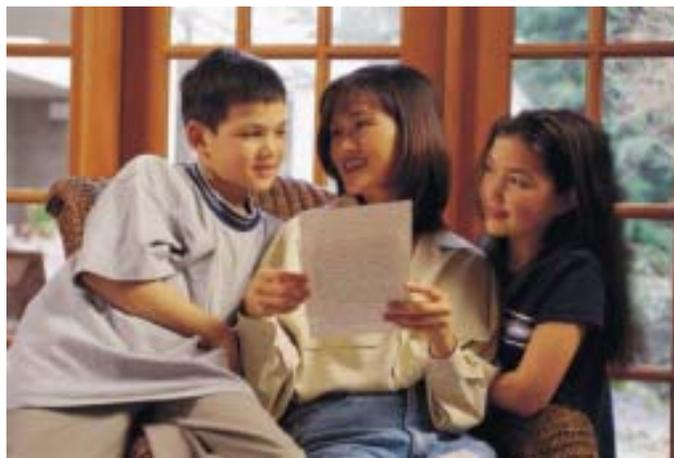


PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2003-04



**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

teachers of AISD's Homework or TEKS helplines, districtwide curriculum standards and testing policy, and supplemental academic services. This fact is further supported by documentation submitted through the parent support specialists' responses to questions in the Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2003-2004. Thus, the following recommendations related to staff are offered for staff development and cost-saving considerations:

1. One of the parent support specialist's major duties is to provide staff development on parent involvement. Campus administrators should use the currently available staff resource of the parent support specialists to provide teachers with staff development. Thus, campus administrators can address the needs of teachers and parent support specialists in this area.
2. Campus leaders (e.g., administrators, counselors, curriculum specialists) must modify some district resources, such as the TEKS and homework helplines to make them more user friendly, and make greater efforts to provide parents, teachers, and students with information about these resources that are available to them and encourage their buy-in and advocacy if the District continues to provide the services. Underutilization of these services is not cost effective.

Another segment of this evaluation included a districtwide 2003-2004 parent survey that showed that parents of middle school students need more information on financial aid and scholarships, and high school parents need more information on high school graduation requirements. Thus, a third recommendation is:

3. Campus administrators must review their survey results and provide parents with the information requested from parents of that campus.

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. Thus, these staff can assist the District in its efforts to close the academic gap between minority students and others.

Self-reported activities in the Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, KPIs, and other support documents indicate that AISD parent support specialists performed their major duties and met their campuses' goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage parent participation

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 reinvigorate 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 managers, principals, and parent support specialists on the major duties and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of parent support staff. A second goal of the evaluation is to provide information to administrators, principals, teachers, parent support specialists, and other school staff so that they may involve parents in richer relationships with their schools. 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 a variety of district and community activities, this evaluation focuses on seven specific objectives relevant to the district's reporting needs.

1. Measure AISD's adherence to federal, state, and local requirements for parent involvement;
2. Document parent support specialists' activities that encourage parental involvement;
3. 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. Describe parents' perceptions of treatment by school staff, awareness of AISD's testing and academic programs, and provision of information on school programs and student performance;
5. Document AISD's community involvement through the Austin's Partners in Education program;
6. Provide district decision makers with information and recommendations for parent involvement program modification and guidance on 2004-2005 parent involvement goals, and

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 PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

POLICY

AISD adopted an updated parental involvement policy (GK-Local: Community Relations) 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 a policy governance model (August 2002) that included a new set of Board policies containing Executive Limitations in 16 distinct areas. The primary Executive Limitation dealing with parents is EL3, "Treatment of Stakeholders," and it outlines appropriate communication with parents and others, and the responsibility of the Superintendent to ensure lawful, ethical, respectful and dignified treatment of parents, staff, students and the public. See Austin Independent School District's website www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/about/policy/boardgov/index.phtml for the full text.

