

AISSD's Dropout Prevention/Reduction Newsletter

# Exitos Finding Success In Its First Year

Behind a heavy yellow door just off the courtyard at Lanier High School, Laura Payne sits, talking on the phone, making another contact for her *Lanier Exitos* program. She speaks with energy and ease, sure of her program's success.

For Laura, success is measured person-by-person. She is in the challenging business of dropout prevention and, clearly, the more parents she talks to, the more community reps she involves, the more teachers she works with, the more people she reaches... the more success her program enjoys. So, behind a heavy yellow door just off the courtyard at Lanier High School, Laura Payne is talking on the phone, not only making contacts, but making her ideas for dropout prevention a reality.

*Lanier Exitos*, began in the final few months of last school year and is becoming fully operational this year. Seven different projects designed to bridge the gaps between available services at the school are currently at work within *Exitos*. These

projects help students who, for a variety of reasons (including grades, language barrier and absences), are referred to or identified by Laura's office as possible dropouts.

The services that *Exitos* provides

complement several other dropout prevention and reduction measures at Lanier. Ms. Payne works as a member of the school's IMPACT Team, keeping the two organizations in sync. Often, *Exitos* is able to provide crucial information about a student's specific situation and works as a liaison between the school and the family. In addition to the IMPACT Team, two full time dropout specialists are housed on campus. These individuals work aggressively to guide students whose attendance has fallen and to retrieve past dropouts. *Exitos* is a close partner with these specialists, aiding their efforts and working to reach students before they make it to their office.

Based on the needs of the Lanier High School student body, a primary focus of *Exitos* is to help the relatively large limited-English population. The frustrations inherent in having a language barrier in public school have historically lead to a high dropout rate among this growing population.

In Laura's words, "These kids have strength. They have ability. Sometimes it's just difficult for them to convey that when they don't speak English." She (continued on page 5)



photo by Ryan Trujillo

Laura Payne and Jodi Harris (intern) with parents, tutors and tutees from *Exitos* on a recent field trip to The Austin Children's Museum.

## The State of Affairs with ASAP

The Absent Student Assistance Program (ASAP) has seen a lot of change since its inception in 1995. Formed as a pilot collaboration between Austin School District's secondary schools and all of the Travis County Constables' offices, ASAP has quickly grown in size and scope. Over the past seven years, the program has gained involvement with Austin's primary schools, Del Valle Independent School District, Pflugerville Independent School District, the Travis County Justice of the Peace judges, Juvenile Court, District Attorney's office, Department of Criminal Justice Planning, Counseling Center, and the Life Works organization. The length of this list is a testament to the need and usefulness of ASAP, but also

a demonstration of the enormity of the problem being addressed.

Designed to utilize the Travis County Constables as uniformed field representatives of the School District, this program has many times proven its effectiveness in getting truant kids to school. In fact, it may have proven it too well for its own good. Last school year, individual constables were sometimes responding to twenty or thirty requests for home visits in one day. Understandably, this was too much for the officers, who respond to requests within twenty-four hours, to be able to make the type of visit that would serve as what one constable calls "a real intervention." This "real inter- (continued on page 3)

## WELCOME

Over the course of two days last month, we held four Impact team training sessions. These sessions were designed more as an opportunity to network ideas than as a "nuts and bolts" lesson. Teams got the chance to meet and work with one another and we got the chance to get some direct feedback from you all. That feedback was especially helpful in defining the goals of our office's communication efforts, including this newsletter.

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# Q & A

with Linelle Clark

Recently, Dr. Clark was asked by a local Justice of the Peace (JP) to further clarify the role of Impact teams with regard to student behavior issues...

**JP:**

“I am confused...I understood that **student behavior** could be an issue for the Impact team to address...I am not talking about those that the statute or the AISD disciplinary rules provide for a hearing to decide if he/she gets sent to Alternative Learning Center (ALC) and/or probation...I am talking about behavior that indicates that the child or teen may be headed in the direction of ALC transfer, etc.

So, behavior does not go to Impact teams, but just attendance? ...behavior is often a pre-condition to dropping out or loosing interest or what have you...and then they quit...help.”

