

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Austin Independent School District

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Acknowledgement

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During the school year, staff from many campuses worked with staff from the Parent Programs office, a part of AISD's Department of School Support Services, to enhance their parent involvement activities. The office is housed in the Family Resource Center located at Allan Elementary School and is directed by AISD's Parent Program Specialist. The office staff provide training for parent support specialists, coordinate parent involvement activities districtwide, facilitate Title I and Title I Migrant Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings, set up special staff development workshops/sessions (e.g., TEA District Effectiveness Compliance visit preparation, and Creating Family Friendly Schools) publish or make available parenting periodicals, provide on-site adult literacy classes, and perform Spanish translations as needed for parent events. The Center is also the meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council, a sub-group of the district's task force that updated AISD parent involvement policy.

An example of community involvement in AISD is the Partners in Education Program, a partnership between AISD and the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce that encourages business and community involvement in public schools. Partners are matched with the school of their choice and provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and cash donations.

To enhance all of the district's parent and community involvement efforts, AISD's School Board adopted an updated parental involvement policy that was recommended for adoption by the District Parent Involvement Task Force in August 2000. The updated policy is based on Joyce Epstein's 1997 list of important parent involvement activities: communication, parent training, promoting student learning, community resources, decision-making and volunteering. (See www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm for some of Epstein's work.) Epstein's research indicates these six activities have been successful ways to involve parents. These activities are endorsed by the National PTA.

Evaluation Overview

During school year 2000-2001, staff from AISD's Office of Program Evaluation worked with the following on parent involvement evaluation: AISD School Support Services, AISD parent support specialists, AISD's Family Resource Center, AISD's grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, AISD's PTA/PTO presidents, AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council, 14 private schools; and parents residing in the AISD attendance area. The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assemble some information from district staff and parents as to the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools.

Since parent and community involvement is such a large and complex phenomenon, this evaluation focused on five specific objectives.

Evaluation Objectives

1. To measure campus staff awareness of AISD's recently revised parent involvement policy, and AISD's adherence to federal, state, and local requirements.
2. To document parent support specialists' activities and use of other *entitlement funds* in parental involvement activities.
3. To measure self-reported level and quality of parents' involvement in schools within AISD attendance zones based on results of a districtwide parent survey.
4. To document AISD's community involvement through the Partners in Education program.

Table 1 shows many teachers (41%) were not aware of the recent adoption of a revised parental involvement policy by the AISD School Board and superintendent, or that multiple funding sources were available to campuses for parent involvement training (42%). In addition, most teachers (59%) were not familiar with the newsletter. In general, administrators,

Table 2: AISD 2001 Employee Survey-Awareness of Parental Inclusion on Campus

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral
# Parents and community members are included as planners and decision makers in planning at my campus.	48% A		

Coordinated Staff Survey Recommendations

The coordinated survey data suggest several areas in which school staff shows *a lack of knowledge*. The following *operational* recommendations are offered for increasing campus staff's knowledge of and access to AISD's parent involvement operations, policies, and other resources, because teachers and other student support staff are first contacts for the majority of parents. Their knowledge or perception of AISD operations, goals and mission should not be limited to classroom activities only. They should be full partners in involving parents in the education of students; their scope of knowledge must include general information about district operations, policies, resources or contacts for resources. Therefore:

- ⌘ *Campuses must provide ongoing staff development for teachers and other staff that will increase their awareness of AISD parent involvement operations, policies and other district activities, and their access to the Family Resource Center's training sessions.*
- ⌘ *The Family Resource Center must market itself and its services within AISD more aggressively.*

AUSTIN ISD ATTENDANCE AREA PARENT SURVEY 2000-2001

An Austin ISD Attendance Area Parent Survey 2000-2001 was developed and administered to more than 4,000 parents in the AISD attendance zone in spring 2001, including AISD private schools within the AISD attendance zone that received federal *title funds* during 2000-01.

