

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2008–2009



Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parent involvement is a key element of Austin Independent School District's (AISD) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Every AISD campus has a Campus Advisory Council (CAC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA), 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.

SURVEY RESULTS

In order to document some of the efforts of various AISD staff in involving parents, the Department of Program Evaluation gathered data through surveys from AISD staff and parents.

Employee Coordinated Survey

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 2008–2009 Employee Coordinated Survey data revealed concerns about staff members' self-reported needs for training. As in prior years, a relatively high percentage of teachers (64%) reported parental involvement was one of the areas in which they needed training.

AISD Parent Survey

Results from the district-wide 2008–2009 AISD Parent Survey showed that most parents reported having had positive experiences with campus staff, including being treated courteously, receiving help to become more involved in their child's education, having their input welcomed in academic decisions about their child, and being given opportunities for two-way communication. As in previous years, greater percentages of parents reported positive experiences with teachers than reported positive experiences with other staff. When parents were asked if they had received information regarding specific AISD school and district policies, most agreed that staff had provided them with information about AISD's parental involvement policy and about their child's behavior and academic progress (e.g., academic plans and goals, preparedness for Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills [TAKS], and whether the child was at risk for failing a grade).

However, lesser percentages of parents agreed that school staff had provided them with adequate and useful information regarding students' personal graduation plans, available financial aid and scholarship resources, college and career opportunities, and the district's process for handling complaints and concerns. Therefore, it is recommended that campus

administrators make every effort to provide frequent and useful information to parents in these areas.

PARENT SUPPORT STAFF

Parent support specialists and other special support staff are vital links between parents, communities, and schools because these staff often live in the communities in which they work, and communicate in the language(s) common to the community and school. They provide parents with academic training opportunities or information to support student learning, and they aid families in acquiring support services when needed. 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, families, and schools. In the 2008–2009 school year, 70 AISD campuses and departments (e.g., School, Family, and Community Education, and Bilingual Education) used funds to employ parent support staff. Collectively, these staff provided workshops and support services to parents, families, and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children.

On AISD Title I campuses, parent support specialists provided federally mandated Title I compliance workshops and services to parents and school staff. On all campuses they served, they supported district initiatives (e.g., literacy programs, transition between grade levels, positive behavior, nutrition and fitness programs); enrolled adults in adult literacy classes; and secured services for special populations of students (e.g., refugees, Vietnamese, American Indians, special needs) enrolled on their campuses. They also provided professional development sessions for school staff and participated in their respective schools' at-risk student assistance programs. According to Dr. L. Clark-Brown (personal communication, October 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."

Other special parent support staff collaborated with campus parent support staff and provided services that were needed on those campuses. They provided training for AISD staff, presented workshops to families, and mailed out informational flyers about available services and upcoming events.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

One financial source supporting parent involvement is mandated through AISD's federal Title I grant. A review of the most current estimates of AISD's federal Title I expenditures for supporting parent and community services for 2008–2009 showed that AISD

had spent 98% (\$230,498) of its Title I parent involvement allocation (\$235,236). Of the expended amount, 77% (\$181,194) was for campus support staff salaries, and 21% (\$49,304) was for other payroll costs, purchased and contracted services, supplies and materials, and other operating expenses. However, the district has many other financial resources that support family involvement activities.

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 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 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 2008–2009 records showed a substantial increase from the prior year with respect to contribution categories (e.g., cash donation and volunteers).

RECOMMENDATIONS

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 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:

- One of the parent support specialists' duties is to provide staff development sessions about parent involvement and available AISD resources (e.g., the Parent Support Office [PSO]). District surveys have shown teachers wish to have more information about parent involvement. Thus, campus administrators should address both the needs of teachers and the goals of parent support specialists in this area by allowing parent support specialists to provide such training. Because parent support specialists already work closely with the district's PSO, campus administrators should request the parent support specialists' assistance in providing workshops or presentations to increase campus staff's awareness of district resources to support parent involvement.

- Currently, AISD’s APIE donations are used to satisfy the \$5 million interest-free QZABP bond, which will save Austin taxpayers millions of dollars. 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 accurately reporting APIE community support data to enhance future savings.

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INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) efforts to enhance students' academic and social success. Although this report provides data 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 2009–2010 parent involvement goals.

This evaluation includes information gathered from district staff and parents about the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools during the 2008–2009 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) staff, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) 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. 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 major duties (MDs), as measured by key performance indicators (KPIs). These MDs and KPIs are defined later in this report.

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 includes a supervisor of parent programs, three parent support coordinators, a community relations specialist, and an office assistant. Although each position has individual responsibilities, the primary responsibilities of the PSO staff 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.

SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Four AISD special support programs (e.g., for American Indians, refugees, Vietnamese, and special needs) work closely with families new to the district and/or those facing unforeseen circumstances requiring special support services. Staff from these programs provide special

assistance with translation; orientation; social services referrals; transition into regular academic and family involvement activities; grief therapy (e.g., loss of loved ones or classmates, separation/divorce); planning for life after high school as a special needs graduate; and many other services.

