



## **Table of Contents**

### **I. Ánimo Project Overview**

1. Executive Overview
2. A Quick Glance: Identifying, Connecting the Dots & Implementing Solutions
3. Ánimo Project Proposal sent to organizations & education administrators.
4. Family Commitment Contract.

### **II. Ánimo Project Details**

1. Project Details
2. Team Members
3. Record of Preliminary Sessions
4. Summary of Weekly Mentoring/Tutoring Sessions
5. Ánimo Project Impact

### **III. Ánimo Family Participants**

1. Ánimo Project Family Details
2. The The Natal Family
3. The Muñoz Family
4. The Palomares Family
5. The Cortez Family

### **IV. Budget**

### **V. References**

1. Community Resources
2. References



## Ánimo Project Overview



## **Executive Overview**

The HAL Education Team has created the *Ánimo* Project, a six-week pilot program to address the needs of some of East Austin's low-income Hispanic families with students who have high absenteeism records. The project provides educational opportunities to help combat the absenteeism problem to all participating students and their parents through the use of donated software and laptops. Through the use of these laptops families engage more effectively in their child's educational experience.

As part of the program, the HAL Education Team offered one-on-one mentoring to these targeted families. During the mentoring sessions, family members learned how to monitor their child's attendance at school, an integral part of each student's academic success, as well as keep track of assignments and grades. At the same time, donated educational software for the laptop allowed the parents to improve their personal skills and development.

### **The Plan:**

In order to achieve its goal, the HAL education team first had to find a school administrator willing to host the pilot program. Azucena G. García, principal at Sanchez Elementary, answered the call and helped identify several students with high absenteeism records.

The Education Team then contacted each family by phone and invited them to an informational session where they learned of the program's goals and duration. During this session, families learned that each student would be assigned during the six-week program. If the families participated in all weekly mentoring sessions and the child showed attendance improvements, the family was able to keep the laptop.

Prior to the informational session, the education team had contacted several local businesses for their help with the program. ThreeSixty Solutions, State Farm and Discount Electronics helped secure the donated software and laptops.

Once a week for six weeks, the education team met with the five families to help them learn to use GradeSpeed, the Austin Independent School District's online grading system. Families also learned to navigate the Internet for age-appropriate educational game sites and other beneficial sites for the family, including employment sites. The team also taught families how to install and use the donated software.

Through the weekly interactions, we were successful in treating the issue of high absenteeism as a family issue. By doing so, the results not only benefited the student, but it benefited all members of the family. We believe that since the entire family was affected, its impact will be longer lasting than individual student impact.



## **A quick glance: Identifying, Connecting the dots and Implementing Solutions**

### **What has research shown in regards to dropout rates and absenteeism?**

- The Texas Education Agency's "Enrollment in Texas Public Schools 2008-09" report states that almost 15% of Texas Hispanic student's dropout.
- Databank's Child Trends identifies Hispanic students being among those with the highest absenteeism rates in the country.

### **How do the two affect one another?**

- In order for a child to learn he or she must be in the classroom.
- "Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement", research by J.L. Epstein and S. B. Sheldon, shows that attendance is an important factor in school success among youth. Its studies show that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds. It also shows that students who attend school regularly score higher on tests than their peers who are frequently absent.

