

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, behavior, and other applicable student issues). By using staff resources such as the parent support specialists to provide teachers with staff development, campus administrators can address the areas in which teachers have said they need assistance.
- Campus leaders must make greater efforts to provide parents, teachers, and students with information about district resources available to them and encourage

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 district advisory councils. Several district programs support efforts 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 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

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 the district's goals. This evaluation assembles information from district staff and parents as to the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools. Since parent and community involvement includes such a variety of district and community activities, this evaluation is focused on six specific objectives relevant to the district's reporting needs:

1. To measure AISD's adherence to federal, state, and local requirements for parent involvement;
2. To document parent support specialists' activities that encourage parental involvement;
3. To measure self-reported levels of awareness among AISD campus staff about district parental involvement resources, needs for specific staff development related to parent involvement; and opinions about academic resources and services for students;
4. To measure self-reported levels of parents' treatment by school staff, their awareness of AISD's testing and academic programs, and whether they have been provided information on school programs and student performance;
5. To document AISD's community involvement through the Austin's Partners in Education program; 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.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

An AISD employee survey was administered in January 2003. 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, and classified staff.

A sampling of campus administrators, teachers, other professionals and classified staff (Group A) responded to a survey item regarding expectations for academic achievement for all students at their campus. Of the 710 surveys sent to this group, 605 (85%) were returned, and 574 (95%) were valid for analysis. A second group (Group B) that excluded classified staff answered questions on staff development needs; use of Title I funds; districtwide curriculum standards and testing; identification of student needs for academic support; supplemental academic services; and the district's homework and TEKS helplines. Of the 516 surveys sent to Group B, 449 (87%) were returned and 424 (94%) were valid for analyses.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The majority of respondents [campus administrators (88%), teachers (94%), other professionals (92%) and classified staff (88%)] felt that staff at their campus had high expectations for the achievement of all students. Although the current percentages are high, they are slightly different from last year's responses. For instance, in 2001-02, 92% of the campus administrators, 90% of the teachers, and 97% of the other professional staff felt that staff at their campus had high expectations for the achievement of all students.

DISTRICTWIDE CURRICULUM STANDARDS AND TESTING

Table 1 shows that campus administrators (88%) more so than other staff (teachers, counselors, and others) agreed that AISD's adoption of districtwide curriculum standards has had a positive effect on student learning. Higher percentages of principals (71%) as compared to teachers (62%) and other professionals (53%) agreed that benchmark test results were used effectively at their campuses to improve student learning. However, the percentage point differences between the staff groups may not be cause for concern, since principals and teachers deal with curriculum and testing more frequently than the other professionals who are primarily counselors.

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

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents		
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know
Adoption of districtwide curriculum standards aligned with the TEKS has had a positive effective on student learning.			
Administrators (n=49)	88	6	6
Teachers (n=330)	62	19	19
Other Professionals (n=53)	59	13	28
Benchmark test results are used effectively at my campus to improve student learning.			
Administrators (n=49)	71	23	6
Teachers (n=327)	62	19	19
Other Professionals (n=53)	53	23	24

Data Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2002-2003.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACADEMIC SERVICES

As shown in Table 2, administrators (98%) more so than other professionals (78%), and teachers (70%) felt that all funds/resources were used effectively at their campuses to enhance learning opportunities. Campus administrators (79%) and teachers (78%) felt that supplemental academic services offered at their campus, such as tutoring, small group instruction, and after school programs, were effective in preparing students for TEKS/TAKS. The majority of the respondents agreed that AISD's summer school programs are necessary for at-risk students to make academic progress. However, a second review of the data on use of funds/resources or the effectiveness of supplemental academic services warrants some concern about teachers and counselors' access to budget information and/or inclusion in extended curriculum resource decisions.

Survey respondents were asked to select up to three areas of academic support that they felt students at their schools needed the most from the following list: Reading, Writing, Oral Communication, Math, Science, Social Studies, Computer/Technology, Life Skills, and Physical/Health Skills. Based on responses, reading (28.8%), writing (28.3%) and mathematics (23.9%) were the areas in which staff reported the most need for academic support among AISD students.