DISTRICT PARENT INVOLVEMENT MODEL

Members of AISD's Cabinet (Superintendent, chief officers, associate superintendents, and other lead staff) approved implementation of a districtwide accountability model for parent involvement staff designed to ensure uniform delivery of service, forms of communication, and rules of governance across all campuses. These measures were established to help provide all AISD families with support as needed. The model, introduced in December 2003, calls for a standardization of the parent support specialist's job description and role in the school and community; monthly time and effort documentation; and assumption of responsibilities in terms of major duties measurable by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These KPIs are defined later in this report. School year 2003-2004 was the baseline year for implementing the model, and school year 2004-2005 will be the first year for making improvements where needed.

STAFFING

In 2003-2004, 57 AISD Title I campuses used a combination of funds to employ 59 parent support specialists who provided workshops and other services to parents and community members. These activities are intended to enhance, empower, and encourage parent participation in the education of children.

During the school year, parent support specialists from 57 Title I campuses and one non-Title I (McCallum) campus worked with staff from the AISD 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, 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.

ADVOCACY FOR AISD HELPLINES

When staff were asked if they encouraged others at their school to use AISD resources such as the Homework Helpline, only about half of teachers (55%), campus administrators (57%), other professionals (54%), and classified staff (58%) agreed with the statement. Smaller percentages of school staff [administrators (41%), teachers (27%), other professionals (32%), classified staff (51%)] agreed that they encouraged the use of AISD's TEKS Helpline. Because parent support specialists routinely facilitate workshops on AISD's helplines, it is likely that they were more familiar with these resources. Regardless, the results raise a concern because AISD provides these services, and if staff are not promoting the use of these helplines, then the district is not getting the best value for its dollars.

DISTRICT CURRICULUM STANDARDS AND TESTING

Table 1 shows that campus administrators (89%), more so than other staff (teachers, counselors, and others), agreed that AISD's adoption of districtwide curriculum standards aligned with the TEKS has had a positive effect on student learning. Campus administrators had the highest percentage of agreement (83%) compared to other campus staff that benchmark test results were used effectively at their campuses to improve student learning.

The gap in responses of agreement between principals and other campus staff on these survey questions creates some concern because all teachers and counselors deal with curriculum and testing. In addition, some concern may be warranted for those staff who responded "Don't Know" on items regarding adoption of districtwide curriculum standards and the effective use of benchmark test results by campuses, suggesting the need for improved access to information and/or inclusion of these staff in curriculum standardization and implementation decisions.

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)	92	6	2
	Teachers (n=681)	77	8	15
	Other Professionals (n=141)	87	6	7
	Classified (n=47)	81	9	10

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2003-2004.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Campus staff were asked about the types 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. As shown in Table 3, 30% 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 categories were chosen most often by other professionals, administrators, and classified staff. These same results were observed in the past two years of the survey. (See AISD's Parent and Community Involvement Summary Reports, 2001-2002, Publication 01.09, and 2002-2003, Publication 02.11).

Table 3: Percentages of AISD Staff Responses Requesting Parent Involvement Workshop Topics

Workshop Topics	Campus Administrators (n=188)	Teachers (n=1,083)	Other Professional (n=270)	Classified (n=138)
Working with parents on student behavior at school (attendance, discipline, etc.)	24%	30%	27%	20%
Advising parents on how to support student learning at home (study skills, learning activities, etc.)	25%	30%	26%	15%
District/campus parent involvement resources	12%	10%	12%	17%
General parent-staff communication skills	9%	9%	12%	17%
Advising parents on grade level curriculum	12%	9%	7%	12%
District/campus parent involvement policy	9%	7%	7%	10%
Advising parents on graduation requirements	9%	5%	9%	9%

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2003-2004.

Table 4 shows staff responses to survey items referring to whether staff have encouraged the use of two AISD resources, the Homework Helpline and TEKS Helpline. Except for classified staff, most campus staff did not agree that they encouraged the use of the AISD's Homework Helpline. Similarly, few respondents agreed that they encouraged the use of AISD's TEKS Helpline. In fact, 43% of teachers and 48% of other professionals indicated they were unfamiliar with the AISD TEKS Helpline.