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 so they can provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and cash donations. In addition to APIE volunteers, parent support specialists recruit and train other community volunteers.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

AISD uses several funding sources (e.g., local, state, and federal) to support family and community services. AISD used \$235,236 of federal Title I monies during 2008–2009 for parent involvement. A review of the most current estimates of the Title I expenditures for supporting parent and community services for 2008–2009 showed that AISD had spent 98% (\$230,498) of its Title I parent involvement allocation (\$235,236). Of the expended amount, 77% (\$181,194) was for campus support staff salaries, and 21% (\$49,304) was for other payroll costs, purchased and contracted services, supplies and materials, and other operating expenses.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The 2009 Employee Coordinated Survey, containing questions about parent involvement issues, was distributed to a sample of 9,699 AISD employees through e-mail in Spring 2009. The employees included a sample of principals and assistant principals (administrators), elementary counselors (non-teaching professionals), teachers (professionals), and parent support specialists (classified). 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 prior employee coordinated surveys. 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 provided to parents about campus expectations, student attendance, and discipline policies. A total of 5,671 valid campus staff responses were counted for the survey. Table 1 shows percentage increases from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 among non-teaching staff (i.e., administrators, classified and non-teaching professionals) on all items regarding campus parent involvement expectations. However, among teaching staff, the table shows slight decreases from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 on four of the items regarding campus expectations, an increase on one item regarding district initiatives, and no change on other items. On the 2008–2009 survey, 33% of the non-teaching ($n = 284$) and 12% of the teaching staff ($n = 71$) reported they did not provide parents of students at their campuses with information about requirements or expectations for their child.

Table 1. AISD Staff Providing Information About Parental Involvement Expectations, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following parental involvement expectations:	2007–2008 Non-teaching ($n = 427$) %	2008–2009 Non-teaching ($n = 1,859$) %	2007–2008 Teaching ($n = 691$) %	2008–2009 Teaching ($n = 593$) %
Working with child at home on school-related tasks	40	51	75	75
Advocating for their child	37	51	67	62
Attending and participating in meetings, workshops, etc.	43	53	62	62
Participating in my school's PTA	32	44	53	52
Providing input in decision making	29	40	39	37
Working toward parent/campus solutions	38	47	45	44
Advocating for their child's school	28	37	43	43
Working with district initiatives	30	36	36	39
I do not provide parents of students at my campus with information about requirements or expectations for their child	36	33	9	12

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Note. Bold numbers indicate increases from the previous 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 agreed they wanted training about advising parents on how to support student learning at home (67%), and training about working with parents on student behavior at school (61%). These two categories also were chosen frequently by other school staff. These same topics have been identified frequently in the past five years of the survey (Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008). Also, more than half (52%) of classified staff wanted training in general parent-staff communication.

Table 2. AISD Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2008–2009

I would like to receive staff development in the following areas:	Administrators (n = 174) %	Classified (n = 448) %	Other professionals (n = 237) %	Teachers (n = 593) %
Advising parents about how to support student learning at home	58	52	64	67
Working with parents on student behavior at school (e.g., attendance, discipline)	43	60	54	61
General parent-staff communication	33	52	32	28
District/campus parent involvement resources	40	33	35	27
District/campus parent involvement policy	34	29	26	18
Advising parents about IMPACT meetings	36	27	43	24
Advising parents about grade level curriculum	34	29	27	26
Advising parents about graduation requirements	23	24	21	13
Advising parents on grade-level promotion requirements	34	22	18	16

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2008–2009

AISD SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Teaching ($n = 593$) and non-teaching ($n = 859$) campus respondents reported their level of awareness about several AISD support services or community resources. Table 3 shows that from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 the percentages of staff reporting being aware of all resources

(except one, the UpClose Program, a high school reform program) increased. The greatest awareness was reported for the district’s IMPACT program, which provides academic services for at-risk students and is aimed at helping prevent student dropout. Teachers’ relative lack of awareness about some resources 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, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources:	2007–2008	2008–2009	2007–2008	2008–2009
	Non-teaching (n = 427)	Non-teaching (n = 859)	Teaching (n = 691)	Teaching (n = 593)
	%	%	%	%
IMPACT	66	75	69	74
Operation School Bell	63	70	51	53
Children’s Health Insurance Program	55	65	43	52
AISD Parent Support Office	40	57	22	38
Citywide PTA/PTO	57	64	39	48
Academic and Special Physical Education Programs	N/A	43	N/A	40
AISD Ombudsman office	33	43	14	16
Family Connection Organization	24	32	9	13
UpClose Program	12	15	5	3

Source. AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

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 show that for the eighth 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). For example, 52% ($n = 233$) of the classified staff requested 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., 37% of the parent support specialists) were hired to replace resigning staff

during the school year. The survey data also suggest that some campus staff need information about parental involvement and support services at their campuses, thus representing an area for future improvement in staff training.

AISD PARENT SURVEY 2008–2009

The AISD Parent Survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to AISD campuses in Spring 2009. 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 Cornetto (2009), the survey was designed to monitor the relationships between campus staff and parents.

Parents were given the option of responding to each statement by indicating their level of agreement on a 4-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with the option of indicating “Don’t know/NA” or of skipping any item. The total number of surveys returned was 17,784 (13,886 elementary, 2,204 middle, and 1,694 high), which represented approximately 22% of the district’s student population. Note that 16,106 parents (12,493 elementary, 1,831 middle, and 1,731 high) returned surveys in 2007–2008. The survey gathered demographic information from parents about their child. In addition, five new items asked parents about the extent of achievement press¹ at home and on campus. The survey gathered opinions from parents about treatment of parents and students by campus staff; provision of information in the parent’s home language about programs, as well as information about campus requirements and expectations, school and district policies, individual students’ progress (e.g., behavior, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills [TAKS]), graduation and post-secondary plans (e.g., financial aid, scholarships, and college and career opportunities); parental involvement opportunities or resources; and frequency with which parents help their child with homework or participate in various activities at their child’s school. Comparison data from the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 surveys are presented in Tables 4 through 6 and in the Appendices.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

From 78% to 98% of parents across elementary through high school reported having had positive experiences and interactions with campus staff. Table 4 shows the following results from the 2008–2009 parent survey, as compared with the prior year’s survey results.

- As in previous years, greater percentages of parents reported positive experiences with teachers than reported positive experiences 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.

