



Austin Independent School District

Department of Program Evaluation

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A SUMMARY OF AUGUST-DECEMBER 2008 PARENT ACTIVITIES REPORTED BY CAMPUS PARENT SUPPORT STAFF

In the Austin Independent School District (AISD), parent support staff who work directly with parents and other school staff are held accountable for the provision of parent support services through documentation of their time and effort; number of hours worked; tasks accomplished; and numbers of parents, students, and staff served. These services and activities are delivered in alignment with the major duties (MDs) and key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined in AISD's Fall 2003 mandated implementation of a district-wide accountability model for parent support staff. This interim report is inclusive of those support services and activities involving parents and students for the period of August through December 2008.

This report includes data submitted as of February 16, 2009 and provides a summary of reported parent attendance at activities from August through December 2008, data regarding home visits (a new item added to the interim report), and the number of parents served during this period through IMPACT services.¹

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of parent support staff worked with the AISD Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) to provide the interim information in this report. Many thanks go to AISD parent support specialists, parent program specialist, Parent Support Office staff, program managers, and grant staff.

¹ A program 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.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION

This summary report focuses on three specific objectives relevant to district reporting needs:

- Documentation and reporting of AISD's interim parent involvement, as part of Title I annual compliance reporting
- Providing mid-year information from parent support staff regarding parent involvement to district staff
- Providing AISD decision makers, principals, program managers, and other school staff with program data and recommendations for addressing concerns or maximizing services already provided before end of school year

The Parent Involvement Activities and Attendance Report—Part I: August 2008–December 2008 was sent to parent support specialists (PSSs) and one parent program specialist (PPS) at 70 campuses on December 11, 2008, with return instructions for January 12, 2009. All 70 campuses returned interim reports. One campus (Jordan ES) had a PPS, who opted to respond with the PSSs. PSSs and the PPS will complete Part II of the report for January 2009 through June 2009 in the 2009 annual questionnaire.

INTERIM ACTIVITIES

AISD PSSs and PPSs engaged 143,849 parents in various activities from August through December 2008. The following participation counts include duplicate counts:

1. 55,515 parents attended assemblies, such as awards, special events, Back to School, concerts, and PTA/PTO meetings.
2. 25,595 parents joined in planning, hosting, and attending school fairs, including academic projects, fund raising, health, and other activities.
3. 23,234 parents participated in nighttime academic or technological workshops or presentations, including Family Night (n = 9,933), family literacy (n = 9,988), Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) (n = 1,777), Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (n = 76), and Principles of Learning (n = 1,460).
4. 13,327 parents attended and participated in workshops about wellness issues (e.g., dental, health, immunization, self-esteem, stress management, vision, diabetes, teen wellness, and nutrition).
5. 13,615 parents attended workshops about social issues (e.g., drugs, gangs, teen pregnancies, mental health, and bullying).
6. 5,108 parents attended get-together events with their principals for brief updates and sharing of information.
7. 3,402 parents attended seminars regarding college financing, available dental programs, school redesign, city services, free income tax services, and Medicare.
8. 3,344 parents and community members participated in campus Learning Walks.
9. 404 parents participated in sessions for enrollment in the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP), a recruiting program with eligibility search software (Medicaider).
10. 305 parents attended KLRU (local public service television) workshops.

Table 1 shows 2007 to 2008 comparisons of the parent activity data about parent attendance at events. Of the 10 events listed in Table 1, large increases occurred for social issues (e.g., drugs, gangs, teen pregnancies, mental health, and bullying) and seminars.

Table 1. Parents Attending Interim Activities (August–December), 2007–2008 and 2008–2009

Event	Parents involved August–December 2007	Parents involved August–December 2008	Difference
Assemblies	56,865	55,515	-1,350
Fairs	29,076	25,595	-3,481
Family Night, literacy, TAKS, TEKS, and Principles of Learning	23,412	23,234	-178
Wellness issues	13,545	13,327	-218
Social issues	6,985	13,615	+6,630
Principal get together	6,333	5,108	-1,225
Seminars	1,241	3,402	+2,161
Learning Walks/Community Walk	3,326	3,344	+18
CHIP	390	404	+14
KLRU workshops	379	305	-74
Total	141,552	143,849	+2,297

Source. AISD Parent Involvement Activities and Attendance Report–Part I: August–December 2007 and AISD Parent Involvement Activities and Attendance Report–Part I: August–December 2008

Of the 10 categories of events in the table, several (e.g., assemblies, fairs, literacy, wellness issues, principal get together, KLRU workshops) showed decreases in attendance from 2007 to 2008. The nature and function of these events required the presence and oversight of experienced PSSs and the notable decreases in attendance at these events raised a concern.

