino parents whose children are enrolled in MCPS. Initiated in 2001, this self-empowering program highlights the importance of parents advocating for the educational needs of their children and also enhances parents' understanding of the school system's organization and procedures, as well as the academic and behavioral expectations for students. The ultimate goal of the program is to narrow the achievement gap between Latino and non-Latino students.

The design of *Conquista Tus Sueños* is from a research-based framework that incorporates theories from transactional analysis and humanistic works of such writers as Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Eric Berne, Muriel James, and Thomas Harris (F. Cruz-Villalba, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

The program is a 10-hour motivational course offered as five sessions or modules based on the following topics: 1) How believing in oneself can be changed and how all parents are leaders, 2) How resentment develops among family members and others when making cultural adaptations, 3) How parents can help

their children with cultural transition and gain a better understanding of the workings of MCPS, 4) How values manifest themselves in relationships and empowerment, and 5) How to convert problems into opportunities as well as future commitments. Parents are asked to commit to attend all five modules. Parents who attended at least three modules were awarded a certificate of participation.

The purpose of this brief is to discuss the findings from surveys administered during the 2006–2007 school year after selected modules, as well as follow-up phone surveys. The purpose of the surveys conducted after the selected modules was to measure results and changes to be effected among participants.

Methodology

Site Locations. Site locations for *Conquista Tus Sueños* evolved over its six years. In the past, parent outreach staff from the Division of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) were the link between *Conquista Tus Sueños* and the local schools. Currently, requests for the program from the schools are accepted and acted upon by DFCEP staff. Schools that want the program fill out a request form; then these are given priority based on the demographic concentration of the school and number of parents who could attend (F. Cruz-Villalba, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

During the fall of 2006, the *Conquista Tus Sueños* program was offered at four sites: Emory Grove Center, New Hampshire Estates Elementary School, Quince Orchard High School, and Seneca Valley High School. In the spring of 2007, the program was offered at five sites: Glen Haven Elementary School, A. Mario Loiederman Middle School, Maryvale Elementary School, South Lake Elementary School, and Summit Hall Elementary School.

There were no differences in the program offered in fall and spring, nor were there differences in the program based on site location.

Parent Outreach. Site coordinators who work within a school informed parents about *Conquista Tus Sueños*. In the initial years of the program, parents were informed by the ESOL parent outreach worker, the counselors at each high school, or teachers at elementary or middle schools. Word-of-mouth publicity has been the best method to recruit parents. Incentives such as child care and refreshments also are used to encourage participation (F. Cruz-Villalba, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

Module Evaluations. A survey instrument was initially developed by the program staff and was in use at each school site prior to DSA’s involvement. DSA was asked to examine the survey instruments to assist with clarity. These modified surveys were put in place after the program had already begun at New Hampshire Estates Elementary School during fall 2006. The surveys were administered in Spanish during the first, third, and fifth modules.

Follow-up Survey. During the fall of 2007, randomly selected participants of *Conquista Tus Sueños* who participated during the 2006–2007 school year were telephoned to gather feedback on their participation in and satisfaction with the program. Follow-up surveys were conducted in Spanish via telephone. Using an attendance roster from program staff, participants were randomly selected using SPSS® software. The criterion entered into SPSS® was for a minimum of 52% of the participant roster. A total of 61 participants from fall and 67 from spring were randomly selected. Response rates of 79% for fall and 67% for spring were obtained. For those contacted who did not respond, the reasons included: telephone disconnected, participant did not remember the program, no answer (after several tries), and moved or no longer at that telephone number. A total of 93 participants responded to the follow-up survey.

Summary of Major Findings

Findings from surveys reveal that participation in *Conquista Tus Sueños* had the following impacts on participants:

- Greater understanding of how to help one’s child with cultural adaptation and school work
- Greater confidence in speaking with teachers about their child’s education
- Increased participation in school activities and events
- Greater confidence in their ability to help their child with homework and school projects
- Greater understanding of the importance of being involved in their child’s education

- Willingness by all participants to recommend the program to a friend

Findings from surveys also revealed a need for more diverse topic discussions.

Discussion of Findings

Fall 2006

During the fall of 2006, 66 parents attended the first module of *Conquista Tus Sueños* across four sites. The intent was to have parents attend all modules to gain the most information that would help them understand the school system. By the fifth and final module during the fall, 50 parents attended (Table 1).

