

National Education Association
“Tellin’ Stories” Project Aims at Closing the Gaps

May 2008

Note: Several speakers in the film speak in Spanish. The translation appears on the screen.

- Narrator: “Tellin’ Stories”, a program of teaching for change, a unique project to engage families in America’s public schools.
- Yarel Marshall: This “Tellin’ Stories” project is awesome. They help the parents in a way that I had never seen before.
- Narrator: “Tellin’ Stories” uses the power of story to bring together parents, educators, and community members to redefine the vision of school communities.
- Fran Tolbert: The “Tellin’ Stories” project is definitely a better fit to our school. Parents love it.
- Narrator: “Tellin’ Stories” is founded on the belief that family involvement is key to the success of our schools and that eliminating barriers to encourage every family to participate in our children’s education is key to increasing family involvement.
- Susan Shaffer: The “Tellin’ Stories” project is a fabulous program because what it does is it builds community with family involvement then you have a greater likelihood of children doing better at school, staying in school, being successful once they leave school, and it has to start very early on and continue all the way through high school.
- Wanda Fox: The “Tellin’ Stories” project does help us to foster a greater understanding and awareness of cultural and ethnic differences.
- Digna Sosa: *(Speaks in Spanish, captioning on the screen)(Spanish transcript: Siento que es muy importante para mi involucrarme porque ayuda a estar mas en contacto con mi hijo y ayudarlo a su educación).* Translation: I think it is very important for me to get involved because it helps to keep in touch with my son and to help him in his education.

[Unidentified staff member]: *(Speaks in Spanish, captioning not on the screen)* *(Spanish transcript: Estoy aqui para leerle a todos)*. Translation: I am here to read to all of you.

America Calderon: There's this sense that parents don't want to participate, they are not interested in the schools, but it's not true.

Fran Tolbert: Parental involvement is very very important. Children have an opportunity to actually see their parents in the classroom. We train our parents to help their children at home.

[Unidentified staff member]: That's when it's addressed or should be brought to the parent's attention.

[Unidentified staff member]: *(Speaks in Spanish, captioning not on the screen)*. *(Spanish transcript: Como un niño puede comportarse una manera en una clase y de otra manera en otra clase)*. Translation: Like a child may behave one way in one class and another way in another class.

Narrator: "Tellin' Stories" programs to encourage family involvement begin with community building by creating opportunities for families across race, class, language, and cultural boundaries to connect to each other and to their school.

Deana Thomas: They're great resource providers to parents and they're also helping parents have a voice in their school.

Jill Weiler: I think parents who have been denied access to participate in their kid's school because they don't speak the school's language suddenly feel a great sense of confidence and pride and power.

Digna Sosa: *(Speaks in Spanish, translation on the screen)* *(Spanish transcript: Me ha ayudado a relacionarme con otros padres y ayudarnos unos con otros y ayudar a la escuela y me gusta)*. It has helped me to meet other parents and we help each other and help the school, and I like it.

Narrator: In each school, telling stories begins with story quilting where family members from all cultures share their stories visually on felt squares. As the squares are sewn together, so too are the lives of those who made them.

- Jill Weiler: The beauty of the quilting process is it's not dependent on language, any language. People often start out saying, "I can't draw" or "I'm not an artist", but they help each other and then they create a beautiful piece of art together and there's a real common bond that comes out of that.
- Maralyn Garcia: *(Speaks in Spanish, translation on the screen) (Spanish transcript: Es muy importante la laboración de ese cobertor porque nos ayuda a reflejar y a tener una vision y no olvidar nuestra cultura de nuestro país y expresar lo que en los tiempos de niñez vivimos).* The making of that quilt is very important because it helps us to reflect and have a vision and not forget our culture and country and express our childhood experiences.
- Narrator: After making a quilt and developing trusting relationships, "Tellin' Stories" works with parents to determine how they can be involved with the school to strengthen academic achievement. One group of parents chose to address student literacy by forming a Roving Readers program. Parents, grandparents, and community members bring the joy of reading to classrooms in their community.
- Andrew Gibbs: In the Roving Reader program I like to engage the child. I would use body language. I would use gestures. I would use emphasis.
- [Unidentified male student]: It's nice to have people come inside to hear the reader book to us.
- Wanda Fox: I like the structure of the "Tellin' Stories" project where parents come and share some sense of self.
- Patricia Derricot: It gave me an opportunity to read to the kids and watch the expression, watching the hands go up, and I'm laughing. "Ooh ooh I know, I know this".
- [Unidentified female student]: I like the story when the little girls made one evening. They talk a different language like I'm doing.
- America Calderon: When the kids love having their parents reading in their own classes, I'm feeling that the parents are being recognized by the other students. The children feel very proud seeing their parents participating.