Table 4: Percentages of AISD Staff Responses to Encouraging the Use of AISD Helpline Resources

Survey Item	Number	%	%	%	%
	Responding	Agree	Disagree	Not Familiar	Does Not Apply
I have encouraged the use of AISD's Homework Helpline among students, staff, and/or parents at my school.	Administrators (n= 79)	43	27	7	23
	Teachers (n=641)	27	45	16	12
	Other Professionals (n=129)	46	21	13	20
	Classified (n=48)	58	23	8	11
I have encouraged the use of AISD's TEKS Helpline among staff and/or parents at my school.	Administrators (n=81)	36	26	33	5
	Teachers (n=649)	20	30	43	7
	Other Professionals (n=135)	23	19	49	9
	Classified (n=49)	51	12	27	10

Source: AISD Coordinated Employee Survey, 2003-2004.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON COORDINATED STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

The coordinated survey data suggest that there are still areas in which school staff need more information about AISD's standards, practices, and resources. For instance, 33% of teachers surveyed either did not know about, or disagreed that, AISD's adoption of a districtwide curriculum had had a positive impact on student learning. Also, relatively few campus staff indicated that they encouraged the use of AISD's Homework Helpline among students, staff, and/or parents at their schools. Almost half of teachers and other professionals indicated that they were unfamiliar with AISD's TEKS Helpline. Since teachers and counselors are those who most often have direct impact on student learning in the school, it is important that AISD provide them with information on AISD operations, policies, and resources through staff development. Furthermore, mechanisms should be put in place at the campus level, and be monitored by campus administrators, to ensure teacher recognition and effective use of such standards and resources.

Most teaching staff indicated on the coordinated survey that they would like training in 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.). Training in those areas was requested most often in staff surveys over the past two years. Since teachers are often the first contact in the communication line between school and home, they greatly impact the relationship between parents and school staff. Thus, campus administrators need to provide ongoing staff development for teachers and other staff, including access to the Family Resource Center's

training sessions, to increase staff awareness of AISD parent involvement operations, policies and district activities. For efficient use of available school resources, campus administrators should use their parent support specialists to provide training related to parent involvement, because the specialists can communicate the value of AISD's district programs and resources to staff and parents.

AUSTIN ISD PARENT SURVEY 2003-2004

The AISD parent survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to 106 AISD campuses in January 2004. The total number of surveys returned from all campuses was 20,533 (last year's return was 27,834 from 102 campuses), which represents approximately 26% of the district's student population. The survey gathered demographic information from parents about themselves and their child. In addition, three questions gathered opinions from parents about the effectiveness of AISD's benchmark testing, and about whether schools provided parents with critical information about their children. Nine questions asked about campus safety, treatment of parents and students by campus staff, school-parent communication, development of sound student character, and student appreciation for exploring visual, performing or musical arts. The last set of questions, designated for middle and high school parent respondents only, gathered opinions about whether secondary schools provided information to parents about course selections, financial aid, scholarships, graduation requirements, and other college or career opportunities. Most of the questions had been asked in the parent survey from the previous year (2002-2003). However, five questions were asked for the first time. Parents of students in all grade levels responded to the survey.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Most respondents were mothers (70%) and had students at elementary schools (78%). Table 5 shows fewer surveys were returned at each grade level in 2004 than in 2003. "Other Campuses" included the Alternative Learning Center (ALC), Alternative Center for Elementary Students (ACES), and Rosedale schools.

Table 6 shows that most parents (at all grade levels) who responded to the five new items on the 2004 survey indicated that: school staff listened to and used parent input in academic decisions about their children; parents were satisfied with the way school staff worked with them as partners to address educational issues concerning their children; parents were aware of benchmark testing; school staff helped their child to develop sound character; and, school staff helped their child to explore the visual, performing, or musical arts.

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

School Level	Number Returning Surveys-2003	Number Returning Surveys-2004
Elementary	22,408	16,070
Middle	3,419	2,721
High	2,007	1,640
Other Campuses	--	102

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

Table 6: Percentage of Agreement of Austin ISD Parents Responding to New Survey Items By School Level, 2004

Survey Item	School Level	Percentages of Parents Agreeing
School staff listen to and use my input in academic decisions about my child.	Elementary	86
	Middle	72
	High	63
	Other	72
I am satisfied with the way staff at my child's school and I work together as partners to address educational issues.	Elementary	90
	Middle	77
	High	68
	Other	83
I am aware of AISD's benchmark testing.	Elementary	84
	Middle	85
	High	75
	Other	72
School staff have helped my child to develop sound character.	Elementary	89
	Middle	73
	High	62
	Other	73
School staff have helped my child to explore the visual, performing, or musical arts.	Elementary	90
	Middle	81
	High	73
	Other	62

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2003-2004.