Table 1
Number of Participants by Site Location for Fall 2006

Site	Module 1	Module 3	Module 5
Emory Grove Center	12	6	4
New Hampshire Estates ES	31	19	26
Quince Orchard HS	12	16	12
Seneca Valley HS	11	17	8
Total	66	58	50

Following the first, third, and fifth modules, participants were asked to complete a brief survey about what was discussed during that module. A majority of the respondents had positive responses to the statements presented in the survey.

Module 1. The first module is designed to introduce parents to the program and help them understand the difference between being a victim of circumstances and being a leader. Participants who attended the module at New Hampshire Estates Elementary School received the unrevised survey instrument as the program was initiated prior to DSA’s involvement. Findings from this school’s participants are not included in the results for this module.

After listening to the presentation, 94% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that one could control feeling like a victim based on the actions of others. Additionally, 74% agreed or strongly agreed that leaders are born to be in power, after listening to the presentation. This finding reveals a lack of understanding of the intent of the content of this module as parents should not have agreed that leaders are born. It is possible that the wording of this statement was confusing to participants, which led to the large percentage in agreement. Ninety-seven percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were motivated to continue attending *Conquista Tus Sueños* after hearing the presentation about the

purpose of the program. Finally, 86% of participants believed that Latino parents are always welcome in their child’s school (Table A1).

Module 3. Helping participants understand how to help their child with cultural transition and navigating MCPS were the topics discussed during module 3. As with module 1, participants who attended module 3 at New Hampshire Estates ES received the unrevised survey instrument as the program was initiated prior to DSA’s involvement. Findings from this school’s participants are not included in the results for this module.

All participants (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that the presentation gave them new ideas on how to help their child with cultural adaptation. Similarly, 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more about their capacity to help their child. Based on the information presented about navigating MCPS, 98% of participants believed it was useful in helping them understand how to better navigate the school system (Table A2).

Module 5. Although the topic of discussion for this module was converting problems into opportunities, the survey was designed to assess changes participants made as a result of attending *Conquista Tus Sueños*. Participants who attended this module at Emory Grove Center received the unrevised survey instrument as the program staff inadvertently administered the incorrect version. Findings from this school’s participants are not included in the results for this module.

Since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños*, all participants (100%) reported a) feeling more capable to communicate with their child’s school and teachers; b) improved relations with their family; c) feeling positive about their child’s future; and d) feeling sure of their ability to help their children with homework and school projects (Table A3). Furthermore, 98% reported a) being more confident in speaking with teachers about their child’s education and b) having joined or participated in activities at their child’s school since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños* (Table A3).

Spring 2007

In spring 2007, 111 parents attended the first module of *Conquista Tus Sueños* at five sites. Similar to the fall delivery of the program, parents were asked to commit to attending at least three of the five modules. At the fifth and final module during the spring, 57 parents attended (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of Participants by Site Location for Spring 2007

Site	Module 1	Module 3	Module 5
Glen Haven ES	27	26	14
South Lake ES	30	15	9
Loiederman MS	12	7	7
Maryvale ES	22	15	21
Summit Hall ES	20	7	6
Total	111	70	57

Module 1. The survey administered during module 1 of the spring varied slightly from the survey offered during the fall as it was the instrument revised by DSA. A total of 111 participants attended this module. After listening to the presentation, 97% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the session helped them understand the importance of being involved in the education of their children. Additionally, 99% agreed or strongly agreed that the information presented during the module would help them advocate for the education of their child. Ninety-nine percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they were motivated to continue attending *Conquista Tus Sueños* after hearing the presentation about the purpose of the program (Table A4).

Module 3. Ninety-nine percent of the 70 participants who attended this module agreed or strongly agreed that the information provided a) gave them new ideas on how to reconnect with dreams and goals and b) would help them help their child to be successful in school (Table A5). Similarly, 96% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the information about navigating the school system gave them ideas that they could use to help their child (Table A5).

Module 5. Fifty-seven participants attended the final *Conquista Tus Sueños* module offered in the spring. Since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños*, 96% reported feeling positive about their child’s future; 95% reported improved family relationships and feeling sure of their ability to help their children with homework and school projects (Table A6). Furthermore, 93% reported being more confident in speaking with teachers about their children’s education, while 91% reported feeling more capable of communicating with their child’s school and teachers since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños* (Table A6).

