

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2004-2005



Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall goal of this report is to provide data about the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) 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.

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization, and other groups with parent representation. Schools are required by state and federal law to include parents on campus and district advisory councils. These laws, local district policies, and several district programs support efforts to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities.

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 AISD's 2004-2005 Employee Coordinated Survey data, there are concerns about staff's self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and need for training. As in prior years, a majority of teachers (62%) reported that parental involvement is one of the areas in which they need training. In addition, only one-third of administrators and less than 10% of teachers and other professionals were aware of the AISD's Family Resource Center and the community's Family Connections Organization. Although the majority of principals and classified staff were aware of AISD's Ombudsman office, only 14% of teachers across grade levels (elementary-high school) were aware of this office.

Also, when staff were asked whether they believed the District-developed Student Learning Profile (Benchmark) assessment/test results were used effectively on their campuses, more than three-fourths of classified staff (mostly parent support specialists), other professionals, and administrators agreed, while two-thirds of teachers did so. The absence of belief among a third of teachers across grade levels raises concerns about the extent to which this resource is influencing teaching and learning. AISD's curriculum department states that the purpose of AISD's Benchmark assessments is to provide one measure to inform the following processes:

- Using data for instructional decision-making,
- Measuring student progress over time,
- Developing individual learning profiles for students,

- Communicating learning progress to students and parents, and
- Improving the district curriculum.

Other important information was gathered from the districtwide 2004-2005 Parent Survey. Parents were asked if they received information from school staff regarding the following programs/services: Special Education, Bilingual/ESL, Gifted and Talented, tutoring, and Advanced Placement and dual credit courses for high and middle school only. Parent responses across grade levels showed that 13% (elementary), 21% (middle school), and 25% (high school) disagreed that staff had given them educational program information. When asked about Advancement Placement or dual credit courses, 27% of middle school and 20% of high school parents disagreed. In keeping with AISD's Guidelines for Model Customer Service, these percentages of disagreement must be addressed if the District is to provide effective courtesies when providing services to customers (e.g., parents, community members).

Parents at all grade levels provided mostly positive survey responses to items concerning how school staff interacted with parents and students. However, parents of high school students agreed less often to these items than parents of students at other school levels.

Parents also were asked if they were aware of AISD's Ombudsman office. Percentages of responses from parents across grade levels showed that less than two-thirds (62%) were aware of this office. Thus, results from both the Employee Coordinated Survey and the 2004-2005 AISD Parent Survey indicated that a number of teachers and parents were not aware of the AISD Ombudsman office.

In school year 2004-2005, 58 AISD campuses 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. During the year, they also implemented a District initiative, the elementary Read and Rise Circles Program, and began to address a District concern about student transition between grade levels. The parent support specialists provided professional development sessions for school staff and participated in their respective school's at-risk student assistance program. According to Dr. L. Clark-Brown, AISD's Dropout Prevention/Reduction Coordinator, "This program is designed to make an 'IMPACT' through facilitation and provision of follow-up services to families that avert or alleviate the at-risk status of students."

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 provide parents with academic training opportunities or information to support student learning. Thus, these staff can assist the District in efforts to close the academic gap between low achieving students and others by providing a crucial link with parents.

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. Data regarding parent support specialists for 2004-2005 indicate that these AISD staff performed their major duties and met their campuses' goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members. However, other evidence indicates that some parent support specialists were underutilized in areas such as providing staff development training sessions. Self-report data indicated that some parent support specialists did not work very often or at all with their principals or other school staff, either due to principal's choice or parent support specialist's decision.

Community contributions to AISD provide validation of community support, which helps the District's standing in the community and improves the District's chances for approval in applications for grants. For instance, AISD will realize financial savings of \$4.1 million for fiscal year 2005 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 repayment of 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 its participating year.

Although a review of APIE's 2004-2005 records showed substantial increases from the prior year in several contribution categories (e.g., cash, in-kind, volunteer hours), these numbers could have been higher if 100% of schools had submitted their reports or completed in full the reports that they did submit.

In keeping with the goal of this summary report and AISD's commitment to a customer service initiative that focuses on providing excellent customer service to all district customers, the following recommendations related to staff development, good will toward customers (parents and community organizations), and cost-saving considerations are offered:

1. One of the parent support specialist's major duties is to provide staff development sessions on parent involvement and available AISD resources such as the Ombudsman office. Campus administrators should use this currently available staff resource of the parent support specialists to provide teachers with staff development opportunities. Thus, campus administrators can address both the needs of teachers and the goals of parent support specialists in this area. Since parent support specialists already work closely with the Ombudsman office, campus administrators should request their assistance in providing workshops or presentations to increase awareness of the Ombudsman office among school staff and parents.

2. The District spent \$146,840 for printing, sorting, delivery, and other activities associated with the administration of the Benchmark tests for school year 2004-2005. Because of the district's long-term investment in the use of Benchmark tests, district and campus leaders must address the issue of perceptions about the effective use of benchmark test scores on the campuses. If some teachers are not convinced that these are useful diagnostic tools, then the test results may be an underutilized AISD resource as evidenced by parents' moderate agreement to the parent survey question regarding the helpfulness of Benchmark testing.
3. Because parents are clearly AISD customers and stakeholders, administrators must review survey results and make every effort to provide parents with opportunities that allow two-way communication and participation in their child's education. Furthermore, school staff must welcome parent input in decision-making activities that concern their child.
4. Although the working arrangement between parent support specialists and school staff may exclude direct contact with the principal, campus leaders must be acquainted with their parent support specialists' work in order to include and use them as resources in daily campus operations, and to know first-hand what information is being passed on to parents. Also, direct contact with the parent support specialist allows the principal to observe whether the staff member's services are aligned with their AISD assigned duties.
5. Currently, AISD's Austin Partners In Education (APIE) donations are being used to satisfy a \$5 million interest-free bond that will save Austin taxpayers \$4.1 million. In light of this opportunity to save district monies, to provide information about community support for AISD, and to assist in grant acquisitions, campus leaders should be diligent about reporting APIE community support to enhance future savings and to re-invigorate the level of giving to AISD schools.

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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 regarding 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, such as those that target more specific activities including prevention of student dropouts, gangs, teen pregnancies, and drug use, as well as enrollment in post-secondary education.

