

Tahoe Truckee Unified School District - Student Services Department

Grant Proposal to Excellence in Education

Grant Title:

Notching Up TTUSD Nurtured Heart Approach® Practices and Impact

Description:

The Nurtured Heart Approach® (NHA) is more than just a parenting or educator behavior management strategy. It is a philosophy for creating healthy relationships with the people in your life. Originally created by Howard Glasser in 1992, NHA is being successfully implemented through families, classrooms, foster care, health care professionals, social workers and criminal justice organizations that are seeking successful, early intervention techniques.

The Nurtured Heart Approach® consists of a set of strategies that assists children in further developing their self-regulation and has been found effective with children of all ages. It focuses on transforming the way children perceive themselves, their caregivers and the world around them. Children learn to understand that they will receive endless amounts of praise, energy, recognition and reward through the positive behavior they display and this supports children to build a positive portfolio of themselves, which we call “Inner Wealth™.”

Hektner, Brennan, Brotherson (2013), reviewed the NHA's theoretical and empirical foundations and found that, “elements of NHA are consistent with clinical practice, developmental theory, and empirically validated parent training programs.” Brennan & Hektner (2016) reported an increase in parent perception of child's strengths and parent confidence, as well as decrease in parent relational frustration following a five week parent course in the Nurtured Heart Approach®.

Finally, in June 2018, a research study conducted by the University of Arizona was concluded that evaluated the efficacy of NHA to reduce inattention and hyperactivity and impulsivity in children ages 6 - 8 years. Participants were parents or guardians of children diagnosed with, or suspected of, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). While publication of study results are still pending, initial findings indicate a reduction in symptoms of inattention and hyperactivity/impulsivity in children according to study participants (see attached media release for more information).

The Nurtured Heart Approach® is based on three stands:

Stand 1: Absolutely No!

- I refuse to give my time, energy, and relationship to negative behavior.
- I will not accidentally foster failure nor will I reward problems by responding to them in animated ways.
- I will save my time and energy for searching for success.

Stand 2: Absolutely Yes!

- I will relentlessly and strategically pull the child into new patterns of success.
- I will constantly recognize the success and achievement that children are displaying no matter how small, and present them with clear undeniable evidence of their value and how great they are.

Stand 3: Absolutely Clear!

- I will have clear and consistent consequences for children when a rule has been broken. “Here are the rules, and here’s what happens when you break a rule.”

The simplicity of the Three Stand framework makes NHA an approachable and achievable methodology for parents and teachers. For example, this framework supports teacher development in classroom management, and promotes emotional regulation in children. These concepts are in line with district objectives for creating a safe and collaborative culture and fostering relationships with students. The Three Stands framework also gives parents relational and behavioral strategies to use in the home. The end results are parents with more confidence in their parenting skills, and children with positive self-concept and improved behavior.

Scope of training efforts to date:

Starting in 2018, Nick Bartlett, TTUSD Special Education Program Specialist and Advanced NHA Trainer was the sole trainer in the region. As a result of the 2020 Excellence in Education grant award, as well as district and school funding contributions, TTUSD was able to train six additional trainers in January 2021. They include:

- Gretel Vargas, 5th Grade Teacher - Glenshire Elementary School
- Rachel Falk, School Counselor - Glenshire Elementary School
- Jessica Scott, Special Education Program Specialist
- Cindy Maciel, Program Manager - STEPP and Early Learning Programs
- Barbara Kane, Coordinator of Translation and Bilingual Community Services
- Angelica Stone, Community Interpreter & Liaison / Translator

Since the 2020 grant approval, TTUSD has accomplished the following:

- One hour introductory teacher training has continued. There is also interest in training high school leadership classes in NHA in order to target student social-emotional well-being in this critical population.
- Teacher support and coaching at Glenshire Elementary School has increased as a result of Gretel Vargas' training and leadership at that school.
- Utilization of the Nurtured Heart Approach methodology for targeted school counseling support, provided by Rachel Falk at Glenshire Elementary School. The NHA inspired book Greatness Kids Initiative (a complimentary text with activities useful for supporting kids of all ages in being their best and learning to use their intensity in great ways) has strongly influenced this work.
- Cindy Maciel and Gretel Vargas presented an 8-week workshop series in 2022 for Early Childhood Learning professionals through the First Five Nevada County Commission. There is an upcoming spring 2023 NHA workshop for Early Learning professionals.
- Continued bi-annual three part parent workshops for English and Spanish speaking families. Having bilingual trainers has enabled the district to provide more tailored and inclusive exposure to NHA for our Spanish speaking families.

While we have accomplished many of the outcomes sought through the previous grant proposal, there is a need for further training. Please refer to the Summary of Grant Proposal section for additional information.

Benefits of the Nurtured Heart Approach:

Parent participants to date have reported average ratings of 9.6 (scale of 1-10) in relation to NHA presentation delivery, and 9.4 on NHA presentation materials (25 parent ratings from 2018-2019 workshops). Comments in support of the NHA include, "The Nurtured Heart training really helps to get both parents on the same page for challenging behavior. It gives us a common language and a shared set of strategies." Likewise, parent participants have reported, "The Nurtured Heart Approach® offers the tools to create a positive way to navigate child development." As these comments indicate, the Nurtured Heart Approach® strategies promote growth and change in students who have spent previous years struggling and acting out. It also empowers parents who may be struggling with their children at home with new parenting tools.

