

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY REPORT, 2005-2006



Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation
November 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information about the Austin Independent School District's (AISD) parent involvement programs to all stakeholders. 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 decision making and operations that are cost-effective.

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, 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 their knowledge of and experience with parent involvement is important. AISD's 2005-2006 Employee Coordinated Survey data revealed concerns about staff's self-reported awareness of parent involvement issues and need for training. As in prior years, a relatively high percentage of teachers (45%) reported parental involvement was one of the areas in which they needed training.

Other important information was gathered from the district-wide 2005-2006 AISD Parent Survey. Parents were asked if they received information from school staff regarding the following programs/services: special education, bilingual/English as a second language (ESL), gifted and talented, tutoring, and advanced placement (AP) and dual credit courses. Parent responses across grade levels showed that 12% (elementary), 25% (middle school), and 32% (high school) disagreed that staff had given them educational program information. When asked about AP or dual credit courses, 31% of middle school and 25% of high school parents disagreed. Also, 48% of middle school and 31% of high school parents expressed disagreement when asked if school staff provided them adequate information about graduation and post graduation. In keeping with AISD's guidelines for model customer service, these percentages of disagreement must be addressed if the district is to provide effective and courteous services to customers (e.g., parents, community members).

The majority of parents across 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 most of these items.

Parent responses across grade levels showed that 98% at elementary, 94% at middle school, and 93% at high school expressed greater agreement regarding positive experiences with teachers than they did with other staff, on topics such as being treated with respect and having opportunities for involvement in their child's education.

When asked about parent involvement policy and the process for handling of complaints, the majority of parents agreed that they had received such information. Percentages of agreement for these items were greatest at the elementary school level.

In the 2005-2006 school year, 60 AISD campuses used funds to employ parent support specialists. These staff provided workshops and other services to parents and community members to enhance, empower, and encourage their participation in the education of children. During the week of September 8-14, 2005, parent support specialists provided emergency outreach services to Hurricane Katrina evacuees, which included escorting evacuee students from the City of Austin's Convention Center to their assigned schools and back; helping with class registration; enrolling the students in federally subsidized lunch programs; securing clothing, shoes, and school supplies; and arranging special testing or securing other AISD supplemental programs or resources (e.g., the Victory Tutoring program). The parent support specialists also provided similar emergency outreach services to Hurricane Rita evacuees, but on a smaller scale. They also continued to implement the district's elementary Read and Rise Circles program and to address student transition between grade levels. They added workshops that addressed positive behavior, another district initiative. 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 Dr. L. Clark-Brown, AISD's dropout prevention/reduction coordinator (2003), "This program is designed to make an 'IMPACT' through facilitation and provision of follow-up services to families that avert or alleviate the at-risk status of students".

Parent support specialists are vital links between parents, communities, and schools because they often live in the communities in which they work, communicate in the language (or languages) 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 gap between low-achieving and high-achieving students and provide a crucial link between parents and schools. Thus, it is important to review any concerns regarding a perceived need for additional training relevant to these specialists. Based on AISD's 2005-2006 Employee Coordinated Survey data, the majority of campus staff respondents indicated they needed more training in workshop topics (e.g., advising parents

about how to support student learning at home, and working with parents on student behavior at school).

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 2005-2006 indicated that 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 that some parent support specialists (22%, n = 12) did not work with their district-assigned vertical teams, and a few (4%, n = 2) did not know who their teams were.

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 financial savings of \$8 million for fiscal year 2006 through a community partnership with the AISD Partners In Education (APIE) program and with a bond program, Quality Zone Academic Bond Program (QZABP). The QZABP allows school districts to receive a waiver on repayment of interest on school bonds that are sold, provided that each campus in the bond package shows a 10% contribution in total dollar amount of community support in its participating year.

A review of the APIE's 2005-2006 records showed substantial decreases from the prior year in three categories: in-kind donations, number of volunteers, and volunteer hours. These numbers could have been higher if 100% of schools had completed in full the reports that they had submitted.

In keeping with the purpose of this report, and 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 can 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 are clearly AISD customers and stakeholders, administrators must review parent survey results and make every effort to ensure parents enjoy positive interactions with all school staff. Furthermore, school staff must provide parents of high school and middle school students timely information about graduation requirements (e.g., TAKS academic progress, credits, semester hours) and post-graduation opportunities.
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 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 a \$5 million interest-free bond that will save Austin taxpayers approximately \$8 million. In light of this opportunity to save district monies, to provide information about community support for AISD, and to assist in grant acquisitions, campus leaders should be diligent about reporting APIE community support data to enhance future savings and to reinvigorate the level of support to AISD schools.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	VII
INTRODUCTION	1
EVALUATION OVERVIEW	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
AISD PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.....	3
Policy	3
District Parent Involvement Accountability	3
Staffing.....	3
Community Involvement	5
EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS.....	5
Providing Information About Campus Expectations to Parents.....	5
Staff Development Needs	6
AISD Support Services and Community Resources.....	7
Recommendations Based on Employee Coordinated Survey Results.....	8
AISD PARENT SURVEY 2005-2006	9
Parent Survey Results	9
Recommendations Based on Parent Survey Results.....	15
PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE.....	17
Staff Collaboration and Training	18
Parent Involvement Activities and Services	19
Special Activities	24
Adult Literacy	24
Use of District Parent Survey Results.....	24
Best Practice	25
The Read and Rise Circles Program	26
Student School-Level Transitions.....	27
Recommendations Regarding Parent Support Specialists.....	28
AISD COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.....	29
Recommendation For APIE.....	29
SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	31
REFERENCE LIST.....	33

