



## NATIONAL CENTER FOR HOMELESS EDUCATION

Operating the U.S.  
Department of Education's  
technical assistance center  
for the federal Education for  
Homeless Children and Youth  
(EHCY) Program

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### CHULA VISTA PROMISE NEIGHBORHOOD CASTLE PARK COMMUNITY | SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

#### INTRODUCTION

Chula Vista, a community nestled in San Diego County (CA), is characterized by intergenerational poverty, low levels of educational attainment, and linguistic barriers that have acted as systemic roadblocks to prevent families from connecting their children to needed supports. With a [Promise Neighborhoods](#) grant from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) awarded in 2012, the [Chula Vista Promise Neighborhood initiative \(CVPromise\)](#) was formed and conducted a needs assessment of the residents of Castle Park, the Chula Vista neighborhood targeted for services, to determine which types of support would be most beneficial for ensuring that children entered school ready to learn and succeeded in school once attending.

Census and needs assessment data indicated that more than 27% of children in the neighborhood were living in poverty with parents who had low levels of educational attainment (e.g., 67% of adults did not graduate from high school). The community had a 10.7% unemployment rate, which did not include the 50% of families who were underemployed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Nearly two-thirds of children under the age of five did not attend preschool, missing early interventions critical to cognitive and socio-emotional development. Fewer than half of these young children demonstrated age-appropriate functioning as measured by the [Ages and Stages Questionnaire](#). In the 2012-13 school year, three school districts overlapping with this Promise Neighborhood identified approximately 2,000 homeless children and youth enrolled in these districts while the San Diego County Office of Education reported approximately

*This brief is part of a U.S. Department of Education series of program profiles that highlight local innovations, program improvements, and collaborations that can improve educational outcomes for homeless children and youth.*

20,000 homeless students enrolled in all public school districts in the county (and California reported almost 260,000 homeless students for that school year).<sup>1</sup>

CVPromise strategically decided to build a new system in the neighborhood that intently focused on supporting early childhood development through formal care, partnerships with critical actors, and supports for parents. The goal was that all families and children would benefit from the services offered and receive the tools necessary to reach their full potential.

## THE PROMISE

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Coordinated by [South Bay Community Services \(SBCS\)](#), CVPromise has created a seamless continuum of “[cradle to college and career](#)” solutions that foster high expectations for all children and provide a clear pathway to college and career success. SBCS brings together collaborative partners representing 28 government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses that have provided matching funds for a total investment of over \$60 million in the project.

While a broad array of supports targets at-risk families and youth in the community, the project conducts site-based activities in five schools in two school districts: Castle Park Elementary School (Castle Park Elementary School District), and Castle Park Middle School, Hilltop Middle School, Castle Park High School, and Hilltop High School (Sweetwater Union High School District). Building on 30 years of working together, SBCS and the Castle Park schools involved in the initiative have memoranda of understanding for data sharing and collaborative projects. Representatives from each of the two school districts and five schools participate on the CVPromise Advisory Committee, Data Team, and Education Committee to oversee school-based planning for comprehensive education reform (preschool through grade 12) and implement school-based projects.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN, AND YOUTH MOST AT-RISK

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### FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

Chula Vista operates five Family Resource Centers that are located on school sites. The Family Resource Centers (FRCs) serve as the hub for connecting families and

<sup>1</sup> ED does not make LEA-level data public nor does the California Department of Education, so these numbers were rounded but provided for context. State-level data can be obtained at <http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov> or at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/consolidated/index.html>.

## PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS

Promise Neighborhoods, established under the legislative authority of the Fund for the Improvement of Education Program (FIE), allows the U.S. Department of Education to provide funding to community organizations, such as nonprofits, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes. Based on the Harlem Children's Zone's place-based initiative, the purpose of the funding is to create a system in distressed communities that enables all children and youth to have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career. Since the program began in 2010, awards support Promise Neighborhoods projects in 20 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html>.

youth to community services. When schools in the CVPromise network identify students and families with particular needs, they refer them to the FRCs. Social workers on staff assist with services like housing, food, birth certificates, and resume writing. The FRCs provide wraparound services and are known as the “no wrong door” connector. CVPromise staff members are on site at each of the FRCs and sit on their steering committees.

Off the school campuses, CVPromise provides a network of *Promotoras*, who are bilingual trained parents from the neighborhood and serve as an important linkage between programs and the Castle Park community. *Promotoras* are visible throughout the neighborhood and at parent centers and Literacy Cafés, informing families about CVPromise programs and engaging them in services to meet their needs. Home visits are available to all families with children ages 0-5 to provide education around brain development, conduct parent-led developmental screenings, offer resources for early literacy, and provide services tailored to the needs of the family.

For families experiencing domestic violence, CVPromise operates *Mi Escuelita*, a therapeutic preschool. The school is a free, full-day program with staff trained to provide specialized care with a range of age-appropriate, therapeutic services. The school has three full-time therapists on staff who conduct intakes and assessments, and provide individual and group counseling for the children, healthy development services, mental health support, and quality educational activities in a safe, healthy environment. The staff provides children with a safe place to learn and heal and offers support to the children’s parents and caregivers to help with behavioral challenges and learning opportunities when the children are not in the school setting. Children are referred by local law enforcement, child welfare, domestic violence programs, SBCS emergency shelter, and transitional housing programs.