¹ Achievement press is the extent to which parents exert pressure for high standards by engaging in conversations about academic priorities both with their child and with school staff.

- From 2007–2008 to 2008–2009, the percentage of parents who agreed they had positives experiences with various school staff increased.
- Although the response percentages were high, there were three instances, (i.e., 2 at the elementary level and 1 at the high school level) where the response rates did not change. Also, there was a fourth instance at the elementary level where there was a percentage loss.

Table 4. Parents Having Positive Experiences With Various School Staff,
2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Survey item	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2007– 2008 %	2008– 2009 %	2007– 2008 %	2008– 2009 %	2007– 2008 %	2008– 2009 %
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect:						
Teachers	98	98	93	97	94	95
Office staff	96	95	93	93	89	91
Counselor(s)	95	96	92	95	88	92
Assistant principals	96	97	91	94	87	92
Principals	96	96	92	93	85	93
School staff have helped me to become more involved in my child’s education:						
Teachers	97	96	88	91	83	83
Office staff	93	*	86	*	71	*
Counselor(s)	91	94	80	90	77	82
Assistant principals	92	93	80	89	72	80
Principals	91	91	78	85	67	78
School staff value my input in academic decisions about my child:						
Teachers	97	97	89	93	86	86
Office staff	93	*	88	*	81	*
Counselor(s)	91	95	82	93	79	86
Assistant principals	93	94	85	92	77	84
Principals	93	93	84	89	73	83
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication:						
Teachers	96	97	91	94	90	90
Office staff	65	95	66	91	67	87
Counselor(s)	93	94	87	92	86	85
Assistant principals	93	94	86	91	80	86
Principals	93	93	85	90	78	86

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

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

* Indicates respondents opted not to complete the item.

Table 11, in Appendix A, shows the majority of parents reported that school staff provided them with individual student information. Elementary school parents had the highest percentage of agreement on all items.

The 2008–2009 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 2008–2009 school year and whether or not it was provided in the parent’s home language. Table 12 in Appendix B shows that from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 the percentage of parents who agreed that school staff provided them with such information decreased, with the greatest decrease occurring on the items about school staff providing parents information about the process for handling complaints and parental involvement policy. The percentage of parents who reported receiving information of this type in their home language in 2008–2009 was less than the percentage reporting it in 2007–2008 (94% and 95%, respectively).²

In Appendix C, Table 13 shows that the majority of 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 tutoring and support services and AISD’s support services and community resources.

Parents of all grade levels were surveyed about whether school staff provided them with graduation and post-graduation information. Table 14 in Appendix C shows 85% to 88% of parents reported receiving information about high school graduation requirements and plans in 2008–2009. However, the percentage of elementary parents who reported receiving information about personal graduation plans and financial aid and scholarship resources decreased.

Most parents who responded to the 2008–2009 AISD Parent Survey believed their child’s school was a safe learning environment. Table 5 shows increases for all school levels from the 2007–2008 survey results.

Table 5. Parents Believing Their Child’s School Is a Safe Learning Environment, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

My child’s school is a safe learning environment:	2007–2008	2008–2009
	%	%
Elementary	96	97
Middle	87	92
High	84	89

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Parents at all grade levels were surveyed about their involvement in campus activities. Table 6 shows that 29% to 72% reported participating in parent-teacher conferences; general school meetings; and sports, art, other performances or special events during 2008–2009.

² Percentages were averaged for each school year.

However, significantly lower percentages of parents participated in academic events, other special events, school committees, PTA activities, and district-wide events.

Table 6. Parents Attending Campus Activities, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2007– 2008	2008– 2009	2007– 2008	2008– 2009	2007– 2008	2008– 2009
Campus activity	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parent-teacher conferences	75	72	54	51	45	42
General school meeting	59	54	65	61	66	63
Sports, art, or other performances	36	34	50	45	60	58
Other special events	40	39	36	40	30	29
Academic events	33	30	40	32	29	25
School committees	20	14	21	14	14	16
PTA	31	28	28	27	32	28
District-wide events	20	19	21	18	14	11

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

When asked if they exerted pressure for high standards by engaging their child in conversations about academic priorities, most parents (i.e., 79% elementary, 78% middle, and 81% high) reported they often talked with their child about the importance of doing well in school; what they were learning in school; and future college and career plans. In addition, 42% to 55% reported they talked with school staff about the importance of having high standards and good teachers. Because these were new items, the relatively low percentages of parents communicating with school staff about high standards and good teachers must be reviewed further to determine if there is cause for concern.

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 customized reports describing how parents of students at their campus responded to the survey.

Overall, more parents ($n = 17,784$) returned surveys in 2008–2009 than did so in 2007–2008 ($n = 16,106$). The percentage of parents who agreed they had opportunities for two-way communication with office staff increased from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009. As in previous years, the percentage of parents who reported positive experiences with teachers was greater than the percentage who reported positive experiences with other staff. However, on the item regarding school staff valuing parents' input in academic decisions about their child or children, parents reported equally positive experiences with middle and high school counselors. The majority of parents at all grade levels believed their child's school was a safe learning environment. However, comparisons with 2007–2008 data showed that the percentage of parents across grade levels who reported receiving information about the processes regarding students' behavior expectations, handling complaints and concerns, and AISD parental involvement policy decreased in 2008–2009.

To promote student success, campus administrators must improve the ways they provide parents with individualized information about their children, as well as information about district and campus policies and expectations. District and campus administrators must use all available resources to provide such information to parents prior to or at the beginning of the school year, maintain an open door policy, and have scheduled times during the year to review school and district policies with parents.