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Staff Agreeing that They Provided Information about Parental Involvement Expectations, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	6
Table 2: Percentages of AISD Campus Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2005-2006.....	7
Table 3: Percentages of AISD Campus Respondents' Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006.....	8
Table 4: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed with Having Positive Experiences with Various School Staff from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	10
Table 5: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed with Whether School Staff Provided Information about Their Child from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	11
Table 6: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Information Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	12
Table 7: Percentages of Secondary Parents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Graduation and Post-graduation Information from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	13
Table 8: Percentages of Parents who Agreed that Their Child's School is a Safe Learning Environment from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006.....	13
Table 9: Percentage of Parents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Information Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006	14
Table 10: Numbers and Percentages of Parents Reporting Specific Educational Goals for Their Child, 2005-2006.....	15
Table 11: AISD Parent Support Specialist MDs and KPIs Accountability Model.....	17
Table 12: Numbers of AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2005-2006.....	21
Table 13: Number of Hurricane Katrina Students and Parents Served September 8-14, 2005	21
Table 14: Number of Hurricane Evacuees Receiving AISD IMPACT Services from Parent Support Specialists between January and May 2006.....	22
Table 15: Number of Parents in Attendance by Activity Category as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2005-2006.....	23
Table 16: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions through Austin Partners in Education, 2002-2003 through 2005-2006.....	29

INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement is a key element of the Austin Independent School District's 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 more specific activities (e.g., enrollment in post-secondary 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 that 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 2006-2007 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. 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 parents' 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 the following: 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 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 Austin ISD Partners In Education program and the Quality Zone Academic Bond Program

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 staff, parent support specialists, Family Resource Center's parent programs staff, PTA/PTO presidents, grant coordinator for Title I and Optional Extended Year programs, members of the Parent 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 (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 of service, forms of communication, and rules of governance across all campuses. These measures were established to provide all AISD families with support, as needed. The model standardized the parent support specialist's 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, and the 2005-2006 school year was the first year for making improvements, where needed, and evaluating improvements compared with the baseline year.

STAFFING

In 2005-2006, 60 AISD sites used a combination of funds to employ 64 parent support specialists who provided workshops and other services to parents and community members. During the school year, parent support specialists from 58 Title I campuses, the Carruth Administration Center, and the Family Resource Center worked with staff from the AISD Parent Programs office to enhance AISD parent involvement activities. The office, housed at the AISD Family Resource Center, is located at the Allan Elementary School Annex and is directed by AISD's parent program specialist.

During 2005-2006, the office staff:

- coordinated parent involvement activities district-wide and provided 12 special professional development workshops/sessions for 64 parent support specialists (i.e., 59 Title I campus staff, 2 bilingual education staff, 1 GEAR UP staff, 1 refugee staff, and 1 parent program staff);
- facilitated Title I and Title I Migrant Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meetings;
- provided emergency training for 64 parent support specialists who participated in the City of Austin's emergency relief plan for receiving and settling Hurricane Katrina evacuees;
- participated in activities that included traveling on AISD school buses to the Evacuee Center/City Auditorium to assist with pick up and delivery of Hurricane Katrina evacuees (parents and students) for school registration; after registration, office staff escorted students to and from their assigned AISD schools for a period of 2 weeks;
- continued to provide parent support specialists with guidance in the implementation and ongoing operations of AISD's Read and Rise Circles program;
- published and/or made available parenting periodicals;
- provided on-site enrichment opportunities, evening adult literacy classes, 20 Taking Care of Business classes for 629 parents/guardians of students who were at risk of legal intervention due to truancy, 40 weeks of on-site parent education classes for 75 parents, and 160 days of ESL classes;
- provided summaries of parent support specialists' time and effort documentation to the associate superintendents;
- conducted 18 parent involvement presentations for community groups (e.g., the Austin Child Care Providers, Any Baby Can, Austin Community College, Education Service Center at Region 13, and Family Connections);
- conducted 27 workshops at schools that did not have parent support specialists;
- 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);
- accepted a commendation award during a Bridge Day Ceremony at the Westover Hills Church, in the form of an appreciation plaque, for parent support specialists' work with Hurricane Katrina evacuees;
- partnered with The Community Foundation Agency (TCFA) to provide free income tax services for 663 families (an increase of 163 families from last year);

collectively, these Austin families received \$967,956 (7.45%) of the \$13,000,000 in refunds to Central Texans; and

- 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 2006 Employee Coordinated Survey was distributed to a sample of AISD employees through e-mail in the spring of 2006. 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 that were 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 182 employees. These staff responded to survey items regarding supplemental academic services, staff development needs, district-wide testing, classroom and campus requirements, and school staff expectations. These survey items were offered in three prior employee coordinated surveys, and response outcomes were similar to those in previous years. Thus, tables show multiple years' worth 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 select the type of information that they most often provided to parents about campus expectations and student attendance and discipline policies. One hundred eighty-two valid campus staff responses were counted for the survey. Table 1 shows that, for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, a greater percentage of the non-teaching campus staff (i.e., assistant principals, counselors, and parent support specialists), compared with teaching staff, reported providing information to parents about attending and participating in meetings, advocating for their child and their child's school, providing input in decision making, and working toward parent/campus solutions. However, in 2005-2006, a greater percentage of teachers (85%) than non-teaching staff (75%) indicated that

they provided information to parents about working with their child at home on school-related tasks. The 2005-2006 data for teachers also showed an increase from the prior year with respect to the percentages of teachers providing information to parents regarding campus expectations. However, because the sample size was different between years, further study is warranted to investigate year-to-year differences in response patterns.