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

One goal of this evaluation is to provide information to the district's Board of Trustees, administrators, program managers, principals, and parent support specialists on the major duties and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of AISD's parent support staff. A second goal of the evaluation is to provide information to all AISD staff so that they may involve parents in richer relationships with their schools. The third goal is to provide district decision makers with information and recommendations for parent involvement program modification and guidance regarding 2005-2006 parent involvement goals. This evaluation assembles information from district staff and parents about 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 six specific objectives relevant to the district's reporting needs.

1. Evaluate the extent and quality of parents' involvement within AISD attendance areas, per federal law.
2. Document parent support specialists' activities that encourage parental involvement.
3. Document the alignment of parent support specialists' major duties and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
4. Describe the following: parents' perceptions of treatment by school staff; their awareness of AISD's districtwide curriculum standards and testing; their awareness of the Ombudsman staff within the Office of Planning and Community Relations; and provision of information to parents regarding campus requirements, expectations, school programs, and student performance.
5. Measure self-reported levels of awareness among AISD campus staff about district parental involvement resources, needs for specific staff development related to parent involvement, perceptions regarding the effective use of districtwide curriculum standards and testing on their campuses to improve student learning, and provision of

information to parents about classroom and campus-related requirements and expectations.

6. Document AISD's community involvement through the Austin Partners in Education (APIE) program and the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP).

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AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

POLICY

AISD's Board of Trustees 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, using community resources, participating in decision-making, and volunteering. In addition, the AISD Board of Trustees adopted a policy governance model (August 2002) that included Executive Limitations in 16 distinct areas. The primary Executive Limitation concerning parents is EL-3, "Treatment of Stakeholders," which outlines appropriate communication with parents and others, and describes 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.austinisd.org/about/policy/boardgov/index.phtml for the full text.

DISTRICT PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2003, members of AISD's Cabinet (superintendent, 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 provide all AISD families with support as needed. The model standardized the parent support specialist's job description and role in the school and community, required these staff to submit monthly time and effort documentation, and outlined their responsibilities in terms of major duties as measured 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 was the first year for making improvements where needed and evaluating improvement compared to the baseline year.

STAFFING

In 2004-2005, 58 AISD campuses used a combination of funds to employ parent support specialists who provided workshops and other services to parents and community members. 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, housed at the AISD Family Resource Center, is located at the Allan Elementary School Annex and is directed by AISD's parent program specialist.

During 2004-2005, the office staff:

- Coordinated parent involvement activities districtwide and provided 16 special professional development workshops/sessions for 61 parent support specialists (57 Title I campus staff, 2 Bilingual Education staff, and 2 GEAR UP staff).
- Facilitated Title I and Title I Migrant Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings.
- Provided leadership in the implementation of the Read and Rise Circles Program (a District initiative), and integration and improvement of the grade level transition process, including the coordination of the Read and Rise Circles Program Parent Celebration (n=230) held at the Delco Center on May 5, 2005.
- Published or made available parenting periodicals.
- Provided on-site enrichment opportunities including evening adult literacy classes, 27 Taking Care of Business classes for parents of students who are at risk of legal intervention due to truancy; 40 weeks of on-site parent education classes for 56 parents; and 160 days of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.
- Provided summaries of parent support specialists' time and effort documentation to the associate superintendents.
- Conducted 18 parent involvement presentations for community groups, such as the Texas Association of School Boards, Austin Community College, and Family Connections.
- Worked with schools that did not have parent support specialists to enhance their parent involvement efforts.

In addition, office staff at the Family Resource Center participated in 23 community resource fairs, including the Celebration of Families event (n=2,300 in attendance), and partnered with The Community Foundation Agency (TCFA) to provide free income tax services to 500 families. The Center is also the meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent Family Involvement Advisory Council (PFIAC).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A strong component of community involvement in AISD is the Austin Partners in Education (APIE) program, a partnership between AISD and the Texas Uniform Unincorporated Nonprofit Association (TUUNA) foundation 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. In addition to APIE volunteers, parent support specialists also recruit and train other community volunteers.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The 2005 Employee Coordinated Survey was distributed to a sample of AISD employees through e-mail in the spring of 2005. The survey is a coordinated effort among AISD's offices and departments to gather information from employees districtwide. The coordinated survey included questions about parent involvement issues that were asked to a sample of campus administrators, teachers, parent support specialists, other professionals, and classified staff. A total of 895 surveys were e-mailed to this sample. These staff responded to survey items regarding supplemental academic services, staff development needs, districtwide testing, classroom and campus requirements, and school staff expectations.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT CAMPUS REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS TO PARENTS

On the employee survey, campus staff were asked to select the type of information they most often provided to parents about classroom-related requirements or expectations and student attendance and discipline policies. Eight hundred ninety-two valid responses to these survey items were analyzed. Results show that the majority of campus staff agreed that they provided information to parents about the following requirements or expectations:

- Classroom behavior (95%),
- Discipline (88%),
- Completing assignments (84%),
- Attendance (83%),
- Participation in classroom activities (81%), and
- Turning in homework (76%).

Further review of these data on the provision of information regarding classroom-related requirements or campus expectations showed that most campus staff also agreed that they provided parents with information about compliance with district policies and procedures (71%), respect (69%), and observing school safety rules (66%). See Appendix A for percentages of staff responses to these items by job category.

Eight hundred eighty-three valid campus staff responses were counted for the survey item regarding providing parents with information about parental involvement expectations. Table 1 shows that in most cases a higher percentage of the non-teaching campus staff (principal, counselors, and classified personnel), compared with teaching staff, reported providing information to parents about attending and participating in meetings, advocating for their child, and providing input in decision-making and other activities. Among teachers, those at elementary schools had greater percentages of agreement with these statements.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Staff Agreeing That They Provided Information About Parental Involvement Expectations, 2004-2005

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following parental involvement expectations:	Non-Teaching (n=245)	Elementary (n=346)	Teachers Middle (n=139)		High (n=153)
	%	%	%	%	%
Attending and participating in meetings, workshops, etc.	87	76	53		33
Advocating for their child	85	65	45		38
Providing input in decision-making	83	55	40		28
Working with child at home on school related tasks	83	83	58		48
Working toward parent/campus solutions	78	78	30		26
Advocating for their child's school	61	61	27		16

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Campus staff were asked about the types of professional development they would like to receive in the following areas: general parent-staff communication skills; advising parents about grade-level curriculum and graduation requirements; working with parents regarding 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; district/campus parent involvement resources; and advising parents about IMPACT meetings. As shown in Table 2, 56% of the teachers (n=531) chose working with parents on student behavior at school, and 68% chose advising parents on how to support student learning at home. These two categories were chosen frequently by other professionals, administrators, and classified staff. In addition, classified staff also wanted training about advising parents on the IMPACT team process (65%). These same topics have been identified frequently in the past three years of the survey. (See AISD's Parent and Community Involvement Summary Reports listed in the Reference section of this report).