Three additional questions were asked of participants during the final spring session. They were asked to identify from a list of five items, steps they would take as a result of participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños*. Participants also were asked to offer comments or suggestions for the program and to

identify their appreciation of the *Conquista Tus Sueños* program.

The majority of participants indicated they would improve their English (90%) and help their child with homework (84%) as a result of participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños*. Seventy-five percent of participants indicated they would speak with their child's teachers (Table 3).

Table 3
Percentage of Participants who Identified Steps They Would Take as a Result of Program Participation (N=57)

Item	%
Improve their English	89.5
Help with school homework	84.2
Speak with their children's teachers	75.4
Learn how to use computers	63.2
Join the PTA at their child's school	56.1
Other	42.1

Note. Participants could select multiple responses.

Ninety-five percent of the participants who attended the final module reported that their appreciation of the *Conquista Tus Sueños* program was good or very good. The remaining 5% did not respond to this item. In response to the open-ended question about other comments or suggestions, 40 out of the 57 participants provided comments. Of the 40 participants who responded to this item, themes centered on appreciation for the program (n= 15), opportunity for additional or longer classes (n=12), opportunities for computer classes (n=5), and opportunities for English classes (n=4).

Follow-up Survey

Results for the follow-up survey disaggregated by session attendance are provided in Table A7.

Respondents were asked to identify how many *Conquista Tus Sueños* sessions they attended. The majority (83%) indicated that they attended five sessions (Table 4).

All participants (100%) reported that they would recommend the *Conquista Tus Sueños* program to a friend. Similarly, 96% of respondents surveyed indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the *Conquista Tus Sueños* opportunities offered to them. Ninety-eight percent of respondents reported that instructors of *Conquista Tus Sueños* were helpful.

Table 4
Number and Percentage of Respondents Indicating Number of Sessions Attended, by Time of Year

Number of Sessions	Fall	Spring	Total
	N=48 (%)	N=45 (%)	N=93 (%)
1	0 (0.0)	1 (2.2)	1 (1.1)
2	1 (2.1)	1 (2.2)	2 (2.2)
3	0 (0.0)	3 (6.7)	3 (3.2)
4	2 (4.2)	8 (17.8)	10 (10.8)
5	45 (93.8)	32 (71.1)	77 (82.8)

With regard to program logistics, 98% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the program activities were well organized; 83% agreed or strongly agreed that they were informed about *Conquista Tus Sueños* with enough time to participate; and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that *Conquista Tus Sueños* was offered at a time that was convenient for them to attend. Only 12% agreed or strongly agreed that transportation was an issue for their participation in the program (Table A8).

Ninety-eight percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that participation in the program helped them understand how to help their child with school work. Since participation in the program, 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel comfortable talking to teachers about their child's education (Table A8).

The majority of respondents (99%) agreed or strongly agreed that participation in the *Conquista Tus Sueños* program provided them with an opportunity to become more involved in their child's school. Moreover, 66% agreed or strongly agreed that they joined or participated in activities at their child's school since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños* (Table A8).

Of those who agreed or strongly agreed that they joined or participated in activities at their child's school since participating in *Conquista Tus Sueños* (n=61), 44% (n=27) reported participating in meetings (school, classroom, or Parent Teacher Association [PTA]) at the school. Seventeen of the 61 (28%) reported that they volunteer at their child's school or in the classroom. Similarly, 17 out of 61 (28%) reported that they help with parties or events at their child's school (e.g., Bingo night, dances, dinners). Other activities mentioned included

attending Back to School Night ($n=3$), attending an open house ($n=3$), helping with fundraising ($n=4$), helping with after school programs ($n=4$), and asking more questions ($n=6$).

When asked about improvements that could be made to the program, 50 out of the 93 respondents replied to this question. Of the 50 who replied, 13 (26%) offered no suggestions or said they liked the program as it is; 18 (36%) requested that the program be extended or wanted more sessions offered; 7 (14%) suggested the program be advertised more so more parents could attend, and 4 (8%) wanted more discussion on other topics (e.g., how students are treated in schools, racism, and problems in the schools).