However, a review of the attendance records from the PSSs’ staff development training sessions dating back to April 2008 suggest that the decrease in attendance at the events was unavoidable in most cases because of staff turnovers, hiring and training opportunities (e.g., 3 PSSs were hired between April and May 2008; a new school started in fall 2008, 4 new PSSs were hired between September and October, 2008; 2 PSSs started in December 2008; and 2 PSSs had leave of absence due to long term illness from January through May, returning in August 2008).

Problems associated with staff turnover, hiring, and training were consistently being addressed by the Parent Support Office’s (PSO) staff through a variety of staff development presentations, such as monthly meetings, experience-level pull-out training, academic at-risk training, and training for campuses with unique projects or problems. The PSO’s supervisor and coordinators also provided modeling and/or individual training sessions.

HOME VISITS

Collectively, the campuses reported contacting 7,245 parents through home visits on 3,862 occasions from August through December 2008. The following reasons were offered most frequently for making these visits:

- Attendance (n = 65)
- Behavior (n = 62)
- School staff referral (n = 50)
- Other (n = 40)
- Took other school staff to the home (n = 38)

A review of the reasons for home visits described under “other” found 18 PSSs securing medical, dental, vision, and hearing services for students that involved carrying paperwork to parents’ homes for signing; 14 delivering clothing, food, holiday baskets, and securing housing, which also involved taking paperwork to families for processing; 7 providing round-trip transportation of parents to various campus meetings [e.g., Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD), IMPACT]; 6 traveling to verify telephone numbers or addresses; 5 carrying sick children home; 3 visiting homes regarding family conflict matters; and 2 each visiting homes regarding sick parents and student academic matters. All of these activities showed parent support staff going away from school-based activities to in-home or other off-site activities.

Unless it is absolutely unavoidable, other arrangements should be made to take care of these tasks at the campus site or by other AISD staff. These off-site activities create concerns about: (a) the amount of time invested in off-site visits, rather than campus-based activities, and (b) indirect fostering of parent dependency on PSSs, which is not a desired or intended outcome.

Further review found a disproportional number of home visits compared with number of parents, or vice versa, reported in 16 instances (e.g., 138 home visits, contacted 910 parents; 7 home visits, contacted 344 parents; compared with 412 home visits, 412 parents contacted; 128 home visits, 74 parents contacted). Although it is unclear as to why these numbers vary in their relationship to each other, disproportions of these types raise an audit flag, and should be a cause for concern.

IMPACT SERVICES

AISD’s IMPACT program is a dropout prevention/reduction initiative that 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. The PSSs’ accountability model supports the goal of this program. One of the PSSs’ major duties state that they are to conduct outreach and be a liaison to families at various levels of need. The levels of need are defined as follows:

- General school-wide services to families of Level I students (e.g., toothbrushes, combs, book bags, and other basic school supplies).
- Emergency service to Level II families for whom preventive intervention was not an option because of an unexpected disruption in the expected quality of the life of the

students and the family (e.g., student becoming at risk of failing a grade, facing possible court action for excessive absenteeism, having medical problems requiring completion of extensive paperwork to secure affordable services). Responses to these needs usually include home visits regarding attendance, enrolling the student in after-school classes or community tutoring services, translating during parent/teacher conferences, doctors' visits, and locating reasonably priced or free medical services.

- Extreme emergency services for parents of Level III students whose needs are so severe the students are at great risk of not being able to continue in school. Sometimes the risk factors are created by natural disasters, such as hurricanes, flooding, and natural gas explosions or leaks. At other times, the risk factors are societal in nature, such as loss of income, eviction from house or apartment, and house or apartment fire. Responses to these needs usually include actions taken by the school's IMPACT team, of which the PSS is usually a member, to decide on a course of action to assist the family.

From August 2008 through December 2008, PSSs provided these kinds of outreach services to 6,174 parents and 5,280 students. Table 2 shows the IMPACT services provided to parents and students, by levels of need, for interim periods 2007 and 2008.