Table 1: Numbers and Percentages of AISD Staff Agreeing They Provided Information about Parental Involvement Expectations, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

I provide parents of students at my campus with information about the following parental involvement expectations:	2004-2005 Non-Teaching (n = 245) %	2005-2006 Non-Teaching (n = 102) %	2004-2005 Teachers (n = 638) %	2005-2006 Teachers (n = 80) %
Attending and participating in meetings, workshops, etc.	87	80	61	76
Advocating for their child	85	88	55	66
Providing input in decision making	83	77	45	55
Working with child at home on school-related tasks	83	75	70	85
Working toward parent/campus solutions	78	59	38	44
Advocating for their child's school	61	63	33	55

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

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. The majority of parent support specialists reported a desire for training regarding 7 of 8 survey items. Forty percent of the teachers (n = 80) desired training about working with parents on student behavior at school, and 49% wanted training about advising parents on how to support student learning at home (Table 2). These two categories also were chosen frequently by other professionals, administrators, and

classified staff. These same topics have been identified frequently in the past 5 years of the survey (see Washington, Doolittle, and Williams, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004).

Table 2: Percentages of AISD Campus Staff Requesting Specific Parent Involvement Workshop Topics, 2005-2006

I would like to receive staff development in the following areas:	Administrators (n = 42) %	Classified (n = 28) %	Other Professionals (n = 32) %	Teachers (n = 80) %
Working with parents on student behavior at school (e.g., attendance, discipline)	45	61	56	40
Advising parents about how to support student learning at home	50	71	44	49
General parent-staff communication	26	57	19	16
District/campus parent involvement policy	26	61	25	6
Advising parents about IMPACT meetings	33	57	43	18
Advising parents about grade level curriculum	24	61	16	5
Advising parents about graduation requirements	21	29	6	5
District/campus parent involvement resources	26	61	25	6

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2005-2006

AISD SUPPORT SERVICES AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Non-teaching (n = 102) and teaching (n = 80) 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), and the Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services). Table 3 shows that, from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006, staff awareness about AISD's Ombudsman Office and the Family Connections organization increased. However, staff's awareness of AISD's IMPACT program and the CHIP decreased. Teachers' lack of awareness may be related to the fact that they are not the ones who usually provide the recommendations for these support services and resources for students and families. Also, from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006, non-teaching staff showed a slight decrease in their awareness of the Family Resource Center. These results for non-teaching staff are a cause for concern because these staff are directly involved in asking their parent support specialists to seek support services that will resolve student/family issues.

Table 3: Percentages of AISD Campus Respondents' Awareness of AISD Support Services or Community Resources, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

I am aware of the following AISD support services or community resources:	2004-2005	2005-2006	2004-2005	2005-2006
	Non-Teaching (n = 245)	Non-Teaching (n = 102)	Teachers (n = 592)	Teachers (n = 80)
	%	%	%	%
Operation School Bell	95	95	52	48
AISD Ombudsman Office	60	67	14	25
IMPACT (AISD Dropout Prevention Program)	97	43	72	18
Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)	88	80	52	40
Family Resource Center (AISD Support Services)	68	65	24	25
Family Connections Organization	37	51	8	9

Source: AISD Employee Coordinated Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON EMPLOYEE COORDINATED SURVEY RESULTS

The AISD Employee Coordinated Survey data suggest that 44% of parent support specialists need professional training for working with and advising parents about various school-related issues. This need may be related to the fact that 14% of the parent support specialists were hired later in the school year. In addition, parent support specialists found a need to refresh themselves about the basic elements of parent involvement when serving the hurricane evacuees, who had never been exposed to an educational support program such as AISD's. Minutes of the May 2006 staff training session held at the Family Resource Center recorded parent support specialists requesting that a greater share of the monthly meeting be dedicated to opportunities for sharing tips, procedures, ideas, and basic training.

The survey data also suggest that campus staff need information about parental involvement and support services at their campuses. In fact, for the fifth year in a row, most 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.

AISD PARENT SURVEY 2005-2006

The AISD Parent Survey, available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, was distributed to 103 AISD campuses in fall 2005. 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.

The total number of surveys returned from all campuses was 14,868, which represents approximately 18% of the district's student population. The survey gathered demographic information from parents about their child. In addition, 11 questions gathered opinions from parents about treatment of parents and students by campus staff, as well as about provision of information to parents about programs; campus requirements and expectations; school and district policies; and individual student information (e.g., positive feedback, behavior, preparedness for TAKS, academic progress).

Another set of questions was designed only for middle school and high school parent respondents. These items gathered opinions about whether secondary schools provided information to parents about course selections, financial aid, scholarships, graduation requirements, and other college or career opportunities.

All of the questions had been asked in the parent survey of the previous year (2004-2005), with the exception of the questions about AISD's parent involvement policy, process for handling complaints and concerns, and parents' academic goals for their child. Comparison data are presented in the following tables whenever applicable.

PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Most parents agreed that they had had positive experiences and interactions with campus staff. Table 4 shows the following results from the 2005-2006 parent survey:

- The majority of parents expressed higher percentages of agreement regarding positive experiences with teachers than 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 parents of secondary school students that experiences with teachers were positive.

From 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 the percentages of secondary school parents reporting positive experiences with staff other than teachers declined for some survey items (e.g., involvement in their child's education, input in academic decisions about their child, and opportunities for two-way communication). One exception was an increase in the percentage of parents of high school students reporting that staff treated them with respect.