In response to “Is there anything else you would like to share?” 45 out of 93 respondents provided responses. The majority of responses, 22 out of 45 (49%), were expressions of appreciation of the program; 7 out of 45 (16%) wanted more sessions or more programs like this offered; and 9 out of 45 (20%) wanted the opportunity to participate in the program again. Other topics discussed included offering English classes, appreciation of staff, and inviting speakers with experience having high-school-aged children.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings from the follow-up surveys:

- Conduct an MCPS review of the course content to ensure that the information is relevant, includes information on Navigating the System, includes information on Communicating with Your Child’s Teachers, and is easily understood.
- Continue to provide multiple opportunities for participants to attend the program throughout the school year as findings revealed participants value the program and make changes to their behavior as a result of participation.
- Publicize the program early and frequently. Enrollment in the program has decreased over time. Participants are eager to attend and word-of-mouth publicity can encourage participation.
- Provide follow-up sessions that cover topics such as racism, child abuse, and first-hand experiences with children in middle and high schools.

- Consider a way to increase parent commitment to attend all 5 modules. By module 5, some sites lost at least 30% of the participants. Participants value receiving the certificate of completion from the program. Thus, instead of giving certificates for attendance to 3 out of the 5 modules, give them for attending all 5 modules.
- Continue to solicit feedback from participants on how to better implement the program.

ⁱ The author wishes to thank Mrs. Maria Jose Allendes of DSA, who entered data findings, translated open-ended comments from Spanish-speaking respondents, and conducted the follow-up telephone survey of past participants.

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**Evaluation of the 2006–2007 Implementation of
*Conquista Tus Sueños (Realize Your Dreams)***

Appendix

Table A1
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Fall 2006 Module 1 (N=35*)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
The presentation of today's topic encouraged me to continue attending.	80.0	17.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.9
The program's announcement was timely so that I was able to organize my time to attend.	85.7	11.4	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
After listening to the presentation I believe that one can control feeling the victim of others.	71.4	22.9	0.0	0.0	5.7	0.0
After listening to the presentation I believe that leaders are born to be in power.	57.1	17.1	2.9	2.9	20.0	0.0
My participation in my children's school will help them improve their grades.	82.9	8.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.5
The Latino parents are always welcome in my children's school.	65.7	20.0	2.9	5.7	0.0	5.7

* Data included in this table are from Emory Grove Center, Quince Orchard HS, and Seneca Valley HS.

Table A2
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Fall 2006 Module 3 (N=39*)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
The presentation gave me new ideas on how to help my children with their cultural adaptation.	79.5	20.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
The information about the MCPS school system will help me utilize it better.	66.7	30.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.5
The visualization exercise helped me imagine a better future for my children.	79.5	20.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
I feel that I learned more about my potential to help my children.	74.4	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.2
I would recommend this program to other Latino parents.	79.5	15.4	2.6	0.0	0.0	2.5
The small group dynamics helped me recognize that other parents face challenges similar to mine.	76.9	10.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.8

* Data included in this table are from Emory Grove Center, Quince Orchard HS, and Seneca Valley HS.

Table A3
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Fall 2006 Module 5 (N=46*)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
Since my participation in Conquista, my family relationships have improved.	67.4	32.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Since my participation in Conquista, I am better able to communicate with my children's school and teachers.	71.7	28.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Since my participation in Conquista, I have joined or participated in my children's school activities.	71.7	26.1	2.2	0.0	0.0
Since participating in Conquista, I feel more comfortable talking to teachers about my children's education.	73.9	23.9	2.2	0.0	0.0
Since participating in Conquista, I feel more confident helping my child with homework and school projects.	76.1	23.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
I feel positive about my children's future.	82.6	17.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

* Data included in this table are from New Hampshire Estates ES, Quince Orchard HS, and Seneca Valley HS.

Table A4
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Spring 2007 Module 1 (N=111)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
The presentation about the purpose of the Conquista program motivates me to continue attending.	83.8	15.3	0.0	0.9	0.0
Today's presentation was easy to read and understand.	86.5	11.7	0.9	0.0	0.9
The handouts will help me to understand today's topic better.	73.0	22.5	0.9	0.0	3.6
This session has helped me understand the importance of my involvement in my children's education.	85.6	11.7	0.9	0.9	0.9
Today's information will help me to advocate on behalf of my children's education.	85.6	13.5	0.0	0.9	0.0

