

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2006–2007



Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information to all stakeholders about the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) parent involvement programs. This information is intended to be useful to the district's board of trustees, administrators, program managers, principals, and parent support specialists as they engage in cost effective decision making about operations.

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

Because district staff, especially teachers, are the gate keepers 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 2006–2007 Employee Coordinated Survey data revealed concerns about staff members' self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and about staff needs for training. As in prior years, a relatively high percentage of teachers (54%) reported parental involvement was one of the areas in which they needed training.

Important information was gathered from the district-wide 2006–2007 AISD Parent Survey. Parents were asked if they received information regarding specific AISD school and district policies. Parents' responses across grade levels showed that most agreed staff had provided them adequate information about AISD's parental involvement policy. However, 47% of middle school and 31% of high school parents disagreed when asked if school staff provided them adequate graduation and post-graduation information. In keeping with AISD's guidelines for model customer service, these percentages of disagreement (especially at the middle and high school levels) must be addressed if the district is to provide effective services to customers (e.g., parents, community members).

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

Parents' responses across all grade levels showed that most (93% at elementary, 91% at middle, and 89% at high school) had positive experiences with teachers (as compared with other campus staff) on topics such as being treated with respect and having opportunities for involvement in their child's education. When asked about their involvement in campus activities as well as in their child's schoolwork (i.e., homework), the majority of parents reported they regularly helped their child with homework and said they were likely to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and general school meetings.

In the 2006–2007 school year, 65 AISD campuses and two departments (School, Family, and Community Education and Bilingual Education) used funds to employ parent support staff (e.g., parent support specialists, refugee family support specialist, parent program specialist). These staff provided workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. They continued to implement previously established initiatives (e.g., literacy programs, transition between grade levels, positive behavior) and introduced new initiatives (e.g., the nutrition program). The parent support specialists provided professional development sessions for school staff and participated in their respective school's at-risk student assistance program. According to a telephone conversation with Dr. L. Clark-Brown, AISD's dropout prevention/reduction coordinator, "This program is designed to make an 'IMPACT' through facilitation and provision of follow-up services to families that avert or alleviate the at-risk status of students" (2003).

Parent support specialists are vital links between parents, communities, and schools because they often live in the communities in which they work, communicate in the language(s) common to the community and school, and provide parents with academic training opportunities or information to support student learning. These staff can assist the district in efforts to close the academic achievement gap between low-achieving and high-achieving students and provide a crucial link between parents and schools. However, based on AISD's 2006–2007 Employee Coordinated Survey data, the majority of classified staff responses indicated they needed more training in providing parents with information regarding parental involvement. Thus, it is important to review any concerns regarding a perceived need for additional training relevant to these specialists.

In fall 2003, AISD mandated the implementation of a district-wide accountability model for all parent involvement staff that included a set of major duties (MDs), key performance indicators (KPIs), and time and effort documentation for parent support specialists employed at campuses. Data regarding parent support specialists for 2006–2007 indicated the majority of these AISD staff performed their MDs and met their campuses' goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members. However, self-

report data indicated some parent support specialists (13%) did not work with their district-assigned vertical teams.

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 2005–2007 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 each campus in the bond package shows a 10% contribution in total dollar amount of community support in its participating year.

A review of APIE's 2006–2007 records showed substantial decreases from the prior year in two categories: number of volunteers and volunteer hours. These numbers may have been higher if 100% of schools had completed in full the reports they submitted.

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

1. One of the parent support specialists' MDs is to provide staff development sessions on parent involvement and available AISD resources (e.g., the Family Resource Center). Campus administrators should use the parent support specialists to provide teachers with staff development opportunities. Thus, campus administrators could address both the needs of teachers and the goals of parent support specialists in this area. Because parent support specialists already work closely with the Family Resource Center, campus administrators should request their assistance in providing workshops or presentations to increase awareness of the Center among school staff and parents.
2. Because parents clearly are AISD customers and stakeholders, campus administrators must review parent survey results and make every effort to ensure parents enjoy positive interactions with all school staff. Furthermore, all school staff must be vigilant in advocating for their campus and providing parents with information regarding campus policies and expectations.
3. Because vertical teams and their operations are aligned with the overall operations of the district, it is important that parent support specialists know their teams and coordinate activities with them. Vertical team coordination encourages inclusive planning, promotes district-wide goals, and produces large turnouts at group activities. By supporting coordinated vertical team activities, staff members support

parent involvement and improve the district's chances for approval of applications for grants that require support for parent involvement.

4. Currently, AISD's APIE donations are used to satisfy the \$5 million interest-free QZABP bond that will save Austin taxpayers millions. In light of this opportunity to save district monies, to provide information about community support for AISD, and to assist in grant acquisitions, campus leaders should be diligent about reporting APIE community support data to enhance future savings and to reinvigorate the level of support to AISD schools.

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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 2007–2008 parent involvement goals.

This evaluation assembled information from district staff and parents about the level and quality of parent and community involvement in AISD schools during the 2006–2007 school year. Because parent and community involvement includes 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, Family Resource Center's parent programs staff, PTA/PTO presidents, the grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, members of the Parent/Family Involvement Advisory Council, various school staff, APIE, and parents residing in the AISD attendance area.

AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

POLICY

AISD's board of trustees adopted an updated parental involvement policy (GK-LOCAL: Community Relations) in August 2000, based on Joyce Epstein's (1997) list of important parent involvement activities: communication, parent training, promoting student learning, using community resources, participating in decision making, and volunteering. In addition, the AISD board of trustees adopted a policy governance model in August 2002 that included executive limitations in 16 distinct areas. The primary executive limitation concerning parents is EL-3 ("Treatment of Stakeholders"), which outlines appropriate communication with parents and others and describes the responsibility of the superintendent to ensure lawful, ethical, respectful, and dignified treatment of parents, staff, students, and the public.