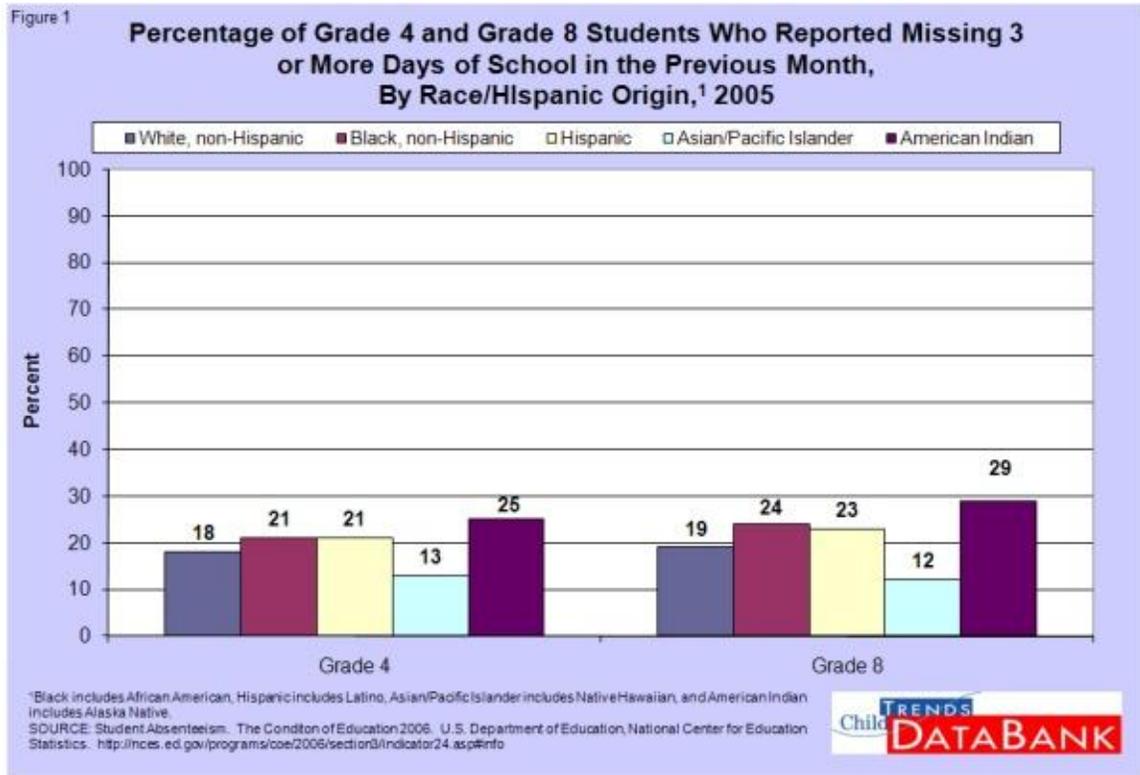
### **What can be done?**

- A program like *Ánimo* that encourages one-on-one mentoring can help educate families of the importance of a child's attendance and empower the parent to be a direct impact on their child's education.

### **How can it be done?**

- Introducing technology at an early childhood education level is key. If the necessary tools are given to parents (such as laptops) at an early education level, parents are able to monitor their child's progress and are able to be in direct contact with the child's teachers through email.
- Mentoring or tutoring families with no or limited computer skills has proven to be a successful teaching parents how to better be connected to their child's educational experience. For parents who are already familiar with using tools like *GradeSpeed*, it would be beneficially to provide more challenging tools including more advanced educational software.

Figure 1:



**(PROPOSAL SENT TO VARIOUS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS & SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS)**

January 21, 2010

Rene Garganta, Ph.D.  
Principal  
William B. Travis High School  
1211 East Oltorf  
Austin, TX 78704-5799

Re: **Proposal to Meet AISD Attendance and Dropout Prevention Objectives  
By Partnering with the HAL Education Team “Animo Project”**

1.0 Executive Summary

The Hispanic Austin Leadership (HAL) Education Team objective is to address the education crisis that Central Texas is experiencing.

A majority of eligible Hispanic students are not graduating from high school, and the majority of those who graduate are not enrolling in college. This trend has been statistically documented and has identified core reasons that limit a successful educational career for the fastest growing segment of our population and the workforce of the future: Hispanic youth.

The HAL Education team seeks to address this crisis and hopes to:

- Achieve improvement in the attendance of Hispanic students
- Create a learning and educational environment through technology
- Improve computer literacy and access to technology in the Hispanic community
- Provide resources for personal, familial and professional development

The HAL Education team proposes to partner with Travis High School to accomplish these objectives.

**1.1 Achieve Dramatic, Measurable Improvement in Attendance and Dropout Prevention**

The HAL Education Team has created the *Animo Project* a pilot program to address the needs of our Hispanic students and their families. The project is designed to work collaboratively with our education partners and provide a measurable means of opportunity. The *Animo Project* seeks to utilize technology as a foundation for equal education opportunity, and has acquired computer laptops for this purpose. These laptops will be offered to targeted need students and their families to assist and allow families to engage more effectively in monitoring their child’s educational experience.

**1.2 Focus Education on the Family**

The HAL Education Team will offer direct mentoring and assistance to these targeted families and will directly interact with the entire family to improve their attendance at school, an integral part of each student’s academic success. At the same time, educational software on the laptop such as GED, Language Learning will allow for access by the parents to improve their personal skills and development.

### **1.3 Method of Assessment**

The *Animo Project* will run for a six-week period and measureable results will be documented during this period by the use of tracking systems and surveys of targeted family usage. These successful results will be used to adopt the *Animo Project* as an appropriate incentive to address and improve education in school and in the home.

### **1.4 School Obligation**

The *Animo Project* requests Travis High School identify targeted four targeted families for participation in the *Animo Project* after all necessary legal and confidentiality issues are reviewed and approved.