The majority of parents responding to the new item about AISD's benchmark testing in Table 6 showed that the parents were aware of the testing. However, Table 7 shows that not all agreed with whether it benefited children's academic achievement, especially at the high school level.

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 communications and helped parents to become more involved in their children's education. Between 2003 and 2004, middle school parents showed an increase in the percentage of parents agreeing on the communication and involvement questions. However, the percentage of high school parents agreeing with all three questions decreased from 2003 to 2004.

Table 8: Percentages of Austin ISD Parent Survey Responses to Survey Items About Parent School Staff Interactions by School Level, 2003 and 2004

Survey Item	School Level	Percentages of Agreement 2003	Percentages of Agreement 2004
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect and welcome my participation in school.	Elementary	97	96
	Middle	92	92
	High	89	85
	Other Campuses	--	91
My child's school provides me with opportunities for two-way communications.	Elementary	97	97
	Middle	90	91
	High	84	80
	Other Campuses	--	86
The staff at my school have helped me to become more involved in my child's education.	Elementary	90	93
	Middle	73	78
	High	68	67
	Other Campuses	--	73

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

Table 9 shows that the majority of parents who responded agreed that their child's school provided a safe learning environment. In addition, most parents agreed that staff treated their children fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability. However, parents at middle and high school levels showed a decline from 2003 to 2004 in the percentages who agreed that schools provided safe learning environments for their children.

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 Indicators, along with the various services they provided to the parents and staff on their campuses, these staff completed two (Fall and End-of-Year) reports and an annual questionnaire. The MDs and KPIs were listed at the end of each question on the questionnaire to assist the parent support specialists in completing the questionnaire. In the Fall 2003 report, parent support specialists were asked to submit a summary of parental involvement activities (and parent attendance at those activities) held at their schools

between August 2003 and January 2004. Fifty-seven (100%) parent support specialists hired between August 2003 and January 2004 returned the interim report. On the spring 2004 end-of-year questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the parent support specialists on activities from February through May as well as on some general parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information in the following areas: school staff with whom parent support specialists worked; Alliance/Vertical Team affiliation; participation in AISD resource programs and staff development; contributions to community empowerment and parent training; provision of staff development training to campus staff; number of families served through IMPACT Team efforts; number of adult literacy classes sponsored; volunteer recruiting; use of parent survey results in their Campus Improvement Plans (CIP); and information about other unique activities they sponsored. Attendance records and meeting minutes for staff development also were used to supplement data from the fall report and the end-of-year questionnaire.

Completed end-of-year questionnaires, which contained the February through May 2004 activities, were returned by 54 (90%) of the parent support specialists. Seven (12%) of the parent support specialists returned an interim report in January 2004 and did not complete an end-of-year questionnaire. Two of 57 schools (Cook and Fulmore) employed two parent support specialists each during 2003-04, and although each of these parent support specialists completed a questionnaire, their questionnaire data were combined to represent their school of employment. One GEAR-UP program parent support specialist also completed a questionnaire and is included in the total.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TYPES OF TRAINING PROVIDED

Fifty-one (94%) of the 54 parent support specialists who completed the questionnaire reported that they worked with their principal, 40 (74%) worked with other school staff, and 40 (74%) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president. Thirty-one (57%) named community agencies and organizations (AVANCE, Austin Academy, Junior League of Austin, Texas LEADS Project, RIF Program, Austin Business College, Insure-A-Kid, Austin Police Department Council of At Risk Youth, Capital 4-H Club, Child INC, PARD, Volunteer Legal Service, Zachary Scott Theater, Safe Place, and others) as work partners. (*Major Duties 2, 3 and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

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 AISD Family Resource Center,

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 Alliance/Vertical Team; 2 (4%) did not know if they belonged to an Alliance/Vertical Team; and 6 (11%) did not answer the question. (*Major Duty 1 and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

TYPES OF ACTIVITIES

Federal Title I Part A funds are allocated in AISD for school-level parent involvement activities, including family literacy training and instruction to enhance parenting skills. Results from the parent support specialists' fall reports and end-of-year questionnaire showed that during 2003-2004, just as in 2002-2003, 100% of parent support specialists hired by the end of the school year spent the bulk of their time on the following activities:

- 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, or immunizations projects;
- Providing staff development to school staff;
- Accompanying parents at truancy court appearances;
- Monitoring students; and
- Assisting the school nurse or counselor; and performing clerical duties.

