

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2007–2008



Austin Independent School District
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parent involvement is a key element of AISD's efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization (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. 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 gatekeepers to communication with parents about their children's academic progress, examining these staff members' knowledge about and experience with parent involvement is important. AISD's 2007–2008 Employee Coordinated Survey data revealed concerns about staff members' self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and about staff needs for training. As in prior years, a relatively high percentage of teachers (53%) reported parental involvement was one of the areas in which they needed training. Among classified staff who responded to the survey, inclusive of campus-based parent support specialists, 67% reported needing professional training for working with and advising parents about various school-related issues.

Important information was gathered from the district-wide 2007–2008 AISD Parent Survey. Parents were asked if they had received information regarding specific AISD school and district policies. Parents' responses across grade levels showed that most agreed that staff had provided them with adequate information about AISD's parental involvement policy. However, at least 25% of both middle school and high school parents disagreed when asked if school staff provided them with adequate information about personal graduation plans, financial aid/scholarships, college opportunities, or career opportunities. In keeping with AISD's guidelines for model customer service, these percentages of disagreement must be addressed if the district is to provide effective services to customers (e.g., parents, community members).

The majority of parents across all grade levels reported that school staff provided them with adequate information about their child (e.g., positive feedback; personal information regarding the child's behavior; academic progress; academic plans and goals; preparedness for Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, or TAKS; and whether the child was at risk for failing a grade). However, parents of high school students agreed less often than did parents of students at other school levels with respect to these items.

Parents' responses across all grade levels showed that most (98% at elementary, 92% at middle, and 86% at high school) had positive experiences with teachers (as compared with other campus staff) on topics such as being treated with respect and having opportunities for

involvement in their child's education. When asked about their involvement in campus activities as well as in their child's schoolwork (i.e., homework), the majority of parents reported that they regularly helped their child with homework and said that they were likely to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and general school meetings.

In the 2007–2008 school year, 71 AISD campuses and two departments (School, Family, and Community Education, and Bilingual Education) used funds to employ parent support staff (e.g., parent support specialists, refugee family support specialist, parent program specialist). These staff provided workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. They provided federally mandated Title I compliance workshops and services to parents and school staff such as the collection of their schools' compacts (i.e., an agreement/contract between the school, parent and child); supported previously established initiatives (e.g., literacy programs, transition between grade levels, positive behavior); and introduced new initiatives (e.g., nutrition and fitness programs). The parent support specialists provided professional development sessions for school staff and participated in their respective schools' at-risk student assistance programs. According to Dr. L. Clark-Brown (2003), 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(s) common to the community and school, and provide parents with academic training opportunities or information to support student learning. These staff can assist the district in efforts to close the academic achievement gap between low-achieving and high-achieving students and can provide a crucial link between parents and schools. However, based on AISD's 2007–2008 Employee Coordinated Survey data, the majority of classified staff (e.g., clerks, parent support specialists, secretaries) responses indicated that they needed more training in providing parents with information regarding parental involvement. Thus, it is important to review any concerns regarding a perceived need for additional training relevant to these specialists.

In Fall 2003, AISD mandated the implementation of a district-wide accountability model for all parent involvement staff that included a set of major duties (MDs), key performance indicators (KPIs), and time and effort documentation for parent support specialists employed at campuses. Data regarding parent support specialists for 2007–2008 indicated the majority of these AISD staff performed their MDs and met their campuses' goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members.

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 of grant applications. For instance, AISD will realize an approximate cumulative financial savings of \$12 million for fiscal years 2008–2010 through community partnerships with the AISD Partners in Education (APIE) program and with the Qualified Zone Academic Bond Program (QZABP). QZABP allows school districts to receive a waiver on repayment of interest on school bonds that are sold, provided that each campus in the bond package makes an in-kind contribution toward community support that is 10% of its total budget during its participating year. A review of APIE's 2007–2008 records showed a substantial decrease from the prior year with respect to the in-kind contribution category. The numbers for in-kind contributions might have been higher if 100% of schools had fully completed the reports they submitted.

A review of the most current estimates of AISD's expenditures for supporting parent and community services for 2007–2008 showed \$13,440,060 as of June 30, 2008. AISD's total 2006–2007 expenditures for these services were \$16,284,286, according to Texas Education Agency (TEA) documentation, which showed a per child expenditure of \$199. The amount of expenditures for 2007–2008 likely will increase when all spending from various reporting periods has been reconciled and validated by the TEA next year.

It is important to remember that parent participation and student attendance influence most educational allocations, and that the district should use all available internal resources to promote parent involvement in efficient and effective ways. Therefore, in keeping with the purpose of this report and with 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 (e.g., parents and community organizations); and cost-saving considerations are offered:

1. One of the parent support specialists' MDs is to provide staff development sessions about parent involvement and available AISD resources (e.g., the Parent Support Office, or PSO). Campus administrators should use the parent support specialists to provide teachers with staff development opportunities. Thus, campus administrators could address both the needs of teachers and the goals of parent support specialists in this area. Because parent support specialists already work closely with the PSO, campus administrators should request the parent support specialists' assistance in providing workshops or presentations to increase awareness of the PSO among school staff and parents.
2. Home visits also are included in parent support specialists' MDs as a way to contact parents who may not have a means of communication (e.g., telephone, e-mail, cell

phones) or of transportation, and as a way to initiate the paperwork for special services, verify addresses, and follow up on projects begun. The repetitive nature of these visits revealed in the annual parent support specialists' questionnaire suggests that district and campus administrators could better embrace the slogan of "working smarter, not harder" by developing district-wide criteria that campus staff can use when making decisions about when to transfer parent/student's situations to other campus/district staff who have more appropriate resources.

3. Because parents clearly are AISD customers and stakeholders, campus administrators and their staff must review parent survey results and make every effort to ensure that parents enjoy positive interactions with all school staff. This is especially true for middle and high schools whose campuses' staff should concentrate on improving parent involvement by examining feedback from parents on the parent survey.
4. Currently, AISD's APIE donations are used to satisfy the \$5 million interest-free QZABP bond that will save Austin taxpayers millions. 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 data to enhance future savings and to reinvigorate the level of support to AISD schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
LIST OF TABLES.....	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
EVALUATION OVERVIEW	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OVERVIEW	3
Policy	3
District Parent Involvement Accountability	3
Parent Support Office	3
Community Involvement	4
EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS.....	4
Providing Information About Campus Expectations to Parents.....	4
Staff Development Needs	6
AISD Support Services and Community Resources.....	6
Recommendations Based on Employee Coordinated Survey Results.....	7
AISD PARENT SURVEY 2007–2008.....	9
Parent Survey Results	9
Summary and Recommendations From Parent Survey Results	15
PARENT SUPPORT OFFICE QUESTIONNAIRE	16
PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE.....	19
Staff Collaboration and Training	21
Parent Involvement Activities and Services	22
Special Activities	26
Adult Literacy	26
Use of District Parent Survey Results.....	27
Best Practice	27
District Initiatives	28
Special Support Programs.....	29
Recommendations Regarding Parent Support Specialists	30
AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.....	32
Recommendation for APIE and AISD Campuses	33
SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	34
REFERENCE LIST.....	37

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: AISD Staff Providing Information About Parental Involvement Expectations, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	5
Table 2: AISD Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2007–2008	6
Table 3: AISD Staff Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	7
Table 4: Parents Having Positive Experiences With Various School Staff, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	10
Table 5: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff About Their Child, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	11
Table 6: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	12
Table 7: Parents Receiving Graduation and Post-Graduation Information From School Staff, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008.....	13
Table 8: Parents Believing Their Child’s School Is a Safe Learning Environment, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	13
Table 9: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008	14
Table 10: Parents Attending Campus Activities, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008.....	15
Table 11: AISD Parent Support Specialist MDs and KPIs Accountability Model	19
Table 12: AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists Through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2007–2008.....	23
Table 13: Parents in Attendance, by Activity Category, as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008.....	25
Table 14: Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through APIE, 2004–2005 Through 2007–2008.....	32

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. Other programs in AISD involve parents and support staff in their operations, such as those that target specific activities (e.g., enrollment in postsecondary education; prevention of student dropouts, gangs, teen pregnancies, and drug use).