Table 2. IMPACT Services Provided to AISD Parents and Students During Interim Periods, 2007 and 2008

Family member	Interim: August–December 2007				Interim: August–December 2008			
	Level I	Level II	Level III	Total	Level I	Level II	Level III	Total
Parents	5,570	1,347	994	7,911	3,967	1,428	779	6,174
Students	4,513	1,532	1,196	7,241	3,620	1,005	655	5,280
Total	10,083	2,879	2,190	15,152	7,587	2,433	1,434	11,454

Source. AISD's Department of Program Evaluation (DPE) interim reports, 2007, 2008

Decreases occurred in the numbers of families served through IMPACT between 2007 and 2008, but this may not mean fewer families were in need of service. The decrease could be attributed to economic or process variables, such as (a) fewer vendors offering to provide these services at free or reduced cost; (b) infrequent vendor presentations before the whole group; (c) delays in the current chain of contact with a vendor (i.e., from PSS to coordinator, coordinator to vendor, vendor to PSS); or (d) campuses choosing to work with vendors outside of the chain of contact. This decrease in number of families needs closer review to determine if there is cause for concern beyond the economy.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AISD's PSSs and PPS engaged 143,849 parents in various activities from August 2008 through December 2008. They involved more parents in the interim period August through December 2008 than in the interim period August through December 2007. The increases were most notable in events such as gangs, drugs, and wellness workshops; seminars that introduced

products or projects and recruited participants; and learning walks and community walks that showcased and introduced the school or community to those participating in the walk. The decreases in the levels of IMPACT services provided in 2008 compared with those provided in 2007 may indicate that parent support staff took measures to meet a number of students' school-wide Level I needs through school-wide distribution of or access to resources (e.g., book bags; toothbrushes; pencils; and sign ups for free medical, health, or nutrition programs), as well as many level II and III needs, which often included sharing community resources (e.g., free tutoring services from surrounding colleges, universities, and local learning centers; Taking Care of Business classes; health; clothing; and shoes) as soon as the need was discerned.

The first concern identified by this report is the decrease in numbers of parents attending school events (e.g., assemblies, fairs, principal get togethers, and academic sessions), which may have an impact on student learning. According to AISD's annual parent survey (Schmitt & Bush-Richards, 2008), one area of concern was evident from the responses by parents of middle and high school students regarding the need for more school-related information (e.g., graduation requirement, TAKS, TEKS, availability of financial aid, college and career opportunities) and individualized information (e.g., academic progress) about their child. A recommendation was made in the annual parent and community involvement summary report (Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2008) that district and campus administrators use all available resources (e.g., PSSs, school newsletters, flyers, and marquees) to provide parents with school-related information about their child.

Another concern is the home visit data. Although home visits are a part of KPI 1, which supports MD 1, and are used by PSSs in some facet of their job performance, a close review of the data presented two items of concern. First, in some cases, PSSs reported disproportional numbers of home visits, as compared with the number of parents seen during those visits. Second, the amount of time spent on "other" visits, relative to their regular/other parent involvement activities, did not represent best practice or the best use of time or resources. For example, PSSs should not have to repeatedly take school forms to a parent's home for completion. In some cases, repeat visits without progress may lead to unwanted dependency upon the PSS. Therefore, it is recommended that the PSO staff (e.g., supervisor, coordinators) review the content of PSSs' reported home visits (profiles of each school's returned interim report are available from the DPE) and provide training to them on use of time for best practice, resources, and accounting methods, where applicable.

Although all PSSs completed and returned their interim reports, a delay occurred in the return of some parent support staff surveys to the DPE, and this created additional delays in completing the analyses and publishing the results for use by program staff. Although this concern is being addressed by the PSO staff, it is necessary to remind PSSs that these data are (a) required for state and federal grant reporting; (b) important for district compliance with Title I regulations; and (c) represent a valuable information resource for program staff and local entities (e.g., the City of Austin, district grant writers, businesses, and other local agencies providing

information about Austin to potential clients and/or residents). Therefore, to ensure high quality services and documentation of such services, additional communication should be provided to these staff relative to the importance of responding to and completing district reports in full and on time. As a general reminder (with utmost appreciation for those who document well), it is suggested that principals and PSS coordinators work with parent support staff in their vertical teams to ensure that expectations are clear, obstacles to compliance are removed, and reports are submitted.

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