Of all these activities, 98% were District-mandated major duties. 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. (*Major Duties 1, 4, and Key performance Indicators 1, 3*).

By the end of school year 2003-2004, 32 (59%) of the parent support specialists who responded had provided three or more staff development training sessions for staff on their

campuses, and 12 (22%) had provided at least one staff development session to campus staff. Six (11%) parent support specialists had not provided any staff development training to campus staff, and 5 (8%) did not answer the question. (*Major Duty 5 and Key Performance Indicator 2*).

Table 13 shows a summary of numbers of families served through IMPACT Team efforts. Fifty (94%) of the parent support specialists responding to the questionnaire indicated that they had provided families of Level I high needs students (e.g., students and families thrust into homelessness, court suits, loss of only source of income, and/or families facing major medical problems for whom intervention is not an option). Fifty (94%) of the parent support specialists also provided Level II intervention services (e.g., clothing, tutoring, mentoring, medical service, family literacy classes, emergency sign-up for free or reduced-priced lunch, and registration for judge-ordered parenting classes) for families of at-risk students through their campus IMPACT team, or as a follow-up service after an IMPACT team decision on a course of action. (*Major Duty 6 and Key Performance Indicator 3*).

Table 13: Number of Families Served through IMPACT Team Efforts, 2003-2004

School Level	# Parent Support Specialists	# Level I IMPACT Services	# Level II IMPACT Services	Level I & Level II IMPACT Total
Elementary	40	1,389	1,666	3,055
Middle	7	281	442	723
High	6	135	88	223
Total	53	1,805	2,196	4,001

Source: *Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2003-2004*.

Table 14 shows a summary of parent and community participation (duplicate counts) in various school-based activities as reported by parent support specialists. As results indicate, school fairs that included academic, wellness, and/or fundraising activities drew the highest number of parents (50,212). The second largest category for parent attendance was "other activities" that included a variety of activities unique to each reporting school (25,508). The third category with the highest parent attendance was assemblies (24,406) that included award activities for such things as attendance, honor roll, Black History celebration, Cinco de Mayo, Parent Involvement Week, and others. Family Night (22,359) usually involved the whole family and included topics such as academics, secondary graduation requirements, transitioning (middle to high school) information, and choice sheet activities. (*Major Duty 2 and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

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

Source: Parent Support Specialist Fall Report and Spring Questionnaire, 2003-2004.

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

Aside from reporting activities and workshops, parent support specialists were asked to list three conference-type activities that required them to act as facilitators (e.g., set up the conference or meeting, contact parents, act as advocate or translator) and provide follow-up contact and services where applicable. Twenty-nine (54) percent of the parent support specialists listed regular parent-teacher conferences; 26% (13) listed translating during parent-teacher conferences; 26% (13) mentioned setting up and participating in academic at-risk conferences; 14% (7) listed principal coffees; and 10% (5) said conferences or home visits related to student attendance problems. (*Major Duty 1 and Key Performance Indicator 3*).

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Parent support specialists participated in activities that extended beyond their regular duties. For instance, when asked if they supplemented their Austin Partners In Education (APIE) program with additional personally-recruited volunteers, 43 (80%) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting 3,093 parents who volunteered 44,408 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that 257 business organizations donated 5,035 hours of volunteer service to act as mentors, buddies, and in other roles; 1,416 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, PAL, Lone Star Girl Scouts, America New Start and community members other than parents) volunteered 24,810

hours of service as mentors or tutors. Information from a separate survey of principals who had Optional Extended Year Program (OEYP) parent involvement activities on their campuses during 2003-2004 showed that 4,005 parents of students in grades 3-8 participated in such parental involvement activities. See AISD's Optional Extended Year Program Report 2003-2004 (Publication 03.08) for more information on this program. (*Major Duty 6 and Key Performance Indicator 3*).