Table 4: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed with Having Positive Experiences with Various School Staff from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

Survey Items	Elementary		Middle		High	
	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
School staff treat me with courtesy and respect:						
Teachers	98	98	93	94	78	93
Office Staff	96	94	94	88	85	87
Counselor(s)	98	96	96	92	87	89
Assistant Principals	98	96	93	90	78	90
Principals	97	95	94	90	79	91
School staff have helped me to become more involved in my child's education:						
Teachers	97	97	84	89	78	85
Office Staff	92	90	86	73	85	68
Counselor(s)	93	90	90	78	87	79
Assistant Principals	93	91	81	74	78	71
Principals	93	92	82	77	79	70
School staff welcome my input in academic decisions about my child:						
Teachers	97	96	88	90	83	86
Office Staff	94	94	90	88	88	87
Counselor(s)	95	93	93	83	90	83
Assistant Principals	94	93	97	81	84	78
Principals	95	92	88	81	86	79
School staff provide me with opportunities for two-way communication:						
Teachers	99	97	92	92	86	89
Office Staff	96	95	93	85	87	82
Counselor(s)	96	94	94	83	89	84
Assistant Principals	96	94	88	93	85	84
Principals	96	95	89	86	85	81
School staff treat my child fairly with respect to culture, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and disability:						
Teachers	98	97	92	92	93	89
Office Staff	97	96	93	92	95	89
Counselor(s)	99	96	94	94	94	91
Assistant Principals	98	97	88	90	93	90
Principals	97	96	89	92	93	91

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

As shown in Table 5, when parents were asked if schools provided them with individual student information, a large majority 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 TAKS, and whether the child was at risk of failing a grade). Longitudinal data were available for five of the items on the 2006 survey. Table 5 shows a slight decline in percentages of parent agreement, compared with percentages of agreement on the same items in the 2005 survey.

Table 5: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed with Whether School Staff Provided Information about Their Child from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

Parents are provided the following information about their child.	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
Child's behavior:		
Elementary	98	97
Middle	90	84
High	86	81
Child's academic progress (e.g., reading, math):		
Elementary	99	94
Middle	93	92
High	89	87
Child's academic plans and goals:		
Elementary	94	91
Middle	71	65
High	72	67
Child's preparedness for TAKS:		
Elementary	94	93
Middle	75	71
High	74	69
Child's risk of failing a grade:		
Elementary	94	93
Middle	88	85
High	87	83
Positive feedback about child:		
Elementary	*	94
Middle	*	84
High	*	80

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

Note: Asterisks indicate data were not available.

Table 6 shows that, although most parents who responded to the 2006 survey agreed that school staff provided them with academic programs/services information, the percentages for middle school and high school parent agreement were less than those in 2005 on the seven original items. These results indicate the need to improve school staff's dissemination of information regarding programs/services (e.g., special education, bilingual/ESL, gifted and talented, availability of tutoring, and AP and dual credit courses). Elementary school parents

showed a slight increase in their agreement about receiving information concerning availability of tutoring. On the two items new to the survey in 2006, parents of elementary students agreed more often than did parents of secondary students that they received information from school staff about parent involvement opportunities and resources.

Table 6: Percentages of Parent Respondents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Information Regarding Specific AISD Academic Programs/Services from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

School staff provided me with information about the following programs:	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
Special Education		
Elementary	89	89
Middle	80	73
High	74	69
Bilingual/ESL Program		
Elementary	89	89
Middle	78	71
High	72	65
Gifted and Talented Program		
Elementary	87	87
Middle	75	72
High	71	61
Availability of Tutoring		
Elementary	85	87
Middle	85	83
High	82	78
Choice Sheets–Course Selections (HS and MS only)		
Middle	91	89
High	87	84
Advanced Placement (HS and MS only)		
Middle	80	77
High	83	80
Dual Credit Courses (HS and MS only)		
Middle	66	62
High	77	71
Parent/Family Involvement Opportunities		
Elementary	*	96
Middle	*	89
High	*	81
Parent/Family Resources		
Elementary	*	90
Middle	*	76
High	*	71

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

Note: Asterisks indicate data were not available.

Table 7 shows that the majority of high school parents' responses were positive when asked if school staff provided them with graduation and post-graduation information. Parents of middle school students agreed less often than did parents of high school students. However,

these topics may be of more immediate concern to high school students and their parents than to those at the middle school level because graduation will occur sooner.

Table 7: Percentages of Secondary Parents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Graduation and Post-graduation Information from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

School staff provided me with the following graduation and post-graduation information:	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
High School graduation requirements and plans		
Middle School	68	57
High School	85	79
Personal Graduation Plans (PGPs)		
Middle School	61	50
High School	70	63
Financial Aid and Scholarship		
Middle School	59	51
High School	75	67
College Opportunities		
Middle School	62	51
High School	76	69
Career Opportunities		
Middle School	62	50
High School	74	65

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2004-2005 and 2005-2006

For the 2004-2005 AISD Parent Survey, most parents agreed that their child's school was a safe learning environment. Table 8 shows similar results for the 2005-2006 survey, although the percentages of agreement were lower for 2005-2006.

Table 8: Percentages of Parents who Agreed that Their Child's School is a Safe Learning Environment from 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

My child's school is a safe learning environment:	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
Elementary	98	96
Middle	89	86
High	89	83

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005-2006 and 2005-2006

The 2005-2006 AISD Parent Survey contained 10 items that asked parents to respond regarding the types of information school staff provided them during the 2005-2006 school year. Longitudinal data were available for 8 of the 10 items. Table 9 shows the following:

- Most parents agreed that they received information about school and district policies.
- Parents of elementary students had greater percentages of agreement on survey items than did parents of secondary students.
- From 2004-2005 to 2005-2006, the percentages of parent agreement decreased slightly for several survey items.

When asked about parent involvement policy and the process for handling of complaints, the majority of parents agreed that they had received such information. Percentages of agreement for these items were the greatest at the elementary school level.