DISTRICT PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

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

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

The Family Resource Center is a part of AISD's School, Family, and Community Education department, located at Allan Elementary School, and is responsible for providing leadership and educational training to district staff, parents, and others in the area of parent involvement. The Family Resource Center also is responsible for monitoring local compliance with state and federal rules and regulations related to parent involvement programs. The AISD Family Resource Center staff accomplished the following:

- Coordinated parent involvement activities district-wide and provided 12 special professional development workshops to 67 parent support specialists
- Facilitated Title I and Title I Migrant Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings

- Provided information to Texas Interagency Interfaith Disaster Response, the long-term recovery committee for Hurricane Katrina
- Provided parent support specialists with guidance in the implementation and ongoing operations of several AISD initiatives (e.g., literacy, nutrition, and behavior modification programs)
- Published or otherwise made available parenting periodicals
- Provided on-site enrichment opportunities, including morning adult literacy/English as a second language (ESL) and parenting classes for 65 adults, 40 weeks of on-site parent education classes for 75 parents, and 160 days of ESL classes
- Provided 20 on-site Taking Care of Business classes for 629 parents/guardians of elementary students who were at risk of legal intervention due to truancy, and 3 campus-wide Taking Care of Business presentations (Cook, McBee, Jordan)
- Collaborated with AISD's dropout prevention program to provide 3 attendance awareness workshops on the roles parent support specialists and attendance clerks play in truancy filing
- Provided summaries of parent support specialists' time and effort documentation to the associate superintendents
- Made 120 school visits to monitor parent support specialists' activities and campus parent involvement programs
- Participated in 23 community resource fairs, including the Celebration of Families event (3,000 in attendance)
- Hosted an open house at the Family Resource Center during Parent Involvement Week (116 parents and community members visited the Center)
- Sponsored a parent champions reception, the Parent All-stars Tribute (PAT), for 137 parents who were nominated by principals and parent support specialists on the basis of their outstanding campus leadership roles
- Provided two staff development training sessions for middle school parent support specialists through Austin Voices, which is an affiliate of the Forum for Youth Investment as well as a member of the Public Education Network and provides leadership development training for middle school parents and students
- Partnered with The Community Foundation Agency (TCFA) to provide free income tax services for 454 families, who collectively received \$665,264 (3.88%) of the \$17,130,837 in current and back refunds to Central Texans; of the dollar amount received, \$277,523 was Earned Income Credit (EIC);
- Provided meeting headquarters for AISD's Parent/Family Involvement Advisory Council (PFIAC).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

A strong component of community involvement in AISD is the APIE program, which represents a partnership between AISD and the Texas Uniform Unincorporated Nonprofit Association (TUUNA) foundation and encourages business and community involvement in public schools. Partners are matched with the schools of their choice and provide volunteer services, in-kind contributions, and cash donations. In addition to APIE volunteers, parent support specialists also recruit and train other community volunteers.

EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The 2007 Employee Coordinated Survey was distributed to a sample of AISD employees through e-mail in the spring of 2007. The survey was a coordinated effort among AISD's offices and departments to gather information from employees district-wide. The coordinated survey included questions about parent involvement issues and was sent to a sample of assistant principals (administrators), elementary counselors (non-teaching professionals), teachers (professionals), and parent support specialists (classified). The items regarding parent involvement issues were e-mailed to 1,157 employees. These staff responded to survey items regarding staff development needs, district-wide testing, classroom and campus requirements, school staff expectations, support services, and community resources. These survey items were offered in four prior employee coordinated surveys, and response outcomes were similar to those in previous years. Thus, tables show multiple years of data when available.

PROVIDING INFORMATION ABOUT CAMPUS EXPECTATIONS TO PARENTS

On the employee survey, elementary counselors, elementary and secondary assistant principals, K-12 teachers, and parent support specialists were asked to identify the type of information they most often provided to parents about campus expectations, student attendance, and discipline policies. A total of 1,157 valid campus staff responses were counted for the survey. Table 1 shows that, for the 2006–2007 school year, a greater percentage of the teaching staff (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school teachers), compared with non-teaching staff, reported providing information to parents about 5 of the 6 items on campus expectation (i.e., working with their child at home on school-related tasks, attending and participating in meetings, advocating for their child, providing input in decision making, and advocating for their child's school). Although the 2006–2007 data for teachers showed some increases from the prior year with respect to the percentages of teachers providing information to parents (i.e., regarding input in decision making, working toward resolving parent campus conflicts, advocating for their child's school), it is equally important for non-teaching staff, especially

campus administrators, to be as vigilant as teaching staff in providing parents information regarding campus expectations. Further study is warranted to investigate year-to-year differences in response patterns.

Table 1. AISD Staff Providing Information About Parental Involvement Expectations, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following parental involvement expectations:	2005–2006 Non-teaching (n = 102) %	2006–2007 Non-teaching (n = 416) %	2005–2006 Teaching (n = 80) %	2006–2007 Teaching (n = 741) %
Attending and participating in meetings, workshops, etc.	80	59	76	69
Advocating for their child	88	47	66	55
Providing input in decision-making	77	56	55	66
Working with child at home on school-related tasks	75	41	85	42
Working toward parent/campus solutions	59	50	44	47
Advocating for their child's school	63	55	55	83

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

STAFF DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Campus staff were asked about the types of professional development opportunities they would like to receive in the following areas: general parent-staff communication skills; advising parents about grade-level curriculum and graduation requirements; working with parents regarding student behavior at school (e.g., attendance, discipline, dress code); advising parents about how to support students' learning at home (e.g., study skills, learning activities); district/campus parent involvement policy; district/campus parent involvement resources; and advising parents about IMPACT meetings. As shown in Table 2, the majority of teachers (54%) and other professionals (57%) desired training about advising parents on how to support student learning at home. Collectively, the same group also wanted training about working with parents on student behavior at school (Table 2). These two categories also were chosen frequently by administrators and classified staff. These same topics have been identified frequently in the past six years of the survey (Washington, Doolittle, & Williams, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006).

Table 2: AISD Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2006–2007

I would like to receive staff development in the following areas:	Administrators (n = 84) %	Classified (n = 237) %	Other professionals (n = 95) %	Teachers (n = 741) %
Working with parents on student behavior at school (e.g., attendance, discipline)	31	36	58	44
Advising parents about how to support student learning at home	30	27	57	54
General parent-staff communication	24	35	14	15
District/campus parent involvement policy	10	20	9	13
Advising parents about IMPACT meetings	21	16	27	22
Advising parents about grade level curriculum	15	13	17	17
Advising parents about graduation requirements	15	12	15	6
District/campus parent involvement resources	18	23	19	18

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2006–2007

AISD SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Teaching (n = 741) and non-teaching (n = 416) campus respondents reported their level of awareness about the following AISD support services or community resources: AISD Ombudsman; Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); Family Connections organization; Operation School Bell (OSB); IMPACT (AISD dropout prevention program); the Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services); and a new item, citywide PTA/PTO. Table 3 shows that, from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007, non-teaching staff’s awareness decreased for all except the one new community resource item. Also, teachers’ awareness decreased for 3 of the continued items. Teachers’ lack of awareness may be related to the fact that they are not the ones who usually provide recommendations for or acquisition of these support services and resources for students and families, so by itself, this is not a matter for concern. However, the results for non-teaching staff are a cause for concern because these staff (e.g., principals, counselors) are directly involved in acquiring support services that resolve student/family issues.