### STREET OUTREACH PROGRAM

The primary goal of the outreach program is to establish and build relationships with runaway, homeless, and street-dependent youth. This assistance helps youth adjust to safe and appropriate alternative living arrangements while becoming independent and self-sufficient. Goals include ensuring that street youth unwilling or unable to leave the streets have the support necessary to be safe and to survive, as well as educating

## EDUCATION SUPPORTS FROM CRADLE TO COLLEGE AND CAREER

### EARLY EDUCATION

- > Newborn Home Visits
- > *Mi Escuelita* Therapeutic Preschool
- > Healthy Development Services
- > K-3 Tutoring

### K-12

- > Granger Turnaround Model
- > In School Music Programs
- > Literacy Café
- > Achieve 3000
- > Chula Vista College Institute
- > Access to Technology
- > Wellness Programs
- > Bullying Prevention
- > At-Risk Youth Services
- > A Reason to Survive (ARTS)
- > Academic Advocates
- > SAT Test Preparation

### COLLEGE AND CAREER

- > Academic Advocates
- > College Application Guidance
- > Summer Jobs and Internships
- > College Tours
- > Compact for Success
- > Computer Training
- > Workforce Development and Employment Assistance

For more information, visit <http://cvpromise.org/index.php/our-work/education>.

youth and the community about issues related to youth homelessness.

## SUPPORT FOR PREGNANT AND PARENTING YOUTH

Trolley Tressle provides transitional housing for youth who have aged out of the foster care system and for pregnant and parenting teens. Programs for youth include job training, mental health services, and parenting classes. Case managers assist youth from a strengths-based perspective and link them to needed services, including school.

## OTHER SCHOOL-BASED SERVICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

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### ATTENDANCE COMMITTEES

CVPromise staff members are stationed in each of the participating schools. They are part of an attendance committee comprised of the CVPromise staff, the principal, school counselors, teachers, attendance clerks, and after school program coordinators. Schools utilize a referral system to ensure that the most at-risk students are provided services and support that meet their needs. The system is also a mechanism for schools to link students and families to community assistance, such as housing and health services.

### ONSITE TUTORS

CVPromise provides tutors who work on site with teachers in the classroom and after school programs. The tutors reduce the ratio of adults to children so that the children can benefit from differentiated instruction customized to their specific needs.

### A REASON TO SURVIVE (ARTS)

In partnership with CVPromise, ARTS provides opportunities to use art as a vehicle to create positive, long-lasting change and transformation in children and youth facing major life challenges. ARTS is a nationally recognized organization that believes in the power of the arts and creativity to transform lives – especially those of kids. By providing a sequential program model of therapeutic arts, arts education, and college and career preparation, ARTS provides a one-stop-shop for youth to move from crisis to college or career.<sup>2</sup>

### ACADEMIC ADVOCATES

CVPromise in partnership with Sweetwater Union High School District brings a unique support system directly to middle and high school students. Academic advocates work closely with the whole family and connect with school counselors and teachers, as well, to create a personal plan for academic success. As students progress through the grades, their assigned academic advocate progresses with them.

Academic advocates provide mentorship to students, create stronger relationships between home and school, connect students and family with resources, and offer college tour opportunities. In high school, academic advocates assist students with researching and applying to colleges, offer resources for preparing for the SAT and ACT,

<sup>2</sup> In 2013, Inocente Izucar, an unaccompanied homeless youth who participated in ARTS, was featured in an Oscar award-winning documentary that depicted her journey of how the arts transformed her life. For more information on the film, entitled *Inocente*, visit <http://www.areasontosurvive.org/arts/inocente-documentary>.

and help with exploring career options.

## SCHOOL PANTRY

Designed specifically for Castle Park Elementary School families, the School Pantry is a mobile pantry that visits the campus twice a month. Through this service, families in need can access healthy food options. The School Pantry is operated by CVPromise *Promotoras* and parent and community volunteers.

## THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT FRAMEWORK

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The collective impact framework that guides the work of CVPromise goes beyond the traditional idea of collaboration. Using this approach, a cross-sector group of stakeholders sets aside individual agendas and strongly commits – in action as well as words – to a common agenda to solve a specific social problem. All partners agree to use common measurements, align their activities, communicate continuously, and create a backbone organization to coordinate and facilitate these processes. Every single partner must own the same results and indicators, whether the partner is a funder, business leader, school district, police department, or intermediary organization. Instead of competing for resources, organizations align their work around particular results to achieve transformative, systems change. The program's hallmarks are cross-sector partnerships, a seamless continuum of solutions, a common set of 10 academic and community results that make the biggest difference for low-income children with 15 associated indicators, and shared accountability for results, using real-time data for continuous improvement and rapid response when interventions fall short.

## IMPACT

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School district data from the 2013-2014 school year and data from a 2014 CVPromise neighborhood survey show improvements in student and school outcomes since the beginning of the project in 2012. Examples of results follow.

- Fourth-grade students moved from 9.8 percent to 15.7 percent at or above grade level in math.
- Sixth-grade chronic absenteeism declined from 11 percent to 3.4 percent.
- Parents who report that they read to their children (birth to kindergarten) three or more times a week increased from 53.5 percent at baseline to 67.8 percent.
- While 19 parents volunteered regularly in the school community at the beginning of the baseline year, the number increased to 682 regular parent volunteers in the fall of 2014.
- The high school graduation rate increased from 86.6 percent to 96.8 percent in target schools.

## REFERENCES

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