Table 2: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Campus Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2004-2005

Survey Items	Administrators (n=76) %	Classified (n=17) %	Other Professionals (n=110) %	Teachers (n=531) %
Working with parents on student behavior at school (attendance, discipline, etc.)	66	70	48	56
Advising parents on how to support student learning at home	59	59	57	68
General parent-staff communication	32	59	24	9
District/campus parent involvement policy	21	59	17	17
Advising parents on IMPACT meetings	20	65	20	16
Advising parents on grade level curriculum	13	53	15	21
Advising parents on graduation requirements	13	9	14	9
District/campus parent involvement resources	3	41	36	22

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

AISD SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Campus staff respondents (n=837) reported their level of awareness of the following AISD support services or community resources: AISD Ombudsman, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Family Connections Organization, Operation School Bell (OSB), IMPACT (AISD Dropout Prevention Program), and the Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services). Table 3 shows that greater percentages of administrators and classified staff compared with other professionals were aware of AISD's Ombudsman Office. However, relatively fewer administrators and other professionals were aware of the AISD Family Resource Center and the Family Connections Organization. The majority of campus staff were aware of IMPACT, CHIP, and OSB. Almost all classified staff respondents, who were mostly Parent Support Specialists, were familiar with these organizations. The results for principals and other professionals are a cause for concern because these staff are directly involved in asking their parent support specialists to seek support services that will resolve student/family issues.

Table 3: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Non-teaching Staff Responses About Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2004-2005

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources:	Administrators (n=94) %	Classified (n=17) %	Other Professionals (n=134) %
Operation School Bell (OSB)	93	100	96
AISD Ombudsman Office	86	76	40
IMPACT (AISD Dropout Prevention Program)	86	100	87
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	86	100	87
Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services)	33	94	33
Family Connections Organization	33	94	33

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

Table 4 shows that teachers were more aware of resources such as IMPACT, CHIP, and OSB than they were of the AISD Ombudsman, Family Resource Center, and Family Connections Organization. However, teachers' awareness of these resources as a whole was less than that of other AISD staff. It is possible that teachers' lack of awareness may be related to the fact that they are not the ones who usually provide the recommendations for these support services and resources for students and families.

Table 4: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Teaching Staff Responses About the Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2004-2005

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources.	Elementary (n=333) %	Middle (n=128) %	High (n=131) %
Operation School Bell (OSB)	65	49	20
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	60	43	41
IMPACT (AISD Dropout Prevention Program)	60	43	41
AISD Ombudsman Office	14	17	11
Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services)	9	7	7
Family Connections Organization	9	7	7

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

SUPPLEMENTAL ACADEMIC SERVICES

Table 5 shows that the majority of campus staff who responded 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. However, compared to other categories of respondents, teachers more often disagreed or indicated that they did not know about supplemental services. These results may be of some concern if these teachers are working with students who need such services.

Table 5: Number of Respondents and Percentages of AISD Staff Responses in each Category of the Employee Coordinated Survey Item on Supplemental Academic Services, 2004-2005

Survey Item	Staff	# Respondents	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know
Supplemental academic Services (such as tutoring, small group instruction, after school, summer School) at my campus are effective in preparing Students for TAKS.	Administrators	94	90	9	1
	Classified	17	94	6	
	Other Professionals	134	90	5	5
	Teachers				
	Elementary	348	80	9	11
	Middle	139	71	19	11
	High	156	80	9	11

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

BENCHMARK TEST RESULTS

Table 6 shows that classified (88%), non-teaching professional (80%), and administrative (79%) staff agreed more often than teachers that AISD benchmark test results were used effectively at their campuses to improve student learning. Because of the cost associated with the administration of the Benchmark tests, all administrators and teachers should make sure the test results are used effectively, so that all groups will understand the importance of these data and use these data to communicate with parents about their children's academic strengths or weaknesses and to improve instruction.

Table 6: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Staff Responses to the Employee Coordinated Survey Item on the Use of Benchmark Test Results at Their Campuses, 2004-2005

Survey Item	Staff	# Respondents	% Agree	% Disagree	% Don't Know
Benchmark test results are used effectively at my campus to improve student learning.	Administrators	94	79	19	2
	Classified	16	88	6	6
	Other Professionals	134	80	7	13
	Teachers				
	Elementary	350	68	16	16
	Middle	140	60	31	9
	High	157	57	29	14

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The AISD employee coordinated survey data suggest that teachers need more information about parental involvement, supplemental academic programs, use of benchmark test results, and support services at their campuses. In fact, for the fourth year in a row, most staff have requested professional development sessions on how to work with parents regarding various issues (e.g., discipline, support for student learning).

Because supplementary academic services such as tutoring, small group instruction, and before/after-school programs are part of AISD's strategy to prepare students for TAKS, it is important that all campus staff know of and support the supplemental services used at their campuses. This is especially true if teachers are working with students who need these supplementary services. Campus administrators must involve all staff, especially teachers, in the planning and implementation of supplementary services used on their campuses.

Survey data also suggest that school staff need professional development training sessions on the effective use of benchmark test results. Because district staff, especially teachers, are the "gate-keepers" to communication with parents about their children's academic progress, campus administrators and AISD's Curriculum department staff must collaborate to provide professional development opportunities regarding the district's rationale for assessing and collecting student performance data throughout the instructional year rather than waiting for the end-of-year TAKS test results. They must also communicate the importance of the use of these data to the following: instructional decision-making process, measurement of student progress, development of individual learning student profiles, communication about students' learning progress to students and parents, and validation of benchmark test results with other student achievement data such as six-week grades, TAKS, and other assessments.