Table 9: Percentage of Parents who Agreed that School Staff Provided Information Regarding Specific AISD School and District Policies, 2004-2005 to 2005-2006

School staff provided me with information about the following school and district policies.	2004-2005 %	2005-2006 %
Student Behavior Expectations		
Elementary	99	97
Middle	96	94
High	93	89
Required Curriculum		
Elementary	95	96
Middle	92	91
High	88	85
Immunization Policy		
Elementary	99	97
Middle	94	94
High	92	90
AISD's Dress Code		
Elementary	98	96
Middle	95	95
High	91	89
Attendance Policy		
Elementary	99	97
Middle	95	94
High	92	90
State Academic Testing		
Elementary	97	97
Middle	92	91
High	89	88
Requirement for 3rd and 5th graders to pass TAKS (EL only)		
Elementary	97	95
Choice Sheets-Course Selections (HS and MS only)		
Middle	91	89
High	87	84
Process for Handling Complaints and Concerns		
Elementary	*	91
Middle	*	84
High	*	76
AISD Parent Involvement Policy		
Elementary	*	95
Middle	*	87
High	*	79

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005-2006 and 2005-2006

Note: Asterisks indicate data were not available.

Lastly, parents were asked to indicate their educational and military goals for their child. Table 10 shows that 94% or more of parents reported having a goal for their child to

obtain a high school diploma, and 74% or more indicated having a goal for their child to obtain a bachelors degree. Between half and two-thirds of parents reported goals for their child to obtain a graduate or professional degree.

Table 10: Numbers and Percentages of Parents Reporting Specific Educational Goals for Their Child, 2005-2006

My goals for my child include the following plans:	Elementary (n = 9,689) %	Middle (n = 1,683) %	High (n = 1,929) %
High School Diploma	94	98	97
Certificate/Associate Degree	29	24	29
Bachelors Degree	74	89	82
Graduate/Professional Degree	64	65	52
Military Service	8	5	6

Source: AISD Parent Survey, 2005-2006

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. In the spring of 2006, AISD's DPE staff developed a review kit that consisted of a parent survey review worksheet and presentation template. During an administrators' meeting, DPE staff gave the campus administrators their 2005-2006 reports and provided training regarding use of the kit. The goal for providing this kit to administrators is to help them to use the survey results and to communicate the findings to staff for 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 (e.g., principal, assistant principal, counselor, office staff, and teachers) were positive for 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, secondary school parents generally reported having positive experiences with staff less frequently than did elementary school parents. These results raise concern because many school staff, such as office employees, may be the first or only contact parents encounter upon entering the school building. In addition, principals, assistant principals, and/or counselors are key decision makers in matters regarding the welfare of students at their school.

Therefore, secondary 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 children'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 secondary students is whether schools are providing adequate information regarding their children's academic plans, goals, and preparedness for TAKS. Secondary 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, responses from parents at all grade levels continue to suggest room for improvement in the dissemination of information regarding academic programs/services (e.g., special education, bilingual/ESL, gifted and talented, availability of tutoring, and AP and dual credit courses). District and campus administrators must use all available resources (e.g., parent support specialists, school newsletters, flyers, marquees) to provide information (e.g., program availability, eligibility criteria, and participation and transportation options) to parents prior to or at the beginning of school.

PARENT SUPPORT SPECIALIST QUESTIONNAIRE

Parent support staff who work directly with parents and other school staff were held accountable for provision of parent support services through their time and effort; documentation concerning the numbers of hours worked; accomplished tasks; 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, prior to the writing of this report, 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) 3. Support adult literacy through classes, seminars, and workshops
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	
5. Organize and conduct training for school staff	4. Organize/conduct 2 staff workshops in the area of parent involvement and services available
6. Connect families with community resources	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 2005 report, 60 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 2005 and December 2005. Of the 61 interim reports sent out, 54 (89%) were returned. Six parent support specialists (9.8%) did not return the interim report for unknown reasons, and 1 (0.2%) was on sick leave. On the spring 2006 end-of-year questionnaire, additional data were gathered from the parent support specialists about activities from January through May 2006, 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
- District initiatives (e.g., Read and Rise Circles program, character education/positive behavior training, 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
- Participation in the City of Austin's Hurricane Evacuation program

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.

Completed end-of-year questionnaires, which contained the January through May 2006 activities, were returned by 54 (89%) of the parent support specialists and the parent program specialist. Four (7%) of the parent support specialists submitted fall interim reports only, and 3 (4%) returned incomplete questionnaires.

STAFF COLLABORATION AND TRAINING

Of the parent support specialists (n = 54) who completed the questionnaire, 93% (n = 50) reported they worked with their principal, and 7% (n = 4) did not respond to the question. Seventy-eight percent (n = 42) worked with other school staff (e.g., counselors, reading

specialists, comprehensive education director, assistant principals); 70% (n = 38) said they worked with their PTA/PTO president; and 59% (n = 32) worked with community agencies and organizations. Some of the organizations that partnered with the parent support specialists included Austin Community College, Insure-A-Kid, Austin Police Department Council of At Risk Youth, Child INC, Family Forward-Next Step, 21st Century, Communities In Schools, Medicaider Program (online search engine for determining applicant's eligibility for children's Medicaid and CHIP), River City Youth Foundation, Safe Place, and Minority Professional Presence Project (a series of professional and successful former inmates' presentations). These activities support MDs 2 and 3, and KPI 1.

The parent support specialists reported participating in a variety of professional development activities during the year. Ninety-eight percent (n = 53) reported attending the Parent Leader Network Retreat (offered in partnership by AISD, the Connections Resource Center, and the Family Forward project). The monthly 4-hour parent support specialists' professional development meetings offered by the AISD Family Resource Center were attended by 96% (n = 52) of the parent support specialists. Fifty-seven percent (n = 31) reported attending a variety of professional development activities, and 6% (n = 3) reported attending AISD's Read and Rise Circles program implementation workshops and the Medicaider program presentation taught by Insure-a-Kid staff. These activities support MD 8 and KPI 5.

