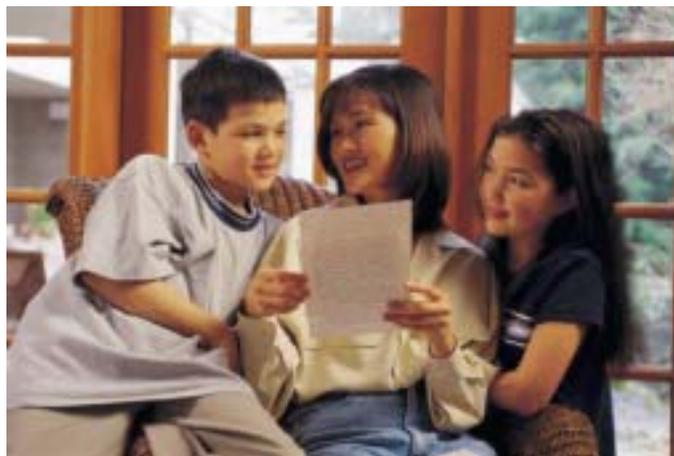


PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2001-02



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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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);

- Teachers (68%) reporting that parental involvement is one of the areas in which they need training.

Therefore, the following *operational* recommendation related to staff is 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). For instance, campuses could use their parent support specialists and other AISD staff to provide most of the training in order to keep staff on campus among familiar settings and as a way to reduce the cost of staff development.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT OVERVIEW

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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

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.

AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT STAFFING AND POLICY

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).

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

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.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY AND RESOURCES

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

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents					
	2000-01 Yes	2001-02 Yes	2000-01 No	2001-02 No	2000-01 Not Sure	2001-02 Not Sure
I am aware of the AISD parental involvement policy and regulation.						
Administrators	48	85	30	8	23	7
Teachers	27	50	41	22	32	28
Other Professionals	48	48	30	27	23	25
Classified	46	46	27	28	28	26
I am aware of multiple funding sources available to campuses for parent involvement training or other instructional activities.						
Administrators	73	82	17	8	10	10
Teachers	39	48	42	32	19	20
Other Professionals	60	51	21	24	19	25
Classified	40	28	27	34	33	38
I am familiar with AISD's Family Resource Center Parent Involvement staff development resources.						
Administrators	65	65	24	25	11	10
Teachers	18	18	56	56	26	26
Other Professionals	46	46	41	41	13	13
Classified	30	29	44	44	26	26

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey

PARENTAL INCLUSION

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

Survey Item	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
Parents and community members are included as planners and decision makers in planning at my campus.						
Administrators	88	98	2	1	10	1
Teachers	78	87	7	7	15	6
Other Professionals	80	91	9	3	11	6
Classified	75	69	10	5	15	26
My school sponsors programs that recognize and use diverse parent and community population resources.						
Administrators	60	85	21	13	19	2
Teachers	50	72	25	16	25	2
Other Professionals	60	70	10	15	30	15
Classified	57	64	8	9	35	27

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey

PARENTAL TRAINING AND RESOURCES

When asked about staff parental training, 65% percent of the administrators indicated that they had participated in parent involvement training. However, the majority of other school staff [teachers (68%), other professionals (57%), and classified (86%)] indicated that they had not participated in any parent involvement training on or off campus. On the other hand, 33% of the 460 teachers responding to the survey indicated they would like to receive training on how to advise parents on ways to support student learning at home (study skills, etc.), and 32% said they wanted staff development training on how to work with parents on student behavior at school (attendance, discipline, dress code, and other activities).

COORDINATED STAFF SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The coordinated survey data suggest areas in which school staff need more information about parent involvement. For instance, there were sizable percentages of staff who were uncertain about some AISD parental involvement operations or resources (e.g., multiple funding sources, and AISD's Family Resource Center). Information on AISD's parent involvement operations, policies, and resources should be integrated into instructional staff training because teachers and other student support staff are first contacts for the majority of parents. Their knowledge or perception of AISD goals and operations should not be limited to classroom activities only. They should be full partners in involving parents in the education of students,

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.*

AUSTIN ISD ATTENDANCE AREA PARENT SURVEY 2001-2002

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.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Ninety (81%) of 111 schools returned staff assignment confirmations as requested. Only fifty-two (47%) returned the checklists with their parent surveys as requested. Review of the

confirmation sheets shows parent support specialists (56%) and PTA/PTO presidents (14%) were assigned the task of administering the survey most often (see Table 3).