PARENT SUPPORT OFFICE QUESTIONNAIRE

PSO staff opted to complete the PSO Staff's End-of-School Year Questionnaire, Spring 2009 jointly. On the questionnaire, PSO staff members were asked to report 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 549 training activities, including the following:

- Facilitated 23 monthly parent support specialists Vertical Team (VT) meetings
- Participated in organizing and planning La Feria Educativa, sponsored by a conglomerate of partners (e.g., APIE, United Way, Seton, Univision Radio & Television, Cricket Communication, AISD), held at the Burger Center in Austin, Texas on February 7, 2009, with approximately 7,000 people attending
- Assisted with campuses' preregistration of parents to attend the National Association of Bilingual Educators conference, held February 18, 2009 at the Austin Convention Center, with more than 50 parents preregistered

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 303 school visits, including meeting with newly hired principals; working with staff of schools identified by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as academically unacceptable (e.g., determining how they were documenting their activities to reflect their Campus Improvement Plan's goals and objectives); assisting with relationship building; screening parent support specialist job applicants; providing technical assistance/support to parent support specialists; and providing grant writing support
- Provided 136 adult literacy classes through Casa Marienella, 36 parenting classes with child care through AVANCE, and eight Taking Care of Business Attendance classes for parents of elementary students who were at risk of legal intervention due to truancy; secured training for 24 AISD campuses about making PTA connections through the Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) program.
- Hosted, sponsored, or assisted with 30 off-site activities, including six presentations to local colleges, community organizations, and AISD campuses; five project

implementations; three community forums or conversations; and 16 local events (e.g., education and health fairs, and grant writing)

PSO staff reported partnering with 16 non-AISD agencies, organizations, or foundations. Seven provided links to local organizations (e.g., Family Connections, South Austin Public Health Nursing Association). Five of the non-AISD contacts provided services that directly affected the parent support specialists and/or the families they served:

- Operation School Bell (OSB), a nonprofit organization, provided clothing for more than 3,000 students during the school year.
- Austin Voices secured a \$10,000 grant to work with parents of secondary students on campuses at risk of closure due to poor state accountability ratings.
- 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.
- St. David's Dental Foundation provided access to a dental sealant program.
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce organized additional parent leadership academies to include Eastside Memorial and Travis High School parents.

Three other organizations contributed the following:

- Austin Community College Eastview provided resource links (e.g., event sites, transportation schedules) to their Hip Hop Into College events.
- Dove Springs Community Health Advisory Group provided outreach information about the opening of the new clinic schools in nearby areas.
- CATCH collaborated with target schools to provide space for training or planning sessions (e.g., parents, school staff, and parent support specialists).

Lastly, the PSO partnered with The Community Foundation Agency (TCFA) to provide free income tax services for 661 families, who collectively received \$1,419,469 (2.3%) of the \$61,112,460 refunds to Central Texans in 2008. Of the dollar amount received, \$344,587 was Earned Income Credit (EIC).

The staff reported three one-time activities in which they provided information to or partnered with AISD departments or offices (i.e., DPE and Middle School office), as well as two community organizations (i.e., Austin Project and United Way Hispanic Quality of Life).

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support staff who worked directly with parents and other school staff were held accountable for the provision of parent support services through their time and effort documentation. They provided data on 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, shown in Table 7.

Table 7. AISD Parent Support Specialist Major Duties and Key Performance Indicators Accountability Model

Major duties (1–6)	Key performance indicators (1–6)
1. Conduct outreach and be a liaison to families	1a. Establish and maintain relationships with parents 1b. Link families with social, health and academic support providers 1c. Work with civic groups (e.g., neighborhood associations, faith-based institutions, universities) 1d. Serve as a member of the campus IMPACT team
2. Organize and/or conduct sessions for families and school staff	2a. Organize a minimum of 12 family sessions per year 2b. Present a minimum of 12 yearly family sessions (include district initiatives). 2c. Provide information to campus staff relating to parent support
3. Develop parent leaders	3a. Connect parents to leadership opportunities 3b. Recruit membership for AISD parent/community groups 3c. Support membership of AISD parent/community groups 3d. Assist in parent-led sessions 3e. Organize parent education classes for leadership development
4. Participate in all scheduled professional development	4a. Attend all monthly professional development sessions conducted by the Parent Support Office 4b. Participate in professional development and planning sessions by vertical teams 4c. Participate in additional support sessions as needed 4d. Seek opportunities for growth and development
5. Document and submit all program activities	5a. Complete and submit required program documentation 5b. Assist in dissemination and collection of AISD Parent Surveys 5c. Track parent and community connections 5d. Monitor Title I compliances 5e. Align work to district planning

Source. AISD Parent Support Office, PSS KPI 08-09 last revision August 18, 2008

To document parent support specialists' activities, the parent support staff completed two (fall and end-of-year) reports and a questionnaire. In the Fall 2008 report, 73 parent support staff were asked to submit a summary of parent involvement activities (and parent

attendance at those activities) held at their school between August and December 2008.

Ninety-nine percent ($n = 72$) returned the Fall 2008 report. The Spring 2009 end-of-year report and questionnaire gathered additional data from the parent support specialists about activities from January through May 2009, as well as information about some specific parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information about the following areas:

- School staff with whom parent support specialists worked
- School vertical team affiliation and collaborative activities
- Participation in AISD resource programs and professional development sessions
- District or TEA initiatives (e.g., literacy program, character education/positive behavior training, 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 number of adults entering the public workforce for the first time
- Number of volunteers recruited
- Use of parent survey results in parent support specialists' Campus Improvement Plans
- Information about other unique activities parent support specialists sponsored.

In Spring 2009, 73 parent support specialists were sent the end-of-year questionnaire. Five district-level family support staff (i.e., the refugee program coordinator, American Indian Education Program [AIEP] coordinator, 2 family and school support specialists, and the Vietnamese parent program specialist) were also asked to complete a short end-of-year report on their programs and families served.