The survey, written in English and Spanish, was based on four (school-parent communication, parent knowledge of school resources, promoting student learning, and community resources) of the six types of parent involvement activities endorsed by AISD's parent involvement policy. In addition, parents were asked if they had additional needs or concerns. The survey was designed to meet mandatory evaluation requirements; gather individualized campus data for and about the public schools; provide benchmark information for the participating private schools within the AISD attendance area that receive Title I funds; include PTA/PTO presidents in the survey process; and acquire information about campus staff most often used by principals to process, administer and collect survey data, and the sites of most survey administrations.

In Table 4B, most parents (76%) said they checked with their child on a daily basis to see if the school had sent home materials needing their attention.

Table 4B: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Communication

Communication	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Two/more times per year	Never or Once per year	No Response
I check with my child to see if the school has sent home materials needing my attention.	76%	16%	3%	1%	1%	3%
I check with the school to determine if I have missed any current communication (test dates, registrations, special events).	15%	28%	20%	26%	1%	10%

In Table 4C, parents responding expressed the highest preferences for weekly folder review (66%) and parent conferences (64%) as the best forms of communications from the school to their homes.

Table 4C: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Communication

The best forms of communication for this household are: (Check all that apply.)	
Weekly folder review (66%)	E-mail (16%)
Parent conference (64%)	Homework hotline (8%)
Progress Report (49%)	Other (6%)
Telephone Calls (44%)	Home visits (5%)

Most parents (80%) agreed that their schools offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues (see Table 5). Also, most felt the schools encouraged families to help their children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, use the homework hotline or folder (89%), and to take advantage of academic after-school or summer programs and/or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement (77%).

Table 5: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Interaction and Promotion of Student Learning

Interaction (Campus-to-Parent)	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Don't Know	No Response
My school staff offers parents the opportunity to discuss parenting, child development, and or other family issues.	80%	6%	12%	2%
The school encourages my family to help children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, and use the homework hotline or folder.	89%	5%	4%	2%
The school encourages families to take advantage of academic after-school or summer programs and/or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement.	77%	9%	13%	2%

Table 6 shows 70% of the parents agreed that their schools offered training or informational workshops that were inclusive of both parents. In addition, 67% of the parents agreed that their schools did an excellent job of coordinating community resource services.

Table 6: AISD's Parental Involvement Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-Support Services

Support Services	Strongly Agree/Agree	Strongly Disagree or Disagree	Don't Know	No Response
The school offers a variety of training or informational workshops that are inclusive of both parents (parenting, child development, TAAS, TEKS, grade level transition, choice sheets, graduation plans, etc.)	70%	9%	17%	4%
My school does an excellent job of coordinating community resource services (free immunization, mental and health contacts, family disaster relief, adult education, etc.)	67%	10%	22%	3%

Table 7: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001
Assignment Confirmation Sheet

Person Assigned	Number	Percent Assigned Tasks
Parent support specialists	43	49
PTA/PTO presidents	17	20
Counselors and principals (5 each)	10	11
Assistant principals, campus secretaries, private school directors (3 each)	9	10
Attendance Clerk, principal's secretary, teachers (2 each)	6	7
Computer lab specialist, curriculum specialist, and School/community liaison (1 each)	3	3

The checklist from schools also provided details on the number of surveys given out for completion and the numbers returned, as well as the various methods and sites of administration. For example, the highest number of surveys returned by a high school was 58, a middle school was 107, an elementary school was 238, and a private school was 48. In fact, several elementary schools returned more than two hundred surveys, and most elementary schools received 75% of the surveys that had been sent to parents. Secondary schools were not as successful. Some staff from secondary schools stated that they had fewer opportunities to access large groups of parents in their secondary setting. In some cases, they also cited the lack of specific staff (e.g., parent support specialists) as a deterrent to better and more frequent parental involvement opportunities. A common response from many schools (both elementary and secondary) was that they needed a longer period (or earlier time in the year) to administer the survey.

