

# Parents learn skills to raise highly capable children

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FORT WORTH—When 29 parents from Manuel Jara Elementary School recently graduated from Parent University, members of [Primera Baptist Church in Fort Worth](#) knew they played a role in giving them the tools, skills and confidence to raise healthy, caring and responsible children.



Parents tell how the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum affected their lives during the graduation ceremony at Manuel Jara Elementary School in Fort Worth. (Photo by Jonathan Martinez)Primera Baptist Church adopted Manuel Jara Elementary two years ago and began investing in its students and their families. Church volunteers started a well-received tutoring program, and Pastor Rafael Berlanga built a relationship with the teachers and Principal Marta Plata.

The pastor and principal talked several times about the need for parenting classes. Through the [Texas Baptist Hispanic Education Initiative](#), Berlanga learned about the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum. He saw it as a

great fit for the school's needs and approached Plata about starting a course in the spring.

### **What parents needed**

"As a pastor, I have seen a lot of times when parents just haven't had the training on how to raise kids," Berlanga said. "It was perfect for what I knew parents needed and what the principal was looking for."

Plata was eager to begin the new program through Parent University, offering incentives along the way to encourage participation. Primera Baptist Church provided funds to purchase workbooks for each parent, and Berlanga taught one of the three courses. Teachers volunteered their time to provide childcare so parents could attend.

"I was overwhelmed with pride for the parents. When we first started the program, I thought that if I got 10 parents to commit, we would be doing well. We had 29 commit to start and 29 finish the program. It was wonderful," Plata said.



Twenty-nine parents

graduated from Parents University at Manuel Jara Elementary School in Fort Worth after completing curriculum on Raising Highly Capable Kids. (Photo by Jonathan Martinez)As the weeks progressed, parents realized the importance of remaining committed and made it a priority. Plata also called each parent every week to remind them of class or to let them know they were missed.

Throughout the program, the parents learned important skills, and open dialogues helped as they worked through new concepts.

“We had good discussions on how our own childhood, our own experiences, some of the things we went through as children can help us in parenting today our own kids,” Berlanga said.

“We had some single moms in my class. One opened up and said she struggled. We were able to share with her to look outside of herself for help when she needs it, whether it’s going to her own family or finding a support structure outside of the family. The church is a great place to turn. That’s why it’s there—to minister to your kids and help you grow.”

### **Parents are ‘first educators’ for kids**

The curriculum placed importance on parents as the first educators of their children. While teachers spend six hours a day with the students, parents have a significant impact on their lifelong development.

“This was such a validation for parents that they are the most important teacher in their child’s life, and we are here to support you and what you are doing with your child,” Plata said.



The 29 graduates of Parent University completed the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum. (Photo by Jonathan Martinez) During the graduation ceremony, many parents described how the class changed their lives.

“I could feel their gratitude for what they learned,” Plata said. “I wish every single school would do it. We are not going to affect real change until we affect the parents, until we affect the home. We need to support the parents and their efforts and what they are trying to do.”

Finishing the course represented a great accomplishment for many participants. One single mom had only a third-grade education and never had experienced a graduation ceremony before.

“For many Hispanic parents, this is the only course or program they will graduate from in their lifetime,” said Gabriel Cortes, acting director of Texas Baptist Hispanic Education Initiative. “Graduating from something makes a lifelong impact in their lives and their families.”

### **Impact at school campus**

Overall, Plata was extremely pleased with the results of the course and the

impact she has seen already on her school campus. Plans are under way to start a new session of Parent University next year through a continued partnership with Primera Baptist Church.

“In public school, we can’t talk about God, but we have to live it,” Plata said. “Pastor Berlanga has been that to us. Not only did their church provide the funds to purchase the program, but he also showed up to teach a class. The parents love him. I know that he planted so many (gospel) seeds in their hearts. Maybe for the first time in their whole life, they saw someone Christ-like, really truly being Christ to them.

“I absolutely admire him and know that truly God sent him to undergird what I am trying to do—what God is trying to do in this school and community.”

The Texas Baptist Hispanic Education Initiative has endorsed the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum, and training is available for churches and schools in English and Spanish.

“Raising Highly Capable Kids is one of the best programs available to get into schools and build relationships with parents and school staff with the goal of sharing Christ’s love with them,” Cortes said.

For more information about the Raising Highly Capable Kids curriculum, email Cortes at [gabriel.cortes@texasbaptist.org](mailto:gabriel.cortes@texasbaptist.org) or call (214) 887-5426.