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 2009 activities, were returned by 70 (96%) of the parent support and parent program specialists. Three parent support specialists did not complete the questionnaire. Thus, only Fall 2008 data from the Interim Report (August 2008–December 2008) were available for these parent support specialists when tallying final results for parent involvement activities and attendance for 2008–2009.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TRAINING

When asked with whom they worked during 2008–2009, parent support specialists reported working with principals (94%, $n = 66$); other school staff (93%, $n = 65$); PTA presidents (91%, $n = 64$); and community agencies and organizations (73%, $n = 51$). Some of the organizations that partnered with the parent support specialists included 21st Century, a state-administered discretionary grant that funds after-school programs; Communities In Schools (CIS); Amerigroup; Lifeworks; CATCH, APIE; and Austin Council of Parent and Teacher Association (ACPTA). These activities supported MD 1 of conducting outreach and being a liaison to families.

The parent support specialists reported participating in a variety of professional development activities during the year. The monthly 4-hour parent support specialists' professional development meetings, offered by the AISD's PSO, were attended by 91% ($n = 64$) of the parent support specialists. Sixty-three percent ($n = 42$) reported attending a variety of other AISD professional development activities, 39% ($n = 27$) reported attending novice training provided for support staff who were newly hired, and 33% ($n = 23$) reported attending other local and state sponsored activities. These activities supported MD 4 to participate in professional development opportunities.

Ninety-four percent ($n = 66$) 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; elementary and secondary fairs (e.g., health, family resources, and jobs); and summer camps (i.e., science, math, language arts); Parent Involvement Week; seminars; True Colors workshops; Dia de los Niños celebration; and other activities. These activities also supported MD 4 to participate in professional development opportunities.

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 2008–2009 school year:

- Preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies
- Attending meetings/professional development sessions
- Providing information to parents
- Recruiting volunteers (e.g., parents, community members, and businesses) for partnerships
- Planning and implementing joint ventures (e.g., Parent Involvement Week)

- Setting up and participating in IMPACT meetings, OSB activities, and immunization projects
- Providing professional development sessions to school staff
- Implementing district or TEA initiative programs (e.g., Read and Rise Circles, CATCH, character education, Positive Behavior Support) and coordinating student transition Parent Leadership seminars, resource fairs, diversity workshops, and grade-level transition
- Planning and implementing community or school learning walks, making home visits, and calling parents
- Assisting school staff whenever necessary (e.g., translation, clerical work, filling in for absent staff, and checking parent addresses)

Ninety-eight percent of these activities were categorized within the district-mandated MDs (1–3). 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.

By the end of school year 2008–2009, 34% ($n = 24$) of the responding parent support specialists had provided three or more professional development training sessions to campus staff, 39% ($n = 27$) had provided at least two such sessions, 6% ($n = 4$) had provided only one session, and 20% ($n = 12$) had not provided any of these training sessions. These activities support MD 2. Thus, this represents an area for improvement among some parent support specialists.

Based on data reported by parent support specialists, Table 8 shows 15,359 parents and 12,078 students were served through IMPACT team efforts during 2008–2009.

Table 8. AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists Through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2008–2009

Reporting period	Level I parents	Level I students	Level II parents	Level II students	Level III parents	Level III students
Fall	3,967	3,620	1,428	1,005	779	655
End-of-year	7,181	4,512	1,303	1,410	701	876
Total	11,148	8,132	2,731	2,415	1,480	1,531

Source. Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2008–2009

All responding parent support specialists ($n = 70$) indicated they had provided a variety of services to these families during the school year. These services, which support MD 1 (conduct outreach and be a liaison to families), 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 (e.g., 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., assistance 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

Parent support specialists were asked to provide information regarding the number of home visits and their reasons for making them during 2008–2009. Ninety-nine percent ($n = 72$) of parent support specialists reported making contact with 7,245 parents through 3,862 home visits between August 2008 and December 2008. Ninety-six percent ($n = 70$) reported making contact with 10,665 parents through 3,761 home visits between January and June 2009. 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 August 2008 and June 2009, the majority ($n = 64$)³ of the responding parent support specialists reported making 128 home visits regarding student attendance. In addition, 54 also made visits about behavior, and 49 reported making visits based on school staff referrals. Other types of home visits made ($n = 34$) included those 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); 32 parent support specialists reported accompanying other school staff on home visits. Eleven reported making visits to confirm and prepare for truancy court dates. Home visits support MD 1, yet many visits and contacts were repetitive in nature, and AISD did provide adequate resources to address most of them. The repetitive nature of the home visits represents an area for improvement such that parent support specialists should use available criteria 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 strategy can make better use of the parent support specialist's time.

Table 9 shows the summary of parent support specialists' data concerning parent and community participation in various school-based activities for school years 2007–2008 and 2008–2009. These data support MD 2. Because parents may have attended more than one event, participation counts may include duplicates.

³ Averages are given for responding parent support specialists because data were taken from two reporting periods (i.e., August–December 2008 and January–June 2009).

Table 9. Parents in Attendance, by Activity Category, as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Activity	Parent participants reported in 2007–2008 (duplicated count)	Parent participants reported in 2008–2009 (duplicated count)
Literacy and curriculum events		
Family night	18,657	16,852
Family literacy	15,527	15,736
Principal get together	11,586	9,613
Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)	4,840	3,861
Learning walks	4,764	4,553
Seminars	2,411	4,914
Choice sheet night	1,618	2,401
KLRU series	1,446	599
Principles of learning	1,432	2,029
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)	1,087	342
Assemblies	94,462	87,286
Fairs		
Other	14,318	11,185
Fundraising	13,335	14,932
Health	12,362	9,772
Academics	9,448	14,528
Wellness workshops		
Other	10,309	9,654
Dental	3,588	3,462
Vision	2,598	2,494
Immunization	1,928	2,387
Self-esteem	1,654	2,818
Stress	977	689
Social issues workshops		
Other	10,449	9,654
Drugs	1,458	1,680
Teen pregnancies	467	455

Source. Parent Support Specialists' Fall 2007 and 2008 reports and Spring 2008 and 2009 questionnaires

Note. Bolded numbers indicate an increase from the previous year.