Table 3: AISD Staff Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources:	2005–2006	2006–2007	2005–2006	2006–2007
	Non-teaching (n = 102)	Non-teaching (n = 416)	Teaching (n = 80)	Teaching (n = 741)
	%	%	%	%
Operation School Bell	95	34	52	54
AISD Ombudsman office	60	14	14	17
IMPACT (AISD dropout prevention program)	97	15	72	13
Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	88	13	52	6
Family Resource Center (AISD support services)	68	21	24	18
Family Connection Organization	51	40	9	44
*Citywide PTA/PTO	*	28	*	15

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Note: Asterisks indicate Citywide PTA/PTO was not included in the 2005–2006 survey.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The AISD Employee Coordinated Survey data suggest that 23% (n = 55) of the classified staff need professional training for working with and advising parents about various school-related issues. This need may be related to the fact that some school staff (e.g., 13% of the parent support specialists) were hired later in the school year. The survey data also suggest that campus staff need information about parental involvement and support services at their campuses. In fact, for the sixth year in a row, most campus staff have requested professional development sessions about how to work with parents on various issues (e.g., discipline, support for student learning).

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

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

AISD PARENT SURVEY 2006–2007

The AISD Parent Survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to 107 AISD campuses in fall 2006. 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 (2007), the survey was designed to monitor the relationship between campus staff and parents.

The total number of surveys returned from 105 campuses (2 campuses were excluded because of low return rates) was 14,592, (11,812 elementary, 1,354 middle, and 1,426 high), which represented approximately 17% of the district's student population. The survey gathered demographic information from parents about their child. In addition, one open-ended item asked parents what their child's school had done well and what could be improved. The survey gathered opinions from parents about treatment of parents and students by campus staff; provision of information to parents about programs; campus requirements and expectations; school and district policies; individual student information (e.g., positive feedback, behavior, preparedness for TAKS, academic progress); and whether schools provided information to parents about financial aid, scholarships, graduation requirements, and other college or career opportunities.

New items on the 2006–2007 survey included one open-ended question as well as items referring to parent support specialists and other campus staff, frequency of parents helping children with homework, and frequency of parent participation in various activities at their child's school. Comparison data from the 2005–2006 survey are presented in the following tables whenever applicable. Note that 14,868 parents (10,907 elementary, 1,807 middle, and 2,100 high) returned surveys in 2005-2006, compared with the 14,592 received in 2006-2007.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Most parents reported having had positive experiences and interactions with campus staff. Table 4 shows the following results from the 2006–2007 parent survey:

- As in previous years, the majority of parents expressed higher percentages of agreement regarding positive experiences with teachers than they did with other staff, on topics such as treatment with respect and involvement in their child's education.
- Parents of elementary school students agreed more often than did parents of secondary school students that experiences with teachers were positive.

From 2005–2006 to 2006–2007, the percentages of secondary school parents reporting positive experiences with staff decreased for parents of middle school students and increased

for high school parents on the majority of survey items (i.e., treatment with respect, input into academic decisions about their child, and opportunities for two-way communication). Compared with other staff, office staff and assistant principals most often received lower ratings from parents with respect to reports of positive experiences.

Table 4: Parents Having Positive Experiences With Various School Staff, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Survey Items	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect:						
Teachers	98	93	94	93	93	93
Office staff	94	92	88	89	87	89
Counselor(s)	96	93	92	91	89	92
Assistant principals	96	92	90	91	90	92
Principals	95	92	90	89	91	92
School staff have helped me to become more involved in my child's education:						
Teachers	97	93	97	89	85	81
Office staff	90	88	90	79	68	71
Counselor(s)	90	89	90	83	79	78
Assistant principals	91	89	91	79	71	71
Principals	92	89	92	80	70	70
*Parent support specialists	*	88	*	80	*	85
School staff welcome my input in academic decisions about my child:						
Teachers	96	92	90	90	86	88
Office staff	94	90	88	84	87	79
Counselor(s)	93	90	83	87	83	84
Assistant principals	93	90	81	85	78	81
Principals	92	91	81	84	79	80
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication:						
Teachers	97	93	92	92	89	90
Office staff	95	92	85	84	82	85
Counselor(s)	94	92	83	88	84	85
Assistant principals	94	91	93	86	84	82
Principals	95	91	86	85	81	80
School staff treat my child fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability:						
Teachers	97	93	92	91	89	91
Office staff	96	94	92	91	89	91
Counselor(s)	96	94	94	92	91	92
Assistant principals	97	93	90	90	90	91
Principals	96	93	92	90	91	92
*Others	*	91	*	90	*	90

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Note: Asterisks indicate parent support specialists and others were not included as items in the 2005–2006 parent survey.

As shown in Table 5, when parents were asked if schools provided them with individual student information, fewer elementary school parents reported this was the case in 2006 than did in 2005 on all items, and percentages declined for all grade levels on the item regarding adequate information about their child's academic progress. These results indicate the need for school staff to be more vigilant about dissemination of academic progress information to parents. On a more positive note, the data showed an increase from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 in percentages of secondary school parents who received information concerning their child's behavior, academic plans and goals, and preparedness for TAKS. Also, the data showed that secondary school parents believed the amount of positive feedback they received about their child increased during this same period.

Table 5: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff About Their Child, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Parents are provided the following information about their child:	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %
Child's behavior:		
Elementary	97	93
Middle	84	86
High	81	83
Child's academic progress (e.g., reading, math):		
Elementary	94	92
Middle	92	88
High	87	84
Child's academic plans and goals:		
Elementary	91	89
Middle	65	73
High	67	68
Child's preparedness for TAKS:		
Elementary	93	89
Middle	71	78
High	69	71
Child's risk of failing a grade:		
Elementary	93	89
Middle	85	85
High	83	82
Positive feedback about child:		
Elementary	94	92
Middle	84	86
High	80	83

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Table 6 shows that, although most parents who responded to the 2006 survey said school staff provided them with academic programs/services information, on a percentage basis, fewer elementary school parents in 2006 than in 2005 responded favorably to the three

continuing items. These results indicate the need to improve school staff's dissemination of information regarding programs/services (e.g., availability of tutoring, parent family involvement opportunities, and parent family resources). Secondary school parents reported a slight increase in the information they received concerning availability of tutoring and parent/family resources. On the item new to the survey in 2006, a higher percentage of parents of elementary students than parents of secondary students received information from parent support specialists about AISD support services and community resources in Austin.

