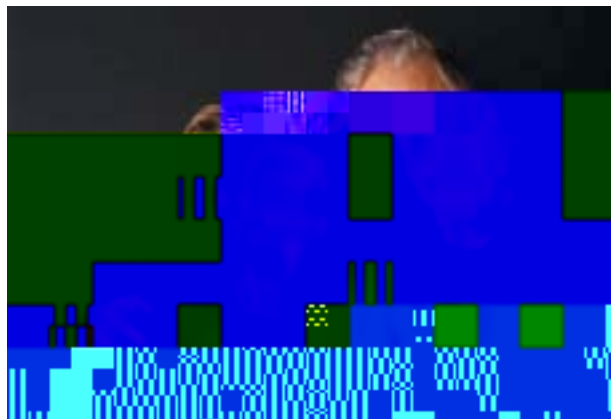
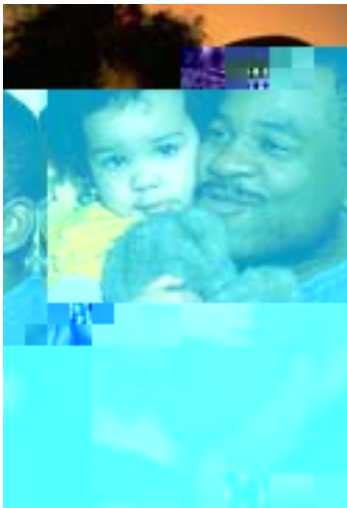
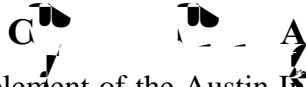


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Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District (AISD's) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, or some other group with parent representation. In addition, schools are required by state and federal law to include parental representation on campus and district advisory councils. Several district programs support these efforts and the common goal of these programs is to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities. In 2001-02, 61 AISD campuses used a combination of funds to employ parent support specialists who provided workshops and other services to parents and community members in order to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. An evaluation conducted during 2001-02 included a survey of over 6,000 parents in the school district and revealed the following results:

- !" Most parents agreed that their school coordinated community resources (66%), and communicated (74%) with them about the availability of those resources. Most parents also indicated that their school offered a variety of school-sponsored training or informational workshops (72%) and encouraged them to take advantage of their academic after-school or summer programs (78%). Most parents (90%) agreed that the school encouraged families to help their students with homework, set academic goals, and access the district's homework helpline.
- !" Most parents (73%) agreed that their schools included parents in the campus decision making process.
- !" Most parents (82%) indicated school staff offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and other family issues, and most parents (86%) agreed that schools offered them opportunities to volunteer.

However, another segment of the evaluation included survey and other data collected from campus staff. Because district staff (especially teachers) are the "door-keepers" to communication with parents about their children's academic progress, it is important to examine their knowledge and experience with parent involvement. Based on survey data, there are some concerns about staff self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues:

- !" Teachers' lack of awareness (22%) and uncertainty (28%) about AISD's parent involvement policies, operations, funding sources, and parental training (68% had no formal training);

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY I

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Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District (AISD's) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, or some other group with parent representation. In addition, schools are required by state and federal law to include parental representation on campus and district advisory councils. Several district programs support these efforts, and the common goal of these programs is to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities.

Although this report provides data on several components of AISD's parent involvement programs, it is not to be considered an all-inclusive report. There are many other programs in AISD that involve parents and support staff in their operations, and such programs are geared to more specific activities such as prevention of dropout, gangs, teen pregnancies, and drugs.

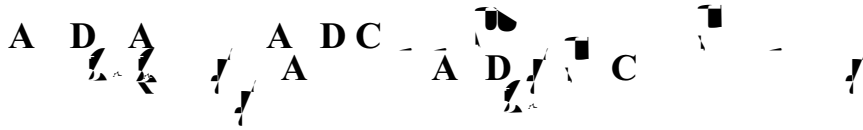
Because district staff (especially teachers) are the "door-keepers" to communication with parents about their children's academic progress, it is important to provide them with constructive feedback. The goal of this evaluation is to provide results that will help administrators, principals, teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff involve parents in richer relationships with their schools for the purpose of reaching Board goals.

A number of people worked with the AISD Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) in developing and carrying out the 2001-2002 evaluation. OPE wishes to thank AISD's School Support Services, parent support specialists, parent programs specialist and the Family Resource Center's parent support specialist and secretary; AISD PTA/PTO presidents; the grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs; Title I designated private schools staff; members of the Parent Involvement Advisory Council; various school staff, 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 the parent and community involvement program includes such a variety of district, community, and citywide activities, this evaluation is focused on five specific objectives relevant to the Office of Program Evaluation's reporting needs:

1. To measure AISD's adherence to federal, state, and local requirements.
2. To document parent support specialists' activities that encourage parental involvement.
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.
5. To provide decision makers with information and recommendations for program modification and to guide 2002-2003 evaluation goals.