Table 9 shows fairs ($n = 50,417$) and wellness workshops ($n = 21,504$) drawing higher numbers of parents in attendance than they did the previous year. Other events (e.g., nutrition, exercise, 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. However, assemblies ($n = 87,286$), which included activities such as Back-to-School Night; End-of-School Year; information presentations (e.g., AISD policies and preparing for TAKS); Cinco de Mayo; Black History Month; Parent Involvement Week celebrations; and awards presentations (e.g., honor roll and attendance), showed significant decreases in attendance from

2007–2008 to 2008–2009. This may be a cause for concern because assemblies serve as a form of mass communication. Lower attendance rates at some literacy and curriculum events may have had contributing factors that influenced the decrease in their rates from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009, such as age-specific materials/curricula for some activities (e.g., KLRU), or some parents may have avoided repeating presentations (e.g., TAKS, TEKS) when they had children in multiple grades on the same campus.

The questionnaire results also revealed that parent support specialists did the following activities, supporting MD 2:

- Recruited 746 parents for participation in the Medicaid program and conducted 160 Medicaid eligibility searches as part of their wellness activities
- Invited 12,241 parents to PTA meetings, where they were given information about their local association and encouraged to join; this was an increase of 1,792 parents in attendance, compared with the previous year.
- Engaged 1,856 parents, 6,945 students, and 348 school staff in district initiative activities (e.g., character education and positive behavior support workshops); all activities had lower rates of attendance, compared with rates the previous year.
- Provided Title I compliance training and other activities for 3,442 parents, 1,357 students, and 420 school staff; all activities had lower rates of attendance, compared with rates the previous year.
- Provided training to 2,164 parents, 290 students and 180 staff about using the newest district technology tool, ParentConnect, for providing parents with academic information about their children

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. Sixty-six percent ($n = 48$) of the parent support specialists listed assistance with special circumstance conferences (e.g., at-risk intervention, TAKS results, summer school, and transitioning between grade levels and schools) and regular parent-teacher conferences. Fifty-six percent ($n = 41$) reported translating at 10 school staff meetings, four outside agencies' conferences, three school-related registrations, and two abuse intervention situations. In addition, 22 parent support specialists hosted 22 specialty workshops. Another 21% ($n = 15$) provided assistance with six admission, review, or dismissal (ARD) committee meetings; three Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) meetings; one Section 504-Americans with Disabilities Act hearing; and five home visits. One

parent support specialist listed oral or sign language translation during parent-teacher conferences and regular parent activities for three special needs families as a means of including the families in all school activities. 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, 87% ($n = 61$) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting a total of 3,508 parents, who volunteered 56,522 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that 364 business organizations donated 3,690 hours of volunteer service in the form of mentors, buddies, and other roles. Finally, they reported that 342 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, and community members other than parents) volunteered 5,824 hours of service as mentors or tutors. These activities supported MD 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 they can assist their children in succeeding academically. Based on questionnaire results, 68 parent support specialists enrolled parents in adult literacy activities during 2008–2009. Of that number, 27 reported holding classes on their campuses and sending parents to other sites when necessary, 23 enrolled parents in activities on their campuses only, and 18 enrolled parents at other sites. A total of 2,402 adults were enrolled in these classes between August 2008 and May 2009. Sixty-two percent ($n = 1,477$) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2009, and 33% ($n = 489$) entered the workforce for the first time. This activity supported MD 3.

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

When asked whether they used the 2008–2009 district parent survey results in developing their campus improvement plans for 2009–2010, 71% ($n = 50$) said they did, nine said they did not know, five said they did not use the results, one said his or her campus did not participate in the 2008–2009 survey, and five did not respond to the question. Ninety percent ($n = 63$) of the parent support specialists said they would use results from the 2009–2010 parent survey when developing their 2010–2011 campus improvement plans' goals and activities for parent involvement if the data were applicable to their programs. This activity supported MD 2.

USE OF OTHER DISTRICT SUPPORT SERVICES

Eighty-nine percent ($n = 62$) of the parent support specialists reported using one or more of the district's special support staff services: refugee, Native American, Vietnamese and/or special education. Of that number, 39 parent support specialists used one service only, 23 reported using multiple services, five said such services were not applicable to their campuses' needs, and three did not respond. Special education support was the service mentioned most often, and it was usually paired with other services, such as the pre-school program for children with disabilities (PPDC), CIS, sign language, English as a second language (ESL), and local consulate offices.

BEST PRACTICE/SUCCESSSES

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 parent attendance, parent and/or community feedback, number of students served, and amount of funding. Eighty-seven percent ($n = 61$) of the parent support specialists reported best practice activities. However, 26% ($n = 16$) of the parent support specialists did not include information about the numbers in attendance at these activities and six did not respond to the question. Forty-five of 61 parent support specialists reported 8,470 parents attended these activities, including the following:

- Twenty-one reported unique one-time activities, such as home behavior modification classes, Beautification Day, Community Resource Fairs, Future of Hispanics Conference, Choice Sheet Night "Prep" Rally, First Annual Auction Dinner, Kealing Block Party, Agrilife extension classes, commemoration of Pleasant Hill's 150 years of service, and a father-daughter cook off ($n = 4,899$)
- Twelve reported presentation activities, such as a CATCH health fair, Life Changes, the Christina Show, immigration, Martin luncheon, and Super Hero Luncheon ($n = 2,471$)
- Eleven reported workshops, which included Healthy Marriage Healthy Living, Reading Is Fundamental Book Club, Wee Teach It, Family Learning Night, Hope and Dreams, ParentConnection, and Teachers' Planning ($n = 820$)
- Two reported seminars on Launch Pad and Association for Bilingual Education Parent Institute ($n = 195$)

- One reported having parents assist with writing a Prime Time afterschool grant application ($n = 85$)

Because 16 parent support specialists omitted their attendance data when they provided a description of their best practice activity, attendance totals at these activities were underreported. Parent attendance is one indicator of the impact of these activities on the district's parent involvement efforts; thus, it is important to ensure that staff provide complete and accurate attendance data in future reporting.

