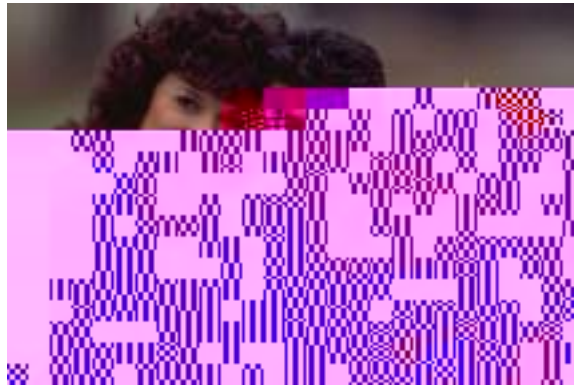


PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2002-03



**Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation**

October 2003

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, and/or some other group with parent representation. Schools are required by state and federal law to include parental representation on campus and district advisory councils. Several district programs support efforts to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities. In 2002-03, 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.

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 of and experience with parent involvement. Based on survey data, there are some concerns about staff self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and need for training:

- ! Teachers (59%) reported that parental involvement is one of the areas in which they need training.
- ! A majority of campus staff reported that they either lacked awareness of or did not encourage the use of AISD resources such as AISD Helplines among parents, students and staff.

Because of the depressed economy and recent budget cuts, the following operational recommendations related to staff is offered for cost-saving consideration:

- ! Campus administrators should identify and use the most cost-effective means to 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, beha2 0 0 12 487.35 0 0rTj0.502 0 0.50(e)Tj12 0 0 1

their use if the District continues to provide the services. Underutilization of these services is not cost effective.

- ! District administration must require parent support specialists to record information about their activities when they participate directly with students and their families in decision-making activities that become part of students' permanent records. For example, effective intervention and follow-up by school staff (counselor, parent support specialists) after an IMPACT meeting on a student's chronic absenteeism could prevent a future court hearing. However, since documentation of this kind may be sensitive if it becomes part of the student's records, approval of campus and district administrators must be sought.
- ! AISD realized \$4.1 million in savings through AISD Partners In Education's role in the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP) in 2002-03, even though a review of AISD Partners In Education records showed substantial decreases in all contribution categories in that school year. In light of this opportunity to save district monies, it is recommended that all campus leaders pay closer attention to reporting APIE community support in order to re-invigorate the level of giving and/or enhance future savings.

Another segment of the evaluation included a districtwide 2002-03 parent survey that showed that parents of middle school students need more information on financial aid, scholarships, high school graduation requirements, and college and career opportunities for their children. Thus, a fifth operational recommendation is:

- ! Involve parents on school-based committees to assist in providing information on high school graduation requirements, classes and courses mapping from high school to college, financial aid, job opportunities for middle school students in and around the community, and other tasks that counselors could oversee rather than deliver directly. This information can be disseminated among all parents and students to help them prepare for high school and beyond.

The sixth operational recommendation is:

- ! Staff from District and community offices, agencies, councils, or departments (e.g., the Department of Program Evaluation, Parent Involvement Advisory Council, School Support Services, and the Family Resource Center) must assist and encourage campus staff to use parent survey data to effect change through improvement plans (campus and district).

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INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), PTA/PTO, and/or some other group with parent representation. Schools are required by state and federal law to include parental representation on campus and

6. To provide district decision makers with information and recommendations for program modification and guidance on 2003-2004 goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people worked with the AISD Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) in developing and carrying out the 2002-2003 evaluation. Many thanks go to our project secretary for her assistance with various project tasks. The Department of Program Evaluation also wishes to thank AISD's School Support Services Staff, parent support specialists, the Family Resource Center's parent programs specialist, 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.

AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

POLICY

AISD's School Board adopted an updated parental involvement policy in August 2000, based on Joyce Epstein's 1997 list of important parent involvement activities: communication, parent training, promoting student learning, community resources, decision-making and volunteering. In addition, the AISD School Board 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).

STAFFING

During the school year, parent support specialists from 61 campuses worked with staff from the Parent Programs office 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 work with schools that do not have parent support specialist staff. The Center is also the meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council.

In 2002-03, 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.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

An example of community involvement in AISD is the Austin's Partners in Education Program (APIE), 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. A number of parent supports specialists also recruit and train community volunteers other than those who come through the APIE program.

Table 1: Districtwide Curriculum Standards and Testing, 2002-2003

Survey Item

Table 2: Supplemental Academic Services, 2002-2003

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents		
	%	%	%

ADVOCACY FOR AISD HELPLINES

When the administrators, teachers, and other professionals were asked if they encouraged others at their school to use AISD resources such as the Homework helpline, a large majority of teachers (72%), other professionals (49%), and principals (58%) did not agree with the statement. Similar results were obtained when staff were asked about encouraging the use of the AISD TEKS helpline: most teachers (78%), other professionals (69%), and administrators (47%) either did not promote it or were unfamiliar with it. These numbers raise a concern because AISD subscribes to these services and low utility may mean that AISD is not getting the best value for its dollars.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

COORDINATED STAFF SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The coordinated survey data suggest areas in which school staff need more information about AISD's standards, practices, and resources. For instance, there were sizable percentages of school staff who were uncertain or disagreed about the effects of AISD's adoption of a districtwide curriculum and benchmark testing on student learning; the impact of AISD funds or supplemental resources on student learning; and/or the value of encouraging students, parents, and staff to use AISD's helplines. Thus, information on such operations, policies, and resources should be integrated into instructional staff training. Campus staffs' knowledge or perceptions of AISD goals, operations, practices, and resources should not be limited to a classroom or office.

