

Get pupils on college track early, parents told



Greg Bryan / Arizona Daily Star

Nathan Landavaso, a fifth-grader at Gallego School, does homework with guidance from his mother, Genevieve Landavaso.

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UA program gives the facts on preparation, finances

By Eric Swedlund

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Armed with the knowledge of how to search for scholarships, apply for financial aid and direct kids to the right high school classes, parents can set their children on the track to college as early as elementary school.

At the Landavaso home, 9-year-old Jacob and 10-year-old Nathan plow through homework of spelling lists and multiplication tables, while their parents are looking ahead.

Frank and Genevieve Landavaso know year by year and class by class what the boys need to take through high school. They know which degrees translate into which jobs. They know how to stimulate their kids' interest. And they know that college preparation is a lot more than studying for the SAT.

Preparing the next generation of college-bound students is getting tougher all the time, and increasingly that preparation has to start earlier. Close parental involvement is a key to success - especially for low-income, minority and first-generation college-bound kids.

A University of Arizona outreach program is giving parents the tools they need to direct their kids to college.

Mom and Dad have to take an active role in their children's schooling. They must instill a desire for a college education in them, and develop the communication and relationships with teachers and schools to ensure their students meet academic expectations through high school. They must stay informed about college academic and admissions requirements, as well as financial aid and scholarships.

The College Academy for Parents gives lessons on current and future academic expectations, improving communication with schools and teachers, and preparing students for higher education, financial aid and scholarships.

The goal of the program is in part to reduce the divide between students whose parents attended college and those whose did not.

Students with college-educated parents are more likely to be honor students, take advanced classes or attend college preparatory schools, according to a 2003 report of the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, a joint research venture among Stanford University, the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania.

"We saw there was a need there to have some specific outreach to parents at an early age that would address that issue," said Rudy McCormick, assistant director of the UA Office of Early Academic Outreach. "There has been a lot of research in regard to the impact the family has on a student going to college."

For the Landavasos, the workshops were eye-opening. While both took some college classes, neither graduated. But they want their children, including 17-year-old Frank Jr., to continue with education. Late dinners and long classes after work were difficult but worth it, they said.

"They cover everything. I don't know if you could get all that information on your own. It really takes it down to the practical level," Frank Sr. said.

Joanna Acedo, mother of a fourth-grader and twins who will enter kindergarten next year, said that without the UA program, she wouldn't know what was required to get into college or what scholarships and grants are available to pay for it.

"It's important to start now," she said. "Read to your children every night, and the parent needs to be the child's first teacher. Don't just send them to school and depend on the teachers there. It needs to start at home."

While the program gave parents an overview of what was required of their students in English, math, science, social studies, foreign language and fine arts, their children's lessons focused on goal setting, reading, writing, scientific research and observation, and math problem-solving.

Acedo said that because of the training they received, her children already are planning on college.

"Every time we drive by the U of A, the older brother says, 'That's where we're going to college, guys,' " she said.

The UA program, in its second year, came out of an existing relationship between the Office of Early Academic Outreach and the Sunnyside Unified School District. This year, the program graduated 71 parents of elementary-school students at seven

Sunnyside schools: Drexel, Esperanza, Gallego, Liberty, Los Amigos, Mission Manor and Ocotillo.

Lessons on financial aid and admissions are paired with university professors talking about their programs and potential careers. Parents attend 10 weekly workshops and take part in meetings, field trips to the UA and other activities.

Many students believe the hardest part is getting into college, when in fact research shows finishing college is much more difficult. Students often underestimate the standards at community colleges and universities.

"The parents need to understand the academic requirements at the high school level, in addition to the admissions requirements at the university, and compare the two, and if there's anything missing, make sure the students take that extra class," said Arlene Benavidez, a senior counselor in the Office of Early Academic Outreach who envisioned the program.

Teaching parents exactly what will be required of their students was the primary goal of the UA's program, McCormick said.

"The focus for the workshops has been understanding the core academic areas that are required for admission to the university," he said. "We want to show parents and the students the relevance and importance of those subject areas."

Elementary school teachers appreciate the program because it translates into success even in early-grade classrooms, said Mary Ann Jester, a fifth-grade teacher at Gallego.

"I wish this was available for more of them. There are parents out there who just don't know they're going to achieve this for their kids," she said.

Jester, whose class includes Nathan Landavaso, said many young students are starting to think about scholarships.

"In their head, they know (college) is part of their future," she said. "It sets them up to do well now."

• Contact reporter Eric Swedlund at 573-4115 or at eswedlund@azstarnet.com.

How parents can help

- Understand academic expectations at each grade.
- Monitor student progress.
- Help the child organize time, and set a daily schedule for homework.
- Read with your children.
- Encourage children to remain academically active during the summer.
- If a student is struggling, seek additional help.
- Attend college programs on financial aid options and scholarship opportunities.
- Attend parent meetings at the beginning of the school year.
- Talk with high school counselors.

Web sites

- UA Early Academic Outreach: eao.web.arizona.edu/
- Parents as Teachers: [www. parentsasteachers.org](http://www.parentsasteachers.org)
- U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov
- The Parent Institute: [www. parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com)
- The College Board: [www. collegeboard.com/parents](http://www.collegeboard.com/parents)