

High School Puente

A Summary of:

“Final Report of the Evaluation of High School Puente: 1994-1998” (December 1998)
The Carnegie Corporation of New York. By Patricia Gándara with Maria Mejorado, Dianna Gutiérrez and Miguel Molina.

Focus

- Early Childhood
- Primary School
- Middle School
- ✓ Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- Extended Learning

Overview

High School Puente (named for the Spanish word for bridge) is a program to help more Latino adolescents successfully bridge the transition from high school to four-year colleges. Latino students constituted the largest population group in the California public schools (41% of the K-12 student population), but they had the lowest participation rates in higher education of all groups. Out of every 100 Latino students in tenth grade, only four qualified for the University of California (UC) system and only one actually enrolled. Puente aims to increase Latino participation in higher education by raising student skills and aspirations through critical thinking and writing instruction, college counseling and mentoring. It provides a focused, supportive and culturally sensitive learning environment that fosters student success. Puente currently operates in 30 high schools across the state of California.

POPULATION

Puente was initially designed to target non-immigrant, English-speaking, Mexican American students as they enter high school in the ninth grade, although Latino students from other countries also participate, as do students of other races/ethnic groups. Classes are comprised entirely of a heterogeneously-skilled Puente cohort of 25-30 students. Puente tries to serve students who demonstrate a sincere desire to excel or improve in school and who “buy into” a college-preparatory ideology. Teachers and counselors from feeder middle schools nominate students, who are selected on the basis of fitting into one of four categories (described under Key Findings).

The 3 Puente case study sites examined in the evaluations collectively included 75 Puente students who began ninth grade in 1994 and a comparison group of 75 non-Puente students (due to student attrition, the final evaluated group was 144 students). The 3 sites chosen were deemed to be representative of all Puente sites with respect to urbanicity, population demographics, location and gender and ethnicity of staff.

Key Findings

The May 1998 evaluation reported college admissions test-taking for matched comparison groups of Puente and non-Puente students, showing that Puente students were more likely to take the PSAT in grades 9-10 and the ACT or SAT in grades 11-12. [See Table.]

The December 1998 study included a comparison of the college-going rates of Puente and non-Puente students (N=144). Puente students were twice as likely to attend a school in the University of California system (7% vs. 4%) or the California State University system (33% vs. 15%).

For the sake of analysis, the December 1998 evaluation also broke the students down into achievement categories as follows:

- ◆ Category 1: high achievers with good grades, test scores and motivation (N=38).
- ◆ Category 2: high potential students with inconsistent grades and scores (N=52).
- ◆ Category 3: students with good effort, but lower grades (N=36).
- ◆ Category 4: students with a history of low performance and low effort, but recommended by a teacher as capable of performing at a higher level (N=24).

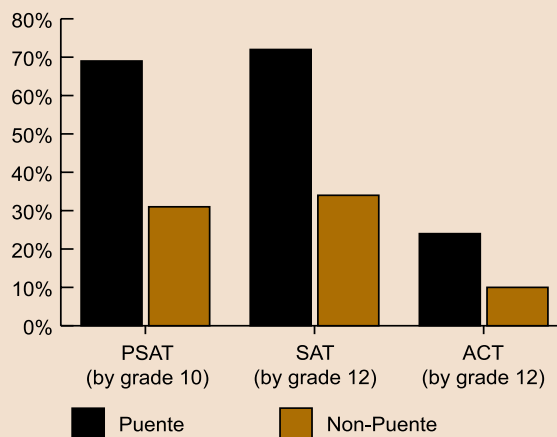
This evaluation also charted percentages of Puente and non-Puente students who completed their college entrance requirements – core academic courses that include English, foreign language, science, math and social studies – which are necessary to be eligible for UC and many other selective institutions, though not necessarily for California State University (CSU).

- ◆ More Puente than non-Puente students (44% vs. 35%) completed the UC requirements. With regard to the completion of requirements, the

“With respect to preparation for college, Puente students reported knowing more about what was needed to go on to college; they completed college preparatory coursework at much higher rates; they took college entrance exams in significantly higher numbers than either other Latino or non-Latino students; and they reported much more influence of counselors, teachers and even parents than the other groups.”

—Gándara, et al., evaluators, Puente project

Completion of College Entrance Exams (Puente vs. Matched Comparison Group)



Puente program had its most positive effect on Category 1 students. More Category 1 Puente students than Category 1 non-Puente students completed their requirements (81% vs. 60%).