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

One goal of this evaluation was to provide information to the district's board of trustees, administrators, program managers, principals, and parent support specialists about the major duties (MDs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) of AISD's parent support staff. A second goal of the evaluation was to provide information to all AISD staff so they can involve parents in richer relationships with their schools. The third goal was to provide district decision makers with information and recommendations about parent involvement program modifications, as well as guidance regarding 2008–2009 parent involvement goals.

This evaluation assembled information from district staff and parents about the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools during the 2007–2008 school year. Because parent and community involvement included a variety of district and community activities, this evaluation focused on six specific objectives relevant to the district's reporting needs:

1. Evaluate the extent and quality of parental 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' MDs with KPIs
4. Describe parents' perceptions of treatment by school staff and the 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 parent involvement resources, needs for specific staff development opportunities related to parent involvement, and provision of information to parents about classroom and campus-related requirements and expectations
6. Document AISD's community involvement through the AISD Partners in Education (APIE) program and the Qualified Zone Academic Bond Program (QZABP)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people worked with the AISD Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) to develop and conduct this evaluation. Many thanks go to our project secretary for her assistance with various project tasks. DPE also wishes to thank AISD's School, Family, and Community Education and Bilingual Education family support staffs, parent support specialists, Parent Support Office's (PSO) parent programs staff, Parent Teacher Association/Parent Teacher Organization (PTA/PTO) presidents, the grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, members of the Parent/Family Involvement Advisory Council, various school staff, APIE, and parents residing in the AISD attendance area.

AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OVERVIEW

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, promotion of student learning, use of community resources, participation in decision making, and volunteering. In addition, the AISD board of trustees adopted a policy governance model in 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.

DISTRICT PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

In 2003, members of AISD's cabinet (i.e., superintendent, associate superintendents, and other lead staff) approved implementation of a district-wide accountability model for parent involvement staff that was designed to ensure uniform delivery across all campuses for services, forms of communication, and rules of governance. These measures were established to provide all AISD families with support, as needed. The model standardized the parent support specialist 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 MDs, as measured by KPIs. These KPIs are defined later in this report. The 2003–2004 school year was the baseline year for implementing the model. The 2005–2006 school year was the first year for making improvements and evaluating progress from the baseline year.

PARENT SUPPORT OFFICE

The PSO is a part of AISD's School, Family, and Community Education department. Housed in the Annex of Allan Elementary School, the PSO's parent involvement program staff include a parent involvement program administrator, three parent support coordinators, a community relations specialist, and a clerk. Although each position has individual responsibilities, the primary responsibilities of the PSO are to provide leadership and educational training for district staff, parents, and others in the area of parent involvement in order to improve educational success of children and to monitor local compliance with state and federal rules and regulations related to parent involvement programs.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A strong component of community involvement in AISD is the APIE program, which represents a partnership between AISD and the Texas Uniform Unincorporated Nonprofit Association (TUUNA) foundation and 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 2008 Employee Coordinated Survey was distributed to a sample of AISD employees through e-mail in Spring 2008. The survey was a coordinated effort among AISD's offices and departments to gather information from employees district wide. The coordinated survey included questions about parent involvement issues and was sent to a sample of principals and assistant principals (administrators), elementary counselors (non-teaching professionals), teachers (professionals), and parent support specialists (classified). The items regarding parent involvement issues were e-mailed to 9,596 employees. These staff responded to survey items regarding staff development needs, district-wide testing, classroom and campus requirements, school staff expectations, support services, and community resources. The majority of these survey items were offered in four prior employee coordinated surveys, and response outcomes were similar to those in previous years. Thus, tables show multiple years of data when available.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT CAMPUS EXPECTATIONS TO PARENTS

On the employee survey, elementary counselors, elementary and secondary assistant principals, K–12 teachers, and parent support specialists were asked to identify the type of information they most often provided or did not provide to parents about campus expectations, student attendance, and discipline policies. A total of 4,956 valid campus staff responses was counted for the survey. Table 1 shows that, for the 2007–2008 school year, a greater percentage of the teaching staff (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school teachers), compared with non-teaching staff, reported providing information to parents about parent involvement expectations (e.g., working with their child at home on school-related tasks, attending and participating in meetings and the school's PTA, advocating for their child, providing input in decision making, advocating for their child's school, and working with district initiatives). The 2007–2008 data for teachers showed dramatic increases from the prior year with respect to the percentages of teachers providing information to parents regarding advocating for their child's school (67%) and working with their child at home on school-related tasks (75%). However, four items

showed slight decreases from the prior year with respect to the percentages of teachers providing information to parents (e.g., attending and participating in meetings, workshops, and other events; working toward parent/campus solutions; providing input in decision making; and advocating for their child’s school). Non-teaching staff showed decreases from the prior year with respect to the percentages of non-teaching staff providing information to parents about 6 items. It is important for non-teaching and teaching staff to be as vigilant as possible in providing parents with information regarding campus expectations. On the 2007–2008 survey, 36% of the non-teaching (n = 153) and 9% of the teaching staff (n = 62) reported they did not provide parents of students at their campuses with information about requirements or expectations for their child. Further study is warranted to investigate year-to-year differences in response patterns.

Table 1: AISD Staff Providing Information About Parental Involvement Expectations, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following parental involvement expectations:	2006–2007 Non-teaching (n = 416) %	2007–2008 Non-teaching (n = 427) %	2006–2007 Teaching (n = 741) %	2007–2008 Teaching (n = 691) %
Attending and participating in meetings, workshops, etc.	59	43	69	62
Participating in my school’s PTA or PTO	N/A	32	N/A	53
Advocating for their child	47	37	55	67
Providing input in decision-making	56	29	66	39
Working with child at home on school-related tasks	41	40	42	75
Working toward parent/campus solutions	50	38	47	45
Advocating for their child’s school	55	28	83	43
*Working with district initiatives	N/A	30	N/A	36
I do not provide parents of students at my campus with information about requirements or expectations for their child	30	36	7	9

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. N/A indicates no data were available. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Campus staff were asked about the types of professional development opportunities they would like to receive in areas related to parent involvement and communication. As shown in Table 2, the majority of teachers (54%) desired training about advising parents about how to support student learning at home, and about half (50%) wanted training about working with parents on student behavior at school. These two categories also were chosen frequently by other school staff. These same topics have been identified frequently in the past 4 years of the survey (Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

Table 2: AISD Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2007–2008

I would like to receive staff development in the following areas:	Administrators (n = 41) %	Classified (n = 227) %	Other professionals (n = 159) %	Teachers (n = 691) %
Working with parents on student behavior at school (e.g., attendance, discipline)	44	41	17	50
Advising parents about how to support student learning at home	41	31	28	54
General parent-staff communication	29	36	11	20
District/campus parent involvement policy	22	22	9	17
Advising parents about IMPACT meetings	29	15	13	23
Advising parents about grade level curriculum	20	17	6	19
Advising parents about graduation requirements	15	15	5	9
Advising parents on grade-level promotion requirements	24	15	4	13
District/campus parent involvement resources	27	22	13	20

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2007–2008

AISD SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Teaching (n = 691) and non-teaching (n = 427) campus respondents reported their level of awareness about 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); the PSO (AISD

Support Services); city-wide PTA/PTO, and a new item, UpClose, a high school reform program. Table 3 shows that for resource items measured in both 2006–2007 and 2007–2008, non-teaching staff’s awareness increased (the exception being for the Family Connection Organization). Teachers’ awareness increased for four of the continued items and decreased for three. Teachers’ lack of awareness may be related to the fact that they are not the ones who usually provide recommendations for or acquisition of these support services and resources for students and families. So by itself, this finding is not a matter for concern.