**Dr. Clark:**

“Impact teams are given training that stresses the responsibility to address the needs of students experiencing attendance, academic, *and/or behavior difficulties*. Students should be referred to Impact Teams after teachers have made a reasonable attempt to address the behavior of concern and the intervention is not meeting the needs of the student and/or teacher.

In terms of referrals for students who may be experiencing behavior difficulties, each situation would have to reviewed individually in terms of where the team may or may not become involved. For example, a specific behavior may warrant an immediate disciplinary consequence that may result in suspension or removal. Under this scenario, the team’s role would be to work with the student upon return to school.

Early intervention by the team is not only driven by the act committed by the student, but also by a teacher or some other adult who acknowledges a need for assistance and requests that assistance. In this regard, it is not unusual for a teacher to ask the team to review or assist in the development of a behavior contract and/or for assistance with classroom management techniques.

Ideally, Impact teams would work with teachers and students prior to a need for removal, but there is no guarantee this would be appropriate in all situations.”

**Q & A is a monthly column, which passes on instructive communications between F. Linelle Clark, Director of Dropout Prevention/ Reduction for AISD and anyone involved with the Impact process. If you have a question for Dr. Clark please contact her office at ext. 49877.**

## First Call For Help Now at 2-1-1

### United Way’s Comprehensive Social Service Database Joins State Network

One of the biggest needs expressed by IMPACT team members is an increased awareness of available resources. With so many services in our community, the Capital Area United Way’s First Call For Help is an invaluable database. It is a central location where you can learn about and connect with local non-profits.

Now, in addition to an online database, there is an easy access, free number that connects to the referral service. Sam Woollard of Community Action Network writes:



“First Call For Help...is in the midst of a transition as we become part of the 2-1-1 statewide information and referral network. 2-1-1 is the new abbreviated dialing code for free information and referrals to health and human services and community organizations...2-1-1 Texas (Austin) was designated as the Area Information Center for South Central Texas...We continue to be a local, confidential and professional service, but now with the convenience of a free and easy-to-remember number and the added resource and flexibility of being part of a statewide network...[Note:] For those attempting to access 2-1-1 from a business or agency that has an independent call manager, you may need to contact your phone system contractor in order to enable your call manager (PBX) to allow for outgoing 2-1-1 calls.”

As well, the database is still available online at [www.uway-austin.org](http://www.uway-austin.org). Some advice for searching this database is:

- 1) When searching by geographical area, it seems to work best if you start with Travis County and then narrow your search.
- 2) If you’re looking for a particular program, search under program “name contains” but try an agency “name contains” also.
- 3) If you get frustrated, call 2-1-1 and have a search specialist assist you. ♦

# ASAP Program Still an Effective Partner with Impact Teams

(continued from page 1) vention” requires time to sit down with parents and explain consequences to them. Without that time, the effectiveness of the program suffered and, as a result, after its sixth year of operation, ASAP was re-evaluated. For the first time, those involved considered ways to scale it back.

ASAP has not gone away, though. Rather, it has been more carefully integrated into the School District’s dropout prevention plans. Most importantly, the re-evaluation sought to lower the number of requests that were being given to the constables. What was needed was for the schools to filter the cases, sending only the unresponsive ones on to the Constables’ offices.

This is where the Impact teams came in. They have been asked to be the filter between the schools and the constables. Based on the numbers so far this year, they have done an excellent job. As of November, most precincts reported that they had worked with or were in contact with members of many Impact teams and that the number of requests for visits has dropped dramatically. The schools are making home visits (when necessary) in the cases where the parents are responsive and the Constables are making home visits in the cases where the parents are not responsive. This role of enforcing the law in the unresponsive cases seems to be the right place for ASAP.

As well, involvement by the Impact

teams has increased the accuracy of crucial information. Most importantly, home addresses (often different than the official records show) have been confirmed. This newly integrated and more effective use of ASAP has made for happier constables and a more efficient dropout prevention system.

