

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2003-04



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

2004

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 other groups with parent representation. Schools are required by state and federal law to include parents on campus and district advisory councils. Several district programs support efforts to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities. In Fall 2003, AISD mandated the implementation of a districtwide accountability model for all parent involvement staff, that included a set of major duties, Key Performance Indicators, and time and effort documentation for parent support specialists employed at campuses. By January 2004, 57 AISD campuses had used funds to employ parent support specialists. These staff provided workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. The parent support specialists provided staff development for school staff and participated in their respective school's at-risk student assistance program which is designed to make an "IMPACT" through facilitation and provision of follow-up services to families that averts or alleviates the at-risk status of students. The overall goal of this report is to provide data about AISD's parent involvement programs that are useful to the district's Board of Trustees, administrators, program managers, principals and parent support specialists in cost effective decision-making, operations, and inclusion of stakeholders.

Because district staff (especially teachers) are the "gate-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 concerns about staff self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and need for training:

Since 2001-2002, a majority of teachers (60% in 2003-2004) have reported that parental involvement is one of the areas in which they need training.

For the second year in a row, the majority of campus staff reported that they either lacked awareness of or did not encourage the use of AISD resources such as AISD Homework or TEKS helpline among parents, students and staff.

Results from the 2003-2004 Employee Coordinated Survey results showed that the majority of classified staff (mostly parent support specialists) were more aware than

in the education of their children. However, other evidence indicates that parent support specialists are not being used to the extent that they could be to provide services that are in keeping with their capabilities and major duties, such as providing staff development. Some of their self-reported activities also indicate that parent support specialists are neither being encouraged consistently to follow guidelines provided by the AISD Family Resource Center, nor to attend the staff development provided by the Center. Thus, another operational recommendation is:

4. Campus leaders should encourage parent support specialists to follow guidelines provided by the AISD Family Resource Center staff and support their attendance at the relevant staff development sessions.

AISD realized financial savings through a community partnership with AISD Partners In Education's (APIE) and a bond program, Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP). The QZABP allows school districts to receive a waiver on repaying interest on school bonds that are sold if each campus in the bond package shows a 10% contribution in total dollar amount of community support in 2003-2004, even though a review of APIE's records showed substantial decreases in several contribution categories (e.g., cash, in-kind, volunteer hours) except number of volunteers in that school year. In light of this opportunity to save district monies and to work effectively within its reorganized structure under the Texas Uniform Unincorporated Nonprofit Association (TUUNA), it is recommended that:

5. Campus leaders pay closer attention to reporting APIE community support to re-invigorate the level of giving and/or enhance future savings.

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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. 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 other programs in AISD that involve parents and support staff in their operations, and these programs are geared to more specific activities such as prevention of student dropouts, gangs, teen pregnancies, and drug use.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

One goal of this evaluation is to provide information to the district's Board of Trustees, other administrators, program m

7. Document the alignment of parent support specialists' major duties and Key Performance Indicators.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people worked with the AISD Department of Program Evaluation in developing and carrying out this 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, Family and Community Education staff, parent support specialists, Family Resource Center's parent programs staff, PTA/PTO presidents, grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, members of the Parent Involvement Advisory Council, various school staff, and parents residing in the AISD attendance area.

AISD P

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, offer AISD classes for parents of students who are at risk of legal intervention due to truancy,
- Provide summaries of parent support specialists time and effort documentation to the associate superintendents, and
- Work with schools that do not have a parent support specialist to enhance their parent involvement efforts.

The Center is also the meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent Involvement Advisory Council.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A strong component of community involvement in AISD is the Austin's Partners in Education (APIE) 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 schools of their choice and provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and cash donations. A number of parent support specialists also recruit and train community volunteers other than those who come through the APIE program.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

An AISD employee survey was administered in January 2004. The survey is a coordinated effort among AISD's offices and departments to gather information from employees districtwide. The coordinated survey audience for questions about parent involvement issues included a sampling of campus administrators, teachers, parent support specialists, other professionals (mostly counselors), and classified staff. These staff responded to survey items regarding supplemental academic services, staff development needs, adoption of districtwide curriculum standards and testing, and the district's Homework and TEKS helplines. A total of 1,192 surveys were sent to a sample of AISD staff, and of that number 1,001 (83%) were returned for analysis.

