

EVALUATION BRIEF

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The Family Leadership Institute: Impact of a parental involvement program on parental attitudes and behaviors and student achievement.

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The Family Leadership Institute (FLI) is a program that aims to improve parents' family leadership skills and increase involvement in their children's education. Four cohorts of parents have completed the program since 2004–2005, representing 504 parents and 765 children. This brief examines the impact of the FLI program on parental attitudes and behaviors, as well as on the academic achievement and attitudes of their children. Results show that parents, overwhelmingly, support the program, and believe it has helped them and their children. The program also has had a significant impact on academic achievement of children of FLI participants, including a subgroup of students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Children of FLI participants showed more positive attitudes toward school than a comparison group of LEP high-school students. Overall, the FLI appears to have been beneficial to participants and their children.

What is the FLI?

The Family Leadership Institute (FLI) is an educational curriculum aimed at parents and caregivers, with the goal of providing them with family leadership skills in order to support academic achievement and life success for their children. The program has been offered in the district since the 2004–2005 school year and is composed of ten modules. These are taught in a group setting in separate sessions, usually one per month throughout the school year. It is offered in the district through a contractual arrangement with Education Achievement Services, Inc. of Las Vegas, Nevada.

The FLI was originally designed to serve immigrant and migrant Hispanic families (workshops are usually conducted in Spanish with bilingual presentation if needed). Its two main areas of emphasis are, first, to provide participating parents and caregivers with the skills and inspiration needed to enhance their own personal success and to allow them to serve as role models for their children. In addition, the program places strong emphasis on parental engagement, and attempts to increase parents' involvement in their children's education.

The main website of the Family Leadership Institute opens with the following statement:

“The objective of the Family Leadership Institute is to teach parents and caregivers the art and skills of family leadership in support of academic achievement and life success for their children by using a practical ten-step approach” (Education Achievement Services, 2009). The following goals are delineated:

- increase engagement of families in their children's education;
- provide purpose, tools, and direction to parents and their children to achieve academic success as well as life success;
- produce a cadre of knowledge and committed parents & caregivers who actively support school/community efforts that benefit their children in addition to encouraging other families to do the same.

Data and Methods

Data collection began by compiling rosters of parents who participated in the FLI between 2004–2005 and 2007–2008. Next, children of FLI participants were identified from the original parent rosters. Identities were confirmed by consulting the district's School Administrative Student Information (SASI) and Chancery databases to verify that students were enrolled in district schools. These databases were then used

to extract student identification numbers and demographic information.

Academic performance data for students were collected from the Stanford Achievement Test (Stanford 10). Other data came from two surveys. One survey was administered to parents attending the FLI. A second survey was administered to a subset of children whose parents attended the FLI.

How many parents and caregivers have participated in the FLI?

Through the first four years of the FLI, 504 parents have graduated. **Figure 1** (see above) shows the number of parents completing the FLI by year. Enrollment was highest during the first year and has declined each year since, mainly due to availability of funding.

Demographic data are not available for all parents who participated in the FLI. However, in spring of each year, a 21-item survey is distributed to all parents attending one of the last sessions of the program (the schedule has varied depending on the availability of staff to assist in administering the survey). Survey data were collected from 279 parents, representing 55.3% of all FLI graduates. Parent surveys contain some questions on parent demographics.

The ethnicity of the parents attending the FLI has been, overwhelmingly, Hispanic. As evidence for this, firstly, most parents chose to complete the survey in Spanish (96.7%) rather than in English (3.3%); the survey is printed in both languages. In addition, 98.6% of parents indicated that Spanish is their home language.