Undoubtedly, ASAP is still an evolving program. As a result, when to utilize it in the course of the truancy prevention process is sometimes a bit unclear. However, the recent changes seem to reflect a movement toward ASAP becoming a mature program that has a well defined and established role. With time, the growing pains will subside and with continued support from IMPACT teams, ASAP will prosper. ♦

## WELCOME TO IMPACT!

(Continued from page 1)

In response to the question “What topics or suggestions do you have for our Spring training?” seventy-five percent of the suggestions called for either expert training and advice or more connection with the community resources that are available. In light of these suggestions, this newsletter will attempt to provide information on community and expert resources that have been researched and seem pertinent to the IMPACT process. The focus here will be especially on programs available within the district (as they are easiest for you to access) and broad-based community organizations that can help with a variety of issues (see articles on The First Call For Help and the AISD grant writing department in this issue).

Another outcome of the past training was that it became clear that communication between schools is an invaluable resource for IMPACT teams. There is almost always someone out there that has dealt with a similar problem to the one that seems unsolvable. As such, I ask that anyone with questions to post to other IMPACT members, suggestions of something that works well, article ideas, or articles of your own (especially success stories) please **contact James Connolly** in the Office of Dropout Prevention at 414-9877 (or use Lotus notes). I am trying to mold this publication toward issues that are truly helpful to both experienced and new members of IMPACT and I look forward to working with you all to do so. Your feedback is very much appreciated.

## Bulletin Board:

● **IMPACT Process Evaluations** Due Fri., December 13th ●

● check out the new pending queue option with the attendance warning letter - call James @ 4-9877 for more info ●

● **Have a Great Holiday!** ●

# Good Ideas Need Good Grants

If only you had the funding? There's money out there...you just have to find it.

The school district is an excellent candidate for grant funding with many expert resources available to help you take advantage of that fact. Every year, several staff positions are created or enhanced because someone with a good idea for their school went through the process of finding and getting a grant that matched their idea. If you think more could be done for dropout prevention (or any cause) at your school but lack the resources to do it then follow the lead of many of your fellow staff members (such as Laura Payne at Lanier Exitos, see page 1) and find those resources.

Before you jump into grant writing, especially if it's your first time, take some time to familiarize yourself with the process. The Department of Grant Development and Program Support is responsible for overseeing all grants written within the Austin School District. They assist in securing the needed information for grant funding and reviewing/ processing all grant requests. Julie Lyons, director of the department says that as soon as the decision is made to apply for funding and the approval of your principal or department head has been obtained, her office should be contacted. At this point, they can assist you in getting started and then in proofreading your submission.

Even if this is not your first time with the grant process, visit the grant development

and program support web site for some expert advice. This site can be found through the AISD main page by clicking the "K-12" icon, going to "School Support" and then "Grant Development." One section of this site, entitled "Grant Writing Tips" is especially helpful at the beginning of the process. There is a "to-do" checklist and several excellent links. As well, they have provided a list of likely candidates for educational funding.

Another great place to start your grant-writing process is the Regional

Foundation Library run by the Hogg Foundation as part of the University of Texas at Austin System (see web sites of interest below for contact information). Once you have your idea set, the librarians there can help connect you with a listing of philanthropic funders in your category. It takes some time to dig through the available grants, but the amount of money available for a well-thought plan makes it very worth it.

In addition, the district offers professional development in grant writing. This can be found in the form of PDA classes three times a year and individual consultations. Contact the Grant Office for availabilities.

As AISD's budget gets tighter, it becomes more and more important for staff members to bring outside finances into the district. Grants are a direct way to fill gaps in services and Dropout prevention always has a need for such initiatives. ♦

## EXPERT ADVICE

Grant Development  
& Program Support

## Exitos Programs

(see article on pp.1&5)

*There are seven components to Exitos...*

**1)Cross-Age Tutoring:** Lanier students are trained to tutor younger students at neighboring elementary schools.

**2)Language Exchange:** Two groups, *student/ student* and *parent/ teacher*, work to increase conversational abilities in English and Spanish.

**3)Exitos Guides:** Lanier students are trained to serve as guides for newly arrived students from other countries.

**4)Counseling:** Social work interns provide individual or small group counseling for students needing additional support.

**5)Community Tutoring:** Tutors from the community are recruited and paired with small groups of students based on interest and need.

**6)Information Sessions:** Monthly parent meetings in Spanish cover topics ranging from options after graduation to adolescence.