Sixty-nine percent (n = 37) 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, and other activities. Twenty-two percent (n = 12) said they did not work with a vertical team, 4% (n = 2) said they did not know who their vertical teams were, and 5% (n = 3) did not answer the question. This activity supports 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 2005-2006:

- Preparing for and conducting workshops, classes, and assemblies
- Attending meetings/professional development sessions;
- Providing information to parents
- Recruiting volunteers (parent, community members, or business)
- 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 initiative programs (e.g., Read and Rise Circles) 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 support MD 1 and 4, and KPI 1 and 3.

By the end of school year 2005-2006, 37% (n = 20) of the responding parent support specialists had provided three or more professional development training sessions to campus staff; and 30% (n = 16) had provided at least two professional development training sessions for staff on their campuses. These activities support MD 5 and KPI 2. However, 11% (n = 6) provided only one professional development session to campus staff, 18% (n = 10) reported they had not provided training sessions to campus staff, and 4% (n = 2) did not answer the question. Thus, this represents an area that needs improvement for 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. Ninety-one percent (n = 49) of the parent support specialists indicated they had provided a variety of services to these families, including 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 (e.g., 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 These activities support MD 6 and KPI 3.

Table 12: Numbers of AISD Parents and Students Served by Parent Support Specialists through IMPACT Team Efforts, by Intervention Level, 2005-2006

Reporting Period	Level I Parents	Level I Students	Level II Parents	Level II Students	Level III Parents	Level III Students
Interim	3,157	3,649	1,984	2,145	2,196	2,471
End-of-Year	6,713	7,130	1,710	2,537	1,181	2,068
Total	9,870	10,779	3,694	4,682	3,377	4,539

Source: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2005-2006

On September 7, 2005, AISD's Internet News and Media Service staff released an article announcing that children in the Austin area who were evacuees of Hurricane Katrina would be attending six local AISD schools: Allan, Becker, and Blackshear elementary schools; Kealing middle school; and Lanier and McCallum high schools (AISD, 2005). In addition, the article announced the time of departure of AISD school buses from the Convention Center on September 8, 2005, with students, parents, and AISD parent support specialists aboard, to visit their new schools. Parent support specialists were summoned for training and scheduling for their role in accompanying students and parents to assigned schools on the same date of the article's release.

Parent support specialists' interim reports showed that they provided a number of emergency outreach IMPACT services to Hurricane Katrina students (n = 353) and parents (n = 251). These services included escorting the evacuee students from the City of Austin Convention Center to their assigned schools; securing school clothing, shoes, and school supplies; enrolling students in free-lunch programs; arranging special testing; and providing other social/academic services from September 8 to September 14. Table 13 shows the number of Hurricane Katrina students and parents served during that period.

Table 13: Number of Hurricane Katrina Students and Parents Served September 8-14, 2005

Report	Level I Parents	Level I Students	Level II Parents	Level II Students	Level III Parents	Level III Students	Total Parents & Students
Interim	98	146	75	101	78	106	604

Source: Parent Support Specialists' Interim Report, Fall 2005

Parent support specialists also provided emergency outreach IMPACT services to Hurricane Rita families (67 students and 40 parents). Thus, on the parent support specialist questionnaire for 2005-2006, parent support specialists were asked to provide the number of Hurricane Katrina and Rita families they served between January and May 2006 only. Table 14 shows that they provided regular services to 804 hurricane evacuees. These counts of evacuees served are included in the end-of-year data in Table 12.

Table 14: Number of Hurricane Evacuees Receiving AISD IMPACT Services from Parent Support Specialists between January and May 2006

Hurricanes	Parents	Students	Total Parents and Students
Katrina	268	324	592
Rita	119	93	212
Total	387	417	804

Source: Parent Support Specialist Questionnaire, 2005-2006

Table 15 shows a summary of parent support specialists' data concerning parent and community participation in various school-based activities. Please note that because parents may have attended more than one event, participation counts that follow include duplicates. Literacy activities, such as principal "get-togethers," Principles of Learning sessions, Learning Walks, and seminars, drew the highest number of parents (n = 37,351). Assemblies, such as 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), drew 31,972 parents. Fairs and fundraisers drew more than 30,000. Parent attendance at workshops about wellness (n = 23,492) and social issues (n = 8,939) ranked fourth and fifth, respectively. Other workshops, such as Texas compulsory attendance law, nutrition, A Trip Through the Latin World, A Slave Ship Speaks (parent field trip to the Bob Bullock Museum), Dia de los Ninos, bullying prevention, received high attendance among the various categories of activities involving parents, but they were too varied for listing. Although not shown in Table 15, parent support specialists also recruited 576 parents for participation in the Medicaid program and conducted 73 Medicaid eligibility searches as part of their wellness activities. These activities support MD 2 and KPI 1.

Table 15: Number of Parents in Attendance by Activity Category as Reported by AISD Parent Support Specialists, 2005-2006

Activity	No. Parent Participants (Duplicated Count)
Literacy and Curriculum	
Family Night	13,277
Principal Get Together	9,811
Family Literacy	8,025
Learning Walks	2,560
TAKS	2,137
Principles of Learning	1,099
Seminars	730
Choice Sheet Night	702
TEKS	442
KLRU Series	102
Assemblies	36,247
Fairs	
*Other	10,849
Fund-raising	8,262
Academics	7,907
Health	3,468
Wellness Workshops	
*Other	16,215
Dental	2,285
Vision	1,981
Immunization	1,345
Self Esteem	860
Stress	806
Social Issues Workshops	
*Other	7,780
Drugs	993
Teen Pregnancies	186

Source: Parent Support Specialists' Fall 2005 Report and Spring 2006 Questionnaire

Note: Other activities were too numerous to list in 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. Forty-eight percent (n = 25) of the parent support specialist respondents listed assistance with regular parent-teacher conferences, and 14% (n = 7) reported assistance with regular conferences and special circumstance conferences, such as emergency parent interventions. Another 48% (n = 25) reported assistance with 10 academic at-risk conferences, 8 attendance conferences, and 7 home visits. Twenty-three percent (n = 12) listed oral or sign language translation during parent-teacher conferences and at medical, dental, and/or social services appointments. Twenty-one percent (n = 11) mentioned set-up and participation in Admission, Review, or Dismissal (ARD) committee meetings, and Local