Table 2: Supplemental Academic Services, 2002-2003

Survey Item	Percentages of Respondents		
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know
All funds/resources are used effectively at my campus to enhance learning opportunities for students.			
Administrators (n=49)	98	2	0
Teachers (n=325)	70	18	12
Other Professionals (n=50)	78	8	14
Supplemental academic services (such as tutoring, small group instruction, after school) at my campus are effective in preparing students for TEKS/TAKS.			
Administrators (n=48)	79	19	2
Teachers (n=331)	78	8	14
Other Professionals (n=52)	69	12	19
AISD summer school programs are necessary for at-risk students to make academic progress.			
Administrators (n=49)	92	6	2
Teachers (n=332)	87	5	8
Other Professionals (n=53)	96	4	0

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2002-2003.

Table 3: Staff Opinion About Areas of Academic Support That Students Need

Subject	Percentages of Respondents		
	All Teachers (n=873)	Other Professional (n=143)	Campus Administrators (n=128)
Reading	29	27	29
Writing	28	28	31
Mathematics	23	25	27
Oral Communication	7	6	2
Science	4	4	4
Life Skills	4	3	2
Computer/Technology	3	3	2
Social Studies	1	2	3
Physical/Health Skills	1	1	0

Data Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey 2002-2003.

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

Campus staff were asked about the type of professional development they would like to receive from among the following areas: general parent-staff communication skills; advising parents on grade-level curriculum; advising parents on graduation requirements; working with parents on student behavior at school (attendance, discipline, dress code, etc.); advising parents on how to support students' learning at home (study skills, learning activities, etc.); district/campus parent involvement policy; and district/campus parent involvement resources. Thirty percent of the 482 teachers responding chose working with parents on student behavior at school, and 29% chose advising parents on how to support student learning at home. These two also were chosen most often by other professionals and administrators (similar to last year, 2001-2002). (See AISD's Parent and Community Involvement Summary Report, 2001-02, Publication 01.09 for the Coordinated Survey 2001-02 results.) Table 4 shows the complete analysis for the preferences among professional development topics.

Table 4: Professional Development for School Staff, 2002-2003

Professional Development Topics	Percentages of Respondents		
	All Teachers (n=482)	Other Professionals (n=80)	Campus Administrators (n=83)
General parent-staff communication skills	11	8	12
Advising parents on grade-level curriculum	11	6	10
Advising parents on graduation requirements	4	15	8
Working with parents on student behavior at school	30	24	25
Advising parents on how to support student learning at home	29	24	27
District /campus parent involvement policy	6	9	5
District/campus parent involvement resources	9	15	13

Data Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey 2002-2003.

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 including their treatment by school staff, their perceptions of school-home communication, and the degree to which they received information on a variety of topics from school staff.

The multiple-choice survey, written in English and Spanish, contained 16 questions. The first 6 questions gathered demographics about the child for whom the parent completed the survey. Four of the remaining ten questions gathered opinions from parents about the effectiveness of AISD's TEKS Family Learning Guides, and benchmark testing, and whether schools provided parents with critical information about their children. The remaining questions asked about campus safety, treatment of parents and students by campus staff, and school-parent communication.

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		
	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree
School staff provided me information about:			
My Child's Behavior			
Elementary School	99		1
Middle School	88	11	11
High School	80	9	11
Academic Programs (e.g. Special Education, Bilingual/ESL, Gifted/talented)			
Elementary School	82	12	6
Middle School	74	15	11
High School	66	20	14
My Child's Academic Progress			
Elementary School	96	2	2
Middle School	89	3	8
High School	80	5	15
My Child's Academic Plan/Goals			
Elementary School	88	6	6
Middle School	75	8	17
High School	71	6	23
Availability of Tutoring			
Elementary School	72	20	8
Middle School	77	11	12
High School	74	9	17
Required Curriculum			
Elementary School	92	5	3
Middle School	84	6	10
High School	82	4	14
My Child's Risk of Failing a Grade			
Elementary School	77	20	3
Middle School	81	12	7
High School	79	11	10
Choice Sheet Signups			
Middle School	78	10	12
High School	76	8	16
Financial Aid and Scholarships			
Middle School	43	36	21
High School	61	16	23
High School Graduation Requirement & Plans			
Middle School	53	30	17
High School	80	6	14
College Opportunities			
Middle School	41	39	20
High School	64	13	23
Career Opportunities			
Middle School	44	37	19
High School	60	15	25

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2002-2003.

