

Celebrating Oakland's First Graduating Class of the Baby Learning Communities Collaborative

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan, OUSD Director Chris Dobbins and community based providers celebrate the first graduating class of Oakland's Baby Learning Communities in the city's Havenscourt Neighborhood



On Saturday, March 12th over 45 Oakland residents walked the stage in a commencement ceremony in the auditorium of Futures and Community United Elementary Schools, honoring their graduation from a college unlike any other in the Bay Area. The parent-scholars accepted their diplomas as graduates of the Oakland Baby Learning Communities Collaborative Program, a project dedicated to parent education and development services for some of the city's most vulnerable children.

In an effort to provide every child in Oakland with the best possible start in life, public systems have partnered with community based organizations to implement innovative programs that encourage families in high-need communities to take part in potentially life changing activities - for them and for their children. The goal is to identify families with young kids who are living in high crime areas of Oakland and to provide a series of support services that will facilitate the healthy development of their children.



Fatimah Eghlim, grandmother of two girls ages five and three, receives a diploma from Mayor Quan and class instructor Dr. Kamil Jabril for having completed the parenting workshop where she learned about child development and positive discipline.

"When colleagues of the City, County and School District and I visited the Harlem Children's Zone two years ago, we were extremely impressed by the level of dedication staff gave to their youngest residents and the impact it had on the children's later success in school," explained Oakland Mayor Jean Quan. "We recognize that with a healthy and supportive beginning, Oakland's children can also improve their achievement and success in school."

Mayor Quan noted that the initial graduating class from the Havenscourt community is particularly meaningful, because Havenscourt is one of the neighborhoods the Mayor has adopted in hopes of significantly improving its quality of life.

"Giving our youngest residents a solid start right from birth will make a huge difference in this neighborhood and in Oakland as a city," she added.

In August of 2010, Safe Passages in partnership with the City of Oakland, Oakland Unified School District, the County of Alameda and community based organizations came together to write a proposal to the Oakland Fund for Children and Youth for the *Oakland Baby Learning Communities Collaborative Program (BLCCP)*. The program, modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone Baby College, involves extensive community outreach, a series of playgroups for parent-infants (children birth to 12 months of age), parent education workshops (children 0-5) and case management services.

Special emphasis is placed on the recruitment of the following low-income families in the target communities:

- Families exposed to community or domestic violence
- New immigrants

- Within the two categories above, families with children and/or parents with disabilities and delays.

This year, available funding allows the program to be implemented in Oakland's Havenscourt (D6) and Sobrante Park (D7) communities, two neighborhoods recognized as particularly high crime areas. Since the start, demand for the program has been strong.

"You judge a community by how it treats its most vulnerable population, its children," said OUSD Superintendent Tony Smith. "As a city, we have a moral obligation to do better by our youth, starting at day one. If we uphold this obligation and create the conditions necessary for children to achieve, it will not only allow our youth to reach their potential, it will strengthen our neighborhoods and create a brighter future for all of Oakland."

Alicia Padilla, a graduating parent of four, states, "This program provides parents with the support necessary to do our job well for our children. In addition, this program builds community. I have met neighbors here that I would not have met without these classes."

BLCCP partners include: Youth Ventures JPA, Safe Passages, Jewish Family Children's Services/EB, Through the Looking Glass, The Central American Refugee Committee of the East Bay, City of Oakland Department of Human Services - Oakland Fund for Children and Youth, Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) and Alameda County Social Services Agency (ACSSA), Oakland Unified School District (Sobrante Park Elementary School, Futures Elementary, Community United Elementary, Madison Middle School, Coliseum College Preparatory Academy and Roots Middle Schools).



Derrell Cooper and his eighteen month old son.