Table 6: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

School staff provided me enough information about the following programs and resources:	2005-2006 %	2006-2007 %
Availability of Tutoring		
Elementary	87	84
Middle	83	84
High	78	80
*AISD support services and community resources in Austin		
Elementary	*	82
Middle	*	69
High	*	56
Parent/Family Involvement Opportunities		
Elementary	96	92
Middle	89	87
High	81	82
Parent/Family Resources		
Elementary	90	87
Middle	76	80
High	71	71

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Note: Asterisks indicate survey item refers to parent support specialist, and no data were available from previous years.

Parents of all grade levels were surveyed about whether school staff provided them with graduation and post-graduation information. Table 7 shows that the percentages of elementary and high school parents who received such information were greater than that of middle school parents. Currently, not enough data are available to suggest reasons for the differences in percentages by school level. However, these topics may be of more immediate concern to high school students and their parents than to those at the middle school level because their graduation will occur sooner.

Table 7: Parents Receiving Graduation and Post-Graduation Information From School Staff, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

School staff provided me with useful information about the following graduation and post-graduation topics:	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %
High school graduation requirements and plans:		
Elementary	*	61
Middle	57	59
High	79	64
Personal graduation plans (PGPs):		
Elementary	*	73
Middle	50	65
High	63	83
Financial aid and scholarship:		
Elementary	*	71
Middle	51	60
High	67	65
College opportunities:		
Elementary	*	70
Middle	51	60
High	69	70
Career opportunities:		
Elementary	*	71
Middle	50	59
High	65	64

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Most parents who responded to the 2005–2006 AISD Parent Survey believed their child’s school was a safe learning environment. Table 8 shows similar results for the 2006–2007 survey, although the percentages of parents holding this belief were slightly less than in 2005–2006.

Table 8: Parents Believing Their Child’s School Is a Safe Learning Environment, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

My child’s school is a safe learning environment:	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %
Elementary	96	92
Middle	86	85
High	83	80

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

The 2006–2007 AISD Parent Survey contained three items that asked parents about the types of school and district policy information that staff provided them during the 2006–2007 school year. A fourth item asked whether school staff provided that information in the parent’s home language. Longitudinal data were available for the three items, and their results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 shows that most parents received information about school and district policies. However, when asked whether staff provided information about student behavior, the percentages of parents of elementary and middle school students declined slightly in comparison with the results from prior years. An increase was observed from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 in the percentages of parents who said they had received information about how to handle complaints. However, during the same period the percentages of parents indicating they had received information about parent involvement policy decreased.

Table 9: Parents Receiving Information From School Staff Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

School staff provided me with enough information about the following school and district policies:	2005–2006 %	2006–2007 %
Student behavior expectations		
Elementary	97	94
Middle	94	92
High	89	90
Process for handling complaints and concerns		
Elementary	91	91
Middle	84	87
High	76	81
AISD parent involvement policy		
Elementary	95	89
Middle	87	82
High	79	77

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Results for the fourth item, regarding whether information was provided in the home language of the parent, showed that 81% (n = 9,116) of the parents' responses were positive.

For the first time, parents were asked about their involvement in campus activities as well as in their child's schoolwork (i.e., homework). Table 10 shows that the majority of parents reported they were likely to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and general school meetings.

Table 10: Parents Attending Campus Activities, 2006–2007

Campus activities	Elementary %	Middle %	High %
Parent-teacher conferences	86	79	70
General school meeting	84	76	70
Sports, art, or performances	83	75	73
Other special events	82	72	68
Academic events	81	73	64
School fund-raising	80	72	66
School committees	70	65	55

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2006–2007

Lastly, parents at all grade levels reported they regularly helped their child with homework (i.e., 93% of elementary school parents, 89% of middle school parents, and 72% of high school parents).

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON 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, campus administrators receive reports describing how parents of students at their campus responded to the survey. They also receive a review kit, developed by AISD's DPE staff, that consists of a parent survey review worksheet and presentation template. During the May 17, 2007 parent support staff development session at the Family Resource Center, DPE staff presented an overview of the results and provided each attendee with a campus copy. The goal for providing this kit to administrators and parent support specialists was to help them use the survey results and communicate the findings to staff for individual and campus improvement planning.

As part of AISD's core values for a community with shared ownership, purposes, and commitment, campus administrators must find ways to meet the responsibilities outlined in EL-3. They can do this by improving the opportunities for two-way communication between their campus staff and parents, the involvement of parents in their child's education, and the process by which administrators receive parents' input about academic decisions.

Although the overwhelming majority of parents' responses regarding all staff (i.e., principal, assistant principal, counselor, office staff, and teachers) were positive for the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school years, parents continued to report less positive experiences with office staff and assistant principals than with other staff. These results are of concern because these staff may be the first or only contact parents encounter upon entering the school building. In addition, assistant principals are usually part of the decision making team in matters regarding academic and behavioral issues for students at their school. Therefore, campus administrators must make a concerted effort to secure training for themselves and for their school staff about customer service and methods for enabling parents to become more involved in their child's education. This will assist staff in keeping with AISD's executive limitation regarding the responsibility for providing respectful and dignified treatment of parents.

Another area of concern noted in responses from parents of students at all levels pertained to schools' provision of adequate information regarding a child's preparedness for TAKS, risk of failing a grade, and graduation requirements. Campus administrators must improve upon the way they provide parents with individual information about their child.

Frequent communication to parents about individual student academic performance is extremely important because of TAKS-related promotion and graduation requirements.

Most parents indicated that school staff provided them with information about school and district policies. However, compared with 2005–2006, parents of elementary and middle school students were less likely to receive information about student behavior in 2006–2007; moreover, parents of students at all levels were less likely during the same period to receive information about AISD parent involvement policy. District and campus administrators must use all available resources (e.g., parent support specialists, school newsletters, flyers, marquees) to provide such information to parents prior to or at the beginning of the school year.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support staff who work directly with parents and other school staff were held accountable for the provision of parent support services through their time and effort documentation concerning the numbers of hours worked; tasks accomplished; and numbers of parents, students, and staff served. In addition, parent support specialists' activities were examined to ensure they were aligned with MDs and KPIs, as defined by the adopted accountability model. The MDs and KPIs were updated in fall 2006 to be more inclusive and descriptive of the parent support specialists' activities. Table 11 shows how the parent support specialists' MDs were aligned with KPIs.