**7)Dropout Prevention/ Recovery:** In coordination with Lanier's Dropout Prevention Specialists, Exitos services focus on improving the attendance of students who are still going to school and on following

up with those who have left school

### WEB SITES OF INTEREST:

[www.dropoutprevention.org](http://www.dropoutprevention.org) National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University's web site; strategies, resources, best practices, stats...and more

[www.hogg.utexas.edu/RFL](http://www.hogg.utexas.edu/RFL) Regional Foundation Library Run by the Hogg Foundation; place to start when looking for grant-funding options

[www.peerassistance.org](http://www.peerassistance.org) local organization; educator resources; mentorships

# Exitos Means Success:

## Laura Payne's dropout prevention program is filling the gaps at Lanier

(continued from page 1) cial work interns try especially hard to encourage these students to help each other. The students themselves, who understand the problems created by language barriers, are a real force that makes the program run.

One of the most interesting aspects of this effort is the cross-age tutoring service. This service, modeled after the highly successful *Coca Cola Valued Youth Program*, trains Lanier students that have a history of attendance, behavior or academic issues to tutor elementary kids. Participants, often with limited English, are paired with tutees that are in the crucial early years of the English as a second language (ESL) education program. Currently, sixteen students travel to area elementary schools three days a week. In his article, "The performance of At-Risk Youth as Tutors," Marty Duckenfeld echoes Ms. Payne's description of the benefits of such an arrangement. He states, "[At-risk] tutors provide tutees with much needed role models," and goes on to show that researchers have concluded that "[limited English] tutees improve not only academically; they also show improvement in communication skills, ability to

casual weekly meetings. This project achieves a very effective synthesis of several of the challenges present in overcoming language barriers in public education. These parents, who are often otherwise difficult to reach, become involved with the school in a friendly and empowering way. The school becomes familiar ground for them and this equates to an increased ability to communicate with staff whenever there are problems. An added benefit has been that teachers are getting the experience of learning in an environment where they don't understand the language very well, building empathy for their students. Additionally, of course, the obvious advantage of teachers with Spanish-speaking students gaining more knowledge of Spanish is an end in itself.

All of the services provided by *Exitos* rely on student involvement. So, how do you get students involved? Laura recognizes the value of clear incentives in this regard. Participation in her programs clears absences from student records. Without a doubt, this is an initial draw to her office for some students. However, there is far more here than just serving time to clear absences. Students have other options, but in Laura's words, "The reason they choose this is because they do want help in a meaningful way." In several cases, students who have completed the agreed upon term of service have chosen to stay. It is what makes these kids stay that *Exitos* is continually building upon.

The responsibility of being a role model for tutees is a new thing for many of the student participants. Tutoring is a valued experience that they take pride in. As well, the opportunities for socialization and learning English in a comfortable environ-

ment are reason enough for some students to join.

Lanier *Exitos* is an example of a program that responds to specific needs. Dropout prevention at this school, which has a majority population of first and second-generation immigrants and refugees, presents unique challenges. Laura Payne recognized the services that were most in need and developed a plan to provide those services. She, like all Impact Team members, was in a position to see where the gaps existed that were enabling dropouts to fall through the school's system and decided to respond to those gaps.

In creating her program, she first identified herself as the primary responsible individual. Second, she clearly identified the problems that needed to be addressed. For her, a need for more services geared toward the Hispanic population was a starting point. Finally, she enacted her program by finding models that worked, developing her own model, and finding the funding. This final step, finding the funding, is no small feat, but is very possible for a well planned project (please see grant writing article on p.4 for some ideas of where to start).

Programs such as *Exitos* are in constant demand within dropout prevention. This program shows that a positive impact can be achieved. It also shows that there is no one right way to approach this issue. There is only the way that best suits you and your students needs. ♦



*Laura at work: Exitos contains seven components; cross-age tutoring, language exchange, a guide program for new students, counseling, community tutoring, info. sessions, and dropout prevention/recovery*

**“These kids have strength. They have ability. Sometimes it's just difficult for them to display that when they don't speak English.”**

**-Laura Payne**

identify long-range goals, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills.”

Another of *Exitos'* projects that has been particularly successful is the parent/teacher language exchange. This service pairs Spanish-speaking parent volunteers with teachers who learn conversational Spanish at