Table 3: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2002
Assignment Confirmation Sheet

Person Assigned	Number	% Assigned Task
Parent support specialists	50	56
PTA/PTO presidents	13	14
Counselors (5), principals (7), and Asst. Principals (4)	16	18
Campus secretaries, Gear Up Staff (3 each)	6	7
Attendance Clerks and curriculum specialists (2 each)	4	4
Teacher	1	1
Total	90	100

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002

The checklist from schools provided details on the numbers of surveys distributed and returned, as well as the various methods and sites of administration. Although all of the schools did not complete and return the checklist, the checklists that were completed and returned showed 13,251 surveys were distributed and 4,029 (30%) were returned for analyses.

Although, secondary schools had a similar number of surveys returned this year (n=745) as last (n=775), staff from these schools explained that they have fewer opportunities and paid staff to access large groups of parents in their secondary settings.

A variety of methods and sites were used in survey administration as shown in Table 4. The most popular methods reported were distribution at general meetings (e.g., PTA/PTO) or sending the survey home with the student in their weekly folders (e.g., Monday-Thursday folders). Elementary schools used the weekly folders, PTA/PTO meetings, and workshops most often to distribute the survey to parents. Secondary schools used PTA/PTO meetings and special assemblies such as student recognition night, choice sheet night, booster club meetings, and others to distribute the survey.

Table 4: Austin ISD's Attendance Area Parent Survey 2002
Methods and Sites of Survey Administration

Methods and Sites	Frequency
PTA/PTO Meeting	21
Sent surveys home with student in weekly folder	16
Workshops (TAAS, Family nights, etc.). (11 each)	11
Administered at special assemblies	8
Administered at multiple administration in ESL/other adult classes	8
Classroom Sampling	5
Coffee Talk with principal and classroom sampling. (5 each)	5
CAC meetings	4
Handouts	4

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002

RESULTS-PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Of 6,767 surveys received from participating AISD campuses, 6,463 (96%) were valid for analyses. The majority of surveys were completed on the site of distribution. Surveys were deemed usable for analyses if they contained at least three responses. Ninety-two of the valid surveys were from the private schools. A summary of the private school data is provided later in this report. Public school analyses showed 69% or 4,443 parents completed the survey in English, 1,997 or 31% in Spanish, and 23 or 1% in Vietnamese. Mothers (70%) completed the surveys more often than fathers (10%) or both parents (16%). The highest numbers of parents who completed surveys by student grade level were parents of first graders 14% or 635.

When asked how often they checked with their child's school to determine if they had missed any current communication, most (35%) parents said they checked on a weekly basis. The other responses to this question were as follows: 18% never checked with their child's school, 17% checked daily, 15% checked three or more times per year, 14% checked weekly, and 1% did not respond to the question.

Table 5, which includes data for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, shows that the majority of parents responding agreed that their school coordinated community resources (66%) and communicated (74%) with them about the availability of those resources. Most of these 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%).

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

Survey Item	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
My school coordinates community resource services.	67	66	10	9	22	24
My school communicates to me about support services that are available for students and families (referrals, immigrant or migrant education, ESL classes, mentoring, career counseling, and scholarship assistance).	71	74	11	11	16	14
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 sheet, graduation plans, etc.).	70	72	9	9	17	12
The school encourages families to take advantage of academic after-school or summer programs and/ or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement.	77	78	9	9	13	12

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002.

Table 6 shows the majority (73%) of parents responding agreed that their child's school included them in the school's decision making process, and 50% of the parents indicated they had provided input during those decision making activities.