Table 11: AISD Parent Support Specialist MDs and KPIs Accountability Model

Major duties (1–8)	Key performance indicators (1–8)
1. Conduct outreach and liaison with families	1. Organize/conduct 20 family workshops and support groups for families school-wide and for targeted Level II and III students 2. Support district initiatives through workshops or activities (e.g., character education program, grade level transition, AISD wellness initiative) workshops or activities (e.g., character education program, grade-level transition, AISD wellness initiative)
2. Organize and/or conduct workshops and support groups for families	
3. Coordinate opportunities for family engagement at schools	
4. Provide opportunities for parents to build and use leadership skills	3. Support adult literacy through classes, seminars, and workshops
5. Organize and conduct training for school staff	
6. Connect families with community resources	4. Organize/conduct 2 staff workshops in the area of parent involvement and services available
	5. Provide outreach to parents of students at Level I (school-wide), Level II (high needs), and Level III (at risk)
	6. Provide emergency outreach to parents and students at Level I, Level II, and Level III in the event of a disaster (e.g., flood, fire, chemical)
7. Recruit school partners (e.g., volunteers, mentors, and parents) who are not already paired with APIE	7. Provide school partner recruiting data to APIE
8. Complete professional development annually	8. Attend 90% of professional development sessions provided by the Family Resource Center

Source: AISD Department of School, Family, and Community Education, 2006–2007

To document parent support specialists' MDs and KPIs, along with the various services they provided to the parents and staff on their campuses, the parent support staff completed

two (fall and end-of-year) reports and an annual questionnaire. The relevant MDs and KPIs were listed at the end of each question to assist the parent support specialists in completing the questionnaire. In the fall 2006 report, 62 parent support specialists and 1 parent program specialist were asked to submit a summary of parent involvement activities (and parent attendance at those activities) held at their schools between August and December 2006. Of the 63 fall 2006 reports sent out, 60 (95%) were returned. On the spring 2007 end-of-year report and questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the parent support specialists about activities from January through May 2007, as well as some specific parent support issues. The questionnaire was designed to obtain information about the following areas:

- School staff with whom parent support specialists worked
- Vertical team affiliation and collaborative activities
- Participation in AISD resource programs and professional development sessions
- District or Texas Education Agency (TEA) initiatives (e.g., literacy program; character education/positive behavior training; Coordinated Approach to Child Health, or CATCH; and grade level transition)
- Contributions to community empowerment and parent training
- Provision of professional development training sessions to campus staff
- Number of families served through IMPACT team efforts
- Number of adult literacy classes sponsored
- Volunteer recruiting
- Use of parent survey results in their Campus Improvement Plans (CIP)
- Information about other unique activities they sponsored

Attendance records and meeting minutes for parent support specialists' professional development sessions also were used to supplement data from the fall report and the end-of-year questionnaire.

In spring 2007, 67 parent support specialists were sent the end-of-year questionnaire. For the first time, two district-level family support staff (i.e., social services specialist for refugees, and parent program specialist for Vietnamese families) were asked to complete a short end-of-year report on their programs and families served.

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 2007 activities, were returned by 63 (97%) of the parent support and parent program specialists.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TRAINING

Of the parent support and parent program specialists (n=63) who completed the questionnaire, 92% (n = 58) reported they worked with their principal, and 10% (n = 6) did not respond to the question. Eighty-four percent (n = 53) worked with other school staff (e.g., counselors, reading specialists, comprehensive education director, assistant principals); 83% (n = 52) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president; and 57% (n = 36) worked with community agencies and organizations. Some of the organizations that partnered with the parent support specialists included Austin Community College, Insure-A-Kid, Child INC, Family Forward-Next Step, 21st Century, Communities In Schools, Medicaid Program (online search engine for determining an applicant's eligibility for children's Medicaid and CHIP), River City Youth Foundation, and Amerigroup. These activities supported MDs 2 and 3, and KPI 1.

The parent support specialists reported participating in a variety of professional development activities during the year. Seventy-eight percent (n = 49) reported attending the Parent Leader Network Retreat (offered in partnership by AISD, the Connections Resource Center, and the Family Forward project). Review of the conference sign-in sheet showed 27 parents and 7 PTA or CIS members attended the conference with their respective parent support staff member. The monthly 4-hour parent support specialists' professional development meetings offered by the AISD Family Resource Center were attended by 95% (n = 60) of the parent support specialists. Eighty-six percent (n = 55) reported attending a variety of AISD professional development activities, 48% (n = 30) reported attending other local and state sponsored activities, and 30% (n = 19) reported attending CATCH workshops. These activities supported MD 8 and KPI 5.

Eighty-four percent (n = 53) of the parent support specialists reported working with their vertical team schools regularly on the following projects: transitioning students from elementary school to middle school to high school, Celebration of Families, Parent Involvement Week, Parent United seminar, Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid presentation, Learning Walks, City of Austin Health fair, monthly planning meetings, KLRU series, and other activities. Thirteen percent (n = 8) said they did not work with a vertical team. Four percent either said they did not know who their vertical teams were, or did not answer the question. This activity supported MD 1 and KPI 1.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

Results from the parent support specialists' fall reports and end-of-year questionnaire showed that parent support specialists spent the bulk of their time on the following activities during the 2006–2007 school year:

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

Of all these activities, 98% were categorized within the district-mandated MDs. Several of these activities (e.g., providing information to parents, making home visits or calling parents, and conducting assemblies) spanned the regular school year and summer school activities. These activities supported MDs 1 and 4, and KPIs 1 and 3.

By the end of school year 2006–2007, 43% (n = 27) of the responding parent support specialists had provided three or more professional development training sessions to campus staff. Also, 24% (n = 15) had provided at least two professional development training sessions for staff on their campuses. These activities supported MD 5 and KPI 2. However, 17% (n = 11) provided only one professional development session to campus staff, and 16% (n = 10) reported they had not provided any training sessions to campus staff. Thus, this represents an area for improvement among some parent support specialists. Providing workshops to other staff on campus is a critical activity for all parent support specialists.

Table 12 shows a summary of numbers of families (parents and children) served through regular IMPACT team efforts. One hundred percent (n = 63) of the parent support specialists indicated they had provided a variety of services to these families during the school year. The services included the following:

- General school-wide services to families of Level I students (e.g., immunization, book bags, toothbrushes)
- Emergency service to Level II families for whom preventative intervention was not an option (i.e., students and families thrust into homelessness, families losing their only source of income, and/or families facing major medical problems or disasters)

- Level III intervention services for parents of at-risk students (e.g., assisted with obtaining clothing, tutoring, mentoring, medical services, family literacy classes, student enrollment for free or reduced-priced lunch, and registration for judge-ordered parenting classes) through their campus IMPACT team, or as a follow-up service after an IMPACT team decision regarding a course of action. All three levels of activities supported MD 6 and KPI 3.