ADULT LITERACY

Federal and state Title I Part A grant guidelines suggest working cooperatively with other programs in the district, including adult literacy, to empower parents through self-improvement so that they may assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on questionnaire results, thirty-one (57%) of the 54 parent support specialists who responded held adult literacy classes during the 2003-2004 school year on their campuses. Thirty-six campuses enrolled parents in adult literacy classes at other sites because the classes were unavailable at their campuses. A total of 2,410 adults were reported as being enrolled in these classes between August 2003 and May 2004. A majority (72% or 1,546) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2004, and 184 (12%) entered the workforce for the first time. (*Major Duties 2, 4, and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Forty-one (76%) of the parent support specialists responded that they used the district parent survey results from 2002-2003 in developing their campus improvement plans for the 2003-2004 school year. Forty-nine (91%) said they would use results from the 2003-2004 parent survey in planning their 2004-2005 campus improvement goals and activities for parent involvement if the data are applicable to their programs. (*Major Duties 1, 2, 3, and Key Performance Indicator 1*).

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. Twenty (37%) parent support specialists described presentations on topics such as Bully Proof, TAKS, Family Health Care, Early College Start, Austin Academy, Fire Prevention, Victims Assistance and Safe Place, Narcotics, and Gangs. Fourteen (26%) described Family Nights (science, literacy, math, reading, ESL, and others), community resource fair, Dia de los

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 and use benchmark testing results, set up scholarship search committees, and gather information on graduation requirements. This type of collaboration would be prudent, economically sound, and would allow the parent

support specialists to perform their district-mandated major duties, aligned with their Key Performance Indicators.

In April 2004, a need was discerned by district staff for parent support specialists to have a standard calendar of activities that involved parents because parent support specialists' self-reported efforts varied across the district. Staff from Program Evaluation, the Family Resource Center, and several parent support specialists worked on creating a standard calendar of activities that designated at least one major activity per month across the district. For example, many campuses' Learning Walks or similar activities are designated for the months of November and April, with flexibility for individual campus planning such as combining the Learning Walk with the campus October Fest. In conjunction with this calendar, the Family Resource Center staff included a schedule of staff development sessions applicable to each activity that would be offered one month prior to that activity. In this way, parent support specialists attending the staff development can serve as each others' resources, and still allow for unique activities that meet the needs of parents and families at each campus. Therefore, a recommendation that can be made for parent support specialists is that campus administrators should encourage parent support specialists to follow the guidelines provided by the Family Resource Center staff and support their attendance at relevant staff development sessions.

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 the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP), a 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 has consistently resulted in savings to the district.

Table 15 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past two years. Decreases were observed for all categories except number of volunteer in 2003-2004. The decreases might be attributed to the delay in hiring parent support specialists at some campuses. On the other hand, the rise in number of volunteers might be attributed to Austin's (business and community) desire to shape the future workforce by becoming involved with Austin's schools. Austin Partners In Education 2003-2004 records show that schools with parent support staff accounted for 42% of the overall in-kind contributions,

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.

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE

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

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Recent studies [Longitudinal Evaluation of School Change and Performance in Title I Schools (Westat and the Policy Studies Associates, 2001), Family Involvement In Children's Education; Appendix A, (Wendell Phillips, 1997); A New Wave of Evidence (Henderson and Berla, 1994)] address the importance of parent involvement in student learning:

- 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).

- 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.

- Based on results from the district parent survey, administrators at middle and high schools should involve parents and staff in committees to help gather district data such as high school graduation requirements, financial aid and other resources. Parent participation in this process can help improve the way in which this information gets to parents and enable this interaction to occur 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 such resources if the District continues to provide these services.
- Administrators must encourage and require parent support specialists to attend staff development where they can receive training and support on effective documentation of regular activities, availability of resources, and district standards of service.
- Campus staff should pay close attention to reporting APIE community support data, and to requirements for participating schools, because AISD realizes savings through the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program that may be invested in furthering students' academic achievement.

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