Table 3: AISD Staff Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources:	2006–2007	2007–2008	2006–2007	2007–2008
	Non-teaching (n = 416)	Non-teaching (n = 427)	Teaching (n = 741)	Teaching (n = 691)
	%	%	%	%
OSB	34	63	54	51
AISD Ombudsman office	14	33	17	14
IMPACT	15	66	13	69
CHIP	13	55	6	43
PSO (AISD support services)	21	40	18	22
Family Connection Organization	40	24	44	9
Citywide PTA/PTO	28	57	15	39
UpClose Program	N/A	12	N/A	5

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. N/A indicates data were not available. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The AISD Employee Coordinated Survey data suggest that 67% (n = 152) of the classified staff need professional training for working with and advising parents about various school-related issues. This need may be related to the fact that some school staff (i.e., 11% of the parent support specialists) were hired to replace resigning staff during the school year. Also, parent support staff experienced a period of adjustment to the following changes: reorganization of the PSO’s staffing pattern, which included three parent support coordinator positions and one community relations specialist; reassignment of parent support specialists by

vertical teams¹ to the parent support coordinators; changes in internal administrative and managerial operations; and interfacing with other external organizations (e.g., OSB, the Family Connection Organization). The survey data also suggest that campus staff need information about parental involvement and support services at their campuses. In fact, for the seventh year in a row, most campus staff have requested professional development sessions about how to work with parents on various issues (e.g., discipline, support for student learning).

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 about topics such as parent involvement, AISD support services, and community resources.

Lastly, the survey data indicate a strong need for non-teaching staff (e.g., counselors, parent support specialists, nurses) to provide information to parents about parent involvement issues. Because of AISD's efforts to build partnerships that benefit students, parents, schools, and communities, this need must be addressed as soon as possible.

¹ A vertical team is a group of campuses consisting of a high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools.

AISD PARENT SURVEY 2007–2008

The AISD Parent Survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to 115 AISD campuses in Spring 2008. Staff at each campus distributed surveys to parents of students at their school. Parents were asked to complete one survey per child per campus to provide information regarding their unique experiences with the respective campuses. According to Schmitt and Bush-Richards (2008), the survey was designed to monitor the relationships between campus staff and parents.

The total number of surveys returned was 16,106 (12,493 elementary, 1,831 middle, and 1,731 high), which represented approximately 20% of the district's student population. Note that only 14,572 parents (11,812 elementary, 1,354 middle, and 1,426 high) returned surveys in 2006–2007. The survey gathered demographic information from parents about their child. In addition, one open-ended item asked parents about what their child's school had done well and what could be improved. The survey gathered opinions from parents about treatment of parents and students by campus staff; provision of information to parents about programs; campus requirements and expectations; school and district policies; individual student information (e.g., positive feedback, behavior, preparedness for TAKS, academic progress); provision of information to parents about financial aid, scholarships, graduation requirements, college and career opportunities, and parental involvement opportunities or resources; and frequency of parents helping children with homework or participating in various activities at their child's school. Comparison data from the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 surveys are presented in Tables 4 through 10.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Most parents reported having had positive experiences and interactions with campus staff. Table 4 shows the following results from the 2007–2008 parent survey:

- As in previous years, the majority of parents expressed higher levels of agreement regarding positive experiences with teachers than with other staff.
- Parents of elementary school students agreed more often than did parents of secondary school students that experiences with school staff were positive.

From 2006–2007 to 2007–2008, the percentages of secondary school parents reporting positive experiences with staff decreased for the majority of survey items (e.g., involvement in students education, input in academic decisions, opportunities for two-way communication). When asked how school staff treated their child, the percentages of parents at all grade levels agreeing their experiences were positive showed decreases from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 for all staff, with the exception of elementary teachers.

Table 4: Parents Having Positive Experiences With Various School Staff, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Survey item	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect:						
Teachers	93	98	93	93	93	94
Office staff	92	96	89	93	89	89
Counselor(s)	93	95	91	92	92	88
Assistant principals	92	96	91	91	92	87
Principals	92	96	89	92	92	85
School staff have helped me to become more involved in my child's education:						
Teachers	93	97	89	88	81	83
Office staff	88	93	79	86	71	80
Counselor(s)	89	91	83	80	78	77
Assistant principals	89	92	79	80	71	72
Principals	89	91	80	78	70	67
School staff welcome my input in academic decisions about my child:						
Teachers	92	97	90	89	88	86
Office staff	90	93	84	88	79	81
Counselor(s)	90	91	87	82	84	79
Assistant principals	90	93	85	85	81	77
Principals	91	93	84	84	80	73
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication:						
Teachers	93	96	92	91	90	90
Office staff	92	65	84	66	85	67
Counselor(s)	92	93	88	87	85	86
Assistant principals	91	93	86	86	82	80
Principals	91	93	85	85	80	78
School staff treat my child fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability:						
Teachers	93	94	91	89	91	87
Office staff	94	71	91	73	91	72
Counselor(s)	94	89	92	84	92	79
Assistant principals	93	79	90	69	91	59
Principals	93	89	90	78	92	62

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

As shown in Table 5, when parents were asked if schools provided them with individual student information, the majority of parents reported this was the case in both 2006–2007 and 2007–2008. Elementary school parents showed the highest percentage of agreement on all items. The percentages of parents agreeing with these items increased from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008, with most exceptions at the high school level (where decreases occurred on all items, except academic plans and goals). These results indicate the need for school staff to be more vigilant about dissemination of academic progress information to parents of high school students, especially in light of the state’s rigid graduation requirements.

Table 5: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff About Their Child, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Parents are provided the following information about their child:	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
Child’s behavior		
Elementary	93	97
Middle	86	89
High	83	82
Child’s academic progress (e.g., reading, math)		
Elementary	92	96
Middle	88	91
High	84	82
Child’s academic plans and goals		
Elementary	89	93
Middle	73	79
High	68	69
Child’s preparedness for TAKS		
Elementary	89	93
Middle	78	81
High	71	71
Child’s risk of failing a grade		
Elementary	89	91
Middle	85	87
High	82	79
Positive feedback about child		
Elementary	92	95
Middle	86	85
High	83	77

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

Table 6 shows that although most parents who responded to the survey agreed that school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, office staff, and parent support specialists) provided them with information about most academic programs/services, the percentages of parents who agreed on these items decreased from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. These results indicate a need to improve school staff’s dissemination of information regarding programs/services (e.g., availability of tutoring, AISD support services and community resources in Austin, parent family involvement opportunities, and parent family resources).