Table 12: AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists Through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2006–2007

Reporting period	Level I parents	Level I students	Level II parents	Level II students	Level III parents	Level III students
Fall	8,489	8,085	2,110	2,341	1,215	1,461
End-of-year	6,842	9,543	2,560	2,565	2,276	2,105
Total	15,331	17,628	4,670	4,906	3,491	3,566

Source: *Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2006–2007*

Table 13 shows an increase in the summary of parent support specialists' data concerning parent and community participation in various school-based activities between the middle and end of school year 2006–2007. Please note that because parents may have attended more than one event, participation counts that follow include duplicates. Literacy activities drew many parents; these included family literacy events (n = 18,734), family nights (n = 17,648), and principal “get-togethers” (n = 15,096). Assemblies drew 46,134 parents; these events included Back-to-School Night and End-of-School Year; information gatherings (e.g., AISD policies and preparing for TAKS); Cinco de Mayo; Black History Month; Parent Involvement Week celebrations; and awards (e.g., honor roll, attendance). Fairs and fundraisers drew more than 41,000. Parent attendance at workshops about wellness (n = 34,836) and social issues (n = 20,991) ranked fourth and fifth, respectively. Other events, such as nutrition, legal aid, Día de los Niños, Explore UT and fundraising, received high attendance among some of the individual categories of activities involving parents, but these events were too varied for listing.

Although not shown in Table 13, the questionnaire data also revealed that parent support specialists recruited 229 parents for participation in the Medicaid program and conducted 39 Medicaid eligibility searches as part of their wellness activities. These numbers are down slightly from last year's 576 parents recruited for participation in the Medicaid program in 2005–2006 and 73 eligibility searches. One of the reasons for this may be that Amerigroup joined the list of available health care resources during the 2006–2007 school year and provided community-wide preventive care and programs that were inclusive of Medicaid recipients. The activities in Table 13 as well as related activities supported MD 2 and KPI 1.

Table 13: Parents in Attendance by Activity Category, as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2005–2006 and 2006–2007

Activity	Parent participants reported in 2005–2006 (duplicated count)	Parent participants reported in 2006–2007 (duplicated count)
Literacy and curriculum		
Family literacy	8,025	18,734
Family night	13,277	17,648
Principal get together	9,811	15,096
Seminars	730	6,193
TAKS	2,137	4,991
Choice sheet night	702	3,810
Learning walks	2,560	1,422
Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)	442	764
Principles of learning	1,099	656
KLRU series	102	433
Assemblies	36,247	46,134
Fairs		
Fund-raising	8,262	12,447
Health	3,468	11,761
*Other	10,849	8,816
Academics	7,907	8,600
Wellness Workshops		
*Other	16,215	23,027
Vision	1,981	4,019
Dental	2,285	3,405
Immunization	1,345	2,256
Self-esteem	860	1,610
Stress	806	519
Social issues workshops		
*Other	7,780	18,049
Drugs	993	2,501
Teen pregnancies	186	441

Source: Parent Support Specialists' fall 2005 and 2006 reports and spring 2006 and 2007 questionnaires. Note: Other activities were too numerous to list in this table.

Aside from reporting activities and workshops, parent support specialists were asked to list three conference-type activities that required them to act as facilitators (e.g., set up the conference or meeting, contact parents, act as advocate or translator) and to provide follow-up contacts and services, where applicable. Fifty-four percent (n = 34) of the parent support specialists listed assistance with regular parent-teacher conferences, and 35% (n = 22) reported assistance with regular conferences and special circumstance conferences (e.g., at-risk intervention and transitioning between schools). Another 25% (n = 16) reported assistance with nine admission, review or dismissal (ARD) committee meetings and seven home visits. Thirty-two percent (n = 20) listed oral or sign language translation during parent-teacher conferences or at medical, dental, legal, and/or social services appointments. Other activities reported

(57%, n = 36) included set-up and participation in local support team (LST) meetings, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act hearings, PTA and CAC meetings, the Coordinated Approved Child Health program (CATCH), and securing outside counseling services for students of incarcerated parents. These activities supported MD 1 and KPI 3.

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 = 55) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting a total of 3,256 parents, who volunteered 91,161 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that a total of 202 business organizations donated 3,010 hours of volunteer service in the form of mentors, buddies, or other roles. Finally, they reported that 785 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, and community members other than parents) volunteered 12,906 hours of service as mentors or tutors. These activities supported MD 6 and KPI 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, 92% (n = 58) of parent support specialists held adult literacy classes on their campuses during the 2006–2007 school year. The parent support specialists at 40 campuses enrolled parents in adult literacy classes at other sites because the classes were unavailable at their own campuses. A total of 3,488 adults were enrolled in these classes between August 2006 and May 2007. Forty-eight percent (n = 1,682) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2007, and 7% (n = 248) entered the workforce for the first time. This activity supported MDs 2 and 4, and KPI 1.

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Seventy-one percent (n = 45) of the parent support specialists responded that they used the district parent survey results from 2005–2006 in developing their campus improvement plans for the 2006–2007 school year. Ten percent (n = 6) said they did not use the district parent survey results in developing their campus improvement plans; 8% (n = 5) said their campuses did not participate in the 2005–2006 survey; 5% (n = 3) said they did not know whether their campuses used the survey data or not; and 6% (n = 4) did not respond to the question. Ninety-two percent (n = 58) of the parent support specialists said they would use results from the 2006–2007 parent survey in developing their 2007–2008 campus improvement

plans' goals and activities for parent involvement if the data were applicable to their programs. Six percent (n = 4) did not respond to the question. This activity supported MDs 1, 2, and 3, and KPI 1.

BEST PRACTICE

Parent support specialists were asked to choose one parent involvement activity from a list of five (i.e., presentation, seminar, workshop, writing a grant, or other) that had occurred at their campus and was a success or best practice, based on factors such as attendance, parent and/or community feedback, number of students served, amount of funding (or in-kind contributions), and terms of the grant. Thirty-seven percent (n = 23) of parent support specialists reported other activities, including the following:

- TAKS family fun nights
- Reading Is Fundamental family fun reading night
- Literacy night pajama party
- Healthy Marriage classes
- A "read in" hosted on Dr. Seuss's birthday
- Porter Middle School farewell legacy event
- 50th anniversary
- Hispanic Young Men's Leadership Conference
- Explore UT

Seventeen percent (n = 11) reported serial workshops. These included workshops on positive communication between parent and child, a 10-week program sponsored by Youth Advocacy, the Texas Extension expanded nutrition program, the Travis County underage drinking program, and a job fair sponsored by 63 vendors. Seven parents were hired during the day of the fair.