Teachers report similar presentation delivery/materials ratings, and have commented, "This training gave me time to positively and safely reflect on my current practices, as well as giving me tools and strategies to improve and work on," and "I found the Nurtured Heart Approach training to be an eye opening and practical approach to dealing with situations in my classroom and school. The practices and ideas are useful and don't take a lot of extra skills in order to apply. I am glad I was able to participate." Our one hour teacher introductions continue to spark interest in the approach as well as requests for classroom observations and coaching.

Summary of Grant Proposal:

The week long CTI training consists of a comprehensive curriculum offered by the Nurtured Heart Institute. The participants gain tools to effectively communicate, teach, and coach the Nurtured Heart Approach® within a community, school, or organization. Upon completion of this program, the participants are able to become NHA Certified Trainers. The training costs include the first year of online access to certified trainer materials.

Given the positive response and ongoing demand in our community for this type of behavioral and relational approach, the TTUSD - Student Services Department is seeking funds to increase our parent, teacher, and community agencies training capacity. For example, we have found that our bilingual trainers are heavily impacted by other demands in the district. Further, our bilingual parent population is less responsive to virtual presentation formats (Zoom), so we are shifting focus to in-person parent workshops, which are more labor intensive. To accomplish this and build additional capacity serving this parent population, an additional bilingual trainer is needed.

In addition, we wish to build on the success of Gretel Vargas' leadership and teacher support at Glenshire Elementary by increasing her teacher coaching skills by way of certification as an Advanced Trainer in the Nurtured Heart Approach. The Advanced Trainer track focuses on mentoring new trainers during the CTI week as well as additional leadership development.

Finally, given that we have reached so many parents in the district, and only 7-16% are returning parents, a new advanced parent workshop is being proposed. In order to accomplish this, we are seeking one additional trainer who can support the initial parent workshops so that Nick Bartlett can develop an advanced parent workshop. This advanced parent training will refresh parents in NHA principals and provide targeted activities and coaching. Parents will walk away with greater depth of knowledge and new tools to utilize at home. To maximize the populations reached by the additional NHA trainer candidate, we plan to seek out either another teacher or school counselor to fill this role.

Implementation:

TTUSD - Student Services will continue to offer NHA training for staff, parents, and community agencies for the foreseeable future. This will include training for parents, staff, and special education instructional aides. If the grant approval timing accommodates, the three new trainers can attend the CTI in October, 2023. This will allow the new trainers to be ready for our winter parent workshops, which have historically been held in December. With this in place, Nick Bartlett will be able structure and promote the advanced parent training program.

Depending on the candidate selected for training (school counselor or teacher), TTUSD will have increased capacity to provide direct student exposure to NHA strategies. For example, if a teacher is selected, another model NHA classroom similar to Gretel Vargas' at Glenshire Elementary could be developed. If a school counselor is the best fit, the goal will be to replicate Rachel Falk's work in counseling groups at Glenshire Elementary. This candidate will serve as a site leader in NHA implementation, assisting with spreading the practice further within the district.

Our new bilingual trainer will participate in the Spanish parent workshops, further expanding our support and impact for families in our community and providing well needed assistance to our current bilingual trainers.

Success of the Program:

This grant will benefit the families, students, and faculty across TTUSD. Having an additional certified NHA Trainer in the district will increase our capacity to grow positive, caring, and authentic connections with students and families, and establish positive classroom climates in which all students feel valued. Over time, we anticipate this will result in lower office referrals at schools, lower suspension rates, and an increase in parent and teacher self-reports of increased efficacy and improved relationships. As a school community, we are all witnessing the social-emotional and behavioral changes in our students following Covid-19 driven school closures and distance learning. Consequently, TTUSD needs positive social-emotional strategies like NHA more than ever.

Sustainability of the Grant Proposal:

NHA training certifications are recommended to be renewed every three years. With this renewal cycle in mind, the costs invested for this training will have a multi-year impact. There is also the potential for the trainers to become advanced trainers when their recertification timeline is due, which has a significantly lower cost than the initial training. Tahoe Truckee Unified School District (TTUSD) strongly believes in this program as evidenced by site and district funds being contributed during the previous training efforts. Executive Director of Student Services, Annamarie Cohen has expressed that the district will contribute financially where gaps in grant funding might surface. In the future there are other funding sources specifically tailored to improving parent-district relations that can be utilized as well.

We sincerely appreciate your time in considering this grant funding request. With increased training offerings in the Nurtured Heart Approach, we look forward to positively impacting the families and school staff in our wonderful community!

Nick Bartlett
Special Education Program Specialist
Tahoe Truckee Unified School District
Nurtured Heart Approach Advanced Trainer

Annamarie Cohen
Executive Director - Student Services
Tahoe Truckee Unified School District

Gretel Vargas
5th Grade Teacher, Glenshire Elementary School
Nurtured Heart Approach Trainer