Most of the parents (97.5%) also indicated that their country-of-origin was somewhere other than the United States. **Figure 2** (see below) illustrates the country-of-origin of all the parents

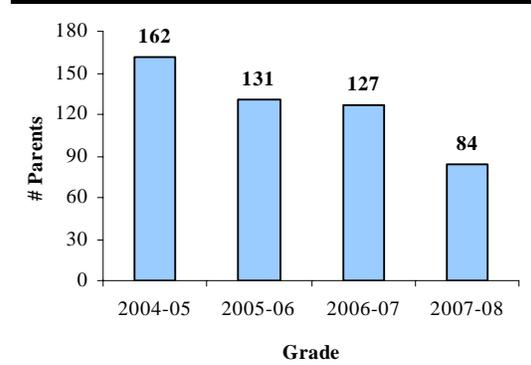


Figure 1. Number of parents completing the FLI for the years 2004-05 to 2007-08.

answering this question on the survey. As can be seen, a large majority list Mexico as the country-of-origin (88.1%). Other Latin American countries make up most of the remainder.

How many children of FLI participants were enrolled in HISD schools, and what were their demographic characteristics?

Table 1 (see next page) summarizes demographic data for the 765 children of FLI participants. Also shown for comparison are data from the general HISD population, as well as the overall LEP population in the district.

Data are summed across the four years of the FLI. It can be seen that the FLI student population is comparable in many ways to the overall LEP population in the district. Specifically, FLI students tend to be, overwhelmingly, Hispanic (99.4%), with a home language of Spanish (93.9%). Indeed, the majority (68%) of FLI students are considered LEP. Similarly, the percentages of FLI students who are immigrant (11.5%), at-risk (83.8%), are served by Title-I programs (98.0%), or are econ-

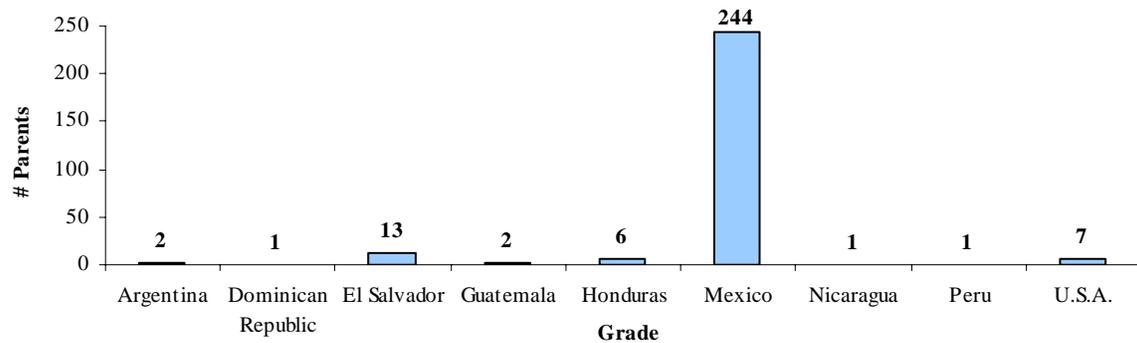


Figure 2. FLI parent country-of-origin (data from parent survey).

Table 1: FLI Student Demographics, Compared to All HISD Students and LEP Students

	FLI		HISD	HISD-LEP
	N	%	%	%
Gender				
Male	417	54.5	51.0	52.4
Female	348	45.5	49.0	47.6
Ethnicity				
America Indian	0	0.0	<1	<1
Asian	2	<1	3.1	2.4
African American	2	<1	29.2	1.5
Hispanic	759	99.4	59.2	95.4
White	1	<1	8.4	<1
Home Language				
Spanish	718	93.9	43.5	94.8
English	44	5.8	53.4	1.0
Other	3	<1	3.1	4.2
Program				
LEP	521	68.1	28.4	-
Immigrant	88	11.5	4.2	13.1
Migrant	6	<1	<1	<1
At Risk	641	83.8	65.3	99.9
Title 1	750	98.0	90.5	97.4
Special Education	34	4.4	9.7	8.9
Gifted/Talented	82	10.8	11.4	4.6
Economically Disadvantaged	729	95.3	80.6	95.0

omically disadvantaged (95.3%), bear more similarity to those of the LEP population than to rates observed in the district.

Special education and gifted/talented status are two areas where FLI students differ from the general LEP population. Only 4.4% of FLI students have special education status, lower than either the LEP population or the district overall. In addition, the percentage of FLI students classified as gifted/talented (10.8%) is higher than that found in the LEP population, and closer to the proportion observed in the general district student population.