DISTRICT INITIATIVES

Parent support specialists were asked to indicate whether they had started a district initiative for the first time or were continuing one from the previous school year. Six campuses reported they had continued a project from 2007–2008, and 47 said they started a new project in 2008–2009. Collectively, these 53 campuses provided 271 workshops related to district initiatives in 2008–2009, with 2,904 parents in attendance. Twelve said they had not done a project during 2008–2009, and five did not respond to the question. Of the six campuses reporting continuation of a project from the previous year, four continued the Read and Rise Circles program, sponsored by the National Urban League, Scholastic Inc. and State Farm Insurance (see Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008). Two parent support specialists reported they continued working with their vertical team schools on student transitioning (elementary to middle to high school) and attendance projects. Forty-seven PSSs reported new projects that were inclusive of their vertical teams. Examples of these new projects included the following:

- a high school parent program focus committee made up of school staff who put together a survey for Spanish-speaking parents of their students to seek input on desired programs and services;
- a high school community walk designed by members of the community, teachers, administrators, and parents to improve two-way communication among all of these groups;
- a middle school uniform task force committee that met with staff from other district campuses whose students wore uniforms to get help making an informed decision about uniforms for their campus; and
- an early literacy program cosponsored by St. John Public Library and a nearby elementary school.

These activities supported MD 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

Overall, the data summarized in this report indicate that most 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 and family participation in the education of children. However, the data showed lower attendance for 2008–2009 ($n = 259,227$) than for 2007–2008 ($n = 265,955$), and several record-keeping errors or omissions were made. For instance, analyses showed:

- fewer parent and family members were reported as having attended literary and curriculum activities and assemblies, compared with the previous year;
- fifty-six cases of not providing activities as outlined in their MDs (e.g., 12 did not provide staff training, 12 did not do district initiative activities, and 30 Title I schools did not conduct Title I compliance workshops);
- sixteen cases in which parent attendance data was not provided regarding best practices;
- thirty-one cases of non-responses to items on the questionnaire,
- nine cases in which data on numbers of volunteers, mentors, or tutors were omitted;
- sixty-three instances of incomplete data submitted to APIE.

Lower reported family attendance at literary and curriculum events is a concern because these are key activities in helping parents and community members become familiar with a school's academic program, and assemblies are forums for communicating with large audiences. Compliance with MDs is essential to ensuring these staff are supporting AISD's policies and mandates for parent involvement. The non-responses or omissions of data prevent district decision makers, state and federal agencies, the City of Austin, AISD grant writers, and others from having a complete picture of the district's parent support services. Therefore, in order to enhance the AISD district-wide picture of parent involvement, parent support specialists must ensure their activities match their mandated MDs, and be more accurate and thorough when documenting activities and events.

Lastly, based on written comments from program staff regarding some items in the report draft, a recommendation is made for program staff and administrators (e.g., parent support office staff, principals) to work with parent support specialists to ensure the reliability and validity of self-reported data. This recommendation will be incorporated with data collection changes to occur in 2009–2010.

SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The special support program e-mail survey sent out in the spring of 2009 was designed to gather data about job titles, work sites within the district, types of support services provided, and other job-related activities of the district's special family support staff (i.e., refugee program coordinator; AIEP coordinator; family and school support specialists team; and Vietnamese parent program specialist, who is also a teacher and the Vietnamese parent connection facilitator). The family and school specialists opted to complete one survey together; thus, four surveys were returned in May 2009. Results showed that these staff assisted families of AISD special populations (i.e., refugees, Vietnamese, American Indians, and special needs [e.g., academic, physical, and emotional]), and served a total of 414 families, 1,845 adults, and 554 children. More specifically, these staff provided the following services:

- served 77 refugee families and assisted 152 refugee students with school enrollment;
- served 136 Native American families and assisted 197 Native American children, with school-related support services;
- provided special support services to 1,520 special needs' families; and
- served 410 Vietnamese students and parents.

All program staff reported that they assisted families or students with regular school enrollment. The refugee coordinator reported providing two-way orientation (i.e., parent to teacher, teacher to parent) at the time of enrollment for 120 refugee parents. The Vietnamese parent program specialist reported working with staff from other schools or departments to assist them with similar special populations. Three support programs (i.e., American Indian, refugee, and Vietnamese), reported monitoring students' grades and attendance and arranging for or providing interpretation during Local Support Team or ARD meetings, PTA meetings, principal coffee chats, parent-teacher conferences, and other activities. The family and school support and Vietnamese specialists reported publishing monthly newsletters, flyers, a resource/service directory, and other publications relevant to their programs. As a teacher and parent connection facilitator, the Vietnamese parent program specialist also provided academic and behavioral diagnostic testing, language assessment, and assistance to families with follow-up special education registration when applicable.

The provision of staff development training or parent workshops activities was unique to each special support program because of their area of service. For instance,

- The refugee program coordinator provided informal information exchanges with families at the time of student registration or during parent-teacher conferences throughout the school year.