Table 6: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

School staff provided me enough information about the following programs and resources:	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
Availability of Tutoring		
Elementary	84	73
Middle	84	81
High	80	69
AISD support services and community resources in Austin		
Elementary		
Middle	82	69
High	69	55
	56	39
Parent/Family Involvement Opportunities		
Elementary	92	81
Middle	87	67
High	82	52
Parent/Family Resources		
Elementary	87	70
Middle	80	71
High	71	40

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

Parents of all grade levels were surveyed about whether school staff provided them with graduation and post-graduation information. Table 7 shows that greater percentages of elementary and high school parents reported that they had received such information, compared with middle school parents. Increases in percentages of parents agreeing occurred from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 on many of these items. However, these topics may be of more immediate concern to high school students and their parents than to those at the middle school level because graduation will occur sooner for the former group. Given that only about two-thirds of parents at the high schools reported receiving useful information about personal graduation plans, financial aid, and college and career opportunities, high school staff should increase their efforts to get such information to parents.

Table 7: Parents Receiving Graduation and Post-Graduation Information From School Staff, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

School staff provided me with useful information about the following graduation and post-graduation topics:	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
High school graduation requirements and plans		
Elementary	61	83
Middle	59	71
High	64	81
Personal graduation plans (PGPs)		
Elementary	73	89
Middle	65	62
High	83	64
Financial aid and scholarship		
Elementary	71	80
Middle	60	57
High	65	69
College opportunities		
Elementary	70	77
Middle	60	57
High	70	68
Career opportunities		
Elementary	71	76
Middle	59	62
High	64	63

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

Most parents who responded to the 2006–2007 AISD Parent Survey believed their child’s school was a safe learning environment. Table 8 shows similar results for the 2007–2008 survey, including an increase in the percentages of parents holding this belief at all grade levels.

Table 8: Parents Believing Their Child’s School Is a Safe Learning Environment, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

My child’s school is a safe learning environment:	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
Elementary	92	96
Middle	85	87
High	80	84

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

The 2007–2008 AISD Parent Survey included three items that asked parents about the types of school and district policy information that staff had provided them during the 2007–2008 school year and whether or not it was provided in the parent’s home language.

Longitudinal data were available for the four items, and their results are shown in Table 9.

Results showed that most parents reported receiving information about school and district

policies, and in their home language. However, when asked whether staff had provided information about the process for handling complaints and concerns, the percentages of parents of middle and high school students who agreed declined slightly in comparison with the results from the prior year.

Table 9: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

School staff provided me with enough information about the following school and district policies: in my home language	2006–2007 %	2007–2008 %
Student behavior expectations		
Elementary	94	97
Middle	92	94
High	90	92
Process for handling complaints and concerns		
Elementary	91	91
Middle	87	83
High	81	75
AISD parent involvement policy		
Elementary	89	96
Middle	82	87
High	77	82
Home language		
Elementary	93	96
Middle	90	93
High	90	92

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Note. Bold numbers indicate a positive increase from year to year.

As shown in Table 10, when asked about their involvement in campus activities, the percentages of parents agreeing with these items decreased from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. However, Table 10 shows the percentages of parents who reported they were likely to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences; general school meetings; and sports, arts or other performances.

Table 10: Parents Attending Campus Activities, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2006– 2007	2007– 2008	2006– 2007	2007– 2008	2006– 2007	2007– 2008
Campus activity	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parent-teacher conferences	86	75	79	54	70	45
General school meeting	84	59	76	65	70	66
Sports, art, or performances	83	36	75	50	73	60
Other special events	82	40	72	36	68	30
Academic events	81	33	73	40	64	29
School fund-raising	80	40	72	36	66	30
School committees	70	20	65	21	55	14

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Lastly, in 2007–2008, parents at all grade levels reported that they had regularly helped their child with homework (i.e., 96% of elementary school parents, 89% of middle school parents, and 67% of high school parents). Parents' responses on this item for 2006–2007 were similar (i.e., 93% elementary school parents, 89% of middle school, and 72% of high school parents) to those for 2007–2008.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

The AISD Parent Survey is used to gather data concerning the treatment of one of AISD's most important stakeholder groups: parents. Each year at the conclusion of the survey analysis, campus administrators receive reports describing how parents of students at their campus responded to the survey. They also receive a review kit, developed by AISD's DPE staff, that consists of a parent survey review worksheet and presentation template. In the past, DPE staff attended the last staff development session for parent supports specialists, presented an overview of the Parent Survey results, gave them a review kit, and provided each parent support specialist in attendance a profile of their school's results. The goal for providing this kit to administrators and parent support specialists was to help them use the survey results and communicate the findings to staff for individual and campus improvement planning. Unfortunately, the presentation to parent support specialists did not occur in 2007–2008.

Although the majority of parents' responses on the parent survey regarding all staff (i.e., principal, assistant principal, counselor, office staff, and teachers) were positive for the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years, secondary school parents continued to report fewer positive experiences with school staff than did elementary school parents.

Parents of all grade levels reported positive experiences with school staff treating them with courtesy and respect, but this was not the case when it came to the treatment of their child.

Sizeable declines occurred from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 with respect to the percentages of parents reporting positive experiences with the treatment of their child by all staff, except elementary school teachers. Therefore, campus administrators must make a concerted effort to secure training for themselves and for their school staff about customer service and about methods for displaying firmness and fairness with respect to staffs' interactions with students. This training will assist staff in keeping with AISD's executive limitation regarding the responsibility for providing respectful and dignified treatment of parents and students.

Another area of concern noted in responses from parents of students at the high school level pertained to schools' provision of adequate information regarding a child's academic progress, risk of failing a grade, graduation requirements, availability of financial aid, and college and career opportunities. Campus administrators need to improve the ways they provide parents with individualized information about their child. Frequent communication to parents about individual student academic performance and attendance is extremely important because of TAKS-related promotion and graduation requirements.

Most parents indicated that school staff provided them with information about school and district policies in their home language. However, compared with 2006–2007, smaller percentages of parents of middle and high school students reported receiving information about the process for handling complaints and concerns in 2007–2008. District and campus administrators must use all available resources (e.g., parent support specialists, school newsletters, flyers, and marquees) to provide such information to parents prior to or at the beginning of the school year.

PARENT SUPPORT OFFICE QUESTIONNAIRE

PSO staff opted to complete the PSO Staff's End-of-School Year Questionnaire—Spring 2008 jointly. On the questionnaire, PSO staff members were asked to report alone or collectively about the type and amount of staff leadership and educational training they provided for district parent support staff (e.g., parent program coordinators, parent support specialists, parent program specialists, and community relations specialists) through monthly staff development, modeling, outside resources, and other activities. Collectively, the staff reported 156 leadership and/or training activities, as follows:

- Facilitated 49 monthly parent support specialists Vertical Team (VT) meetings, 26 Austin Council of Parent and Teacher Associations (ACPTA) meetings, 18 Taking Care of Business sessions (for parents/guardians of elementary students who were at risk of legal intervention due to truancy), 10 Attendance Awareness Classes for attendance clerks, and 10 monthly African American Men and Boys Conferences

- Provided parent support specialists with 13 Technology Training Support classes about access and use of on-line reporting forms; 9 monthly staff development training sessions; 9 novice support sessions (aimed at parent support staff who are newly hired); and 12 other training or facilitation activities (e.g., Austin Voices, KLRU, Family Connections, Austin Interfaith House meetings, middle school principal meetings, Positive Behavior Support Office, High School Redesign)

When asked to report on other activities the staff provided on or off site during the school year, the PSO staff indicated they had done the following:

- Conducted 351 school visits, which included mentoring parent support specialists, observing training sessions and providing feedback, planning and goal setting, providing support for novice parents support specialists, and occasionally acting as liaison during resolution of campus issues
- Provided 144 Adult Literacy classes through Casa Marienella
- Hosted, sponsored, or assisted with 64 off-site activities, including 43 presentations, 9 school fairs, 6 parent recognition events, 5 Title I Parent Advisory Council meetings, 1 AISD African American Heritage ceremony, and 20 parenting classes through AVANCE (a Spanish word meaning “to advance” or “to progress”)

PSO staff reported partnering with 9 non-AISD agencies, organizations, or foundations. Five of the non-AISD contacts provided services that directly affected the parent support specialists and/or the families they served:

- OSB, a non-profit organization, provided clothing for 2,982 students during the school year.
- Texas Department of Health and Human Services provided access to or resources for acquiring medical, dental, and mental health services.
- Austin EastSide Story, a City of Austin project that serves as a catalyst for growth and development by bringing together people, money, and resources, provided technology training for children and their families who live in the 11th and 12th Street Corridor and for people who live, work, and/or attend school in the East and Northeast sectors of Austin.
- AmeriGROUP, an organization that manages health care services for the public sector, provided information and resources (e.g., cash and in-kind donations) to assist parent support specialists in securing health-care coverage for low-income families.

- Austin Public Libraries provided assistance in planning cultural events, conducted summer reading programs, and coordinated a parent sign-up for library cards campaign.

Three others organizations contributed the following:

- Austin Community College Eastview campus hosted monthly staff development training sessions for parent support specialists.
- Capital IDEA assisted with the organization of the Teacher Pipeline, a project devoted to addressing the teacher shortage in Austin by providing AISD paraprofessionals with the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree and become certified teachers.
- Parent Family Involvement Advisory Council planned parent involvement and parent recognition events.

Lastly, the PSO partnered with The Community Foundation Agency (TCFA) to provide free income tax services for 661 families, who collectively received \$827,482 (3.96%) of the \$20,911,623 in 2007 refunds and back refunds to Central Texans. Of the dollar amount received, \$344,587 was Earned Income Credit (EIC).

The staff reported 14 one-of-a-kind activities in which they provided information to or partnered with an AISD department or office, such as Dropout Prevention, Counseling, Bilingual/English as a Second Language, Ombudsman, Program Evaluation, and Special Education. PSO's program manager also provided weekly staff meetings and 8 strategic planning meetings (6 on site and 2 off site) for PSO staff.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support staff who work directly with parents and other school staff were held accountable for the provision of parent support services through their time and effort. They provided documentation concerning the numbers of hours worked; tasks accomplished; and numbers of parents, students, and staff served. In addition, parent support specialists' activities were examined to ensure they were aligned with MDs and KPIs, as defined by the adopted accountability model. The MDs and KPIs were revised in Fall 2007 to be more inclusive and descriptive of the parent support specialists' activities. Table 11 shows how the parent support specialists' MDs were aligned with KPIs.

Table 11: AISD Parent Support Specialist Major Duties and Key Performance Indicators Accountability Model

MDs (1–6)	KPIs (1–6)
1. Conduct outreach and be a liaison to families	1a. Provide outreach to parents of students at Level I (school wide), Level II (high needs or at risk), and Level III (crisis), and families at all levels in the event of a disaster (e.g., flood, fire, chemical) 1b. Make personal connections 1c. Conduct neighborhood walks 1d. Serve as a member of the campus IMPACT team
2. Organize and/or conduct training sessions for families and school staff	2a. Organize/conduct 25 yearly family trainings for Level I, Level II, and Level III families 2b. Provide support for district initiatives (e.g., character education program, grade transition, AISD wellness initiative, adult literacy classes, Principles of learning) 2c. Provide staff development training to campus staff
3. Provide opportunities for parents to build and use leadership skills	3a. Recruit and support membership to AISD's partnerships (e.g., District Advisory Council, PTA, CAC) 3b. Assist in facilitating parent-teacher conferences 3c. Work with civic groups (e.g., neighborhood associations, faith-based institutions, universities)
4. Engage volunteers, mentors, and parents who are not already paired with APIE	4. Provide school partner recruiting data to APIE
5. Participate in all scheduled professional development activities	5a. Attend all scheduled professional development sessions provided by the Family Resource Center 5b. Participate in professional development and planning sessions by vertical teams
6. Document and submit all program activities	6a. Complete and submit required DPE documentation (e.g., survey and questionnaire) 6b. Submit monthly Report to the Family Resource Center Staff

Source. AISD Department of School, Family, and Community Education, 2007–2008

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. These activities supported MD 6. 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 2007 report, 70 parent support specialists and 1 parent program specialist were asked to submit a summary of parent involvement activities (and parent attendance at those activities) held at their schools between August and December 2007. Of the 71 Fall 2007 reports sent out, 64 (90%) were returned. Four parent support specialists did not complete the fall report, two positions were still vacant by the December distribution date, and one was a recent hire. On the Spring 2008 end-of-year report and questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the parent support specialists about activities from January through May 2008, as well as some specific parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information about 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 sessions
- District or Texas Education Agency (TEA) initiatives (e.g., literacy program; character education/positive behavior training; Coordinated Approach to Child Health, or CATCH; 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 and home visits
- Number of adult literacy classes sponsored and adults entering the public workforce for the first time
- Volunteer recruiting
- Use of parent survey results in their Campus Improvement Plans (CIP)
- 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.

In spring 2008, 71 parent support specialists were sent the end-of-year questionnaire. Two district-level family support staff (i.e., social services specialist for refugees, and parent program specialist for Vietnamese families) were asked to complete a short end-of-year report on their programs and families served for the second year in a row.

Two campuses had multiple parent support staff who opted to complete one survey per campus. The completed end-of-year questionnaires, which contained the January through May

2008 activities, were returned by 69 (97%) of the parent support and parent program specialists. Two parent support specialists did not complete the questionnaire. Thus, only fall 2007 data from the Interim Report (August 2007-December 2007) were available for these 2 parent support specialists when tallying final results for parent involvement activities and attendance for 2007-2008.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TRAINING

Of the parent support and parent program specialists (n = 69) who completed the questionnaire, 97% (n = 67) reported that they worked with their principal. Ninety-six percent (n = 66) worked with other school staff (e.g., counselors, reading specialists, comprehensive education director, assistant principals); 90% (n = 62) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president; and 73% (n = 50) worked with community agencies and organizations. Some of the organizations that partnered with the parent support specialists included Austin Community College, Insure-A-Kid, Child INC, Family Forward-Next Step, 21st Century, Communities In Schools, Medicaider Program (online search engine for determining an applicant's eligibility for children's Medicaid and CHIP), River City Youth Foundation, and Amerigroup. These activities supported MDs 2 and 5.

The parent support specialists reported participating in a variety of professional development activities during the year. Sixty-five percent (n = 45) reported attending the Parent Leader Network Retreat (offered in partnership by AISD, the Connections Resource Center, and the Family Forward project). Review of the conference sign-in sheet showed that 20 parents attended the conference with their respective parent support staff member. The monthly 4-hour parent support specialists' professional development meetings, offered by the AISD PSO, were attended by 95% (n = 65) of the parent support specialists. Seventy-eight percent (n = 54) reported attending a variety of AISD professional development activities; 44% (n = 30) reported attending novice training provided for support staff who are newly hired; and 41% (n = 28) reported attending other local and state sponsored activities. These activities supported MD 2 and 5.