Because survey data indicate a need for staff to obtain more information, district and campus administrators should use parent support specialists to provide professional development training sessions to campus staff specifically related to parent involvement, AISD support services, and community resources.

AISD PARENT SURVEY 2004-2005

The AISD Parent Survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to 103 AISD campuses in fall 2004. Staff at each campus distributed surveys to parents of students at their school. The total number of surveys returned from all campuses was 15,915; and 942 parents responded to the survey online. Thus, a total of 16,857 surveys were returned, which represents approximately 21% of the district's student population. (The return in 2003-2004 was 20,533 from 106 campuses). The survey gathered demographic information from parents about their child. In addition, 11 questions gathered opinions from parents about:

- Treatment of parents and students by campus staff;
- The effectiveness of AISD's benchmark testing;
- Campus safety;
- Provision of information to parents about programs, campus requirements, and expectations; and
- Awareness of the AISD Ombudsman office.

Another set of questions was designated only for middle and high school parent respondents, and these items gathered opinions about whether secondary schools provided information to parents about course selections, financial aid, scholarships, graduation requirements, and other college or career opportunities.

All of the questions had been asked in the parent survey of the previous year (2003-2004) with the exception of the question about the AISD Ombudsman office. In the administration of the 2004-2005 surveys, parents were asked to complete one survey per child per campus to provide information regarding their unique experiences with campuses.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Most parents at all grade levels agreed that they had positive experiences and interactions with campus staff. However, Table 7 shows that:

- High school parents agreed less often than parents at other school levels regarding positive experiences with school staff.
- Elementary parent respondents as compared to other school level parents appeared to have greater percentages in agreement on these items.
- Some of the survey items with the least percentages of parents in agreement included topics such as the school's provision of opportunities for two-way communication (e.g., telephone calls, notes, student agenda books, meetings), involvement in their child's education, and input in academic decisions about their child.

Table 7: Percentages of Parent Respondents Who Agreed With Having Positive Experiences with Various School Staff, 2004-2005

Survey Item	School Staff	Elementary	Middle	High
		% Agree	% Agree	% Agree
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect.	Teachers	98	93	89
	Office Staff	96	94	92
	Counselor(s)	98	96	93
	Assistant Principals	98	93	91
	Principals	97	94	93
School staff have helped me to become more involved in my child's education.	Teachers	97	84	78
	Office Staff	92	86	85
	Counselor(s)	93	90	87
	Assistant Principals	93	81	78
	Principals	93	82	79
School staff welcome my input in academic decisions about my child.	Teachers	97	88	83
	Office Staff	94	90	88
	Counselor(s)	95	93	90
	Assistant Principals	94	97	84
	Principal	95	88	86
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication.	Teachers	99	92	86
	Office Staff	96	93	87
	Counselor(s)	96	94	89
	Assistant Principals	96	88	85
	Principal	96	89	85
School staff treat my child fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability.	Teachers	98	93	89
	Office Staff	97	95	93
	Counselor(s)	99	94	92
	Assistant Principals	98	93	91
	Principal	97	93	93

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005.

In the 2003 and 2004 Parent Survey, most parents indicated that they were aware of benchmark testing. However, not all agreed with whether it benefited children's academic achievement, especially at the high school level. Table 8 shows that this trend is still prevalent in the 2005 survey although overall percentages are higher in 2005 than in 2003.

Table 8: Percentages of Parents Responding that AISD Benchmark Testing is Helpful, by School Level, 2002-2003 Through 2004-2005

AISD's benchmark testing is helping to improve my child's academic achievement.	%	%	%
	Agree 2003	Agree 2004	Agree 2005
Elementary	64	69	77
Middle	58	61	66
High	43	42	66

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2003 Through 2005.

Review of survey results from both the 2005 AISD Parent Survey and the 2005 AISD Employee Coordinated Survey show that about two-thirds of parents and less than one-fifth of teachers were aware of the AISD Ombudsman office. See Table 9.

Table 9: Percentages of Responses of AISD Parents and Teachers by Grade Level About Awareness of the AISD Ombudsman, 2004-2005

	Elementary	Middle	High
I am aware of the AISD Ombudsman	%	%	%
AISD Parent Survey-Parents	69	57	61
Employee Coordinated Survey-Teachers	14	17	11

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

Table 10 shows that the majority of parents and campus staff agreed on some items about the provision of information to parents about school and district policies, requirements, and expectations. Although most parents and campus staff agreed with the items in Table 10, nearly one-third of the elementary and middle school staff said they did not provide parents with information about required curriculum, and more than one fourth of middle school staff said they did not provide parents with information about AISD's attendance policy.

Table 10: Percentages of AISD Parents and Campus Staff Responding to Items Regarding the Provision of Information to Parents About School and District Policies, 2004-2005

Parents are provided information about the following school and district policies.	AISD Parent Survey			Employee Coordinated Survey		
	Elementary %	Middle %	High %	Elementary %	Middle %	High %
Student Behavior						
Expectations	98	96	93	97	95	94
Required Curriculum	95	91	88	68	69	86
Attendance Policy	98	95	92	81	71	86

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005.

Table 11 shows that most parents who responded to the survey agreed that school staff provided them with academic programs/services information. For example, the majority of middle (91%) and high (87%) school parents reported receiving information about Choice Sheets-Course Selections. The overwhelming majority (91%) of elementary parents also reported receiving information about the District's Student Success Initiative (SSI) policy. However, middle and high school parents' responses indicate there is room for improvement in school staff's dissemination of information regarding programs/services, such as Special Education, Bilingual/ESL, Gifted and Talented, availability of tutoring, and Advanced Placement and Dual Credit Courses.