Did the FLI impact the academic achievement of the children of program participants?

Stanford 10 results for all students were retrieved for the same year their parents

participated in the FLI, the prior year, as well as all subsequent years. This resulted in a database containing Stanford 10 results for FLI students that reflected their performance before, during, and after the program. Mean normal curve equivalents (NCEs) were collected for each of the five areas of reading, mathematics, language, science, and social science.

This protocol was followed for each cohort of students. To increase statistical power, results from the four cohorts were then aggregated. **Figure 3** (see below) shows summary data from the five Stanford subtests for all FLI students. In the format used, year “0” represents the year in which the students’ parents attended the FLI. Year “-1” is data from the school year prior to the FLI, and years “+1”, “+2”, and “+3” represent student performance one, two, or three years after their parents attended the FLI.

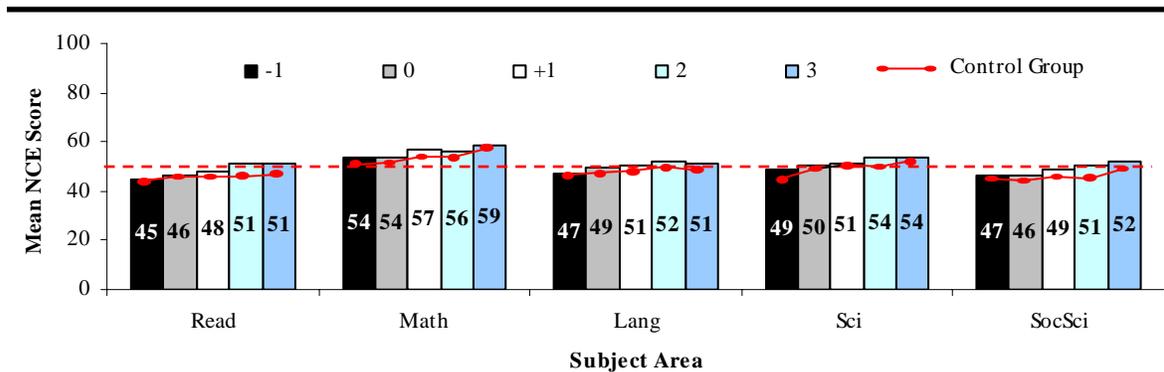


Figure 3. FLI student Stanford 10 performance (mean NCEs) by subject area and year.

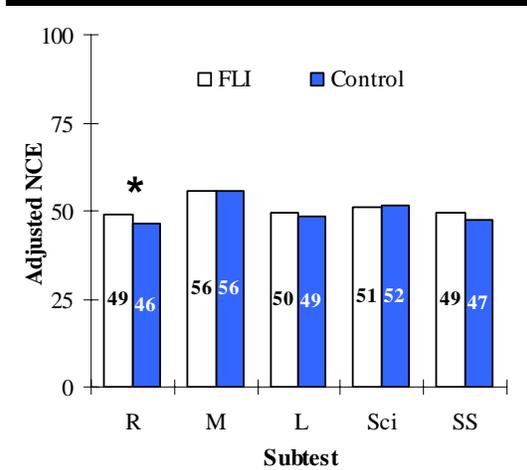


Figure 4. Adjusted NCE scores for FLI and matched comparison groups.

In Figure 3, the filled circles represent data from a randomly selected comparison sample. This control group was matched to the FLI students on ethnicity, LEP status, gender, grade level, and campus attended.

As can be seen in Figure 3, gains were shown by FLI students in each subtest area. A statistical analysis (MANCOVA) found no significant difference between the FLI and control groups overall ($p > .11$). However, when results of the five Stanford subtests were considered separately, there was a significance advantage for the FLI group in *reading* ($p < .05$). Adjusted mean NCE scores (see Figure 4 above) showed that the FLI group had higher post-FLI performance than did the comparison group (adjusted NCEs of 48.6 vs. 46.1).