- The AIEP coordinator collaborated with a four-district consortium to provide Native American parent committee meetings, summer mini-camps for Native American students, culturally-relevant activities at participating districts, and participation in local and regional Native American cultural events.
- The family and school support specialists' team provided Platicas workshops for Spanish-speaking elementary parents whose children had special needs. They also facilitated Family Support Cooperative (FSC) activities. FSC is a collaboration between AISD's Special Education department; Austin-Travis County's Mental Health and Mental Retardation department; and the Arc of the Capital Area, which hosts support and information meetings for families of children with disabilities. During 2008–2009, 13 staff training sessions were held at various schools in the district, with 1,520 parents attending. Support team records indicate more parents participated in FSC activities in 2008–2009 ($n = 1,520$) than in 2007–2008 ($n = 864$).
- The Vietnamese parent program specialist provided parenting classes, a workshop about school rules and regulations, a Vietnamese cultural awareness presentation, a back-to-school orientation meeting, and a planning meeting for an end-of-year picnic and award day for students.

When asked for other comments related to their jobs, special support program staff reported on the availability of special support services to assist families in planning for life after graduation from AISD's special needs programs, and the program's ability to provide emotional support for families during crises. In addition, the Vietnamese program staff commented on the need to expand knowledge about other programs outside of the Austin area. The AIEP coordinator desired to see the continuation of the enrichment, motivation, and education of Native American students in the region. The refugee program coordinator expressed comfort with the current program operations.

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.

Increases occurred from 2007–2008 to 2008–2009 in Austin’s cash and volunteer contributions through APIE, although in-kind donations decreased during this period. APIE staff’s computed cash value of volunteered services provided by the reporting schools totaled \$8,820,453. Of the 70 campuses (i.e., 66 Title I and 4 non-Title I) contacted by APIE staff for annual community monetary and volunteer contribution information, only seven campuses provided complete data for all four donation categories. Table 10 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past 3 years.

Table 10. Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through AISD Partners in Education (APIE), 2006–2007 Through 2008–2009

Type of donation	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009
In-kind contributions	\$3,432,601	\$1,324,328	\$872,407
Cash donations	\$626,896	\$626,556	\$808,125
Number of volunteers	4,433	4,530	7,464
Number of volunteer hours	118,483	156,980	490,025

Source. APIE records, 2006–2007 through 2008–2009

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 2009, and donations from 2009 will save Austin taxpayers approximately \$4 million. However, the contributions for 2008–2009 may have been underestimated because not all campuses provided all their information.

Because this information is an opportunity to save district monies, reflects community support, and has been used by AISD when applying for grants, it is recommended that campus leaders pay closer attention to accessing and reporting all APIE community monetary and 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 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 data about some of AISD's parent involvement programs and services 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 staff development training for non-teaching and teaching staff in two-way communication with parents about non-academic matters, team building, and decision sharing
- Monitor parent support specialists' compliance with their MDs
- Work closely with parent support specialists to ensure that self-reported data are reliable and valid
- Ensure effective documentation of activities and completion of parent and community reports by school staff so the district receives complete parent and community involvement data that can be used for ensuring local, state, and federal compliance, as well as for seeking grant funding

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. PARENTS RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM SCHOOL STAFF ABOUT THEIR CHILD

Table 11. Parents Receiving Information From School Staff About Their Child, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Parents are provided the following information about their child:	2007–2008 %	2008–2009 %
Child's behavior		
Elementary	97	96
Middle	89	91
High	82	86
Child's academic progress (e.g., reading, math)		
Elementary	96	97
Middle	91	94
High	82	90
Child's academic plans and goals		
Elementary	93	97
Middle	79	94
High	69	90
Child's preparedness for TAKS		
Elementary	93	94
Middle	81	88
High	71	80
Child's risk of failing a grade		
Elementary	91	93
Middle	87	90
High	79	85
Positive feedback about child		
Elementary	95	96
Middle	85	91
High	77	81

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

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

APPENDIX B. PARENTS RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM SCHOOL STAFF IN HOME LANGUAGE ABOUT AISD SCHOOL AND DISTRICT POLICIES

Table 12. Parents Receiving Information From School Staff in Home Language Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

School staff provided parents with information about the following items/topics in home language	2007–2008 %	2008–2009 %
Student behavior expectations		
Elementary	97	97
Middle	94	94
High	92	92
Process for handling complaints and concerns		
Elementary	91	88
Middle	83	81
High	75	74
AISD parent involvement policy		
Elementary	96	92
Middle	87	86
High	82	75

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

**APPENDIX C: SCHOOL STAFF PROVIDING PARENTS WITH ACADEMIC, SUPPORT SERVICES,
GRADUATION AND POST-GRADUATION INFORMATION**

Table 13. Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD
Academic and Support Programs/Services, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

School staff provided me enough information about the following programs and resources:	2007–2008 %	2008–2009 %
Availability of tutoring		
Elementary	73	91
Middle	81	90
High	69	81
AISD support services and community resources in Austin		
Elementary	69	92
Middle	55	89
High	39	74

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Table 14. Parents Receiving Graduation and Post-Graduation Information From
School Staff, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

School staff provided me with useful information about the following graduation and post-graduation topics:	2007–2008 %	2008–2009 %
High school graduation requirements and plans		
Elementary	83	88
Middle	71	82
High	81	85
Personal graduation plans (PGPs)		
Elementary	89	84
Middle	62	74
High	64	67
Financial aid and scholarship		
Elementary	80	78
Middle	57	69
High	69	69
College opportunities		
Elementary	77	80
Middle	57	71
High	68	70
Career opportunities		
Elementary	76	81
Middle	62	72
High	63	63

Source. AISD Parent Survey, 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

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