Table 11: Percentages of Parents' Responses To Survey Items About Whether School Staff Provided Information Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services, 2004-2005

School staff provided me with information about the following programs:	School Level	% Agree	% Disagree
Student Success Initiative (EL only)	Elementary	97	3
Special Education	Elementary	89	11
	Middle	80	20
	High	74	26
Bilingual/ESL Program	Elementary	89	11
	Middle	78	22
	High	72	28
Gifted and Talented Program	Elementary	87	13
	Middle	75	25
	High	71	28
Availability of Tutoring	Elementary	85	15
	Middle	85	15
	High	82	18
Choice Sheets-Course Selections (HS and MS only)	Middle	91	9
	High	87	13
Advanced Placement (HS and MS only)	Middle	80	20
	High	83	17
Dual Credit Courses (HS and MS only)	Middle	66	34
	High	77	23

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005.

Although Table 12 shows that the majority of high school parents' responses were positive when asked if school staff provided them with graduation and post-graduation information, middle school parents were more moderate in their responses. However, these topics may be of more immediate concern to high school students and their parents than to those at middle school because graduation will occur sooner.

Table 12: Percentages of Secondary Parents' Responses to Survey Items About Whether School Staff Provided Graduation and Post-graduation Information, 2004-2005

School staff provided me with the following graduation and post-graduation information:	% Agreeing	% Disagreeing
High School graduation requirements and plans:		
Middle School	68	32
High School	85	15
Personal Graduation Plans (PGPs)		
Middle School	61	39
High School	70	30
Financial Aid and Scholarship		
Middle School	59	61
High School	75	25
College Opportunities		
Middle School	62	38
High School	76	24
Career Opportunities		
Middle School	62	38
High School	74	26

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

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 information to parents. They should review the campus-specific survey data returned to them. Administrators should take steps to provide middle and high school parents with more information regarding their children's academic plans, goals, and preparedness for TAKS. Administrators should also make a concerted effort to provide parents at all grade levels with more information about the availability of other academic programs and services at their campuses and the purpose of Benchmark testing. In order to address these issues, administrators should consider hosting seminars or workshops regarding these issues. Also, parents must be provided opportunities for two-way communication about and involvement in their child's education. Parents' input must be recognized and welcomed by campus administrators.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support staff who work directly with parents and other school staff were held accountable for provision of parent support services through their time and effort documentation concerning 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 13 shows how the parent support specialists' major duties are aligned with Key Performance Indicators.

Table 13: AISD Parent Support Specialist Major Duties and Key Performance Indicators Accountability Model

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 Department of School, Family and Community Education, 2003-2004.

To document parent support specialists' MDs and KPIs, along with the various services they provided to the parents and staff on their campuses, the parent support staff completed two (Fall and End-of-Year) reports and an annual questionnaire. The relevant MDs and KPIs were listed at the end of each question to assist the parent support specialists in completing the questionnaire. In the Fall 2004 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 2004 and December 2004. Seventy-one percent (n=41) of the parent support specialists returned this report. On the spring 2005 end-of-year questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the parent support specialists about activities from January through May as well as some general parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information in the following areas:

- School staff with whom parent support specialists worked;
- Vertical Team affiliation and collaborative activities;
- Participation in AISD resource programs and professional development;

- Implementation of District initiatives (e.g., Read and Rise Circles Program, Character Education/Positive Behavior Training, and grade level transition);
- Contributions to community empowerment and parent training;
- Provision of professional development training sessions 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 parent support specialists' professional development sessions also were used to supplement data from the fall report and the end-of-year questionnaire.

Completed end-of-year questionnaires, which contained the January through May 2005 activities, were returned by 84% (n=49) of the parent support specialists. Six (11%) of the parent support specialists submitted fall interim reports only, one remained on medical leave all year, and one left the position in late fall. One GEAR-UP program parent support specialist also completed a questionnaire, and these data are included in the total.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TYPES OF TRAINING PROVIDED

Of the parent support specialists (n=49) who completed the questionnaire, 88% (n=43) reported that they worked with their principal, 8% (n=4) indicated that they did not work with their principal, and 4% (n=2) did not respond to the question. Eighty-two percent (n=40) worked with other school staff (e.g., counselors, reading specialists, comprehensive education director, assistant principals); 69% (n=34) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president; and 61% (n=30) worked with community agencies and organizations. Some of the organizations that partner with the parent support specialists include: Austin Community College, Insure-A-Kid, Austin Police Department Council of At Risk Youth, Child INC, Family Forward-Next Step, 21st Century, Communities In Schools, Medicaider Program (online search engine for determining applicant's eligibility for children's Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program CHIP); Hispanic CREO; Volunteer Legal Service; Safe Place; Boy and Girl Scouts of America. (*Major Duties 2, 3, and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

The parent support specialists reported participating in a variety of professional development activities during the year. The monthly four-hour parent support specialists' professional development meetings offered by the AISD Family Resource Center were attended by 94% (n=46) of the respondents. AISD's Read and Rise Circles Program Implementation workshops, Medicaider program presentation taught by Insure-a-Kid staff, and the Parent Leader

Network Retreat (offered in partnership by AISD, Connections Resource Center, and the Family Forward project) were attended by most (n=36 or 74%) of the parent support specialists. (*Key Performance Indicator 4*)

Eighty-two percent (n=40) of the parent support specialists reported working with their Vertical Team schools regularly on the following projects: transitioning students from elementary to middle school to high school, Celebration of Families, Parent Involvement Week, Vertical Team Community Resource Fairs (e.g., Rebel Fest sponsored by Travis High School), Learning Walks, and other activities. Thirteen percent (n=6) said they did not work with a Vertical Team, and 6 did not answer the question. (*Major Duty 1 and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

Results from the parent support specialists' fall reports and end-of-year questionnaire showed that parent support specialists spent the bulk of their time on the following activities during 2004-2005:

- Preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies;
- Attending meetings/professional development sessions;
- 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 professional development sessions to school staff;
- Implementing District Initiative programs, such as Read and Rise and student transition;
- Planning and implementing joint ventures, such as Parent Involvement Week, community fairs, grade-level transition; and
- Assisting school staff whenever necessary (e.g., translation, clerical, filling in for absent staff).