Ninety-seven percent (n = 67) of the parent support specialists reported working with their vertical team schools regularly on the following projects: transitioning students from elementary school to middle school to high school, Celebration of Families, Parent Involvement Week, Parent United seminar, Hope and Dreams Conference, Learning Walks, City of Austin Health fair, monthly planning meetings, KLRU series, and other activities. These activities supported MD 2 and 5.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Results from the parent support specialists' fall reports and end-of-year questionnaires showed that parent support specialists spent the bulk of their time on the following activities during the 2007–2008 school year:

- Preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies
- Attending meetings/professional development sessions
- Providing information to parents
- Recruiting volunteers for partnerships (parents, community members, or businesses)
- Making home visits or calling parents
- Setting up and participating in IMPACT meetings, OSB activities, or immunizations projects
- Providing professional development sessions to school staff
- Implementing district or Texas Education Agency (TEA) initiative programs (e.g., Read and Rise Circles, CATCH) and student transition
- Planning and implementing joint ventures (e.g., Parent Involvement Week, Hope and Dreams conferences, Parent Leadership seminars) and grade-level transition
- Planning and implementing Community/Learning walks
- Assisting school staff whenever necessary (e.g., translation, clerical, filling in for absent staff)

Ninety-eight percent of these activities were categorized within the district-mandated MDs. Several of these activities (e.g., providing information to parents, making home visits or calling parents, and conducting assemblies) spanned the regular school year and summer school activities. These activities supported MDs 1, 2 3, and 6.

By the end of school year 2007–2008, 38% (n = 26) of the responding parent support specialists had provided three or more professional development training sessions to campus staff. Thirty percent (n = 21) had provided at least two professional development training sessions for staff on their campuses. These activities supported MD 2. However, 20% (n = 14) provided only one professional development session to campus staff, and 12% (n = 8) reported they had not provided any training sessions to campus staff. Thus, this represents an area for improvement among some parent support specialists (however, note that two were new hires). Providing workshops to other staff on campus is a critical activity for all parent support specialists.

Table 12 shows a summary of numbers of families (i.e., parents and children) served through regular IMPACT team efforts. One hundred percent (n = 69) of the responding parent

support specialists indicated they had provided a variety of services to these families during the school year. The services included the following:

- General school-wide services to families of Level I students (e.g., immunization, book bags, and toothbrushes)
- Emergency service to Level II families for whom preventive intervention was not an option (i.e., students and families thrust into homelessness, families losing their only source of income, and families facing major medical problems or disasters)
- Level III intervention services for parents of at-risk students (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) through their campus IMPACT team, or as a follow-up service after an IMPACT team decision regarding a course of action. All three levels of activities supported MDs 1 and 2.

Table 12: AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists Through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2007–2008

Reporting period	Level I parents	Level I students	Level II parents	Level II students	Level III parents	Level III students
Fall	8,270	6,462	1,515	1,753	1,359	1,438
End-of-year	4,950	4,430	1,437	1,692	846	941
Total	13,220	10,892	2,952	3,445	2,205	2,379

Source. Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2007–2008

School year 2007–2008 was the first time parent support specialists were asked to provide information on the end-of-year questionnaire regarding the number of home visits between January and May 2008 and their reasons for making them. Sixty parent support specialists reported making contact with 3,375 parents through 3,417 home visits during this 5-month period. Totals for the number of parents contacted and for the number of homes visited include duplicates. However, the reasons for making the visits were summarized across all visits for this report.

Between January and May 2008, 60 of the responding parent support specialists had made home visits regarding student behavior. Of this group, 59 also made visits about attendance, and 44 reported making visits based on school staff referrals. Along with making home visits regarding behavior, 30 reported accompanying other school staff on home visits, and 30 reported making home visits for other reasons (e.g., verifying addresses, dropping off donations, following up on social service referrals, transporting sick students home, and translating for other staff). Fourteen reported making visits to confirm and prepare for truancy court dates. Home visits are supported by MD 1. However, the visits and contacts were repetitive in nature, and AISD does provide adequate resources to address most of them. The

repetitive nature of the home visits represents an area for improvement regarding developing criteria that campus staff may use in making decisions about when to transfer a parent/student's situation to other campus/district staff who have more appropriate resources, without leaving the parent with a feeling of abandonment. This way, better use can be made of the parent support specialist's time.

Table 13 shows the summary of parent support specialists' data concerning parent and community participation in various school-based activities for school years 2006–2007 and 2007–2008. These data support MD 2. Please note that because parents may have attended more than one event, participation counts that follow may include duplicates. Although literacy activities (e.g., family nights [n = 18,657], literacy events [n = 15,527], and learning walks [n = 4,764]) drew higher numbers of parents in attendance than they did the previous year, some literacy and curriculum activities (e.g., family literacy, TAKS, and seminars) showed decreases in attendance from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008. Contributing factors that may have influenced the pattern of decrease in attendance at these activities include the reorganization of the PSO's staffing pattern, varying methods of operation, the format for staff development activities, and a high number of novice parent support specialists. Some campuses may not have been as involved in encouraging attendance at these events as were others. Those activities showing increases in attendance were planned and staged in collaboration with and with assistance from other school staff (e.g., principals, counselors, teachers, and librarians). Assemblies and fairs are examples of activities that incorporated collaboration among school staff (including parent support specialists) and other vendors/organizations inside or outside AISD. Assemblies drew 94,462 parents. These events included 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 and attendance). Fairs and fundraisers drew more than 49,463.

Parent attendance at workshops about wellness (n = 21,054) and social issues (n = 12,374) was smaller than it was at those activities the previous year. Other events (e.g., nutrition, legal aid, Día de los Niños, Explore UT, and fundraising) had high attendance at activities involving parents, but these events were too numerous to list in this report.

Table 13: Parents in Attendance, by Activity Category, as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2006–2007 and 2007–2008

Activity	Parent participants reported in 2006–2007 (duplicated count)	Parent participants reported in 2007–2008 (duplicated count)
Literacy and curriculum		
Family night	17,648	18,657
Family literacy	18,734	15,527
Principal get together	15,096	11,586
TAKS	4,991	4,840
Learning walks	1,422	4,764
Seminars	6,193	2,411
Choice sheet night	3,810	1,618
KLRU series	433	1,446
Principles of learning	656	1,432
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)	764	1,087
Assemblies	46,134	94,462
Fairs		
*Other	8,816	14,318
Fund-raising	12,447	13,335
Health	11,761	12,362
Academics	8,600	9,448
Wellness Workshops		
*Other	23,027	10,309
Dental	3,405	3,588
Vision	4,019	2,598
Immunization	2,256	1,928
Self-esteem	1,610	1,654
Stress	519	977
Social issues workshops		
*Other	18,049	10,449
Drugs	2,501	1,458
Teen pregnancies	441	467

Source. Parent Support Specialists' Fall 2006 and 2007 reports and Spring 2007 and 2008 questionnaires

* Other activities were too numerous to list in this table.

