



Family Engagement Services by Parent Support Specialists

2020–2021

Introduction

Austin Independent School District (AISD) considers family engagement a top priority. Accordingly, the district employs a parent support specialist (PSS) at 69 Title I schools, 52 of whom are funded with City of Austin grant funds. PSSs provide community and parent engagement opportunities to students' families. The [Parent Engagement Support Office](#) (PESO), within AISD's Department of Student Enrollment and Advocacy, monitors, coordinates, and provides support and professional learning to PSSs.

This report summarizes some of the family engagement services provided by PSSs in the 2020–2021 school year. COVID-19 had a significant impact on most aspects of the school experience, including the needs of families and the services PSSs provided.

Family and Community Engagement Services and Impact

AISD's PESO staff offer a variety of services and learning opportunities across the district. In 2020–2021, PSSs provided support to 20,794 unique students' families. Examples of services included home visits, referrals to a social service agency, translation services, and help with a student's attendance or academic success. PSSs also helped organize and/or conduct 1,856 classes, trainings, and meetings to support parent education and life skills. One such learning opportunity was the [ParaEducator Institute](#), provided by Austin Community College, which 141 AISD parents completed.

Results From the Districtwide Family Survey

All AISD parents and guardians are encouraged to complete the annual [Family Survey](#), which asks questions about caregivers' experiences with various programs, services, and staff at their student's campus. This year, the survey asked caregivers two new items regarding interactions with the PSS at their student's school (Figure 1), and the majority of respondents answered favorably.

Figure 1
Ninety-eight percent of caregivers agreed that they were treated with courtesy and respect by the PSS and that their involvement was welcomed by the PSS.



Source. AISD Family Survey, 2020–2021.

Results From the PSS Impact Survey

The Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) and PESO leadership collaborated to create a new survey, administered in May 2021, aimed at measuring caregivers' awareness of the PSS program and position, as well as the impact of services provided by the PSS. More than 300 individuals responded to this survey, and results indicated that 96% of family members who used services provided by PSSs found them "very useful." Responses to the item, "Do you know the parent support specialist at your school?" revealed an opportunity for growth, in that 29% of respondents indicated they did not know the PSS at their student's school.

Additional Areas of Impact

Winter Storm Uri

PSSs provided crucial services during the winter storm that affected much of Texas in February 2021. In coordination with PSSs, campuses provided water, food, and supplies through campus distribution centers and home visits. During the 2 weeks following the storm, PSSs served the families of 3,377 students, often providing multiple services to each family.

Enrollment Clinics

When district leaders announced their enrollment goals for the 2021–2022 school year, PSSs were recruited to engage with families to increase enrollment. During the month of June, a limited number of PSSs provided registration assistance and other services to more than 800 students' families at 80 locations.

[Our PSS] organized and delivered most of the teacher recognitions and gifts we did throughout the school year. She helped deliver food and diapers during the snowstorm and on the weekends.

– Campus principal

Conclusion and Recommendations

In meeting the standards set by AISD district leaders for parent empowerment and family engagement, PESO and PSSs play a crucial role. Although school year 2020–2021 was a challenging year for staff, students, and families, PESO and DRE were able to initiate new data collection methods in an effort to understand how the PSS program is being implemented across the district and the variations that may occur from campus to campus. These data will inform future strategic planning and program improvements, and will highlight areas for celebration.

Recommendations for the next school year are to continue to collect implementation and impact data, improve implementation progress monitoring methods, offer professional learning opportunities for PSSs, and inform stakeholders about the valuable services PESO staff provide.

AUSTIN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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