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Table 1: Percentages of AISD Staff Responses to Survey Items on District Curriculum Standards and Testing, 2003-2004

Survey Item	Number of Respondents	% of Responses		
		Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Adoption of districtwide curriculum standards aligned with the TEKS has had a positive effective on student learning.	Administrators (n=83)	89	4	7
	Teachers (n=668)	67	17	16
	Other Professionals (n=136)	60	17	23
	Classified (n=49)	70	12	18
Benchmark test results are used effectively at my campus to improve student learning.	Administrators (n=84)	83	14	3
	Teachers (n=664)	64	18	18
	Other Professionals (n=140)	66	15	19
	Classified (n=51)	77	6	17

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2003-2004.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACADEMIC SERVICES

As shown in Table 2, most staff agreed that supplemental academic services at their campus, such as tutoring, small group instruction, after-school programs, and summer school, were effective in preparing students for TAKS. Most staff also agreed that these supplemental academic services were effective in preparing students for promotion at their campus.

Table 2: Percentages of AISD Staff Responses to Survey Items on Supplemental Academic Services, 2003-2004

Survey Item	Number of Respondents	% of Responses		
		Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Supplemental academic services (such as tutoring, small group instruction, after school) at my campus are effective in preparing students for TAKS.	Administrators (n=82)	82	15	3
	Teachers (n=649)	80	7	13
	Other Professionals (n=131)	84	8	8
	Classified (n=47)	83	6	11
Supplemental academic services (such as tutoring, small group instruction, after school, summer school) at my campus are effective in preparing students for promotion.	Administrators (n=82)			
	Teachers (n=681)			
	Other Professionals (n=141)			
	Classifi			

training sessions, to increase staff awareness of AISD parent involvement operations, policies and district activities

Table 5: Number of Austin ISD Parent Survey Responses by School Level, 2003 and 2004



Table 7: Percentages of Responses to Survey Items on Austin ISD Parent Survey
Benchmark Testing by School Level, 2003 and 2004

Survey Item	School Level	% in Agreement 2003	% in Agreement 2004
AISD's benchmark testing is helping to improve my child's academic achievement.	Elementary	64	69
	Middle	58	61
	High	43	42
	Other Campuses	--	57

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2002-03 and 2003-04.

As shown in Table 8, the majority of parents felt that their school provided two-way

Table 9: Percentages of Austin ISD Parent Survey Responses to Survey Items on Campus Safety and Treatment of Students by School Level, 2003 and 2004

Survey Item	Grade Level	Percent Agreement to Item-2003	Percent Agreement to Item-2004
My child's school is a safe learning environment.	Elementary	96	96
	Middle	89	88
	High	82	79
	Other Campuses	--	80
At my child's school, my child is treated fairly, with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability	Elementary	95	95
	Middle	86	87
	High	84	81
	Other Campuses	--	84

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2002-03 and 2003-04.

The items in Table 10 summarize how parents responded to whether school staff provided them with certain kinds of information. The percentages of parents at middle and high school levels agreeing that school staff provided information on their child's risk of failing a grade declined from 2003 to 2004. Elementary and high school parents showed declines from 2003 to 2004 in percentage agreeing that school staff provided information about required curriculum, and their child's academic progress and behavior. However, more middle school parents agreed in 2004 than in 2003 that school staff provided information on required curriculum, students' academic progress, and student behavior. Also, more elementary and middle school parents agreed in 2004 than in 2003 that school staff provided information on the availability of tutoring, and about students' academic plans/goals. Only elementary school parents agreed more in 2004 than in 2003 that school staff provided them with information about the availability of academic programs on their child's campus.

Table 10: Percentages of AISD Parent Survey Respondents Agreement with Whether School Staff Provide Them With Information by School Level, 2003 and 2004

School staff provide me with information about:	School Level	% of Agreement-2003	% of Agreement-2004
My child's risk of failing a grade	Elementary	96	96
	Middle	89	88
	High	82	79
	Other Campuses	--	80
Required Curriculum	Elementary	92	91
	Middle	84	86
	High	82	78
	Other Campuses	--	76
Availability of Tutoring	Elementary	70	74
	Middle	77	79
	High	74	70
	Other Campuses	--	71
My Child's Academic Plans/Goals	Elementary	88	89
	Middle	75	76
	High	71	66
	Other Campuses	--	77
My Child's Academic Progress	Elementary	96	95
	Middle	89	90
	High	80	79
	Other Campuses	--	77
Academic Programs (e.g., special education, bilingual/ESL, gifted)	Elementary	82	83
	Middle	74	73
	High	66	64
	Other Campuses	--	78
My Child's Behavior	Elementary	96	95
	Middle	89	90
	High	80	79
	Other Campuses	--	79

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2002-03 and 2003-04.