### **Conclusion:**

The HAL Education Team—which includes the participation of Guillermo Calderon of State Farm Insurance; Joshua Frescas of Univision; Ben Littlefield of Three Sixty Solutions; and Gissela SantaCruz of ¡ahora sí!—is committed to improving the educational environment and opportunity for the Hispanic community and its most precious asset – Hispanic children. We believe the creation of the *Animo Project* will serve to directly impact and improve attendance and inspire students to higher education.

This proposal is submitted for your review and consideration. Please call or email my office if you have any questions regarding this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Guillermo Calderon, Jr.  
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**(COMMITMENT CONTRACT EACH FAMILY HAD TO SIGN)**

Hispanic Austin Leadership (HAL) Education Team  
**Animo Project**  
Participant Commitment Agreement

The HAL Education Team and Sanchez Elementary are partners in a new project to assist our families with their technology skills. The **Animo** Project seeks to provide students and their families with an educational tool necessary to assist in the students' academic improvement, improve their technological proficiency, and empower parents.

As a participant in the **Animo Project**, I agree to the following conditions:

- I will be assigned a laptop computer for my family's use
- I will be required to log on to the laptop on a regular basis weekly
- I will access my student's academic profile with the school
- I will review and monitor their attendance
- I will commit to zero (0) absences by my student for rest of school year
- I will learn to use the applications and programs on the laptop
- I will actively engage in improving my student's attendance
- I will monitor my student's academic progress
- HAL Team members will mentor and assist families with laptop use
- HAL Team members will meet weekly with the families for a four week period
- I will protect the assigned laptop from damage
- I will not sell or exchange the laptop for any financial gain
- I will report to Sanchez Elementary on my experience after one full year

**\*\*Upon completion of the project goals, I obtain full ownership of the laptop computer. \*\***

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

School Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Ánimo Project Details



## Project Details

The *Ánimo* Project is a six-week pilot program that addresses the needs of some of Austin's lower-income Hispanic families with students who have high absenteeism records.

The HAL Education Team chose to take on this project after researching some of the issues facing the Austin Independent School District (AISD). Among its most notable problem is the Hispanic drop-out rate. According to various the Texas Education Agency (TEA) report on Secondary School Completions and Dropouts in Texas Public Schools 2007-08, 14.4% of Hispanic students in Texas drop out of school. The HAL Education Team then looked in AISD's attendance and objectives.

The team found, through speaking to administrators and community leaders, that the two problems really affect one another, and heard on several occasions (from AISD Superintendent Meria Carstarphen), "a child cannot learn if he is not in school".

After several meetings and discussions with community leaders, the team members chose to focus on technology as a means to help families remedy, or at least lessen, attendance issues.

Our original team leader, Ben Littlefield, was able to secure two laptops through his connections at ThreeSixty Solutions.

Guillermo Calderon, who later assumed the team leader role, secured three more laptops with the help of State Farm in association with Discount Electornics.

All donated computers had to be refurbished, a service that would have cost the team additional funds. Luckily, the team was also able to find a provider who was willing to donate his services.

The team approached several school administrators about the proposed project, including the challenge to identify potential families in a short period of time.

Azucena Garcia, principal at Sanchez Elementary answered the call and provided the team with five families.

The participating families agreed to commit to attend six weeks of mentoring sessions where they would be given the tools to help them keep track of their child's attendance, assignments and how to connect directly through email with their child's teacher. The families were informed that if they attended all the mentoring sessions and their child showed significant improvement in their attendance, the assigned laptop was theirs to keep.

In order to provide equal opportunities for the students the team gave them each family laptop free of charge; we installed additional educational software and we tutored them on how to use the computer.

The HAL Education Team offered direct mentoring and provided assistance to these targeted families and directly interacted with the entire family to improve their attendance at school, an integral part of each student's academic success.

Through the *Ánimo* Project, the Education Team was able to holistically focus on the entire family, instead of singling out the student, and we targeted the root of the problem.

The attendance records for participating student significantly improved and all family members benefited from the use of the donated laptops.



## HAL Education Team Members

Guillermo Calderon, Team Leader

Joshua Frescas, Team member

Gissela SantaCruz, Team member

Due to the late development of unforeseen events, the 2010 Education Team lost its original leader and the remaining members were forced to veer from the standard assignment of roles as defined by HAL organizers. Though the team lost its original Project Manager, the remaining members made a conscious decision to share the responsibilities to guarantee the execution of the project.

Guillermo Calderon was assigned the role as Project Manager in order to give the team guidance, direction and leadership.