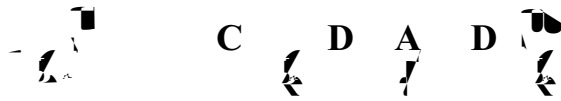


During the school year, parent support specialists from many campuses worked with staff from the Parent Programs office, a part of AISD's Department of School Support Services, to enhance their parent involvement activities. The office is housed in the AISD Family Resource Center located at Allan Elementary School Annex 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, 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.

In 2001-02, 61 AISD campuses used a combination of funds to employ parent support specialists who provided workshops and other services to parents and community members in order to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children.

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 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. In addition, the AISD School Board recently adopted (August 2002) a new set of policies on Board Governance regarding Executive Limitations. The primary executive limitation dealing with parents is entitled Treatment of Stakeholders, and outlines appropriate communication with parents and the responsibility of the Superintendent to ensure lawful, ethical, respectful and dignified treatment of parents, students and the public. (See www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/about/policy/boardgov/index.phtml).



An AISD employee survey was administered in January 2002. The survey is a coordinated effort among AISD's divisions and departments to gather information from employees districtwide that is pertinent to their department or division. The coordinated survey audience for questions about parent involvement issues included a sampling of campus administrators, teachers, parent support specialists, other professionals, and classified staff.

Of the 1,051 surveys sent to the campuses, 841 (80%) were returned and 712 (85%) were valid for analyses in the following areas: staff awareness of district parent policy and resources, parental inclusion in campus activities, professional development for parent support staff, and the use of funds to effectively enhance learning opportunities for at-risk students.



Table 1 shows that campus administrators were more aware than other staff (teachers, counselors and others) of AISD parental involvement policy and regulation, AISD's Family Resource Center parent involvement staff development resources, and the availability of multiple funding sources to campuses for parent involvement training. The low awareness among teachers raises a concern since teachers are often the first contact in the communication line between school and home. Tables 1 and 2 show two years of data.

Table 1: Trends in Staff Awareness of AISD Parent Involvement Policy and Resources
2000-2001 Through 2001-2002

	Percentages of Respondents					
	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02
	Yes	Yes	No	No	Not Sure	Not Sure
A	48	85	30	8	23	7
A	27	50	41	22	32	28
C	48	48	30	27	23	25
C	46	46	27	28	28	26
A	73	82	17	8	10	10
A	39	48	42	32	19	20
C	60	51	21	24	19	25
C	40	28	27	34	33	38
A	65	65	24	25	11	10
A	18	18	56	56	26	26
C	46	46	41	41	13	13
C	30	29	44	44	26	26

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey

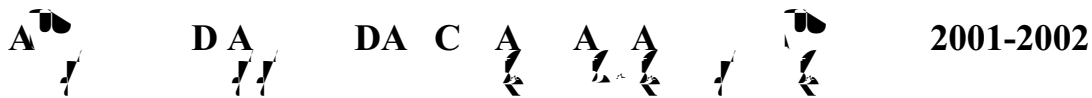
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In Table 2, the majority of respondents agreed that they were aware of parents being actively involved in programs, planning, and decision-making at their campuses. However, there were still sizeable percentages of staff that either disagreed, or did not know about parent participation in these areas. This warrants some concern about staff accessibility to or inclusion in parental involvement activities at their campuses.

Table 2: Trends in Staff Awareness of Parental Inclusion on Campus
2000-2001 Through 2001-2002

	Percentages of Respondents					
	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02
	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Don't Know
A	88	98	2	1	10	1
	78	87	7	7	15	6
	80	91	9	3	11	6

because most teaching staff indicated on the Coordinated Survey 2001-02 that they would like training on two topics: advising parents on ways to support student learning at home (33%) and working with parent on student behavior (32%). Also, because teachers are often the first contact in the communication line between school and home and they greatly impact the relationship between parents and the school, *campuses must provide ongoing staff development for teachers and other staff (including access to the Family Resource Center's training sessions) that will increase their awareness of AISD parent involvement operations, policies and other district activities. Campuses could use their parent support specialists and others to provide most of the training in order to keep staff on campus among familiar settings.*



An Austin ISD Attendance Area Parent Survey 2001-2002 was developed and administered to more than 6,000 parents in the AISD attendance zone in spring 2002, including 102 AISD campuses and nine private schools within the AISD attendance zone that received federal title funds during 2001-02.

The one-page, multiple-choice survey, written in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was based on four (communicating, promoting student learning, volunteering, and including parents in campus decision making activities) of the six types of parent involvement activities endorsed by AISD's parent involvement policy. The survey was designed to meet mandatory evaluation requirements; gather individualized campus data for and about the public schools; provide information for the participating private schools within the AISD attendance area that receive Title I funds; include campus staff and PTA/PTO presidents in the survey process; and acquire information about campus processes for administering and collecting survey data.