Table 6: Parent Inclusion in School Decisions, 2002

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	No Response
My child's school includes parents in school decisions (Campus Advisory Council, campus improvement planning or other committees, etc.)	73	6	21	0
I have provided input in decisions at my child's school through the Campus Advisory Council, PTA/PTO, grade level committees, etc.	50	11	38	1

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002

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

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents			
	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know	No Response
My school's staff offers parents the opportunity to discuss parenting, child development, and or other family issues.	82	5	12	1
My child's school offers opportunities for volunteering (reading to my child's class, special event coordination, class monitor, PTA/PTO events, etc.)	86	4	9	1
The school encourages my family to help my children with homework, check homework, set academic goals, and use the homework hotline or folder.	90	5	12	1

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2001-2002

RESULTS FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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

with their homework, and 69% said families were encouraged to take advantage of academic after-school or summer program and/or correspondence classes beneficial to student achievement. Fifty-seven percent of the parents said their schools communicated to them about other support services that were available for students and families. However, parents were equally divided on their school's coordination of community resources: 41% agreed that their school coordinated community resources and 41% did not know whether the school coordinated community resources or not. When asked about parent inclusion, 76% of the parents felt their school included parents in school decisions, and 71% indicated they had made contributions to the decision making activities at their school.

PARENT SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed to help schools effect changes in their program's daily operation and involvement of parents:

- *District staff should take advantage of the survey results by coordinating efforts to work with parents of all Austin students since they may be enrolled at one time or another in either public or private school.*
- *Campus staff should develop strategies to increase parent awareness of certain school/district services. For instance, information about the school or district services could be provided through handouts at the beginning of the school year, and during registration, PTA or PTO meetings. Schools could also tape brief descriptions about their services and make the tapes available through free distribution or checkout to first-time parents of school age children or parents new to the district. Cassette tapes would be a good choice for this project because they are less expensive and most parents have access to a cassette tape player. Also, campuses need to inform parents about different opportunities for them to have input in decision making such as PTA/PTO, grade level, and other committee meetings.*

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

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 complete a questionnaire. Although eleven of the 61 schools (Allan, Andrews, Linder, Burnet, Fulmore, Kealing, Martin, Mendez, Webb, Lanier, and Travis) employed two or more parent support specialists each during 2001-2002, each school returned only one survey. The summary responses to the questionnaire are presented below by categories.

WORK HABITS

The 25 parent support specialists who completed the questionnaire all reported that they worked with their principal, 21 (84%) worked with other school staff, and 20 (80%) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president. Seven (28%) named community agencies [El Buen Samaritano, North Austin Civic Association., St. Davis Root Cause (dental restoration program), and others] as work partners.

The parent support specialists used a combination of methods to gather parental input and feedback on activities they conducted during 2001-2002. The majority (92%) of the support specialists used the parent survey and their own surveys, telephone calls (72%), and think tank sessions (60%) to gather input from parents.

Seventy-six percent said they used district parent survey results in writing up their CIP activities for the 2001-2002 school year. Two parent support specialists said the parent survey

results were not applicable to their CIP process because their campus programs which serve teen parents are designed as alternative programs.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The parent support specialists provided a list of staff development activities that they had completed in the past year that were offered by AISD or other agencies. There was a wide variety in the staff development attendance reported. The two most common activities mentioned were: Connections Resource Center's Celebration of Families (n=25), and the Family Resource Center's monthly staff development meeting (n=25).

ADULT LITERACY

Federal or state Title I grant guidelines suggest working cooperatively with other programs in the district, including adult literacy, in order to empower parents in self-improvement and to assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on survey results, 16 (67%) of the 24 parent support specialists held adult literacy classes during the 2001-2002 school year. They enrolled 865 adults between August 2001 and May 2002. Two hundred and ninety-two (34%) of the enrolled adults completed the classes, and 21 (2%) entered the workforce for the first time. Two hundred and twenty-one (26%) were in ongoing summer programs, and 309 (41%) had no completion information because they had been placed at sites off campuses. One hundred seventy-four (20%) of those parents who completed the literacy classes were already employed.

SCHOOL LEVEL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Title I funds are allocated for school-level parental involvement activities, including family literacy training and instruction to enhance parenting skills. Results from the parent support staff's interim reports and questionnaire showed that during 2001-02, 54 parent support specialists primarily spent their time preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies; attending meetings/staff development; providing information to parents; recruiting volunteers (parent, community members or business); and making home visits or calling parents. Several of these activities (providing information to parents, making home visits or calling parents, and conducting assemblies) spanned the regular school year and summer school activities. Information from summer school surveys to principals showed that as a result of summer activities 2,420 parents of students in grades 3-8 participated in summer parental involvement activities. See AISD's Optional Extended Year Program Report 2001-2002 (Publication 01.10) for more information on summer programs.