Support Team (LST) meetings, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act hearings. Other activities reported (60%, n = 31) included set up and participation in academic/progress, grade placement, TAKS, and/or grade-level conferences or meetings; Youth and Family Advocacy Center meetings; Explore UT family field trips; PTA meetings; and securing outside counseling services for parents of delinquent youths. These activities support 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, 72% (n = 39) of the parent support specialists reported recruiting a total of 2,014 parents, who volunteered 41,662 hours of service in their schools. In addition, they reported that a total of 470 business organizations donated 7,327 hours of volunteer service as mentors or buddies, or in other roles. Finally, they reported that 453 other individuals and groups (e.g., university students, school campus staff, and community members other than parents) volunteered 14,253 hours of service as mentors or tutors. These activities support 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, 61% (n = 33) of parent support specialists held adult literacy classes on their campuses during the 2005-2006 school year. The parent support specialists at 32 campuses enrolled parents in adult literacy classes at other sites because the classes were unavailable at their own campuses. A total of 1,342 adults were enrolled in these classes between August 2005 and May 2006. Forty-two percent (n = 566) of the enrolled adults completed the classes by May 2006, and 10% (n = 138) entered the workforce for the first time. This activity supports MD 2 and 4, and KPI 1.

USE OF DISTRICT PARENT SURVEY RESULTS

Sixty-seven percent (n = 36) of the parent support specialists responded that they used the district parent survey results from 2004-2005 in developing their campus improvement plans for the 2005-2006 school year. Eleven percent (n = 6) said they did not use the district parent survey results in developing their campus improvement plans; 2% (n = 1) said their campuses did not participate in the 2004-2005 survey; 11% (n = 6) said they did not know whether their campuses used the survey data or not; and 9% (n = 5) did not respond to the question. Ninety-one percent (n = 49) of the parent support specialists said they would use

results from the 2005-2006 parent survey in planning their 2006-2007 campus improvement plans' goals and activities for parent involvement if the data were applicable to their programs. Nine percent (n = 6) did not respond to the question. This activity supports MD 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 campuses 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 = 20) of parent support specialists reported educational workshops, such as the following:

- Parents' TAKS Night
- Book Bear Buddy, a reading program for students in grades K-2
- RIF Parent Book Club
- Texas Extension Expanded Nutrition program
- Weekly Wednesday Specials, a program that rewarded parents with home libraries for perfect attendance
- Positive Defining Moment, workshops for parent of secondary students
- School-wide attendance roundup workshop, a combined 5-week, 2-hour workshop that included literacy facts
- Leyendo A-Z and ESL for expanding English vocabulary
- Strengthening Families, a 10-week family program

Twenty-six percent (n = 14) reported other activities; such as the following:

- Summer Camp Surprises, a district-wide event that provided information for parents of all grade levels regarding summer school activities
- Bring your Parent or Guardian to School Day, a secondary activity that invites students to bring parents, guardians, relatives, and community members to the campus for a school day
- Parent Lunch days
- Dis-it Days Campus Beautification Project
- Travis Community Education Foundation (TCEF) pilot mentoring program for children with incarcerated parents

Twenty-two percent (n = 12) reported presentations on such topics as solutions for challenging behaviors, domestic violence, building a bridge between home and school, saving for the future, how to talk to your child, and an environmental walk. Eight percent (n = 4)

reported two seminars and two grant-writing projects each. Seven percent (n = 4) did not respond to the question. These activities support MD 2 and KPI 1.

THE READ AND RISE CIRCLES PROGRAM

In fall 2004, parent support specialists at elementary schools were asked to help the district implement a new initiative, the Read and Rise Circles program, sponsored by the National Urban League, Scholastic Inc., and State Farm Insurance. The Read and Rise Circles program 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 campuses during the 2004-2005 school year. The program continued during 2005-2006.

In their spring 2006 questionnaire, parent support specialists were asked to indicate whether they had started the Read and Rise Circles program for the first time (2005-2006) or were continuing from the previous school year (2004-2005). Of the original 37 elementary campuses participating in the program, 8 reported they had not continued the program. Two other elementary campuses reported starting the program in the 2005-2006 school year.

Parent support specialists were told to include a program description in the questionnaire only if they started their program in the 2005-2006 school year. The two campuses that started their programs in the 2005-2006 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 (2005):

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 that parent support specialists conducted 201 Read and Rise Circles program workshops with 3,228 parents in attendance. Of these workshops, 58% (n = 18) of parent support specialists reported using English and Spanish languages in their presentations, 32% (n = 10) used Spanish only, and 10% (n = 3) used English only. 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, cameras to record activities, 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, indicating that parents felt they had gained information they could use to better the relationship with their schools, and 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 enters school. Parent support specialists 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 going to use this to help my children).” Parents also expressed approval of the direction and development of the parent involvement program at their schools, and reported improved communication and increased comfort levels when they visited the classrooms of their school-age children or attended school events. These activities support MD 2 and KPI 1.

STUDENT SCHOOL-LEVEL TRANSITIONS

Sixty-nine percent (n = 37) of the parent support specialists reported working with their vertical team schools regularly on the student-transitioning project (elementary to middle to high school). Another 22% (n = 12) said they did not work with their vertical team, 4% (n = 2) said they did not know their vertical team members, and 5% (n = 3) did not respond to the question. 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, such as the *AISD Parent Learning Guide*, Title I materials, TAKS information, first-day folder, school map, class schedules, lunch prices, dress code, students’ expectations list, and PowerPoint presentations (with Q and A sessions afterward), 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 support MD 1 and 3 and KPI 1.