Of all of these activities, 98% were categorized within their 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 2004-2005, 39% (n=17) of the responding parent support specialists had provided at least two professional development training sessions for staff on their campuses, and 36% (n=16) had provided three or more professional development training sessions to campus staff. Twenty-three percent (n=10) of the parent support specialists provided

only one professional development session to campus staff, and 2% (n=1) reported that they had not provided training sessions to campus staff. (*Major Duty 5 and Key Performance Indicator 2*)

Table 14 shows a summary of numbers of families (parents and children) served through IMPACT Team efforts. Ninety-five percent (n=54) of the parent support specialists indicated that they had provided services to families of Level I high needs students for whom preventative intervention was not an option (e.g., students and families thrust into homelessness, loss of only source of income, and/or families facing major medical problems). Ninety-five (n=54) percent of the parent support specialists also provided Level II intervention services (e.g., assisted with obtaining clothing, tutoring, mentoring, medical services, family literacy classes, student enrollment 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 regarding a course of action. Four parent support specialist respondents did not complete the IMPACT service section of the report or questionnaire. (*Major Duty 6 and Key Performance Indicator 3*)

Table 14: Numbers of Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists Through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2004-2005

School Level	# Parent Support Specialists	# Level I Parents	# Level I Students	# Level II Parents	# Level II Students
Elementary	41	1,859	2,029	2,441	2,318
Middle	8	588	680	363	375
High	5	121	192	202	182
Total	54	2,568	2,901	3,006	2,875

Source: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2004-2005.

Table 15 shows a summary of parent support specialists' data concerning parent and community participation in various school-based activities. Please note that because parents may have attended more than one event, participation counts that follow include duplicates. Literacy activities, such as principal "get-togethers", Principles of Learning sessions, Learning Walks, and seminars, drew the highest number of parents (n=40,722). Assemblies, such as Back-to-School Night and End-of-School Year, information gatherings (e.g., AISD policies and preparing for TAKS), Cinco de Mayo, Black History month, Parent Involvement Week celebrations, and awards (e.g., honor roll, attendance, others) drew 34,143 parents. Fairs and fundraisers drew more than 32,000. Parents' attendance at workshops on wellness (n=20,740) and social issues (n=5,922) ranked fourth and fifth, respectively. Although other workshops, such as Information on Texas Star, Taking Care of Traffic Tickets, Discount Dental Plan, PSAT & College, Cafecito con Comadres, Austin Blueprint Elementary Schools Initiative, and many others received high attendance among the various categories of activities involving parents, they were too varied for

listing. While not shown in Table 15, parent support specialists also recruited 718 parents for participation in the Medicaid program and conducted 169 Medicaid eligibility searches as part of their wellness activities. (*Major Duty 2 and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

Table 15: Number of Parents in Attendance by Activity Category as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialist, 2004-2005

Activity	# Parent Participants (Duplicated Count)
Assemblies	34,143
Literacy and Curriculum	
Family Night	16,708
Family Literacy	9,220
Principal Get Together	8,581
Seminars	3,909
TAKS	3,437
TEKS	1,229
Learning Walks	1,190
Principles of Learning	1,114
Fairs	
Fund-raising	11,977
*Other	10,541
Academics	7,234
Health	2,774
Wellness Workshops	
*Other	9,526
Dental	4,614
Vision	2,915
Immunization	2,870
Self Esteem	511
Stress	304
Social Issues Workshops	
*Other	4,747
Drugs	777
Teen Pregnancies	398

Source: Parent Support Specialists' Fall 2004 Report and Spring 2005 Questionnaire.

Note: 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 to provide follow-up contacts and services where applicable. Fifty-one percent (n=25) of the parent support specialist respondents listed assistance with regular parent-teacher conferences and 41% (n=20) listed oral or sign language translation during parent-teacher conferences. Thirty-seven percent (n=18) mentioned set-up and participation in Admission, Review, or Dismissal (ARD), Local Support

Team (LST) meetings, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act hearings. Other activities reported included 27% (n=13) who set up and participated in academic/progress, grade placement, TAKS, and/or grade level conferences or meetings; 27% (n=13) who provided assistance with attendance, discipline, and conflict resolution conferences; 18% (n=9) who made home visits with school staff; and 8% (n=4) who facilitated and followed-up on students' medical or vision problems. (*Major Duty 1 and Key Performance Indicator 3*)

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Some 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, 90% (n=44) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting a total of 2,002 parents who volunteered 39,272 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that a total of 391 business organizations donated 7,820 hours of volunteer service as mentors, buddies, and in other roles. Finally, they reported that 545 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, and community members other than parents) volunteered 49,695 hours of service as mentors or tutors. (*Major Duty 6 and Key Performance Indicator 3*)

ADULT LITERACY

Federal and state Title I Part A grant guidelines suggest that all Title I schools collaborate with other programs in the district, including adult literacy programs, to empower parents through self-improvement so that they may assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on questionnaire results, 69% (n=34) of parent support specialists held adult literacy classes on their campuses during the 2004-2005 school year. The parent support specialists at 32 campuses enrolled parents in adult literacy classes at other sites because the classes were unavailable at their own campuses. A total of 1,763 adults were enrolled in these classes between August 2004 and May 2005. Forty-eight percent (n=851) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2005, and 19% (n=164) entered the workforce for the first time. (*Major Duties 2, 4, and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Eighty-eight percent (n=43) of the parent support specialists responded that they used the district parent survey results from 2003-2004 in developing their campus improvement plans for the 2004-2005 school year. All parent support specialists said they would use results from the 2004-2005 parent survey in planning their 2005-2006 campus improvement plans' 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 choose one parent involvement activity from a list of five (presentation, seminar, workshop, writing a grant, or other) that had occurred at their campuses and was 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-nine percent (n=14) of parent support specialists selected presentations on topics such as Family Involvement Week, Principal/Parent Round Table Discussion, Family Literacy Night, Extravaganzas, Health and Vertical Team Fairs, a 10-class AIDS of Austin series, and The Austin Project (TAP). TAP is a \$12,000 grant-funded project with three components: (1) enhancing Pre-K children's reading and character habits through books and stuffed animals; (2) involving parents and their children under age 4 in a night of multiple interactive games; and (3) visits to local attractions, such as the Coach Barn for rides on the coach-like buses, Children's Museum, and other sites. Another 16% (n=8) reported unplanned presentations made during "times of opportunity" (e.g., Back-to-School Night, Principal Coffees, Vertical Team Meetings, etc.) on topics such as bullying, drugs and teens, gangs, and the Read and Rise Circles Program.