The remaining roles —as originally defined Marketing/Communications/Sales; Finance Officer: Research/At Large— were shared by all. Potential initiatives, decisions and follow-through were made as a team.



## **RECORD OF PRELIMINARY SESSIONS**

- Meeting with Principal Azucena Garcia of Sanchez Elementary
- Meeting with Principal Rene Garganta, Ph.D. of Travis High School
- Composition of Project Animo written proposal
- Composition of Project Anmio Family Commitment Agreement Criteria
- Meeting with Principal Garcia to review and edit Family Commitment Agreement
- Identified need for five families for Project Animo
- Principal Garcia selects five families and provides profiles of each family
- Establishment of weekly technical training sessions for the families
- Principal makes contact with each family and invites them to first training session

# **SUMMARY OF MENTORING/TUTORING SESSIONS**

## **INITIAL SESSION – FEBRUARY 18, 2010**

- Principal Garcia introduces HAL education team and project to five families
- Review of HAL Project Animo Commitment Agreement
- Signature of family member on Commitment Agreement obtained from all families
- Discussion of session time and agreement on two separate sessions to accommodate families
- Discussed student subject fields of interest for software program installation

## **SESSION TWO – FEBRUARY 25, 2010**

- Laptops were issued to families with basic training on their operation
- Activity Logs were issued to each family for documentation
- Discussion of expectations on laptop use for the family
- Created email account and provided internet access information to families
- Discussion of Grade Speed to monitor attendance and academic performance of child
- Obtain photos of Education Team members training and educating families on laptops

## **SESSION THREE – MARCH 4, 2010**

**F**

- Review of laptop issues and documented activity
- Obtained Grade Speed website path and family pin numbers for families from Principal Garcia
- Trained families on Grade Speed AISD website and its effective use
- Presented educational software to families in attendance for installation and usage
- Obtained video of Sanchez Elementary
- Obtained video of training session with education team members and families

## **SESSION FOUR – MARCH 11, 2010**

-

- Reviewed activity reports from families
- Discussed installation of purchased educational software
- Installed software in laptops and mentored on its usage
- Discussed and practiced basic typing skills with families and students
- Reviewed family employment issues and referred to resources
- Discussed referral of one family member to a second family with employment opportunities
- Emphasized need to make contact with the teacher of each student directly and discuss needs

## **SESSION FIVE – MARCH 18, 2010**

- Met with families at Cepeda Library due to spring break at Sanchez Elementary
- Discussed installation of new software obtained including Encyclopedia Britannica Disney Typing
- Reviewed laptop start up menus and program installations
- Discussed necessity of home internet service provider and their monthly costs
- Discussed and reviewed access procedures for GradeSpeed
- Practiced emailing to participants on new G-mail accounts
- Review job sites and opportunities on web sources for secondary employment

**SESSION SIX – MARCH 25, 2010**

- A Technical Class Completion Ceremony and Dinner was held at the school
- The four families were recognized for their completion of the program
- State Farm Agent Joe Pena presented Certificates and Laptop Bags to families
- including, a mouse, a journal, and State Farm T-Shirts for the parents
- Realtor Cynthia Calderon with Casa Blanca Realty consulted with family members on new homes, business certifications and GED education
- Video was obtained from family members on their program experience
- Plans were set to continue mentoring families with home visits as needed



## PROJECT IMPACT

Student	Grade	Teacher	# of absences prior to 2/18/10 **	# of absences between 2/18/10 & 3/25/10***
Charles Natal	1 <sup>st</sup>	Ms. Fennell	4 unexcused absences 10 unexcused tardies	0
Allison Alveo Resto	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mrs. Sanchez	3 unexcused absences 2 excused absences 14 unexcused tardies	1 Unexcused tardy
Atziri Esmeralda Lopez	1 <sup>st</sup>	Mrs. Sanchez	16 unexcused absences 1 unexcused tardies	0
Christian Jesus Munoz	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Ms. Gonzalez	6 unexcused absences 7 unexcused tardies	1 excused absence (illness)
Gabriel Amir Palomares	4 <sup>th</sup>	Mrs. Puga	3 unexcused absences 2 unexcused tardies	0

*“Wow Guillermo! Take a look at the results!!! This is fantastic!!! Thanks so much for your willingness to work with our families. I am going to go a step further and see what the data looks like at the end of the year as well...”*

— Azucena García, Principal at Sanchez Elementary

### **Project results:**

With the donated laptops, the HAL Education Team was able to connect participating families to GradeSpeed, the Austin School District’s online grading system. Through this tool parents were able to better engage themselves with their child’s progress and could see what assignments would be affected if the child continued to miss school. Parent’s with children in grades three or higher also learned how to use GradeSpeed’s email utility to connect directly with teachers through email. All parents, regardless of the student’s grade, were taught how to utilize GradeSpeed.