Table A5
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Spring 2007 Module 3 (N=70)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
Today's presentation gave me new ideas on how to reconnect with my goals and dreams.	77.1	21.4	0.0	0.0	1.5
The information about <i>Navigating The System</i> gave me ideas I can use to help my children.	74.3	21.4	1.4	0.0	2.9
The visualization exercise helped me imagine a better future for my family and myself.	75.7	21.4	1.4	0.0	1.5
Today's information will help me support my children so that they are successful in school.	87.1	11.4	0.0	0.0	1.5
Today's information was presented in a practical and easy to understand format.	75.7	20.0	2.9	0.0	1.4

Table A6
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
About Spring 2007 Module 5 (N=57)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
Since participating in Conquista, my family relationships have improved.	68.4	26.3	1.8	0.0	3.5
Since participating in Conquista, I am better able to communicate with my child's school and teachers.	73.7	17.5	0.0	0.0	8.8
Since participating in Conquista, I have joined or participated in activities at my children's school.	71.9	17.5	3.5	0.0	7.1
Since participating in Conquista, I feel more comfortable talking to teachers about my children's education.	63.2	29.8	0.0	0.0	7.0
Since participating in Conquista, I feel more confident helping my child with homework and school projects.	73.7	21.1	0.0	0.0	5.3
I feel positive about the future of my children.	79.0	17.5	0.0	0.0	3.5

Table A7
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With the Statements About Conquista, by Time of Year

	Fall 2006 (N=48)					Spring 2007 (N=45)				
	SA	A	D	SD	NO	SA	A	D	SD	NO
I would recommend a friend to attend Conquista Tus Sueños.	83.3	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	88.9	11.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Instructors of Conquista Tus Sueños were helpful.	68.7	29.2	0.0	0.0	2.1	80.0	17.8	2.2	0.0	0.0
Overall, Conquista Tus Sueños activities were well organized.*	85.1	12.8	0.0	0.0	2.1	86.7	13.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
I was informed about Conquista Tus Sueños with enough time to participate in the program.	52.0	22.9	2.1	4.2	18.8	84.4	6.7	0.0	0.0	8.9
Conquista Tus Sueños was offered at a time that is convenient for me to attend.	64.5	29.2	0.0	4.2	2.1	91.1	6.7	2.2	0.0	0.0
Transportation was an issue for my participation in Conquista Tus Sueños.	10.4	4.1	18.8	47.9	18.8	4.4	4.4	13.3	68.9	9.0
Conquista Tus Sueños helped me understand how to help my child with their school work.	79.1	18.8	2.1	0.0	0.0	64.4	33.3	0.0	0.0	2.3
Since participating in the Conquista program, I feel comfortable talking to teachers about my child's education.	62.5	27.1	8.3	2.1	0.0	68.9	22.2	6.7	0.0	2.2
Conquista Tus Sueños provided me with an opportunity to become more involved in my child's school.	79.2	20.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	77.8	20.0	0.0	0.0	2.2
Since participating in the Conquista program, I have joined or participated in activities at my child's school.	43.7	27.1	8.3	6.3	14.6	40.0	20.0	4.4	15.6	20.0

Note. SA= Strongly agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly disagree, and NO = No opinion.

* One respondent from fall 2006 did not respond to this item.

Table A8
 Percentage of Follow-up Survey Respondents Indicating Level of Agreement With Statements
 About *Conquista Tus Sueños* (N=93)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
I would recommend a friend to attend Conquista Tus Sueños.	86.0	14.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Instructors of Conquista Tus Sueños were helpful.	74.2	23.7	1.0	0.0	1.1
Overall, Conquista Tus Sueños activities were well organized.*	84.9	12.9	0.0	0.0	1.1
I was informed about Conquista Tus Sueños with enough time to participate in the program.	67.7	15.1	1.0	2.2	14.0
Conquista Tus Sueños was offered at a time that is convenient for me to attend.	77.4	18.3	1.0	2.2	1.1
Transportation was an issue for my participation in Conquista Tus Sueños.	7.5	4.3	16.1	58.1	14.0
Conquista Tus Sueños helped me understand how to help my child with their school work.	72.0	25.8	1.1	0.0	1.1
Since participating in the Conquista Program, I feel comfortable talking to teachers about my child's education.	65.6	24.7	7.5	1.1	1.1
Conquista Tus Sueños provided me with an opportunity to become more involved in my child's school.	78.5	20.4	0.0	0.0	1.1
Since participating in the Conquista Program, I have joined or participated in activities at my child's school.	41.9	23.7	6.4	10.8	17.2

* One respondent did not respond to this item.