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
My child's school provides me with opportunities for two-way communications.			
Elementary School	97	1	2
Middle School	90	2	8
High School	84	3	13

Source: AISD's Parent Survey 2002-2003.

PARENT SURVEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Elementary and middle school campus administrators should look at their school's survey results to check whether the TEKS Family Learning Guides (for grades K-8) are being used by parents. If needed, campus staff can set up strategies for increased awareness and use. To help middle and high school parents become more aware of information on financial aid, scholarships, high school graduation requirements, and college and career opportunities, campus staff could appoint parents to committees in order to increase parental awareness of relevant school or district programs and services. For instance, using information available in AISD, parents could be asked to establish scholarship search committees, design generic student portfolios and graduation requirements checklists, become transition buddies to middle school students entering high school, and become involved in other activities that would bring parents together with staff and students. This could help build capacity to support students and provide parents with much needed information and an opportunity to be involved. Because parent

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%) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president. Fourteen (45%) named community agencies [AVANCE, Meadow Brook Housing Authority, Youth Advocacy, University of Texas at Austin, RIF Program, WIC, Insure-A-Kid, Austin Police Department Liaison team, Indigent Care Coalition, Hispanic Physicians Association, Safe Place, and others] as work partners.

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 Family Resource Center were attended by all of the respondents (32 or 100%). There were a wide variety of responses provided by parent support specialists for attendance at AISD-sponsored staff development workshops and other staff development workshops in or out of Austin. Cultural Connections, Prime Time and training at ESC Region XIII were the three activities mentioned at least two times by staff.

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Title I funds are allocated in AISD 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 2002-03, 53 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); making home visits or calling parents, setting up and participating in IMPACT meetings, Operation School Bell activities, and truancy court appearances. 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.

Table 7 shows a summary of parental and community participation (duplicate counts) in various activities offered by the schools as reported by parent support specialists. As results indicate, school assemblies drew the highest number of parents (48,667). The second largest category for parent attendance was Family Night activities (21,589) including academics, TAKS, secondary graduation requirements, and transitioning (middle to high school) information. These were usually conducted in English and Spanish. The Other category (with 21,434 parents attending) included a variety of activities such as truancy discussions, receptions for dads, moms, and grandparents, meetings over coffee with the principal, recognition dinners or receptions, holiday programs, grade level celebration for parents, PTA/PTO fundraisers, back to school celebrations, orientation, parent involvement information fairs, and many others.

Aside from reporting activities and workshops that involved parents, students, school staff, and community, parent support specialists were asked to select three conference-type (parent, principal, juvenile judge, counselor, parent support specialist) activities that required them to act as facilitators (set up the conference or appearance, contact parents, provide transportation in some cases, act as advocate and translator) and provide follow-up contact and

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 recruiting 1,784 partners who volunteered 35,952 hours of services as tutors and mentors (all grade levels) during 2002-03. Also, information from Optional

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 Campus Improvement Plans for the 2002-2003 school year. (The 2002-2003 district parent survey had not been administered at the time of their survey.) Five (16%) high school parent support specialists said the 2001-2002 parent survey results were not applicable to their CIP process because their campuses served teenage parents. Three (10%) said their schools did not give the 2001-02 survey, and one (3%) did not respond to the question. When asked if they would use the results from the 2002-03 parent survey to help develop their CIPs, 71% said they would if they were hired for the 2003-04 school year. However, two (6%) said they would not use the 2002-03 parent survey results because the data were not applicable to their program, and seven (21%) said their jobs had not been funded for the 2003-04 school year.

