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

- **Summer Youth Program**
- **After School Youth Program**

The Summer Youth Program is offered to students ages 14-21 who presently have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), as well as students without IEPs who would benefit from this program and are enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia.

***The Mission of HUNE's Summer 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 (SSIP) by including the following outcomes:

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

- Increase participation within the community
- Increase school retention
- Increase graduation rates

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

The structure of the program includes:

- Attendance 3 days a week (4 hours daily)
- Up to 30 students enrolled
- 60 percent of the students enrolled for 2 consecutive years
- Staff/Mentor/Volunteer ratio (one mentor per six students)
- Ongoing collaboration between HUNE and community agencies
- Ongoing culturally and linguistically appropriate partnership with students' families

As part of the initiative, HUNE promotes family engagement as an evidence-based practice, as parents and families are part of the planning team. Questions, such as the following, provide information that is important in planning relevant learning activities:

- What are your expectations or goals for your son/daughter during and as a result of the summer program?
- What makes your son/daughter motivated to learn?
- What is his/her favorite summer family activity?
- Does your son/daughter have something to which he/she responds positively (e.g., group work, individual work, drawing, music, swimming, dancing, sports)?

- How does your son/daughter envision his/her responsibilities for academics during the summer? For example, does your child typically read during the summer?
- What does your child prefer to read (e.g., newspapers, magazines, comic books, books, Internet articles)?
- In what other academic activities is your child involved during summer breaks?

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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.**



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Teaching and learning are accomplished with a focus upon the student's strengths and interests, through a program designed with the individual student's special needs in mind.

A safe, culturally responsive environment is established, in which students feel comfortable sharing personal stories and concerns. Students' confidence in academic learning is strengthened through one-on-one mentoring and cooperative learning.

Socialization skills are enhanced in the small group setting with implementation of team-work-building strategies, self-advocacy strategies, and self-control. Daily life skills (e.g., cooking and cleaning) are also developed, while incorporating academic skills such as mathematics and science.

Staff is competent in handling sensitive information and responding to emergency situations, while treating students with care, respect, and empathy at all times. Staff works to empower and support youth to develop their transition goals (post-secondary school), building upon students' strengths and interests. To achieve these goals, HUNE guides students by:

- Linking the academic program with youth's career aspirations, fostering meaningful learning
- Visiting higher education institutions in the area

- Building work readiness and soft skills, such as punctuality and appropriate teacher-student and employer-employee interactions, and using a variety of modalities
- Networking with community agencies for potential career exploration opportunities, as appropriate.

HUNE works as a direct liaison between school personnel and parents, including consultations on attendance, bullying, grades, and behavior.

Since the start of this program, student attendance and family engagement have consistently been at 95 percent. This is due to a comprehensive effort to maintain open communication with families in their preferred language of communication, strong interagency collaboration with schools, and effective research-based teaching practices aligned to Pennsylvania Core Standards. The integration of these standards has provided students with an academic foundation for academic achievement and graduation.

### Family Engagement

Family engagement is an important aspect of our youth program. We provide ongoing communication regarding best practices to support the students' academic and social development. Families' feedback regarding the changes in their children's attitudes and behavior is positive.

HUNE hosts monthly meetings for the parents and families of the youth in the program. The monthly meetings are scheduled at a time and date convenient for families. HUNE conducted both an online and paper survey for parents to assess the best dates and times for meetings. As a result, HUNE's parent meetings are held twice a month, in the morning and afternoon. This gives parents and families the flexibility they need to attend the meetings.

At the meetings, youth display their work for the month using a variety of formats (e.g., paper, PowerPoint, Prezi, tangibles), we discuss the student's progress and the next month's curriculum and activities, and the families discuss any issues or share successes. Successes often increase the satisfaction results of the student's academic development and improvement in their grades and behavior in school.

## 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](http://www.huneinc.org)
- PaTTAN, Increasing Graduation Rates and Decreasing Dropout Rates Initiative, [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)
- PaTTAN, Parental Engagement Initiative, [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)
- PaTTAN, Parent Publications for Parents, [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)
- PYLN, Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network, [www.pyln.org](http://www.pyln.org)
- The PEAL Center, [www.pealcenter.org](http://www.pealcenter.org)

### PaTTAN ([www.pattan.net](http://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*



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