Although not shown in Table 13, the questionnaire data also revealed that parent support specialists did the following activities, supporting MD 2:

- Recruited 678 parents for participation in the Medicaid program and conducted 296 Medicaid eligibility searches as part of their wellness activities; these findings were more than double the number of parents recruited last year (n = 229) for participation in the Medicaid program, and more than triple the number in last year's eligibility searches (n = 73)

- Invited 10,449 parents to PTA/PTO meetings, where they were given information about their local association/organization, treated to presentations about the association, and encouraged to join
- Engaged 3,138 parents, 12,139 students, and 513 school staff in district initiative activities (e.g., character education and positive behavior workshops)
- Provided Title I compliance training and other activities for 6,860 parents, 4,594 students, and 890 school staff

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. Forty-five percent (n = 30) of the parent support specialists listed assistance with regular parent-teacher conferences, and 36% (n = 24) reported assistance with regular conferences and special circumstance conferences (e.g., at-risk intervention, TAKS results, summer school, and transitioning between grade levels and schools). Another 24% (n = 16) reported assistance with 10 admission, review, or dismissal (ARD) committee meetings; 4 Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) meetings; 1 Section 504-Americans with Disabilities Act hearing; and 1 home visit. Forty-six percent (n = 31) listed oral or sign language translation during parent-teacher conferences or at medical, dental, legal, and/or social services appointments. Other activities reported (36%, n = 24) included facilitating learning walks, student-led conferences, cultural events, and PTA and CAC meetings. These activities supported MD 2.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

Some parent support specialists participated in activities that extended beyond their regular duties. For instance, when asked if they supplemented their APIE program with additional personally recruited volunteers, 89% (n = 61) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting a total of 4,370 parents, who volunteered 75,609 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that 255 business organizations donated 2,784 hours of volunteer service in the form of mentors, buddies, or other roles. Finally, they reported that 326 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, and community members other than parents) volunteered 5,362 hours of service as mentors or tutors. These activities supported MD 4.

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 they can assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on questionnaire results, 55 parent support specialists enrolled parents in adult literacy activities during 2007–2008. Of that number (n = 55), 29 reported holding classes on their campuses and sending parents to other sites when they could no longer accommodate them physically or academically, 16 enrolled parents in activities on their campuses only, and 10 enrolled parents at other sites because they did not provide adult literacy activities on their campuses. A total of 4,440 adults were enrolled in these classes between August 2007 and May 2008. Thirty-nine percent (n = 1,751) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2008, and 4% (n = 160) entered the workforce for the first time. This activity supported MD 2.

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Seventy-one percent (n = 49) of the parent support specialists responded that they used the district parent survey results from 2006–2007 when developing their campus improvement plans for the 2007–2008 school year. Seven said they did not use the district parent survey results when developing their campus improvement plans, 4 said their campuses did not participate in the 2006–2007 survey, 6 said they did not know whether their campuses used the survey data or not, and 3 did not respond to the question. Ninety percent (n = 62) of the parent support specialists said they would use results from the 2007–2008 parent survey when developing their 2008–2009 campus improvement plans' goals and activities for parent involvement if the data were applicable to their programs. Three did not respond to the question. This activity supported MD 2.

BEST PRACTICE

Parent support specialists were asked to choose one parent involvement activity from a list of five (i.e., presentation, seminar, workshop, writing a grant, and other) that had occurred at their campus and was a success or best practice, based on factors such as attendance, parent and/or community feedback, number of students served, and amount of funding. Sixty-eight of the parent support specialists reported best practice activities. However, 35% (n = 24) of the parent support specialists did not include information about the numbers in attendance at these activities. Twenty-five of 30 parent support specialists reported valid attendance data for 4,649 parents at other activities, including the following:

- All-day parent conference focus group (1,500)
- Day and evening literacy events (1,297)
- Community dinners (500)
- CATCH events (446)
- Hermanitos, a program for Hispanic youth, (364)

- A variety of one-time events (542)

Seven of 14 reported valid attendance data (1,113) on presentation activities, such as

- Movin, Groovin Workout with TAKS (430)
- African American Men and Boys conference (312)
- Health smart conference (150)
- TAKS rally (108)
- Baby Bear Book Club (89)
- Middle school transition meeting (14)
- Limited English Proficiency (LEP) (10)

Another 10 of 20 reported valid attendance data (429) for serial workshops. These included math and reading workshops held in the morning and evening, a science series, a Hope and Dreams day-long workshop, grade-level parent sessions, bilingual basic computer training, a session about developing an expanded role for PTAs, and a 6-week Healthy Marriage/Healthy Living course. Two of three reported valid attendance data (79) about two seminars regarding parent leadership and a youth advocacy program. Another reported 150 parents in attendance at the Shoes for Austin grant presentation that supports walking, running, and exercise in general.

Reported attendance totals at these activities could have been higher at the district level if all of the parent support specialists had included their attendance data along with the description of their best practice activity. Because parental attendance is one factor that has an impact on the effectiveness of the district's parent involvement activities and initiatives, it is important to ensure that staff provide complete and accurate attendance data.

DISTRICT INITIATIVES

In the Spring 2008 questionnaire, parent support specialists were asked to indicate whether they had started a district initiative for the first time in 2007–2008 or were continuing from the previous school year (2006–2007). Nineteen campuses reported they had continued the project from 2006–2007, 36 said they started a new project in 2007–2008, 12 said they had not done a project during 2007–2008, and 2 did not respond to the question. Of the 19 campuses reporting continuation of the project from the previous year, 6 continued with the Read and Rise Circles program, sponsored by the National Urban League, Scholastic Inc., and State Farm Insurance. Read and Rise Circles 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 for children during their early childhood years (birth to 4 years). See previous publications for program details (Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2005, 2006, 2007).

Thirteen of the parent support specialists reported that they continued working with their vertical team schools on the student-transitioning project (elementary to middle to high school) and attendance. Thirty-six campuses reported new projects that were inclusive of their vertical teams. Examples of these new projects included a series of 10 weekly workshops about strengthening the family; a city-wide, twice per week pre-K and K Read-A-Thon; vertical team parent seminars; monthly African American Men and Boys Conferences; bilingual workshops for school staff, taught by volunteer parents; Hope and Dreams conferences; Hispanic Young Men's Leadership Conference; and core subject literacy workshops (e.g., in math, reading, and science).

In the case of parent support specialists working with their vertical teams, middle schools usually coordinated the events with their elementary feeder schools and receiving high schools to acquaint parents and students with campus layout, buildings, and staff. Parent support specialists used a variety of materials (e.g., Title I materials, TAKS information, school maps, class schedules, lunch prices, dress code, students' expectations list, and arranged learning walks) at receiving campuses. The parent support specialists also provided on-site transition classes/camps for parents and students, either at the end of May or during the first week in June. Collectively, these campuses provided 367 workshops and engaged 4,141 parents and 5,430 students in district initiatives during 2007–2008. These activities supported MD 2.

SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Two district family support staff (i.e., the refugee family support specialist and the Vietnamese parent representative) assisted special populations (i.e., refugees and Vietnamese) in AISD. These support staff returned their e-mail surveys in May 2008. The refugee family support specialist, housed at the Baker Center, reported the provision of support services to political refugee students, their parents, their schools of attendance, and resettlement agencies during the 2007–2008 school year. During the year, the refugee specialist

- assisted 143 refugee students with school enrollment;
- provided two-way orientation at the time of enrollment (i.e., school staff [n = 43] to parent and parent to school [n = 60]);
- provided an additional orientation class for parents (n = 37) who came after the general orientation session;
- arranged for an interpreter during parent/school staff conferences and orientation events;
- monitored students' grades and attendance; and

- referred students for assistance with academic or behavioral issues.

The Vietnamese parent representative, a teacher at Walnut Creek Elementary School, also worked as a part-time parent representative to assist the Vietnamese students and parents (a collective count of 200) during the 2007–2008 school year. During 2007–2008, the representative

- assisted parents and students with school registration;
- provided academic diagnostic testing and language assessment;
- made parent contacts;
- provided interpretation during Local Support Team, ARD, and PTA meetings, and during coffee chats and parent-teacher conferences;
- attended CAC and cadre (city-wide/community Vietnamese) meetings with parents;
- worked with Walnut Creek’s parent support specialist and assisted other AISD schools with Vietnamese parents and students;
- organized positive parenting classes;
- published the monthly Vietnamese bilingual program newsletter;
- provided translations for the school monthly newsletter, regular communiqués to parents, and teachers’ monthly newsletters;
- assisted parents in completing CHIP, Medicaid, medical, and legal forms (e.g., child support papers and Child Protective Service documents); and
- worked with parents to organize fundraising activities, such as the New Year Tet show, Mid Autumn Festival, end-of-year picnic, and Back to School Day.

