

Narrative

Pegasus Legal Services for Children proposes to partner with the GRADS Program (Graduation, Reality, and Dual Role Skills) to develop an advocacy education program for GRADS students at Santa Fe Public Schools who are receiving Home Visiting Services, focused on the issue of expanding high quality home visiting services that have quantifiable outcomes. GRADS students would be invited to become subject matter experts and spokespersons on the issue of expanding high quality home visiting services. The students would be tutored by experts, write letters to legislators, comment on legislators' Facebook pages, write post cards to legislators, and meet with legislators individually during the 2018 Session.

Pegasus Legal Services for Children is a private non-profit agency that targets the civil legal needs of vulnerable children and youth through direct representation, community legal education, and policy advocacy. Pegasus' mission is to promote and defend the rights of children to safe and stable homes, quality education and healthcare, and a voice in decisions that affect their lives. The GRADS Program is an in-school program for teenage parents that provides a range of services including for credit course work, on-site Child Care Centers, Career Readiness, Youth Leadership, and Fatherhood Programs. The primary focus of NM GRADS is to provide an in-school program that actively and directly addresses barriers to success for expectant and parenting teens.

Goals:

1. Educate and engage diverse Santa Fe Public Schools GRADS students to become subject matter experts and spokespersons on the importance of early childhood education and expanded access to home visiting services;
2. Provide compelling in-person and written testimony on the value of home visiting to legislators who have yet to express strong support for expanding home visiting programs.

Activities:

1. Bring subject matter experts into the GRADS classroom to educate GRADS students about the importance of early childhood education and home visiting;
2. Present a workshop to Santa Fe GRADS students about how the New Mexico State Legislature works;
3. Partner with the GRADS teachers to develop GRADS students' persuasive writing skills;
4. Partner with the GRADS teachers to develop GRADS students' verbal advocacy skills;
5. Partner with the GRADS teachers to schedule one on one meetings with legislators who have yet to express strong support for Home Visiting.
6. Organize a post-card drive for GRADS students at the twenty-four GRADS sites around the state.

7. Contact legislators by telephone or email to ask about their response to the project, and its impact on their level of support for expanding high quality home visiting services that have quantifiable outcomes.

Timeline:

1. **December:** Bring a minimum of two subject matter experts into the GRADS classroom to educate students about evidenced-based research on the benefits of home visiting;
2. **December-January:** Organize a post-card drive for GRADS students at the twenty-four GRADS sites around the state.
3. **December- January:** Present a workshop to GRADS students about how the New Mexico State Legislature works;
4. **December – January:** Partner with the GRADS teachers to build GRADS students’ verbal advocacy skills in preparation for advocacy events during 2018 Legislative Session;
5. **December - January:** Partner with GRADS teachers to develop and teach a seminar on persuasive writing for GRADS students;
8. **January-February:** Organize a post-card drive for GRADS students at the twenty-four GRADS sites around the state.
6. **January – February:** Partner with the GRADS teachers to schedule one on one meetings with legislators to discuss expanded home visiting services.
7. **March -** Contact legislators by telephone or email to ask about their response to the project, and its impact on their level of support for expanding high quality home visiting services that have quantifiable outcomes.

Key Staff:

Elizabeth V. McGrath is the co-founder and former executive director of Pegasus Legal Services for Children. She graduated from Hampshire College in 1981 and the University of New Mexico School of Law in 1987. Ms. McGrath has spent her career working on behalf of individual children and youth, and advocating for legislative and policy changes that benefit children, youth and their caregivers. In 2003, Ms. McGrath founded Pegasus Legal Services for Children with Tara Ford. Ms. McGrath developed and oversees Pegasus’ programs serving grandparents raising grandchildren, young parents, and homeless and runaway youth. Ms. McGrath was instrumental in the conception, drafting, and passage of the 2001 Kinship Guardianship Act. She has taught at UNM School of Law as an adjunct professor, and has given many presentations about the rights of children and youth across the state of New Mexico. Ms. McGrath now has her own consulting practice and works on special projects for Pegasus.

Matthew Bernstein is a Staff Attorney at Pegasus Legal Services for Children. He represents children in abuse/neglect and special education cases, and focuses on stopping the school-to-prison pipeline. He graduated with honors from the University of New Mexico School of Law. He holds a master’s degree in United States history from UNM, where his thesis focused on race relations and education, and a Level II New Mexico teacher’s license. Prior to attending law school, Matthew taught English, history, and economics at Amy Biehl High School in downtown Albuquerque.

Lauren Whitehurst, a NM GRADS teacher and Mother Tongue Project Executive Director & teacher, holds a B.A. magna cum laude in English from Amherst College, a Master's of Fine Arts in English-Creative Writing from the University Washington; and her NM public-education teacher's certification. In addition to teaching the NM GRADS class at Santa Fe's Capital High School, she directs the Mother Tongue Project, a relationship-based literacy education organization supporting teen parents, and teaches its anchor program, a standards-based and specialized curriculum 11th-12th-grade English class. She shares student essays and writes about parenting in her "Mother Tongue" blog for The Santa Fe Reporter. Before working with teen parents, Whitehurst was a marketing director and copywriter, a magazine and newspaper journalist and editor, and a community and college teacher. She lives in Santa Fe with her husband and two delightful children.

Keith Richards has been teaching the GRADS course for the past 3 years. He received his B.S. degrees in Business Administration and Kinesiology/Physical Education from the University of Maine. He entered the teaching profession in Florida for 3 years, then one in Utah, and has been a high school teacher in Santa Fe for the past 9 years. He chooses to teach so that all of his students can be provided with a safe and positive learning environment as they prepare themselves for their future aspirations.

Evaluation:

The Pegasus/GRADS Home Visiting Advocacy Project will be evaluated by contacting legislators after the 2018 Session through telephone or email to ask them about their response to the project, and its impact on their level of support for expanding high quality home visiting services that have quantifiable outcomes.