ADULT LITERACY

Federal and state Title I grant guidelines suggest working cooperatively with other programs in the district, including adult literacy, to empower parents in self-improvement so that they may assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on survey results, twenty (65%) of the 31 parent support specialists held adult literacy classes during the 2002-2003 school year on their campuses. Sixteen schools enrolled parents in adult literacy classes at other sites because the class or classes were unavailable at the home campus. A total of 1,578 adults were reported as being enrolled in these classes between August 2002 and May 2003. Six hundred and seventy-five (43%) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2003, and 59 (9%) entered the workforce for the first time.

BEST PRACTICE

Parent support specialists were asked to pick and rate one parent involvement activity from a list of five (presentation, seminar, workshop, writing a grant, or other) as a success or best practice based on factors such as attendance, parent and /or community feedback, number of students served, amount of funding (or in-kind), and terms of the grant. Eleven (36%) parent support specialists described events such as Family Nights, School Information Fair, Fathers-Daughters Dance 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. 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

record. To this end, efforts are underway now by district staff to account more thoroughly for the activities of the parent support specialist.

AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

AISD has access to many local business and community volunteers and resources through Austin Partners in Education (APIE). Both monetary donations and volunteer hours are given to support Austin schools through APIE. According to APIE staff, APIE also partners with Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP), the bond program that 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. This partnership resulted in a \$4.1 million savings last year. Table 8 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past four years. 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. However, decreases occurred in in-kind contributions and number of volunteer hours for both 2001-02 and 2002-03. Cash donations and number of volunteers also dropped from 2001-02 to 2002-03. APIE records show that schools with parent support staff received 76% of the overall in-kind contributions, 70% of the cash, 59% of the volunteer services, and 71% 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 8: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin ISD Partners in Education, 1999-2000 Through 2002-03

Type of Donation	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-2003
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,892,343	\$4,295,736	\$3,154,530	\$2,434,112
Cash Donations	\$3,115,851	\$4,279,080	\$4,336,087	\$967,175
Number of Volunteers	12,303	16,649	16,656	10,606
Number of Volunteer Hours	358,620	366,251	348,714	220,072

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 1999-2000, 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE

Because of the relevancy of APIE to QZABP and recent decreases in reported APIE contributions, it is recommended that campus staff familiarize themselves with their APIE partners, the partners' contributions, and the method their campus uses to report these data (partners and contributions) to district APIE staff.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

According to some recent studies [Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools (Westat and the Policy Studies Associates, 2001), and Family Involvement In Children's Education; Appendix A, (Wendell Phillips, 1997)], achievement improved faster for students when two factors were present: professional staff development for teachers 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, decision-making, and interaction with students at the campus or district level is aligned with the District's parental involvement policy and regulation.

This report shows several areas in the district's parent involvement efforts that need improvement:

- Teachers (59%) reported parental involvement as one of the areas in which they need training.
- Some middle and high school parents reported lacking enough information on financial aid, scholarships, high school graduation requirements, and college and career opportunities.
- Parent support specialists' job duties seem to cover a wide variety of activities that often go without documentation that ties it to student success.

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

- Campus administrators must 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, behavior, and other applicable student issues). Parent support specialists are the ideal staff to provide the training because they already do this task in some cases, and they have relationships with the teachers and the

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 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. Documentation of the amount of time and effort expended by the parent support specialist on tasks of this nature will help in the efforts to obtain clearer and consistent documentation of parent support staffs' activities across AISD. 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.
- 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) and campus administrators should use parent survey data to effect change through improvement plans (campus and district).
- Because AISD realized \$4.1 million in savings through the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program in 2002-03, it is urgently recommended that campuses pay close attention to reporting APIE community support.

Austin Independent School District

Office of Accountability
Maria Whitsett, Ph.D.

Department of Program Evaluation
Holly Williams, Ph.D.

Project Supervisor
Martha Doolittle, Ph.D.

Author
Wanda Washington



Board of Trustees
Doyle Valdez, President
Ingrid Taylor, Vice President
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John Fitzpatrick
Rudy Montoya, Jr.
Robert Schneider
Patricia Whiteside

Superintendent of Schools
Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., Ph.D.