- ◆ Nearly all of both Puente and non-Puente Category 1 students who applied to CSU were accepted. Differences were more pronounced for other student categories. More Category 2 Puente students than Category 2 non-Puente students were accepted to CSU (64% vs. 32%). More Category 3 Puente students than Category 3 non-Puente students were accepted to CSU (25% vs. 12.5%). More Category 4 Puente students than Category 4 non-Puente students were accepted to CSU (33% vs. 8.3%).
- ◆ According to statewide data, Puente students applied to the UC at a much higher rate than their peers (24% vs. 8%). In 1998, Puente students in the matched sample attended four-year colleges at nearly double the rate of non-Puente students (43% vs. 24%).
- ◆ The Puente program appeared to have no effect on participants' GPAs, relative to non-Puente students in a matched comparison group.

Program Components

Puente is operated in public high schools. In each high school, 25-30 students are identified for program participation. These students:

- ◆ Enroll in ninth and tenth grade English classes specially designed for Puente. These classes focus on writing and literature, with an emphasis on Latino literature and cultural awareness. Puente teachers receive special training in the curriculum used in these classes. The classes, considered college-preparatory, are for credit and replace English classes students would otherwise take.
- ◆ Continue the program as eleventh and twelfth graders by receiving intensive, college preparatory counseling. Counseling services include ensuring that students are placed in college preparatory classes, that any deficiencies are quickly noted and addressed and that students are supplied with information necessary to ensure high school success and to gain admission to postsecondary education.
- ◆ Have two types of mentors. A “peer partner” who acts as a guide through the early transitions into high school and an adult mentor who introduces the students to new opportunities and roles. A Community Mentor Liaison (CML) seeks out appropriate mentors from the community for the students, trains them and matches them to students in the program. The CML also works with counselors to arrange for

appropriate activities for students and mentors and monitors these relationships.

- ◆ Attend meetings held at least monthly, with teachers and/or advisors during the school day, after school and in the evenings to discuss specific challenges, develop mentor relationships and talk about current issues impacting life choices. Teachers constantly weave “life lessons” (discussed in Contributing Factors, below) into these meetings.

Puente also ensures that parents have information to ensure high school success and college admission. Parental involvement begins early in the Puente program. A student cannot be accepted into the program unless a parent or guardian requests it and is willing to sign a statement agreeing to support the student in a variety of ways, including by attending parent meetings and events. Parent nights are usually “family affairs” with food, informal conversation, presentations in both Spanish and English and materials and information that are of critical importance to parents, such as information about financial aid or special programs that can help both students and families.

Puente also has as its goal, changing the consciousness of the school and the community about the potential of these students. One result is that the program creates local support networks that can assist Puente by offering resources, financial donations and visibility.

Contributing Factors

Family and Peer Involvement

The program design allowed for extensive parent-to-student as well as peer-to-peer involvement. Puente provides a framework through which such relationships can be developed and nurtured.

Personal Attention

Evaluators found that Puente was successful in taking students from *where they were* and

maximizing their potential. Researchers found that Puente students were far better prepared than non-Puente students for preparing college applications, and the personal counseling they received from both teachers and counselors evidently led them to make critically important decisions that resulted in their taking the appropriate courses and examinations to be eligible for selective institutions such as UC.

Quality Staff

Strong, supportive principals who wove Puente into the culture of the school and quality teachers who wove personal “life lessons” into the curriculum were evident at the most effective Puente sites. These successful Puente sites also showed high levels of dedication and enthusiasm from teachers willing to work in the evenings and after school.

Community Involvement

Evaluators noted that community support, which was not dependent on one key individual, helped ensure the ongoing strength of a Puente program. The more widespread the community support, the more mentors and opportunities available to students.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study is the final of four qualitative studies on High School Puente. For the quantitative analysis, the evaluator matched 75 Puente students from across several representative sites with a 75-student, non-Puente control group (due to student attrition, the final evaluated group was 144 students). The evaluator matched students in the control and treatment groups by school attended, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, grades and reading scores upon entering the ninth grade. Data was collected on the two groups over four years. The students were further separated into categories (see Key Findings). Teachers indicated students for each category. The study also includes surveys; school, community and classroom observations; and formal and informal conversations with administrators, teachers, counselors, parents and students (qualitative data was not summarized).

EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING

The Puente evaluation was funded by The Carnegie Corporation of New York. The original Puente pilot projects were supported by the DeWitt Wallace Reader’s Digest Fund. Then Puente became largely funded by the state – not

by the individual schools – and in 1998 it cost roughly \$480 annually, per student. Training of staff to implement the program was partially subsidized by the University of California in the form of in-kind personnel costs.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

The Puente project is in 30 high schools throughout California.

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Note: For additional research on High School Puente and other programs to raise Latino student achievement see “Capturing Latino Students in the Academic Pipeline” (1998) Chicano/Latino Policy Project Report. Edited by Patricia Gándara. Available through the Institute for the Study of Social Change, University of California at Berkeley, 2420 Bowditch Street, #5670, Berkeley, CA 94720-5670.