

Parent and Family Engagement Services by Parent Support Specialists

Summary Report, 2016–2017

Overview

Austin Independent School District (AISD) staff provide community and parent engagement support to families of students attending its schools. AISD's Department of Communication and Community Engagement staff coordinate many of these support activities. Using a combination of federal, district, and city funding, AISD employed parent support specialists (PSSs) at most of its elementary, middle, and high schools during the 2016–2017 school year. This report summarizes some of the parent and family engagement services provided by PSSs to parents and families at their schools during the 2016–2017 school year, as recorded in eCST, one of the district's data systems for recording student/family services. These data do not represent all the parent and family services provided by the PSSs during the 2016–2017 school year.

Parent and Family Support Services

AISD's Parent Engagement Support Office (PESO) staff provide a variety of services across the district (<https://www.austinisd.org/parentsupport>). Examples of these services include parent and family engagement support to schools, communication and outreach to families and community members, parent and family education opportunities (e.g., workshops, classes), and professional development sessions for AISD staff. PESO staff also provide guidance and training to the PSSs on engaging parents through partnerships to strengthen students' academic success. AISD's Family and School Support Team (FASST) provide support and training to parents of students receiving special education services (<https://www.austinisd.org/academics/sped/family>).

PSSs use the district's eCST data system to record their parent engagement activities. Each time PSSs provide an individualized service to a student's family (e.g., home visit, translation service, one-on-one meeting), they document the service on the student's service tracking record. For 2016–2017, AISD PSSs provided support to 17,911 students' parents or guardians. In addition to individualized services, PSSs also helped organize and/or conduct classes, trainings, and workshops to support parent education and life skills. At these group events, sign-in sheets were used to record the numbers served. For 2016–2017, 22,625 parents or guardians participated in life skills activities, and 95,978 parents or guardians participated in parent education activities. The counts for life skills and parent education activities include duplications because some parents attended more than one group activity.



Examples of the Parent Support Specialists' Impact on Families

AISD PSSs responded to a January 2018 survey with examples of how families at their campuses had been helped recently. With almost half of PSSs responding, most PSSs described helping families with basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, furniture, transportation), assisting homeless families (e.g., with utility payments), and supporting families experiencing traumatic events (e.g., death of a spouse or child, domestic violence, natural disaster). Other ways that PSSs supported families included assistance with employment and medical paperwork, translation services, referrals to health providers, and emotional support.

In one case, a PSS reported that a child had been diagnosed with cancer, but the family did not have health insurance for the child. Once the child was in the hospital, the PSS assisted the family in enrolling the child and siblings in Medicaid to help cover expenses, and school staff worked together to provide the family with donations of food and medication not covered by Medicaid. In another case, a refugee family with no home goods or furniture was assisted by the PSS, who sent out a school-wide message requesting donations. Many donations were given by staff, and as the PSS reported, “We all delivered [the donations] together, and it was just a wonderful feeling to be a part of this campus; everybody came together to help, and it was just an amazing feeling to see the family smile and feel like they belong.” In a third example, a PSS described being at the hospital assisting a mother and four children by translating when hospital staff told the mother that her husband had died. The PSS continued to assist the family with emotional support, funeral arrangements, insurance, housing, food, and paying bills. The PSS reported the parent was able to get a job, enroll her children in after-school care, get a vehicle, and move in with family members.

Conclusion

AISD provides a variety of parent and family engagement support services on an annual basis to family members of students. These services are part of the district’s vision and mission to provide a comprehensive, high-quality, engaging educational experience for all students (<https://www.austinisd.org/about-us>). The Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) and PESO staff continue to work together to assure that family engagement support services—and the impact of those services—are well documented and evaluated.

Parent and Family Engagement: Federal, State, and Local Policies

Parent and family engagement is part of AISD policy at the local, state, and federal levels. The AISD board of trustees adopted district policy (Local GK) states that the district’s mission is to provide, in partnership with parents and the community, a comprehensive educational experience that is high quality and challenging for all students (<http://pol.tasb.org/Policy/Code/1146?filter=GK>).

The state of Texas also has requirements for reporting community and student engagement data as part of the broader state accountability system ([http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Laws_and_Rules/Commissioner_Rules_\(TAC\)/Adopted/14_06_Adopted_New_19_TAC_%C2%A761_1023/](http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Laws_and_Rules/Commissioner_Rules_(TAC)/Adopted/14_06_Adopted_New_19_TAC_%C2%A761_1023/)).

At the federal level, any school district that receives federal funding must provide opportunities and support for parent and family engagement, communication, and support (<https://www2.ed.gov/documents/essa-act-of-1965.pdf>).

Family engagement data are used by AISD for various reporting and compliance purposes.