Another 14% (n = 9) reported presentations on topics such as the following:

- CATCH
- Middle school redesign
- Astronaut Joan Higginbotham's visit
- Tamalada
- Exhibit booth at the Spanish Language Education Fair (Feria Educativo)
- Ballet folkloric program
- RIF book club

Thirteen percent (n = 8) reported holding seminars on topics such as ninth graders who will be 2011 graduates, urban schooling and curriculum, and technology. Eleven percent (n = 7) reported providing educational workshops (e.g., assessment of reading skills and

comprehension, the *Make It-Take It* reading guide for helping children at home, a 6-week “Science Count” program, and an 8-week Reading 101 class). Three percent (n = 2) reported grant-writing projects totaling \$53,000. Five percent (n = 3) did not respond to the question. These activities supported MD 2 and KPI 1.

DISTRICT INITIATIVES

In the spring 2007 questionnaire, parent support specialists at elementary schools were asked to indicate whether they had started the Read and Rise Circles program for the first time in 2006–2007 or were continuing from the previous school year (2005–2006). Of the 31 elementary campuses participating in the 2005–2006 program, 16 reported they had not continued the program in 2006–2007. Another 16 elementary campuses reported starting the program in the 2006–2007 school year.

The Read and Rise Circles program, sponsored by the National Urban League, Scholastic Inc., and State Farm Insurance, is an early literacy and pre-reading skills program (Parents as First Teachers, or Los Padres/Madres Como Los Primeros Maestros) aimed at developing strong reading skills in children during their early childhood years (birth to 4 years). The program objective is to train parents to

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

Read and Rise Circles program training was provided to 43 parent support specialists during fall 2004 by the Family Resource Center’s parent program specialist. Ninety-three percent (n = 37) of the parent support specialists implemented the program on their campus during the 2004–2005 school year. The program continued during 2006–2007, with campuses opting to continue or discontinue the program based on campus needs.

Parent support specialists were told to include a program description in the questionnaire only if they started their program during the 2006–2007 school year. The campuses that started their programs in the 2006–2007 school year were part of the original group (n = 43) trained in 2004–2005. Thus, the following composite English and Spanish mission statement created from AISD’s 2005 parent support specialists’ questionnaire remained the same in 2006–2007:

The desire of the parent support specialist is to provide parents with essential skills and techniques that empower the parents to become the first purveyors of literacy to their children. Se diría que, el deseo de los especialistas en apoyo a padres de familia es

proporcionar a los padres las destrezas y técnicas esenciales para capacitarlos como los primeros proveedores de instrucción para su hijos.

Additional responses showed 49% (n = 31) of the parent support specialists worked with their vertical team schools to conduct 315 Read and Rise Circles program workshops, with 4,959 parents in attendance. Of these workshops, 65% (n = 20) of parent support specialists reported using English and Spanish languages in their presentations, 29% (n = 9) used Spanish only, and 6% (n = 2) did not indicate language used. A variety of handouts and materials were used in these workshops, such as TAKS and TEKS workbooks, literacy books, dictionaries, reading outlines and charts, vocabulary lists to translate from English to Spanish, word find lists, benchmark test information, flash cards, PBS videos, poems, English/Spanish nursery rhymes, vocabulary lists, Make It/Take It booklets, building blocks, and behavior modification materials.

Parent support specialists shared feedback from parents that indicated the parents felt they had learned how to prepare their preschool-age child in many different ways that would help that child enjoy reading and pave the way for better performance when he or she entered school. They also reported that some bilingual parents felt more comfortable when the presentation was done in Spanish, and offered such comments as “fantástico, nos gustó esta sesión, fué un gran taller, aprendí mucho, y yo voy a poder ayudar a mis hijos (fantastic, enjoyed the session, good job, learned a lot, and am going to use this to help my children).” Parents reported improved communication and increased comfort levels when they visited the classrooms of their school-age children. These activities supported MD 2 and KPI 1.

Eight percent (n = 5) of the secondary school parent support specialists reported that they continued working with their vertical team schools on the student-transitioning project (elementary to middle to high school). Another 13% (n = 8) said they did not work with their vertical team on any project. However, 30% (n = 19) reported new projects that were inclusive of their vertical teams. Some examples of these new projects were a 3-week free summer transitioning program designed specifically for in-coming ninth graders, a city-wide twice per week pre-K and K Read-A-Thon, vertical team parent seminars, monthly African American Men and Boys Conferences, and a Hispanic Young Men’s Leadership Conference.

In the case of parent support specialists working with their vertical teams, middle schools usually coordinated the events with their elementary feeder schools and receiving high schools to acquaint parents and students with campus layout, buildings, and staff. Parent support specialists used a variety of materials (e.g., Title I materials, TAKS information, school maps, class schedules, lunch prices, dress code, students’ expectations list, and arranged learning walks) at receiving campuses. The parent support specialists also provided on-site

transition classes/camps for parents and students, either at the end of May or during the first week in June. These activities supported MD 1 and 3, and KPI 1.

SPECIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Two district family support staff (i.e., the refugee family support specialist and the Vietnamese parent representative) assisted special populations (i.e., refugees and Vietnamese) in AISD. These support staff returned their e-mail surveys in May 2007. The refugee family support specialist, housed at the Family Resource Center, reported the provision of support services to political refugee students (n = 93), their parents (n = 38), their schools of attendance, and resettlement agencies during the 2006–2007 school year. During the year, the refugee specialist:

- assisted families with school enrollment;
- provided two-way orientation (i.e., school to parent and parent to school);
- acted as interpreter during parent/school staff conferences and orientation events;
- monitored students' grades and attendance; and
- referred students for assistance with academic or behavioral issues.

The Vietnamese parent representative, a teacher at Walnut Creek Elementary School, also worked as a part-time parent representative to assist the Vietnamese students and parents (a collective count of 200) during the 2006–2007 school year. During 2006–2007, the representative:

- assisted parents and students with school registration;
- provided academic diagnostic testing and language assessment;
- made parent contact;
- provided interpretation during LST, ARD, and PTA meetings, and during Coffee Chats and parent-teacher conferences;
- attended CAC and cadre (city-wide/community Vietnamese) meetings with parents;
- worked with Walnut Creek's parent support specialist and assisted other AISD schools with Vietnamese parents and students;
- organized positive parenting classes;
- published the monthly Vietnamese bilingual program monthly newsletter; and
- provided translations for the school monthly newsletter, regular communiqués to parents, and teachers' monthly newsletters.