Most teaching staff indicated on the Coordinated Survey 2002-03 that they would like training on two topics: working with parents on student behavior at school, (e.g., attendance, discipline, dress code, and etc.), and advising parents on ways to support student learning at home (e.g., study skills, learning activities, etc.). These were requested the most in the previous year's survey as well. Since teachers are often the first contact in the communication line between school and home, they greatly impact the relationship between parents and the school. Thus, campuses need to 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. For efficient use of available school resources, campuses also should use their parent support specialists and others to provide most of the training related to parents in this school district.

AUSTIN ISD PARENT SURVEY 2002-2003

An Austin ISD Parent Survey, made available to parents at all 103 campuses, was received from 27,834 parents in the AISD attendance zone in January 2003. This survey asked parents about a variety of topics in Tm(devi0 0 485.7275 288.933.eceived from 27,5 288.933.eceived)Tj-(

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

When asked if the AISD TEKS Family Learning Guides (grades K-8) helped parents to help their child learn, most of the elementary (66%) and middle school (52%) parents agreed. Twenty-three percent and 29% respectively of the elementary and middle school parents indicated that they did not know whether the learning guides helped their child or not. On benchmark testing, the majority of elementary (64%) and middle school (58%) parents agreed that the testing was helpful in improving their child's academic achievement. Only 43% of the high school parents agreed with the statement. The percentages of parents responding that they did not know about the benefits of benchmark testing were notable (24% elementary, 24% middle and 31% high school).

Table 5 shows most parents felt AISD schools' staff provided parents with information about their child. The first seven items were answered by all parents. The last five items were only for middle school and high school parents. The percentages of middle and high school parents who responded either that they did not know about, or disagreed with the items about having received information on financial aid, high school graduation requirements, and college and career opportunities, shows that campus staff need to make sure that these particular topics are communicated to all parents. However, middle school may not be too early to begin preparing students and parents on these topics.

In areas of school safety and treatment received from staff, which drew responses from parents of all students, the majority of parents agreed that staff at their child's school provided two-way communications; treated the children fairly; and, treated the parents with courtesy and respect. Parents also felt their child's school provided a safe learning environment. The percentages of parents agreeing that school staff handled parents' concerns effectively were in the majority, but they were not as high as those for other survey items. See Table 6 for the detailed results of these items.

Table 5: Parents' Opinion of Whether School Staff Provided Information to Them

Survey Item	Percentage of Respondents	
School staff provided me information about:	Agree	

Table 6: Customer Satisfaction With School Staff

Survey Items:	Percentage of Respondents		
	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree
My child's school is a safe learning environment.			
Elementary School	96	2	2
Middle School	89	3	8
High School	82	6	12
At my child's school, my child is treated fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability.			
Elementary School	95	3	2
Middle School	86	6	8
High School	84	6	10
School staff have handled concerns I have about my child's school effectively.			
Elementary School	87	7	6
Middle School	78	11	11
High School	71	11	18
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect and welcome my participation in school.			
Elementary School	97	1	2
Middle School	92	4	4
High School	89	4	7

support specialists and counselors already work with most of the parents at their schools, there would be no need to hire staff to supervise these activities.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

The salaries of parent support specialists are paid from various grant or local funds. These staff work directly with parents and school staff. To document and report the various services they provide to the parents and staff on their campuses, these staff completed activity reports and an annual survey. Parent support specialists were asked to submit interim reports on the parental involvement activities (and to record parent attendance at those activities) held at their schools between August 2002 and January 2003. Fifty-three (87%) of the parent support specialists returned the interim report. In the spring 2003 questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the support specialists on activities from February through May as well as on some general parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to get information in the following areas: school staff with whom parent support specialists worked, participation in AISD resource programs and staff development; use of the district parent survey results in their Campus Improvement Plans (CIP); and contributions to community empowerment and parental training. Attendance records and meeting minutes for staff development also were used to supplement data from the interim reports and the questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires, which contained the February 2003 through May 2003 activity report, were returned by 31 (51%) of the parent support specialists. Twenty-two (36%) of the parent support specialists returned interim reports in January 2003 and did not complete a questionnaire. Eight of 61 schools (Andrews, Linder, Pickle, Fulmore, Martin, Pearce, Lanier, and Travis) employed two or more parent support specialists each during 2002-03. Although each of these support specialists returned a survey, their survey data were combined to represent their school of employment. The summary responses to the questionnaire are presented by categories.