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

ACTIVITY	# PARENT PARTICIPANTS	# SCHOOLS RESPONDING
Assemblies, Seminars, etc.	19,126	37
Regular (Make It Take It, Math Family nights, Literacy, Principles of Learning, TAAS/TAKS, and others) academic workshops	16,263	39
TEKS Alive	1,146	13
Learning Walk	450	10
Social (Gangs, Drugs, Teen Pregnancies)	6,861	27
Wellness (Stress, Mammography, Inoculations, Dental)	5,945	26
*Others (KLRU series, Back-to-school nights, PTA meetings, Principal coffees, Choice Sheet Nights, Attendance, and others)	30,306	43
TOTAL	80,097	**

Source: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire and Interim Reports, 2001-2002

Legend: *Other Category contained examples of activities, not an itemized list. **=Column not added because school counts are duplicates.

When asked to describe one activity in detail that was successful or was a best practice effort based on attendance and feedback from parents and/or other community members, thirteen or 52% of the parent support specialists described academic activities such as Family Reading Night, Family Math Night, Healthy Choices Curriculum, and KLRU Reading series. Another 9 (36%) shared other types of events such as transition social gatherings for parents of students entering middle school and neighborhood walks, and 3 (12%) shared health fair activities.

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 a language or

languages common to the community and school, and provide parents with academic training opportunities to support student learning (e.g., TAAS; TAKS; Family math, reading, science and other academic subjects). In addition, they can interpret school policies, procedures, and report cards; translate during parent-teacher conferences; obtain clothing, medical and dental services for students; provide transportation in special circumstances; and perform tasks over an 8 hour work period that cannot be incorporated into other school staff tasks. They go when others cannot.

The parent support specialist's 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 still room for improvement: 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 campus staff development in order to provide teachers and other campus staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success.*

AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

AISD has access to many local business and community volunteers and resources through Austin Partners in Education (APIE), formerly the Austin Adopt-a-School program. Both monetary donations and volunteer hours are given to support Austin schools through APIE. Table 9 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past three years. Although increases occurred from 1999-2000 to 2000-01 in in-kind contributions, cash donations, number of volunteers, and number of volunteer hours to AISD schools, there were slight decreases in 2001-2002 in in-kind contributions and number of volunteer hours. APIE records show that these schools with parent support staff received 42% of the overall in-kind contributions, 21% cash, 28% volunteer services, and 29% of the volunteer hours. See (www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/community/partners/index.phtml) Partners in Education's web site for additional information on APIE partners and the types of programs or services they provide schools. For instance, State Farm Insurance Company provided a \$25,000 grant to three Austin elementary schools, Becker, Metz, and Rodriguez, which allows them to stay open during "prime time". Prime time, the hours between 3-6 pm, is considered the time kids are least likely to be supervised. Another example is the Alliance of Black Ministers, a partner to Sims elementary school. The Alliance provides monetary support and acts as a Sunday morning web site dispensing information about Sims to the congregation.

Table 9: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin ISD Partners in Education, 1999-2000 Through 2001-02

Type of Donation	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,892,343	\$4,295,736	\$3,154,530
Cash Donations	\$3,115,851	\$4,279,080	\$4,336,087
Number of Volunteers	12,303	16,649	16,656
Number of Volunteer Hours	358,620	366,251	348,714

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02

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 and targeting 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. Parental contact is a critical component of 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.

This report shows several areas of weakness in parent involvement efforts that include:

- 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);
- Teachers (68%) reported parental involvement as one of the areas in which they need training.
- Some parents' lack of knowledge about certain school resources such as coordination of community resource services (24%) and schools offering a variety of training or informational workshops that are inclusive of both parents (19%); and
- The percentage of parents who reported not knowing whether parents were included in campus decisions (21%).

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 survey data to effect change through improvement plans (campus and district). Both public and private school staff should use their school survey results to address parental concerns and help guide improvements in campus operations.*
- *Greater efforts should be made by principals to communicate with PTA/PTO presidents about parent involvement issues (district, federal and state) and activities on their campuses, because PTA/PTO presidents' comments (phone calls, and notes to OPE staff) indicate that they serve on a volunteer basis and can not spend as much time conducting parental involvement activities or attending staff development as do paid school support staff.*
- *Campuses must make greater efforts to provide parents with information about resources available to them through the school and community.*

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