A variety of methods and sites were used in survey administration as shown in Table 8. The most popular sites reported were adult classes or general meetings (e.g., PTA/PTO, workshops, assemblies).

Table 8: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001
Methods and Sites of Survey Administration

Methods and Sites

Gathering Input from Parents

The parent support specialists used a combination of methods to gather parental input and feedback on activities they conducted during 2000-2001. Think tank activities or open discussions (n=21) led the list in methods used most often by the parent support specialists. Annual parent surveys and telephone calls (n=20) were also mentioned.

Staff Development Activities

The parent support specialists were asked to list staff development activities that they had completed in the past year that were offered by AISD or other agencies. Following are the staff development activities mentioned most often: Connections Resource Center Celebration of Families (n=25); Creating Family Friendly Schools (n=25); Texas Education Agency's Parent Involvement Conference (Creating Opportunities for Student Success) (n=10); Education Service Center Region XIII workshops (n=6); and AISD Impact Training (n=5). Attendance records were kept on monthly staff development sponsored by Family Resource Center. Out of 9 staff

Table 9: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire-Parental Involvement
Activities Summary 2000-01

Parent Activity	Parent Attendance	# Schools Responding
Assemblies	4,281	19
Regular Workshops (Make-It Take It, Sticker Book, Family Nights, etc.)	2,725	17
Social (Gangs, Drugs, Teen Pregnancies, etc.)	1,845	12
Wellness (Stress, Mammography, Inoculations, dental, etc.)	965	10
Parent & Student Transportation	770	8
Home or Community Visits	1,004	4
Parent Volunteers (CAC reps., chaperons, monitors, and TA's)	768	6
Special get-togethers (parent with school staff)	565	3
Speciality Classes, Fairs, Workshops	1,010	7
Recipients of Charitable Acts	262	3

Unique Work-Related Requests From Campus Staff

Several AISD staff members from School Support Services, Human Resources, the Family Resource Center, and the Office of Program Evaluation, as well as two representatives from Education Austin, worked through the Parent Involvement Advisory Council (PIAC) to unify the job titles and descriptions of the parent support specialists; establish a uniform starting pay grade; and secure a salary increase for those presently employed. This was done due to a concern within School Support Services about the variation in assigned job activities among parent support specialists across the district. The Office of Program Evaluation assisted the PIAC by gathering unique work-related information through the parent support specialist questionnaire. These data were instrumental in creating a singular job title for parent support specialists, a specific job description, and a pay increase that went into effect August 2001.

Table 10: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin ISD Partners in Education, 1999-2000 and 2000-01

Type of Donation	1999-2000	2000-01
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,892,343	\$4,295,736
Cash Donations	\$3,115,851	\$4,279,080
Number of Volunteers	12,303	16,649
Number of Volunteer Hours	358,620	366,251

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 1999-2000, 2000-01

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

According to a study (Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools) by Westat and the Policy Studies Associates (2001), reading and mathematics achievement improved faster for students in grades 3-5 when two factors were present: professional staff development for teachers in those subject areas, and active (teacher and other) school staff outreach to parents of low achieving students (see website www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html). Therefore, encouraging parent involvement is a critical component in promoting student learning.

Parent support specialists, PTA/PTO presidents, teachers and other school staff are primary initiators of parental contact. Regardless of the length or site of the contact, parental contact is critical to achieving AISD's vision of providing every student with an excellent education. In addition, parental contact is aligned with AISD's belief that family and community are vital partners in the development of students. Engaging parents for input and decision making at the campus or district level is in alignment with the District's parental involvement policy and regulation.

A recent TEA District Effective and Compliance (DEC) visit seems to indicate that AISD is effective in promoting parent involvement. DEC staff reviewed much of the data in this report to substantiate their findings that AISD was in compliance on parental involvement efforts according to TEA standards. All data were made available at the campus level in order to provide information to campus staff for improvement of their efforts to engage parents.

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