The survey packet was sent to 102 AISD public campuses (PreK-12) and nine private school campuses (PreK-8). Instructions were for school staff to survey at least 100-200 parents, complete the return checklist, and forward all surveys to AISD's Family Resource Center or call for pick up by the Family Resource Center's parent support specialist. Individual campus results were summarized and reported to campus principals. District-level results are presented in this report.



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Ninety (81%) of 111 schools returned staff assignment confirmations as requested. Only

workshops (72%) and encouraged them to take advantage of their academic after-school or summer programs (78%).

Table 5: School and Community Resources, 2000-2001 Through 2001-2002

	Percentages of Respondents					
	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02	2000-01	2001-02
	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Don't Know
	67	66	10	9	22	24

Table 7 shows that 82% of parents agreed that their schools offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues, and 86% agreed the school offered opportunities for volunteering. However, 36% of parents never volunteered at their child's school. Of those that did volunteer, 31% of parents indicated they volunteered 3 or more times per year, 13% volunteered monthly, 13% volunteered weekly, and 6% volunteered daily (2% did not respond). In addition, most (90%) parents felt the schools encouraged families to help their children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, use the homework hotline or folder.

Table 7: Interaction Between School and Parent, 2002

	Percentages of Respondents			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	No Response
Agreed that their schools offered opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues	82	5	12	1
Agreed that their schools offered opportunities for volunteering	86	4	9	1
Felt the schools encouraged families to help their children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, use the homework hotline or folder	90	5	12	1

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002

Five private schools returned 92 surveys that were usable for analyses, and all were completed in English. Of surveys completed, 85% were completed by mothers, 6% both parents, 5% fathers, 2% guardians, and 2% did not indicate who completed the survey. Most (83%) of the parents responding had students at the elementary level. Pre-kindergarten (25%) and kindergarten (19%) had the highest number of parents completing the survey. Survey results indicated that 42% of the responding parents communicated with the school weekly to determine if they had missed any current communication. The majority of parents indicated that their schools offered them opportunities to discuss parenting, child development and/or other family issues (92%) and volunteer (89%). Forty-one percent of responding parents indicated they had volunteered at least 3-5 times during the school year. Also, 45% of the parents felt that the school offered a variety of training or informational workshops that are inclusive of both parents. Almost all (97%) of the parents agreed that the school encouraged them to help their children



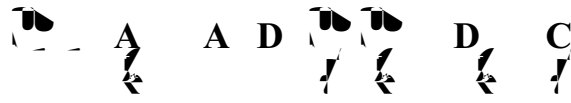
Parent support specialists are AISD staff members who provide or coordinate workshops, seminars, fairs, and other services to parents and community members that can enhance, encourage, and empower them to participate in the education of children. Because parent support specialists are paid from various grant or local funds to work directly with parents, it is necessary to document and report the various services they provide to the parents on their campuses. Parent support specialists were asked to submit reports on the parental involvement activities and parent attendance at those activities held at their schools between August 2001 and May 2002. In the spring 2002 questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the support specialists. The questionnaire was designed to get information in the following areas: school staff with whom parent support specialists worked; methods used to gather parental input; participation in AISD resource programs and staff development; use of the parent survey results in their Campus Improvement Plans (CIP); and contributions to community empowerment and parental training. Attendance records for staff development and meeting minutes also were used to supplement data from the reports and the questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires were returned by 25 (42%) of the parent support specialists. Nineteen (32%) of the parent support specialists returned interim reports in January and did not

Table 8 shows a summary of parental and community participation in various activities offered by the schools as reported by parent support specialists. As results indicate, school assemblies drew the highest number of parents (19,126). Activities in the Other category, which included a variety of activities such as the KLRU series, and meetings over coffee with the principal, were usually mentioned exclusively by staff from elementary schools. Functions at night, which included back to school, orientation, parent involvement information, choice sheet, end of the semester, and family learning activities (literacy, math, and science), were used by both elementary and secondary schools.

Table 8: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire and Interim Activity Report -Parental Involvement Activities Summary 2001-02

AC	# PARENT PARTICIPANTS	# SCHOOLS RESPONDING
A	19,126	37
AA / A	16,263	39
A	1,146	13
	450	10
D	6,861	27



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 and targeting parent involvement is a

Parental support is critical to promoting student learning (TJTT*0.0 in th

Therefore, the following recommendations related to staff, parents and PTA/PTO are offered for consideration:

- !" *Administrators must empower teachers and other school staff to carry out their roles as active shareholders in AISD's parent involvement program by providing training for them in how to involve parents in all areas related to student success in school (e.g., academic support, health, attendance, behavior, dress codes, and other applicable student issues).*

- !" *Staff from District and community offices, agencies, councils, or departments (e.g., the Office of Program Evaluation, Parent Involvement Advisory Council, School Support Services, and the Family Resource Center) should use parent*