Also, all participating parents were given educational software and directed to educational game websites to help motivate their child to learn.

As a result, the project’s objective to help lessen a student’s absenteeism record was achieved. Numbers show that the average number of absences and tardies within a 6 weeks period significantly improved.

### **The program also had additional impacts:**

For parents with little or no computer experience, the weekly mentoring/tutoring sessions taught them how to use email, search for jobs and get connected to other life opportunities.

### **Not expected was the impact the program had on the entire family as a whole:**

Parents reported to use the newly learned GradeSpeed for older students in other schools. They also reported that older siblings were also taking advantage of the laptops earned to keep up with their assignments through GradeSpeed and complete homework.

**Even more surprising were the real connections made through the special guests:**

Visiting guests made an impact and personal connection with participating parents.

Cynthia Calderon, a local realtor and Guillermo's wife was interested in observing the class. During her visit, Cynthia was able to educate Ms. Muñoz on home ownership and Ms. Natal on GED opportunities and business management courses. Cynthia was also able to plant the seed in Ms. Natal that it might be more beneficial for the family if their older children went to college to learn how to better manage the family business, instead of working that business right out of high school.

State Farm agent Joe Peña was at the program's Graduation Day to help families learn about personal insurance, business opportunities and securing their future.

**\* Student data provided by Sanchez Elementary Principal, Azucena Garcia.**

**\*\* These are the number of absences recorded by the student's teacher as of the first day of school, August 24, 2009. Prior to February 18, 2010, students had been in school 25 calendar weeks. However, within those 25 weeks, 20 days were student holidays. Between August 24, 2009 and February 18, 2010, AISD students were in class 105 days.**

**\*\*\* Between February 18, 2010 and March 26, 2010, there was a total of 6 days of student holidays. AISD students were in class 22 days during this period.**



Ánimo Project Family Participants



## Family Participants

With the help of Sanchez Elementary School Principal Azucena Garcia's help, the HAL Education Team was able to identify five families with high absenteeism.

Charlie Natal, 1st grade  
Christian Muños, 2nd grade  
Gabriel Palomares, 4th grade  
Atziri Esmeralda Lopez, 1st grade  
Allison Alveo Resto, 1st grade

With the exception of one, all families were able to complete the project.

Mobility is one ingredient that directly affects a child's attendance. The project experienced its effects first hand when it lost one of the original participating families to a move. The project lost all communication with Jocelyn Resto Pereles, Allison's mom.

## The Natal Family



Mr. & Mrs. Natal and Charlie Natal  
Contact: Rebecca Natal  
86 Navasota St.  
Austin, TX 78702  
512-736-8429 – Cell#  
Email: [rebecca.natal@yahoo.com](mailto:rebecca.natal@yahoo.com)

## The Muñoz Family



Ms. Maria de Jesus Muñoz and Christian Muñoz  
Contact: Maria de Jesus Muñoz  
2425 e. Riverside Dr., #213  
Austin, TX 78741  
Mmunoz57@gmail.com

## The Palomares Family



Mr & Mrs. Palomares and Gabriel Palomares  
Contact: Michelle Palomares  
80 San Marcos St.  
Austin, TX 78702  
512-632-5095  
512-573-6074  
Email: [michellepari@yahoo.com](mailto:michellepari@yahoo.com)

## **The Lopez-Cortez Family**

(No photo available)

Ms. Yesenia Cortez and Atziri Esmeralda López

Contact: Yesenia Cortez

1313 Holly St.

Austin, TX 78702

5112-220-5357 – Home

512-287-1479 – Cell



## Budget Overview

<b>Budget</b>	<b>\$500</b>
Video production/editing	\$200
Software purchase	\$50
Tech supplies	\$42
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$292</b>
<i>(Remaining funds:</i>	<i>\$208)</i>

## Donations Received

Video production/editing	(\$800)
Graduation Day Celebration Food	(\$110)
T-Shirts	(\$150)
Logo Graphics / Marketing strategies	(\$300)
Family laptop bags and supplies	(\$320)
Laptops (donated by Ben Littlefield & ThreeSixty Solutions)	(\$400)
Laptops & software (donated by State Farm Hero Program)	(\$480)
Tech Services (reformatting laptops & software)	(\$500)
<b>Total donations:</b>	<b>(\$3060)</b>

HAL EDUCATION TEAM

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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Jeff Lieberan & Jason Simank  
BC Sports



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