Items in Table 11 were answered by middle and high school parents only. Middle school parents less often agreed than did high school parents with statements about school staff's provision of information. However, most of these topics are more relevant for high school students and families. The moderate percentages of high school parents' agreement leave ample room for concern. For example, only 76% of high school parents agreed that they received information on high school graduation requirements in the 2004 survey. In

addition, only 66% agreed that they received information on college opportunities while 59% agreed they received information on career opportunities for their students in 2004.

Table 11: Percentages of AISD Parent Survey Respondents Agreeing With Having Received Information From School Staff by School Level, 2003 and 2004

School staff provide me with information about:	School Level	% of Agreement-2003	% of Agreement-2004
Choice Sheets	Middle	78	84
	High	76	77
Financial Aid and Scholarships	Middle	43	43
	High	62	65
High School Graduation Requirements and Plans	Middle	53	53
	High	80	76
College Opportunities	Middle	41	42
	High	64	66
Career Opportunities	Middle	44	44
	High	60	59

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2003 and 2004.

PARENT SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators should review their school's survey results to check parents' opinions about benchmark testing and, if needed, campus staff can set up strategies to increase parents' awareness of how such testing is used to benefit student academic progress. To help middle school parents become more aware of information on financial aid, high school graduation requirements, and career opportunities; the transition process for middle school parents and students from middle to high school should include seminars throughout the school year on these topics and encourage parent/student exploration of resources. In general, high school parents agreed less often than parents at any other school levels that they were receiving information from school staff on academic programs and on their students' academic or behavior performance. As part of AISD's core values for a community with shared ownership, purposes, and commitment, campus administrators must find ways to improve the provision of such information to parents.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Although the implementation of a parent involvement staff accountability model was in place by December 2003, parent support specialist staffing was not completed at campuses until March 2004. Parent support staff, who work directly with parents and other school staff, were held accountable for parent support services through time and effort documentation on the numbers of hours worked, accomplished tasks, and numbers of parents, students, and staff served. In addition, parent support specialists' activities were examined to ensure that they were aligned with major duties (MDs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as defined by the adopted accountability model. Table 12 shows how the parent support specialists' major duties are aligned with Key Performance Indicators. (Self-reported attendance at AISD's Family Resource Center and other local or out-of-town staff development sessions align with KPI #4).

Table 12: Parent Support Specialist Major Duties and
Key Performance Indicators, 2003-2004

Major Duties (1-6)	Key Performance Indicators (1-4)
1. Conduct outreach & liaison with families	1. Organize/conduct 10 family workshops and support groups for families
2. Organize and/or conduct workshops and support groups for families	
3. Coordinate opportunities for family engagement at schools	
4. Provide opportunities for parents to build and use leadership skills	
5. Organize and conduct training for staff personnel	2. Organize/conduct 2 staff workshops
6. Connect families with community resources	3. Provide outreach to parents of students at Level I (high needs) and Level II (at risk)
	4. Attend 90% of professional development sessions provided by the Family Resource Center

Source: AISD School, Family and Community Education, 2003-2004.

To document parent support specialists' major duties and Key Performance

were attended by 52 (96%) of the respondents. Attendance at the Parent Leader Network Retreat, offered in partnership by AISD, Connections Resource Center and the Family Forward project, was mentioned by most (43 or 80%) of the parent support specialists. (*Key Performance Indicator 4*).

Thirty-one (57%) of the parent support specialists reported working with their Alliance/Vertical Team schools regularly on such projects as transitioning from elementary to middle school, parent newsletters, TAKS grade level meetings, bully prevention workshops, Celebration of Families, Taco Cabana Benefit, Family Literacy Nights, Resource Fairs, IMPACT meetings, and other activities. Fifteen (28%) said they did not work with an

campuses, and 12 (22%) had provided at least one staff development session to campus staff.