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 (or languages) common to the community and school, and can 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 and for campus administrators to improve their use of these specialists. For instance, in the past 4 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. In addition, parent support specialists found a need to refresh themselves regarding the basic elements of parent involvement when serving hurricane evacuees. Thus, campus administrators should (a) promote parent specialists' ability to provide professional staff 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. Then, 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. Parent support specialists must continue to enhance parents' and staff's awareness of AISD support services and community resources through presentations or other communications specific to these services and resources. 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 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 that are 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 the 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 to the district.

Table 16 describes community partnership information provided by APIE for the past 4 years. Decreases were observed in 2005-2006 from 2004-2005 for all categories except cash. APIE's records show that schools with parent support staff accounted for 49% of in-kind contributions, 56% of cash donations, 60% of volunteer services, and 47% of volunteer hours. APIE staff's computed cash value of volunteered services provided by the reporting schools totaled \$3,783,293.

Table 16: Summary of Austin Community Monetary and Volunteer Contributions through Austin Partners in Education, 2002-2003 through 2005-2006

Type of Donation	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
In-Kind Contributions	\$2,434,112	\$2,402,459	\$2,511,687	\$922,425
Cash Donations	\$967,175	\$268,156	\$277,256	\$468,897
Number of Volunteers	10,606	14,906	12,615	6,790
Number of Volunteer Hours	220,072	180,622	186,315	119,019

Source: Austin Partners in Education records, 2002-2003 through 2005-2006

RECOMMENDATION FOR APIE

AISD realizes financial savings through a community partnership with APIE and the QZABP. AISD was selected again for participation in the bond program for fiscal year 2006. Donations from 2006 will save Austin taxpayers approximately \$8 million.

Although APIE's records show that all schools submitted their annual reports, 20 schools did not report information regarding in-kind or cash contributions. Sometimes the schools' staff reported one but not the other category, and at other times information for both categories was left out. Thus, the substantial decreases that occurred in the reports of in-kind contributions, number of volunteers, and number of volunteer hours for 2005-2006 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 APIE in-kind and cash support from the community to enhance future savings.

SUMMARY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Recent studies (e.g., Henderson & Berla, 1994; Phillips, 1997; Turnbull, 2001) 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, suggesting that the district's parent involvement efforts can be improved through the following actions:

- Provide professional development 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, such as the AISD's IMPACT program, Ombudsman office, academic programs, and grade-level transition programs
- 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 more information about specific AISD programs, such as special education, bilingual/ESL, gifted and talented, availability of tutoring, and AP and dual credit courses

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, they have relationships with the teachers and the parents, and they are available. Therefore, it is recommended that campus administrators use the parent support specialists to provide the training teachers need to work with parents on improving student achievement and behavior.

In addition, campus staff must pay close attention to securing and reporting APIE community support because AISD realizes savings through the QZABP, 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 2005-2006 AISD Parent Survey results reflected an overwhelming majority of positive responses regarding all staff (i.e., principals, assistant principals, counselors, office staff, and teachers), secondary school parents generally reported having positive experiences with staff less frequently than did elementary school parents. Therefore, another recommendation is that all AISD campus administrators (especially at the secondary school level) secure training for themselves and their school staff in customer service methods to enable parents to become more involved in their children'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, especially at the high school level, more individual information about their children's academic performance, plans, goals, and preparedness for TAKS.

REFERENCE LIST

Austin Independent School District. (2005, September 7). *Six Austin campuses selected to host evacuee students of Hurricane Katrina*. Retrieved October 24, 2006, from <http://www.austinisd.org?newsmedia/release/archive>

Austin Independent School District. *2005 parent support specialists' questionnaire results*. Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Boethel, M. (2003). *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory examines school, family, and community connections among diverse populations*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved October 24, 2006, from www.sedl.org/new/media.html

Clark-Brown, L. (2003, January). *Dropout prevention/retention plan*. Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Educational Support Services.

Henderson, A., & Berla, N. (1994). *A generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.

Phillips, W. (1997). *Family involvement in children's education*. Kansas City, MO: Phillips Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School.

Schmitt, L. (2006). *Summary results of the 2005-2006 Austin Independent School District Parent Survey*. Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Schmitt, L., & Young, R. (2006, July). *2006 employee coordinated survey results release*. Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Turnbull, B. (2001). *Longitudinal evaluation of school change and performance in Title I schools*. Washington, DC: Westat & Policy Studies Associates.

Washington, W., Doolittle, M., & Williams, H. (2001). *Parent and community involvement summary report, 2001-2002* (OPE Publication 01.09). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Office of Program Evaluation.

Washington, W., Doolittle, M., & Williams, H. (2002). *Parent and community involvement summary report, 2002-2003* (DPE Publication 02.11). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Washington, W., Doolittle, M., & Williams, H. (2003). *Parent and community involvement summary report, 2003-2004* (DPE Publication 03.05). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Washington, W., Doolittle, M., & Williams, H. (2004). *Parent and community involvement summary report 2004-2005* (DPE Publication 04.05). Austin, TX: Austin Independent School District, Department of Program Evaluation.

Austin Independent School District

Office of Accountability
Maria Whitsett, Ph.D.

Department of Program Evaluation
Holly Williams, Ph.D.
Martha Doolittle, Ph.D.

Author
Wanda Washington



Board of Trustees
Mark Williams, President
Rudy Montoya, Jr., Vice President
Johna Edwards, Secretary
Cheryl Bradley
Annette LoVoi, M.A.
Lori Moya
Robert Schneider
Karen Dulaney Smith
Vincent Torres, M. S.

Superintendent of Schools
Pascal D. Forgione, Jr., Ph.D.

Publication Number 05.16
November 2006