As mentioned earlier, approximately two-thirds of the FLI students were also classified as LEP. The next analysis reports results of only those FLI students who were considered LEP

during the year in which their parents attended the program. Findings from this analysis are shown in Figure 5 (see below).

As in the case with the full samples (see Figure 3), the FLI student group showed gains in performance from pre-FLI baseline (year “-1”) to the most recent post-FLI year. However, these improvements do not appear to be greatly different from those shown by a matched sample (this matched sample was composed of the LEP subset of the one described earlier).

Analysis of the LEP data showed that the FLI-LEP and control-LEP groups were not significantly different overall ($p = .06$). However, the FLI-LEP and control groups did differ on the *language* subtest ($p < .005$). Adjusted mean NCE scores (see Figure 6 next page) showed that the FLI-LEP group had higher post-FLI performance on language than did the comparison group (adjusted NCEs of 42.0 vs. 35.1).

In conclusion, both the findings from FLI students overall as well as those from the LEP subgroup suggest that FLI participation had a measurable, if modest, impact, on the academic performance of students. Students whose parents participated in the FLI showed gains in performance on the Stanford 10 that are larger than those seen in comparable populations over the same time period for reading (for the overall FLI sample) and for language (for the LEP subgroup of FLI participants).

Did participating in the FLI change the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors of parents and caregivers?

Parent surveys were administered to 279 parents over the four years in which the program was offered, and their responses are summarized here. Demographic statistics for survey

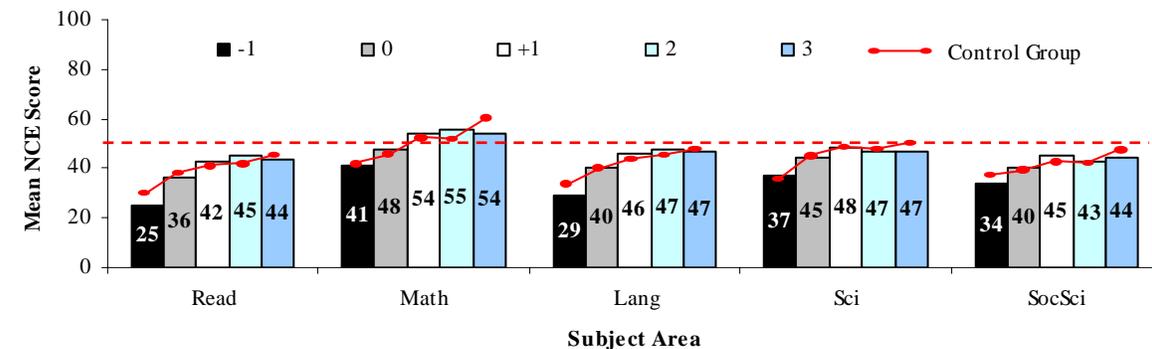


Figure 5. FLI LEP student Stanford 10 performance (mean NCEs) by subject area and year.

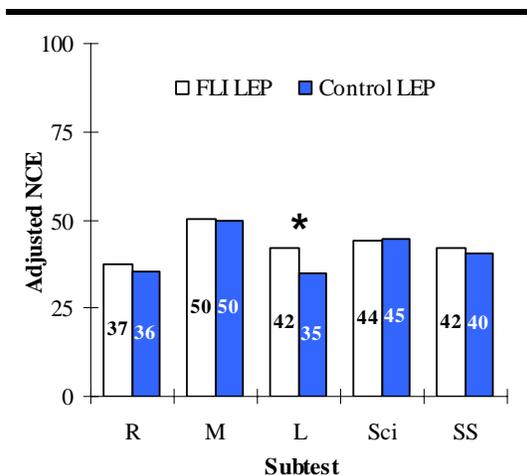


Figure 6. Adjusted NCE scores for FLI LEP and matched comparison groups.

participants were provided earlier. Survey items are divided into four different categories; empowerment, benefits, family life, and leadership.