WORK HABITS

Twenty-three (74%) of the 31 parent support specialists who completed the questionnaire reported that they worked with their principal, 23 (74%) worked with other school staff, and 18 (58%)

The parent support specialists reported participating in a number of staff development activities during the year. The monthly parent support specialists staff development meetings and the "Nuts and Bolts" workshops offered by the Fahe Fa

services where applicable. Seventy-seven percent of the parent support specialists listed IMPACT meetings as the number one activity that required them to act as facilitator and provide follow-up services. Also, they listed parent teacher conferences (16 or 52%), LST/ARD meetings (7 or 23%) and home visits with parents (6 or 19%) as other conference-type activities that required them to act as facilitators and provide follow-up services.

Table 7: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire and Interim Activity Report -Parental Involvement Activities Summary 2002-03

ACTIVITY	# PARENT PARTICIPANTS (Duplicated Count)	# EVENTS
Assemblies, Seminars, etc.	48,667	478
Family Night (academic-whole family)	21,589	164
Other (variety of activities unique to each school)*	21,434	658
End of Semester/School	10,514	46
Literacy (ESL, Title I information, Life skills, adults only)	10,229	263
Fair (academic, health, carnival involving whole family)	10,162	82
Dental (Information, parental sign-up for child participation)	6,000	66
Principal get-together	5,822	343
TAKS Workshops	4,251	88
Drugs (presentations)	3,428	67
TEKS Workshops	2,678	100
Choice Sheet Night	2,609	25
Inoculations (information and parent sign up for child's participation)	2,253	27
Wellness Fairs	1,745	119
Vision (information and sign up for child's participation)	1,421	35
Learning Walk	1,596	75
Gangs (presentations)	1,083	11
KLRU Series (parent-child learning activities, self staffed)	690	46
Title I Parent Advisory Council (PAC), federal mandated meetings	648	24
Mammography Screening	643	12
Principles of Learning	605	32
Stress Workshops	237	41
Teen Pregnancies Workshops involving moms, daughters & sons	93	19
TOTAL (Duplicated count)	158,397	2,821

Source: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire and Interim Reports, 2002-2003

Legend: *Other category of activities were too numerous to list in table.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Parent support specialists performed or participated in activities aside from their regular activities such as recruiting volunteers or coordinating parent involvement activities for Optional Extended Year Program (OEYP) funded programs. For instance, when asked if they supplemented their APIE program with personally-recruited volunteers, 23 (74%) of the parent support specialists reported

Extended Year Program (OEYP) surveys to principals who held OEYP parent involvement activities on their campuses during 2002-03 showed 3,917 parents of students in grades 4-8 participated in OEYP parental involvement activities. See AISD's Optional Extended Year Program Report 2002-2003 (Publication 02.12) for more information on OEYP.

DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY USE

Twenty-two (71%) of the parent support specialists responding to the survey said they used the district parent survey results from 2001-02 in developing their Cam

out adults who had never participated in activities related to their child's school. Eight (26%) described math, science, and reading workshops with large attendance and positive feedback. Seven (23%) described civic (e.g. mayoral and city council), Insure-A-Kid, and other presentations with large turnouts. These activities also increased parents' familiarity with the various school district or community offices or services. One (3%) described writing a grant to provide shoes for all students at the school. The grant, which was awarded, covers the 2003 and 2004 school years. Four (13%) did not respond to this question.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

Parent support specialists are vital links between parents, communities, and schools because they often live in the communities in which they work, communicate in the language (or languages) common to the community and school, and can provide parents with academic training opportunities to support student learning (e.g., TAKS; math, reading, science and other academic subjects). In addition, they perform tasks over an 8-hour work period that cannot be incorporated into other school staff's tasks. They go places and do tasks when others cannot.

The parent support specialists' questionnaire and other support documents indicate parent support specialists in AISD met their campuses' goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. However, other evidence indicates that there is room for improvement in the effective use of the specialists. For instance, in the employee-coordinated survey, teachers have reported the need for training on how to work with parents. Therefore, the following recommendation is offered: increase the participation of parent support staff in providing campus staff development to teachers and other campus staff so they may gain the necessary skills and knowledge to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success. Secondly, use parent support specialists and other campus staff to work with groups/committees appointed to specific projects. For example, parent support staff can assist parents and other staff on scholarship search committees, and developing and designing generic portfolios and graduation requirements checklists.

The full extent of activities performed by parent support specialists may go beyond the current job description, and there has been limited documentation of and inconsistency in the reporting of their activities. Therefore, a third recommendation is to create more thorough documentation of how parent support specialists' activities directly support student success. Parent support specialists should post records of services provided to students involved in IMPACT meetings, court hearings, or any activity which becomes part of a student's permanent

parents. Administrators also should involve parents and staff in committees to help gather district, local, and federal data such as high school graduation requirements, classes and course mapping for college entries, advance placement policies, financial aid resources, etc. Parent participation in this process may help improve the way in which this information gets to parents and enhance the interaction on matters of this nature between school and parent at an earlier grade level. Counselors and parent support specialists could help oversee this process. Campus and district administrators must make greater efforts to provide parents, teachers, and students with information about district resources available to them (such as the TEKS helpline) and encourage their use of resources if the District continues to provide such services.

! District administration must require

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