



After-School Program:

Working With Diverse Families and Students With Disabilities in Urban Settings



Hispanos Unidos para Niños Excepcionales (HUNE) Mission

HUNE empowers and supports parents of children and youth with exceptionalities in obtaining a quality public education, so that the students will lead rich, active lives and attain future success.

HUNE offers programs to improve the academic development of children and youth with disabilities. Presently, HUNE has two Youth Programs:

- After School Youth Program
- Summer Youth Program

The focus of this brief is the After-School Youth Program, which is offered to students ages 14-21 who presently have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and are enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia.

The Mission of HUNE's Youth Program is to empower youth 14-21 years of age to stay in school, graduate, and become contributing members of society.

The goals of the program are aligned to the **Pennsylvania State Systemic Improvement Plan** by including the following outcomes:

- Increase on-track factors that impact high school graduation (i.e., attendance, behavior, course performance)
- Create a safe, culturally responsive place for students with and without disabilities
- Increase participation within the community

- Improve students' social skills
- Increase school retention
- Increase graduation rates

To achieve these goals, HUNE works in partnership with parents, school districts, community organizations, agencies, and businesses to expand students' exposure to various occupations and professions.

The structure of our program includes:

- Attendance three days a week (2.5 hours daily)
- 15 students enrolled yearly
- 60 percent of the students enrolled for two consecutive years
- Staff/Mentor/Volunteer ratio (one mentor per six students)
- Ongoing collaboration between HUNE and school district staff
- Ongoing communication and collaboration with students' families

As part of the initiative, HUNE promotes family engagement as an evidence-based practice because families are part of the planning team.

The following questions provide HUNE with information that is important in planning relevant learning activities:

- Does your son/daughter have something to which he/she responds positively (e.g., group work, individual work, music, dancing)?
- Does your son/daughter read at home? What kind of materials does he/she prefer (e.g., newspaper, magazines, catalogs)?

- What are your son's/daughter's social and academic strengths?
- What is his/her favorite family activity?
- What makes your son/daughter motivated to learn?

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Youth who participate in summer programs improve in key areas that foster success in school, including social and emotional development, increased interest and engagement in school, and avoidance of risky behaviors.



Completion for All Pennsylvania Students

Do you know a student who is considering dropping out of school?

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Students in the after-school program learn socializing skills, teamwork building strategies, self-control, and self-advocacy techniques. They also participate in activities to build work-readiness and soft skills, such as punctuality and appropriate teacher-student and/or employer-employee interactions using a variety of modalities.

HUNE reaches out to schools that students attend in an effort to network on behalf of the individual youth and assist with school dropout prevention initiatives. HUNE works as a direct liaison between school personnel and parents (e.g., attendance, bullying, grades, behavior).

Since the start of this program, student attendance and parental engagement have always been at 95 percent. This is due to a comprehensive effort to

maintain open communication with parents in their preferred language of communication, strong interagency collaboration with schools, and effective research-based teaching practices aligned to the Pennsylvania Core Standards. The integration of the Pennsylvania Core Standards has provided our students with an academic foundation that benefits their chances for academic achievement and graduation.

Family engagement is an important aspect of our youth program. We provide ongoing communication regarding best practices to support students' academic and social development. Families' feedback regarding the changes in the students' attitudes and behavior are positive. The results of their academic development and improvement in their grades and behavior in school are also satisfactory.

Family Feedback

"Yuliana likes the program. The program has helped her to get integrated. She is less shy and is open to socializing. She gets a lot of homework help. She gives the program five stars. Yuliana has had new experiences. She is really happy about the youth program."

– Yuliana's Mother

"He likes the program because he can socialize with other students of his age. He gets a lot of homework help. Also, he has developed as a person."

– Jose's Mother

"My son does homework in the program. He likes the program a lot because people are nice in the program. He is a little bit nicer to others now that he is in the program. He likes the way he is treated in the program."

– Henry's Mother

Resources for Families

- HUNE, www.huneinc.org
- PaTTAN, Increasing Graduation Rates and Decreasing Dropout Rates Initiative, www.pattan.net
- PaTTAN, Parental Engagement Initiative, www.pattan.net
- PaTTAN, Parent Information, www.pattan.net
- PYLN, Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network, www.pyln.org
- The PEAL Center, www.pealcenter.org

PaTTAN (www.pattan.net)

- *Extended School Year Services in Pennsylvania*
- *Is Your Child Having Difficulty in School? A Guide to Communicating With Your School and District*
- *Pennsylvania Parent Guide to Special Education for School Age Children*
- *Top 5 Reasons Schools Need to Engage Parents*

Additional Resources for Parents

- My Next Move (Career Exploration), www.mynextmove.org
- Access Careers (Pre-College), www.washington.edu/doi/Careers/precollege_stu.html
- I'm Determined, www.imdetermined.org/parents
- Inside Jobs, www.insidejobs.com
- "Think College," www.thinkcollege.net/topics/resources-for-families