The services and support provided by the Vietnamese parent representative were more extensive than those provided by the refugee family support specialist and more similar to the regular parent support specialist because the roles of teacher and parent representative were rolled into one, eliminating a number of rungs in the chain of communication and action. As a teacher, the Vietnamese parent support specialist set the expectations for student behavior and success in the classroom and on campus, and collaborated with the campus administrator on appropriate follow-up actions when these expectations were not met. Also, as a teacher, the parent representative had worked with the regular campus parent support specialist after families transitioned into the school and community.

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

common to the community and school, and 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 achievement gap between student groups by using skills and knowledge for promoting parent involvement.

The data summarized in this report indicated that AISD parent support specialists performed their MDs and met their campus goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage parent participation in the education of children. However, evidence from the questionnaire and other surveys included in this report indicated room for parent support specialists to improve their performance in the area of providing professional development opportunities to school staff. Similarly, campus administrators can improve their use of these specialists. For instance, in the past 6 years of AISD's Employee Coordinated Survey, many campus staff reported the need for training about how to work with parents to support student learning. Also, parent support specialists expressed a need for training to help them work with and advise parents about various school-related issues.

Second, the AISD Parent Survey data indicated a strong need at all grade levels for school staff, inclusive of parent support specialists, to improve the dissemination of information regarding the availability of specific services or resources. Campus administrators must arrange with the parent support coordinators from the PSO for whole-school staff training about the availability of these services. With this help, campus staff, including parent support specialists, can gain improved skills and knowledge about how to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success.

Results from the parent support staff questionnaire showed a sharp decline in parent and family attendance at literary and curriculum activities, compared with the previous year. This is cause for concern because literary and curriculum events are key elements in helping parents and community members become familiar with a school's academic program. Therefore, campus administrators must (a) provide guidance about planning activities of this nature, especially if their parent support specialists are recent hires and (b) include all applicable staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, librarians, and others) in planning and delivery of these events. The questionnaire results also raised a concern regarding the repetitive nature of home visits made by parent support staff and the amount of time spent on them. Following a model of "working smarter, not harder," district and campus administrators must develop district-wide criteria that campus staff can use in making decisions about when to transfer a parent/student's situation to more appropriate campus/district staff and resources.

Lastly, some parent support specialists failed to respond to items or omitted data that were supported by their MDs and KPIs. The reasons for these non-responses or omissions of data are unclear. However, not having this information prevents decision makers, auditing agencies (e.g., TEA and the United States Department of Education), the City of Austin, AISD grant writers, and benefactors from having a complete picture of the district's parent support services. In order to enhance the AISD district-wide picture of parent involvement, parent support specialists must (a) pay greater attention to documenting activities and events in quantitative terms (e.g., numbers, amount, and duration), as well as through qualitative descriptions and (b) complete and submit all documentation required by program managers and other AISD staff in a timely manner.

AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

AISD has access to many local business and community volunteers and resources through APIE. Both monetary donations and volunteer hours are given to support Austin schools through APIE. According to APIE staff, APIE also partners with QZABP, a bond program that allows school districts to receive a waiver with respect to repaying interest on school bonds that are sold. Each campus included in the bond package must make a contribution for community support that is 10% of its total budget in its participating fiscal year. This partnership consistently has resulted in savings for the district.

Table 14 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past 4 years. Decreases were observed from 2006–2007 to 2007–2008 in in-kind and cash donations. However, the number of volunteers and volunteer hours increased during this same period. APIE's records show that schools with parent support staff accounted for 76% of in-kind contributions, 50% of cash donations, 49% of volunteer services, and 44% of volunteer hours. APIE staff's computed cash value of volunteered services provided by the reporting schools totaled \$2,825,635.

Table 14: Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through APIE,
2004–2005 Through 2007–2008

Type of donation	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007	2007–2008
In-kind contributions	\$2,511,687	\$922,425	\$3,432,601	\$1,324,328
Cash donations	\$277,256	\$468,897	\$626,896	\$626,556
Number of volunteers	12,615	6,790	4,433	4,530
Number of volunteer hours	186,315	119,019	118,483	156,980

Source. APIE records, 2004–2005 through 2007–2008

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE AND AISD CAMPUSES

AISD realizes financial savings through a community partnership with APIE and QZABP. AISD was selected again for participation in the bond program for fiscal year 2008, and donations from 2008 will save Austin taxpayers approximately \$4 million.

APIE's records showed that schools that returned the parent support specialist questionnaires had also submitted their annual APIE reports. However, 22 of these schools had not provided 2007–2008 information at the time this report was written. Eight of those schools did not report numerical values for some of the donation columns. The substantial decrease that occurred in in-kind contributions and the smaller decrease for cash donations for 2007–2008 are causes for concern. Because this information provides an 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 accessing and reporting about APIE community volunteer support to enhance future savings.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Studies (e.g., Henderson & Berla, 1994; Phillips, 1997; Turnbull, 2001) have addressed the importance of parent involvement in student learning. For example, achievement improved more quickly for students when two factors were present: professional staff development opportunities for teachers, and active (teacher and other) school staff outreach to parents of low-achieving students. Also, a January 2004 press release by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory reported that, when families were engaged in their children's learning at home and in guiding their educational careers, children tended to do better academically in school and stay in school longer, and were more likely to pursue higher education, compared with children whose families were not as involved (Boethel, 2003).

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, and about students that inform, aid, and often avert or alleviate the at-risk status of students. This report provides some data about AISD's parent involvement programs and suggests that the district's parent involvement efforts can be improved through the following actions:

- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers about working with parents to improve student achievement and behavior
- Provide whole-school training for staff about the availability of local academic, parent, and family resources
- Develop district-wide criteria that campus staff can use in making decisions about when to transfer a parent/student's situation being addressed by home visits to other more appropriate campus/district staff and resources
- Ensure effective documentation of activities and completion of reports by school staff (e.g., parent support specialists, counselors, and clerks) so the district receives complete parent and community involvement data

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 about involving parents in all areas related to student success in school. Experienced parent support specialists are the ideal staff to provide such training because they have the capacity to do this, have relationships with the teachers and the parents, and are available. Therefore, it is recommended that campus administrators use experienced parent support specialists to provide the training teachers need to work with parents on improving student

achievement and behavior. Campuses without parent support staff and campuses with newly hired parent support staff should contact the PSO staff for assistance (e.g., a parent support specialist to mentor their volunteers or provide presentations and workshops).

In addition, campus staff must pay close attention to securing and reporting APIE community support because AISD realizes savings through QZABP, the funding for which is 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 of applications for large grants that may support furthering students' academic achievement.

Although the 2007–2008 AISD Parent Survey results reflected a majority of positive responses across grade levels regarding campus staff on topics such as treatment with respect, two-way communication, and fair treatment of their child, parents of elementary school students were more likely than parents of secondary school students to consider these experiences positive.

AISD's policy on community relations establishes that parents, families, and community members are all partners with schools for the purpose of promoting 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, and especially at the high school level, more individual information about their child's academic performance, plans, goals, and preparedness for TAKS.

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