The services and support provided by the Vietnamese parent representative were more extensive than those provided by the refugee family support specialist and more similar to the

regular parent support specialist because the roles of teacher and parent representative were rolled into one, eliminating a number of rungs in the chain of communication and action. Also, as a teacher, the parent representative had worked with the regular campus parent support specialist after families transitioned into the school and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

Parent support specialists are vital links between parents, communities, and schools because they often live in the communities in which they work, communicate in the language common to the community and school, and provide parents with academic training opportunities or information to support student learning (e.g., TAKS and other assessments; curriculum and programs). Thus, these staff can assist the district in its efforts to close the academic achievement gap between student groups by using skills and knowledge for promoting parent involvement.

The data summarized in this report indicate that AISD parent support specialists performed their MDs and met their campus goals in providing workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage parent participation in the education of children. However, other evidence indicates room for parent support specialists to improve their performance in the area of providing professional development opportunities to school staff. Similarly, campus administrators can improve their use of these specialists. For instance, in the past 5 years of AISD's Employee Coordinated Survey, many campus staff reported the need for training about how to work with parents to support student learning. Also, parent support specialists expressed a need for training to help them work with and advise parents about various school-related issues. The survey data also indicated a strong need for non-teaching staff to provide information to parents about their campus's expectations for parental involvement. Thus, campus administrators should (a) promote parent support specialists' ability to provide professional development training sessions to teachers and other campus staff and (b) provide parent support specialists with professional training about the basic elements of parent involvement and campus advocacy. With this help, campus staff, including parent support specialists, can gain improved skills and knowledge about how to work with parents toward the goal of student academic success.

Lastly, a review of the results from the parent support staff questionnaire showed six instances of failure to respond to items that were supported by their MDs and KPIs. Reasons for these non-responses are unclear. Not having this information prevents decision makers from having a complete picture of the district's parent support services. Parent support specialists must continue to enhance parents' and staff's awareness of AISD support services and community resources through presentations or other communications. In order to enhance

the AISD district-wide picture of parent involvement, parent support specialists must (a) pay greater attention to documenting activities and events in quantitative terms (e.g., numbers, amount, duration) as well as through qualitative descriptions; (b) complete and submit all documentation required by program managers and other AISD staff in a timely manner; and (c) perform the duties mandated by this district.

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 show a 10% contribution in total dollar amount of community support in its participating fiscal year. This partnership consistently has resulted in savings for the district.

Table 14 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past 4 years. Decreases were observed from 2005–2006 to 2006–2007 in number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours. However, in-kind and cash donations increased during this same period. APIE’s records show that schools with parent support staff accounted for 49% of in-kind contributions, 50% of cash donations, 34% of volunteer services, and 39% of volunteer hours. APIE staff’s computed cash value of volunteered services provided by the reporting schools totaled \$2,223,951.

Table 14: Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions Through APIE, 2003–2004 Through 2006–2007

Type of donation	2003–2004	2004–2005	2005–2006	2006–2007
In-kind contributions	\$2,402,459	\$2,511,687	\$922,425	\$3,432,601
Cash donations	\$268,156	\$277,256	\$468,897	\$626,896
Number of volunteers	14,906	12,615	6,790	4,433
Number of volunteer hours	180,622	186,315	119,019	118,483

Source: APIE records, 2003–2004 through 2006–2007

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE

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 2007, and donations from 2007 will save Austin taxpayers approximately \$4 million.

APIE’s records showed that schools that returned the parent support specialist questionnaires had also submitted their annual APIE reports. However, several did not report

numerical values for some of the donation columns. For instance, 8 schools did not report information regarding cash contributions, 7 did not report volunteer information to APIE (even though their parent support specialists provided volunteer information in the Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire), and 2 did not report cash or volunteer information. Although cash may not be these schools' greatest concern, the substantial decreases that occurred in the number of volunteers and number of volunteer hours for 2006–2007 are causes for concern. Because this information allows the opportunity to save district monies, provides information about community support, and assists AISD in grant acquisitions, it is recommended that campus leaders pay closer attention to accessing and reporting about APIE community volunteer support to enhance future savings.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Studies (e.g., Henderson & Berla, 1994; Phillips, 1997; Turnbull, 2001) have addressed the importance of parent involvement in student learning. For example, achievement improved more quickly for students when two factors were present: professional staff development 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 are engaged in their children's learning at home and in guiding their educational careers, children tend to do better academically in school, stay in school longer, and pursue higher education (Boethel, 2003).

Parent involvement is a critical component of AISD's vision of providing every student with an excellent education, and is aligned with the district's belief that family and community members are vital partners in the development of students. Parent support specialists, PTA/PTO presidents, teachers, and other school staff are primary initiators of parent contact. These people provide information or services to, for, and about students that inform, aid, and often avert or alleviate the at-risk status of students. This report provides some data about AISD's parent involvement programs and suggests the district's parent involvement efforts can be improved through the following actions:

- Provide professional development opportunities for teachers in working with parents to improve student achievement and behavior
- Provide information to parents, teachers, and students about district resources available to them (e.g., AISD's IMPACT program, Ombudsman office, academic programs, and grade-level transition programs)
- Provide professional development opportunities for all school staff, especially "first contact persons" on public relations and advocacy roles
- Ensure effective documentation of activities and completion of reports by school staff (e.g., parent support specialists, counselors, clerks) so the district receives complete parent and community involvement data
- Provide high school parents with more information about their child's academic progress

Campus administrators must use cost-effective means to empower teachers and other school staff to carry out their roles as active stakeholders in AISD by providing training for them about involving parents in all areas related to student success in school. Parent support specialists are the ideal staff to provide such training because they have the capacity to do this, have relationships with the teachers and the parents, and are available. Therefore, it is recommended that campus administrators use parent support specialists to provide the training

teachers need to work with parents on improving student achievement and behavior. Campuses without parent support staff should contact the Family Resource Center staff for assistance (e.g., a parent support specialist to mentor their volunteers or provide presentations and workshops).

In addition, campus staff must pay close attention to securing and reporting APIE community support because AISD realizes savings through QZABP, funding for which is based in part upon these data. Contributions also provide validation of community support, which helps the district's standing in the community and improves the district's chances for approval of applications for large grants that may be invested in furthering students' academic achievement.

Although the 2006–2007 AISD Parent Survey results reflected a majority of positive responses across grade levels regarding campus staff on topics such as treatment with respect and involvement in their child's education, parents of elementary school students were more likely than parents of secondary school students to consider these experiences positive. Therefore, another recommendation is that secondary campus administrators secure training for themselves and their school staff in customer service methods to enable parents to become more involved in their child's education.

According to AISD's policy on community relations, parents, families, and community members are all partners with schools for the purpose of promoting success throughout a child's educational experience. Therefore, the final recommendation is that campus administrators make every effort to offer parents at all grade levels, and especially at the high school level, more individual information about their child's academic performance, plans, goals, and preparedness for TAKS.

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