Twenty-five percent (n=12) of the parent support specialists reported seminars on the Read and Rise Circles Program. Eighteen percent (n=9) reported educational workshops, such as Parents' TAKS Night, Family Reading workshops, Parenting workshops, KLRU sessions, Shared Reading Program, and a series of Nutrition Classes. Six percent (n=3) chose grant writing for Prime Time After School (\$18,000), an electronic sign that provides continuous event updates (\$30,000), and TAP (\$12,000). All of these activities were reported as successes because they increased parents' familiarity with the school, the school district, or community offices or services, and they provided instant help to families in most cases. (*Major Duty 2, and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

THE READ AND RISE CIRCLES PROGRAM

In fall 2004, parent support specialists at elementary schools were asked to help the District implement a new initiative, the Read and Rise Circles Program, sponsored by the National Urban League, Scholastic Inc., and State Farm Insurance companies. The Read and Rise Circles Program is an early literacy and pre-reading skills program (Parents as First Teachers or Los Padres/Madres Como Los Primeros Maestros) aimed at developing strong reading skills in children during their early childhood years (birth to 4 years). The program objective is to train parents to:

- Be first teachers;
- Use the home as first campus;
- Use the kitchen table as first desk, first library table, and/or first math or science lab; and
- Use junk mail for geography, shopping, and many other kinds of teaching activities.

Read and Rise Circles Program training was provided to 43 parent support specialists during fall 2004 by the Family Resource Center's Parent Program specialist. In January 2005, five parent support specialists shared experiences, tips, and translated materials with other parent support specialists at their monthly professional development meeting. The presenters suggested that parent support specialists:

- Take the program's teaching manual apart, laminate the pages, and put them into a binder for planning and copying ease.
- Utilize available resources, such as campus staff's bilingual teaching materials, Eager To Learn and KLRU tapes, personal storybooks, and other teaching tools.
- Prepare and practice presentations, and make a prop box or bag for all of the books and charts that will be used in the presentation.
- Modify presentations to fit the home language of the audience (Spanish for Spanish-speakers, English for English speakers, and bilingual for Spanish-English speakers).
- Keep presentations short (a maximum of 7 minutes).
- Use the reading and mathematics comprehension levels appropriate for your audience.
- Model animated reading and use of junk mail as teaching tools.
- Give parents something to take home to put into practice.
- Make a Show and Tell Book for posterity's sake. The book is a large, 36" x 48", stand-alone, fold out three-panel, display board. Making the book is a required activity in the program's curriculum. The Family Resource Center's Parent Program specialist ordered the display boards and one-time use cameras for the project.

Parent support specialists picked up these items at the end of the January (cameras) and March (display boards) professional development sessions. They were used to make a visual record of the program's curriculum, activities, and participants. These boards also were designated to be part of a planned Read and Rise Circles Program Showcase at the end of the school year.

The parent support specialists requested at the January 2005 meeting that their Read and Rise Program activities be recorded through the annual Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire. Thus, the Questionnaire asked each elementary parent support specialist to provide:

- A brief description of their program, including a mission statement, teaming information, and facilitator usage;
- Total numbers of workshops given;
- Total number of parents in attendance;
- Language used most often in the workshops;
- Description of the handouts used; and
- Parent feedback about the workshops.

Ninety-three percent (n=37) of the parent support specialists who returned completed questionnaires provided information about their Read and Rise Circles Program. A review of their program descriptions provided the following composite English and Spanish mission statement: "The desire of the parent support specialist is to provide parents with essential skills and techniques that empower the parents to become the first purveyors of literacy to their children. Se diría que, el deseo de los especialistas en apoyo a padres de familia es proporcionar a los padres las destrezas y técnicas esenciales para capacitarlos como los primeros proveedores de instrucción para su hijos."

Program descriptions also indicated that parent support specialists conducted Read and Rise Circles Program workshops as main facilitators, often teaming with school staff (reading specialists, kindergarten teachers, curriculum specialists) and/or other parent support specialists. Several schools teamed up for these programs: Andrews/Sims/Pecan Springs; Barrington/Hart/Harris; Cook/McBee/Graham, and Allan/Ortega. A total of 26 parent support specialists reported working with campus staff.

Additional responses showed that parent support specialists conducted 378 Read and Rise Circles Program workshops, with 3,237 parents in attendance. Of these workshops, 53% (n=21) of parent support specialists reported using English and Spanish languages in their presentations, 33% (n=13) used Spanish only, and 8% (n=3) used English only. A variety of handouts and/or materials were used in these workshops, such as instructions for writing the alphabet, sounding out letters, Eager To Learn video tapes, puppets, KLRU materials, poems, English/Spanish

nursery rhymes, vocabulary lists, “Make-It Take It” booklets, building blocks, and behavior modification materials.

Parent support specialists shared feedback from parents, indicating that parents felt they had learned how to prepare their preschool age children in many different ways that would help them enjoy reading and pave the way for better performance when the child entered school. Parents also reported improved communication and increased comfort level when they visited the classrooms of their school-age children or attended school events.

There were some parent suggestions for program improvement, such as lengthening the presentation time, expanding the number of sessions offered, and continuing the program to the end of school (May). (*Major Duty 2 and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

STUDENT SCHOOL-LEVEL TRANSITIONS

Eighty-three percent (n=40) of the parent support specialists reported working with their Vertical Team (VT) schools regularly on the student transitioning project (elementary to middle school to high school). Middle schools usually coordinated the events with their elementary feeder schools and receiving high schools. Parent support specialists arranged Learning Walks at receiving campuses to acquaint parents and students with campus layout, buildings, and staff. Middle and high school campus staff participated in staff meetings at some of their elementary feeder campuses. The parent support specialists also provided on-site transition classes/camps for parents and students either at the end of May or the first week in June. (*Major Duties 1,3, and Key Performance Indicator 1*)

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING 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 these specialists. For instance, in the past three years of the Employee

Coordinated Survey, many campus staff reported the need for training on how to work with parents to support student learning. Campus administrators should promote parent specialists' ability to provide professional staff development training sessions to teachers and other campus staff. Then, campus staff may gain improved skills and knowledge on how to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success. Parent support specialists should also enhance parents' and staff's awareness of AISD support services and community resources through presentations or other communications specific to these services and resources.