Table 14: Number of Parents in Attendance at Each Activity as Reported by
AISD Parent Support Specialist, 2003-2004

ACTIVITY	# PARENT PARTICIPANTS (Duplicated Count)	# EVENTS
Fairs (academic, wellness, fundraiser)	50,212	646
*Other (variety of activities unique to each school)	25,508	636
Assemblies, Seminars (award activities, insurance, etc.)	24,406	405
Family Night (academic, whole family; Choice Sheet)	22,359	174
Information (literacy, life skills, dental, vision, inoculation)	13,207	323
Principal get-together	8,337	501
Seminars (recruiting volunteers, signing up for CHIP, etc.)	6,927	312
Workshops (TAKS, TEKS, Stress, Teen Pregnancies)	5,262	170
KLRU Series (parent-child learning activities, self staffed)	2,347	304
Presentations (Drugs, Gangs)	1,902	109
Learning Walk	1,617	120
Principles of Learning	1,591	61
Mammography Screening	173	9
TOTAL (Duplicated count)	163,848	3,770

ninos/Dia de los libros, and other after-school events, which drew crowds in excess of 200 and brought out adults who had never participated in activities related to their child's school. Three (6%) described seminars such as the Minority Professional Presence Project, El Buen Samaritanos Promotores, and Centro de Apoyo Para Trabajadores Immigrantes (Immigrants who Work and Don't Get Paid). These activities were reported as having increased parents' familiarity with school district or community offices or services, and as having provided "instant" help to families in some cases. (*Major Duty 2 and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

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 or information to support student learning (e.g., TAKS and other assessments; curriculum and programs). Thus, these staff can assist the District in its efforts to close the academic gap among student groups by using their skills and knowledge for promoting parent involvement.

The data summarized in this report indicate that AISD parent support specialists performed their major duties and met their campus 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 parent support specialists to improve their performance and for campus administrators to improve their use of the specialists. For instance, in the past two years of the employee coordinated survey, many campus staff reported the need for training on how to work with parents to support student learning. One recommendation for campus administrators is to promote parent support specialists' ability to provide campus staff development to teachers and other campus staff. Then, campus staff may gain improved skills and knowledge to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success. A second recommendation is to have parent support specialists collaborate with other campus staff through specific groups/committees on specific projects to meet the needs of the campus. For example, in collaboration with teachers and other staff, parent support staff can assist parents in learning how to interpret j

21% of the cash donations, 60% of the volunteer services, and 46% of the volunteer hours. See the Austin Partners in Education's web site for additional information (www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/community/partners/index.phtml).

Table 15: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin ISD Partners in Education, 2002-2003 and 2003-2004

Type of Donation	2002-2003	2003-2004
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,434,112	\$2,402,459
Cash Donations	\$967,175	\$268,156
Number of Volunteers	10,606	14,906
Number of Volunteer Hours	220,072	180,622

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 2002-03 and 2003-04.

RECOMMEN

When families of all backgrounds are engaged in their children's learning at home and in guiding their educational career, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and pursue higher education (see website www.seidl.org).

Parent involvement is a critical component of AISD's vision of providing every student with an excellent education, and is aligned with the district's belief that family and community are vital partners in the development of students.

Parent support specialists, PTA/PTO presidents, teachers, and other school staff are primary initiators of parent contact providing information or services to, for, or about students that inform, aid, and often avert or alleviate at-risk status of students. The overall goal of this report is to provide data about AISD's parent involvement programs that are useful to the district's Board of Trustees, administrators, program managers, principals and parent support specialists in cost effective decision-making, operations, and inclusion of stakeholders. Review and analyses of surveys and a questionnaire, meeting minutes, and APIE reports, shows that the district's parent involvement efforts need improvement in the following areas:

Teachers need professional development in how to work with parents to improve student achievement and behavior.

Middle and high school parents need more information on financial aid, scholarships, high school graduation requirements, and college or career opportunities.

Parent support specialists need staff development and support on effective documentation of regular activities, availability of resources, and district standards of service.

Therefore, the following recommendations are offered to address these needs:

Campus administrators must use cost-effective means to empower teachers and other school staff to carry out their roles as active shareholders in AISD by providing training for them in how to involve parents in all areas related to student success in school. Parent support specialists are the ideal staff to provide such training because they have the capacity to do this, and they have relationships with the teachers and the parents.

District and campus staff should use parent survey data as one source of input in improvement plans (campus and district). Such data should be shared with parents and community members to help guide such planning.

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