

BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

Nuestro Grupo grew out of a September 20, 2013, convening of parents, community advocates, and local city, university and public library leaders sponsored by the Texas Center for Education Policy at UT and various other entities to discuss "Issues and the Role of Libraries and Community Advocacy" at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center (ESB-MACC). The lively conversation focused on the importance of children's books in advancing literacy in English and Spanish for AISD children and youth, specifically. Also discussed were ways to improve the quantity and quality of teaching materials used in AISD schools, as well as in the context of the community's dream of a Saturday academy. In short, our community wants and needs a Saturday Academy and a robust curriculum that also benefits Austin ISD schools.

Currently, and as a result of Nuestro Grupo's partnership with the Tejano History Curriculum Project from the University of Texas and Austin ISD, we have developed three robust lesson plans that are aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge Skills (TEKS) on the topics of immigration/migration, civil rights history, and local history. We also sponsored a professional development workshop (May 2014) that prepared 25 teachers to implement the lesson plans in a three-week Dual Language Summer Camp hosted at five elementary school campuses in July 2014. The materials have also been made available to Austin ISD teachers beginning this academic year in the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th and 11th grades.

We are currently planning a Saturday Academy with two classes of AISD fourth grader students, 35 total. The Saturday Academy will be inaugurated on January 10, 2015 and hold weekly classes between 9:00 am and 12:00 pm until May 2 (except for March 28, Spring Break) at the ESB-MACC.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our primary target audience is 35 fourth-grade English Language Learners and students for whom Spanish is their heritage language who will be selected from three target Austin ISD elementary schools—specifically, Sanchez, Metz, and Zavala Elementary; space permitting, Blackshear and Travis Heights Elementary will also get targeted. These students will get taught exclusively in Spanish a Mexican American history curriculum. The entire curriculum will be posted on a project web site to facilitate its use in Austin ISD and other districts throughout the state.

We wish to involve their parents in various capacities. We have selected four current AISD teachers that will alternate in teaching at the Saturday Academy (two rotating teams of two teachers). They will be similarly assisted by two teams of two interns selected from the teacher preparation program at the University of Texas at Austin.

BENEFITS

We are confident that the Saturday Academy Project will bring numerous benefits to our constituents and communities that we represent.

First, teaching Texas history makes use of the wealth of the Mexican American cultural heritage and history based on high-quality content in an unprecedented manner and in a large, Texas district. Moreover, our collaborative approach offers a model for others throughout the state and nation that seek an authentic curriculum that fosters positive intercultural understandings and socio-emotional well-being. Second, because this curriculum will be taught exclusively in Spanish, it will promote bi-literacy and in so

doing, help revitalize the Spanish culture and language of Austin ISD children.

Third, parents and their participating children will forge a strong bridge to the regular curriculum taught in public schools. Parents will find a community of educators and other parents to help them navigate the intricate public school system on their children's behalf. They will also enter a dense network of ESB-MACC community events, community-based organizations, and local and state institutions that will help them acquire the skills, knowledge, and connections to help the children advance in their academic trajectories. Fourth, based on research evidence, this revitalization is expected to positively impact schooling outcomes like higher student attendance, positive behavior, higher achievement levels, and literacy in two languages.

Fifth, curriculum writers and teachers will benefit from their acquired knowledge of an important content area and instructional techniques shared in professional development settings. Lastly, for the participating teachers and interns, this project will contribute to their own socio-emotional well-being, sense of purpose, and as a consequence, their retention in the teaching profession.