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 in its participating fiscal year. This partnership consistently has resulted in savings to the district.

Table 14 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past three years. Increases were observed in 2004-2005 from 2003-2004 for all categories except number of volunteers. APIE's records show that schools with parent support staff accounted for 39% of in-kind contributions, 70% of cash donations, 47% of volunteer services, and 26% of volunteer hours. APIE staff's computed cash value of volunteered services provided by the reporting schools totaled \$3,240,580. For more information from APIE's 2004-2005 report, see the Austin Partners in Education's web site (www.austinpartners.org).

Table 16: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through Austin Partners in Education, 2002-2003 Through 2004-2005

Type of Donation	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,434,112	\$2,402,459	\$2,511,687
Cash Donations	\$967,175	\$268,156	\$277,256
Number of Volunteers	10,606	14,906	12,615
Number of Volunteer Hours	220,072	180,622	186,315

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 2002-2003 through 2004-2005.

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE

AISD realizes financial savings through a community partnership with Austin Partners In Education (APIE) and the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program (QZABP). AISD was selected for participation in the bond program for fiscal year 2005. Donations from 2005 are being used to satisfy a \$5 million plus interest-free bond that will save Austin taxpayers \$4.1 million.

Although APIE's records show substantial increases in several contribution categories (e.g., cash, in-kind, volunteer hours) for 2004-2005, these numbers could have been higher. Eight campuses either did not provide any information to APIE staff, or failed to complete all of the documentation that would have enabled APIE staff to compute volunteer hours and/or the

value of these hours. Since this information allows the opportunity to save district monies, provides information about community support, and assists AISD in grant acquisitions, it is recommended that campus leaders pay closer attention to reporting APIE community support to enhance future savings.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Recent studies (e.g., Turnbull, 2001; Phillips, 1997; Henderson & Berla, 1994) address the importance of parent involvement in student learning. For example, achievement improved more quickly 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). Also, a January 2004 press release by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory reported that when families are engaged in their children's learning at home and in guiding their educational careers, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and pursue higher education (Boethel, 2003). See website www.sedl.org/new/media.html.

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 members 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. These people provide information or services to, for, or about students that inform, aid, and often avert or alleviate at-risk status of students. This report provides some data about AISD's parent involvement programs, suggesting that the district's parent involvement efforts can be improved through the following actions:

- Provide professional development for teachers in working with parents to improve student achievement and behavior.
- Provide information to parents, teachers, and students about district resources available to them, such as the Ombudsman office, academic programs, and grade level-transition programs.
- Ensure effective documentation of activities and completion of reports by school staff (e.g., parent support specialists, counselors, clerks) so that the District receives complete parent and community involvement data.
- Enhance school staff's knowledge about the effective use of benchmark test results on their campuses.
- Provide high school parents with more support, information, and opportunities to have two-way communication and input on academic decisions involving their child.

Campus administrators must use cost-effective means to empower teachers and other school staff to carry out their roles as active stakeholders in AISD by providing training for them on involving 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, they have relationships with the teachers and the parents, and they are available. Therefore, it is

recommended that campus administrators use the parent support specialists to provide the training that teachers need to work with parents on improving student achievement and behavior.

Second, campus and district administrators must use cost-effective means in their efforts to provide parents, teachers, and students with information about district resources available to them, such as the Ombudsman office and grade-level transition programs, and should encourage use of such resources. Parent support specialists are the ideal medium for this task because: (1) they already use these resources in many of the services performed for parents, students, or school staff; (2) they have established relationships with teachers, parents, and students enrolled on their campuses; (3) they often facilitate some of the activities associated with the Ombudsman office or the grade-level transition camps; and (4) they can merge this information into other training offered to school staff, parents, and students.

A third recommendation is that campus staff pay close attention to reporting APIE community support data because AISD realizes savings through the Quality Zone Academy Bond Program based, in part upon these data. Contributions also provide validation of community support, which helps the District's standing in the community and improves the District's chances for approval in applications for large grants that may be invested in furthering students' academic achievement.

AISD must address certain school staff's (especially teachers') perceptions about the effective use of Benchmark test results on their campuses because the Student Learning Profile (Benchmark) Assessment Process is a part of AISD's current curriculum, and teachers should be using these data to improve teaching strategies, to measure student progress, and to communicate the progress to students and parents. Also, there is a possibility that staff's negative opinions about the tests could be passed on to parents, which could hinder the helpfulness of benchmark testing. Since AISD's Curriculum department staff have specific skills in the administration, interpretation, and application of AISD's benchmark tests, a fourth recommendation is for AISD's Curriculum department staff to provide more professional development training sessions to campus staff regarding benchmark testing and the use of the results. Professional development might bring accord among campus staff regarding whether or not their campus' use of the results is effective.

According to AISD Policy on Community Relations [GK (LOCAL)], parents, families, and community members are all partners with schools for the purpose of promoting student success throughout a child's educational experience. Therefore, the final recommendation is that campus administrators make every effort to offer parents at all grade levels, especially at high school grade levels, support and opportunities to have two-way communication and input on academic decisions involving their children.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STAFF RESPONSES TO THE EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY

Numbers and Percentages of AISD Staff Responses to the Employee Coordinated Survey Item About Provision of Information to Parents on Classroom Requirements or Expectations, 2004-2005

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following requirements or expectations:	Non-Teaching Staff (n=245)			Teachers (n=647)		
	Administrators (n=95)	Classified Staff (n=17)	Other Professionals (n=133)	Elementary (350)	Middle (n=140)	High (n=157)
Discipline	99%	88%	81%	91%	88%	83%
Classroom Behavior	98%	75%	80%	97%	95%	94%
Attendance	97%	94%	83%	81%	71%	86%
Compliance with district policies and procedures	91%	91%	78%	68%	69%	61%
Participation in classroom Activities	88%	82%	76%	88%	84%	74%
Completing Assignments	87%	71%	76%	84%	90%	90%
Observing school safety rules	85%	85%	72%	74%	56%	41%
Turning in Homework	76%	71%	75%	79%	75%	73%
Respect	69%	69%	80%	72%	64%	59%
Loyalty	13%	41%	40%	20%	19%	19%

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005

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