- Sandra Cruz: *(Speaks in Spanish, translation on the screen) (Spanish transcript: Lo que me gusta es que se le va a leer a los niños a la clase sobre todo que se les esten leyendo en Español y en Inglés, o sea los dos idiomas).* What I like best is that you read to children in their class. Above all that they're being read to in Spanish and English – both languages.
- Frank Sheffield: I would read the portion in the bilingual book that is English. And then she would read the Spanish portion. It will show the children that it's a multicultural society.
- Narrator: The *Roving Readers* program breaks down barriers not just of language, but of education and literacy.
- Saba Abraham: I like everything they do because they trying to help the kids in school and parents to be involved with the kids and with the teachers. That's really important for the kids when they see their parent, they're already involved in school.
- Narrator: As communities develop within schools, the "Tellin' Stories" project takes family involvement to the next level through weekly meetings, workshops, trainings, and grassroots organizing.
- Jill Weiler: We'd have workshops around topics identified by the parents. What you saw today was a workshop on understanding your child's report card and the parents really seem to crave information and have said, "I'm not getting information in other places".
- Deana Coreas: *(Speaks in Spanish, translation on the screen) (Spanish transcript: Me gusta "Tellin' Stories" porque cuando recibo el reporte de mi hijo de como esta la evaluación de el, puedo comprender y saber lo que el maestro me esta explicando).* I like "Tellin' Stories" because when I receive my son's report card I can understand it and what the teacher is explaining.
- Narrator: Through cross city parent leadership training, "Tellin' Stories" mobilizes committed parent leaders who are eager to share their skills with other parents and become effective advocates for children and schools.
- Lezli Gresham: It's important to advocate for your kids in school so you'll know what's going on, how you will respond, what the needs of the kids are, how you can get it done in schools or the community.

[Unidentified]: The thing about Cross City Leadership Training, it's important for all parties to work together. That is what our school is made up of. One parent can't do anything, but ten parents can.

Dyana Forester: The parents that are leaders, they have shown the initiative to want to be involved in school, but really don't have the tools to go back and help other parents get involved in the school so it helps them to be able to go back and give other parents resources.

Doris Watkins: I think all parents need to have the tools and skills that they need and know how to advocate for their children.

Narrator: Parents and families who become involved in our schools naturally become advocates for our schools. "Tellin' Stories" provides support and tools for parents to become advocates so they can help not only their own children, but all children.

Yarel Marshall: "Tellin' Stories" offers a starting point in terms of where we can go as a culturally responsive education system.

Doris Watkins: The "Tellin' Stories" project provides parents a mechanism to advocate for quality education for their children.

Lezli Gresham: I know I am a leader. I know that I can get different resources. I know how to get things done.

Wanda Fox: "Tellin' Stories" project has provided a wonderful, supportive, worthwhile, very advantageous resource for us. It really increased our parental involvement by 300%.

Jill Weiler: Our vision for "Tellin' Stories" is a project like this in every school in the country. I think every school needs support for parent engagement and it's so lacking. We get so many calls with people saying, "Oh, we would love to have that in our school. We don't have resources. We don't have support. We are well-meaning, talented leaders, but we don't have any support or training for them so we would love to see this kind of approach in every single school".

- End of video -

Video participants:

Saba Abraham - Parent

America Calderon – Program Manager, “Tellin’ Stories”

Deana Coreas – Parent

Sandra Cruz – Parent

Patricia Derricot – Grandparent

Dyana Forester – Family School Organizer, “Tellin’ Stories”

Wanda Fox – Principal, Brightwood Elementary

Andrew Gibbs – Parent

Maralyn Garcia – Parent

Lezli Gresham – Parent

Yarel Marshall – Parent

Susan Shaffer – Executive Director, Maryland Parental Information and Resource Center

Frank Sheffield – Parent

Digna Sosa – Parent

Deana Thomas – Parents

Fran Tolbert – Principal, Cool Spring Elementary

Doris Watkins – Senior Program Coordinator, “Tellin’ Stories”

Jill Weiler – Senior Program Coordinator, “Tellin’ Stories”