Empowerment

Ninety percent of parents reported that they were involved in parent-related activities at their child’s school. Most (53.6%) indicated that they had been involved for more than a year, with 28.1% involved between 6 months and a year, and 18.3% being involved for less than 6 months.

The most common parent activities reported were acting as a volunteer (71.8%) and participating in a parent leadership group (67.3%). Most parents also reported that they had enrolled in classes to improve their English skills (76.7%), the most common option being ESL classes (83.6% of those responding).

Benefits

Nearly all FLI participants reported that they used strategies learned from the FLI program in their homes (98.1%), the most commonly cited strategy being “communicating with their children daily about their needs and their future”, 86.3%. Also mentioned were “becoming active participants in their child’s homework” (67.9%), and “organizing an area in their home that their child could use as a work space” (60.5%).

Most parents said that they had received career guidance through the FLI (93.1%), including such things as college field trips, how to transfer college or school credits, and how to apply for and get assistance to enter college.

Family Life

Almost all parents reported that the FLI had affected how much time they or their spouse spent with their children (95.3%). Activities commonly listed towards this end were: spending more time together, communicating, listening to their children more, doing some kind of fun activity together, and discussing schoolwork.

In addition, 97.3% of parents believed that the FLI had affected their child’s performance at school. Things affected by the FLI included improved grades (80.0%), improved relationships between child and teachers (60.8%), improved relationships with peers (51.0%), and improved school attendance (46.5%).

Leadership

The majority of parents reported that their perceptions of school leaders had changed since they started the FLI (92.7%). Reasons for the change included having more respect for school leaders, valuing the work of school leaders and teachers, knowing that the school staff are interested in educating their children, and knowing that they were concerned about their kids.

Ninety-two percent of parents also reported that their interactions with school leaders had changed as a result of the FLI. Examples included improved communication, lower feelings of insecurity in meetings with teachers, more self-confidence, improvements in expressing themselves, and increased mutual respect.

Did the FLI have an impact on the beliefs of children of FLI participants?

A number of the children of FLI participants have been involved with the SLiCK program (Student Leadership, Identity, Knowledge, and Culture). SLiCK is a parallel series of leadership workshops for middle and high school students whose parents participate in the FLI. The SLiCK program consists of a series of five workshops occurring in the fall or spring, and is offered by the same group (EAS, Inc.) providing the FLI workshops for parents.

Beginning in spring 2007, a sixteen-item survey was administered to student participants in the SLiCK program (n=84). Students were polled on their attitudes towards school, motivational levels, and, more generally, how

they perceived their current school environment. Also, in spring 2007 the same survey was administered to over 4,000 LEP high school students in the district. Statistical analyses (Chi-square tests) were used to compare the proportions of students in the two samples who answered positively or negatively to the various survey items.

On 8 of the 16 survey questions, there was a statistically significant difference between the proportions of positive and negative responses of SLiCK participants and the district's LEP high school population. The significance levels of these Chi-square tests ranged from $p < .05$ to $p < .005$. In each of these cases, the SLiCK participants were the group demonstrating *more positive responses*. Examples of such items included: "science/social studies teachers makes the coursework easy enough to understand", "students can get counseling when they need it", items concerning teacher's motivational levels and expectations, and how prepared students were for the schoolwork they now faced.

Conclusions

The Houston Independent School District has offered the FLI program since 2004–2005. This program focuses on providing parents and caregivers with family leadership skills in order to support academic achievement and life success for their children. Results from the first four years of the program show that parents reported increases in attitudes and behaviors reflecting leadership and involvement in their children's education. Parents also believed that the program had affected their children's performance in school. Children involved with the affiliated SLiCK program also showed more positive attitudes towards school. Finally, statistical analyses found modest but significant increases in children's academic achievement in the areas of reading (all students) and language (LEP subgroup only). Findings on whole suggest a positive impact of the FLI program on both parents and children.

References

Education Achievement Services (2009).
<http://www.latinaspeaker.com/FamilyLeadershipInstitute-.htm>

For additional information contact the HISD Department of Research and Accountability at 713-556-6700 or e-mail Research@Houstonisd.org .
