

A Summary of Parent Involvement Support Services, 2009–2010

Summary

This report brief describes those parent involvement activities at Austin Independent School District (AISD) which are coordinated by the Parent Support Office (PSO), conducted by campus-based parent support specialists (PSSs), and supported through the activities of special parent support staff. A survey of PSSs in the district indicated that most PSSs spent most of their time on outreach to families, in particular establishing and maintaining relationships with families. According to PSSs, many parents and family members requested better communication and parenting classes from schools, whereas PSSs themselves requested training and technology resources. Additionally, nearly every PSS who responded to the survey reported that the PSO leaders were responsive and supportive and provided them with useful training and support. This brief also describes special parent support programs that support parental involvement with diverse populations (i.e., English-language learners [ELLs], Vietnamese speakers, Native Americans, and parents of children in special education).

Overview

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) stipulates in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) renewal of 2004 that Local Education Agencies (e.g., AISD) are entitled to receive Title I funds to enact a policy of parental involvement (section 1118). The AISD Strategic Plan 2005–2010, Priority 5 includes the plan to “build strong partnerships with parents and community at the classroom, campus, and district levels.” To this end, the district maintains a PSO that supervises PSSs who work directly with parents in schools. Each Title I school receives funds to support parent involvement activities. Additionally, Title I and other monies fund special parent support programs in the district.

Parent Support Office

The charge of the AISD PSO is “to develop opportunities for parents and families to become more involved in the education of their children”(AISD, 2010). This charge includes developing parent leadership and community involvement, developing programs and tools to help families navigate AISD schools, and coordinating the work and professional development activities of AISD's PSSs. To fund the PSO staff salaries, \$200,902 was allocated from Title I Part A monies for 2009–2010, and as of August 31, 2010 all but \$492 had been spent. The staff include a program coordinator, a community relations specialist, three parent support coordinators, a parent training coach, and a secretary.

During the 2009–2010 school year, the PSO provided more than 20 staff development sessions for the PSSs (e.g., Title I Budget Training, Consensus Building, Youth Service Mapping, Planning and Prioritizing). PSO staff held more than a dozen stand-alone trainings for PSSs, including Team Building, Effective Presentations, the AISD Strategic Plan, and How to Deal With Difficult Parents. At AISD facilities, PSO staff offered parenting classes (e.g., True Colors, Love and Logic) and other sessions (e.g., Attendance Awareness) directly to families. The PSO also participated in or sponsored activities outside of AISD,

including parent recognition and school fairs (e.g., Hispanic Futures); planning meetings; and African American Men and Boys sessions. In addition, PSO staff conducted 348 school visits for a variety of purposes, including providing one-on-one support to PSSs, assisting PSSs with work portfolios, and observing and providing feedback about PSS presentations. PSO staff also partnered with organizations not affiliated with AISD, such as Austin Project, KLRU television, AmeriCorps, Huston Tillotson College, Austin Community College, and the Bob Bullock Museum. Within the district, PSO staff collaborated with almost 20 departments, including Dropout Prevention, Diversity, Special Education, High School Redesign, Bilingual, and Early Childhood.

Parent Support Specialists Survey 2009–2010

Survey Background

During the 2009–2010 school year, salaries of 74 PSSs at 72 schools were funded mostly with local funds, and salaries of four PSSs were funded with grant monies. PSSs were surveyed to gather required information on parent involvement activities and participation. Of these, 67 PSSs (90%) responded to the survey online in May and June of 2010.¹ Of note was that, for the first time, these data were collected via the Internet, so program staff had results in 24 hours. Thus, the survey's usefulness to program staff was immediate.

Major Duties of PSSs

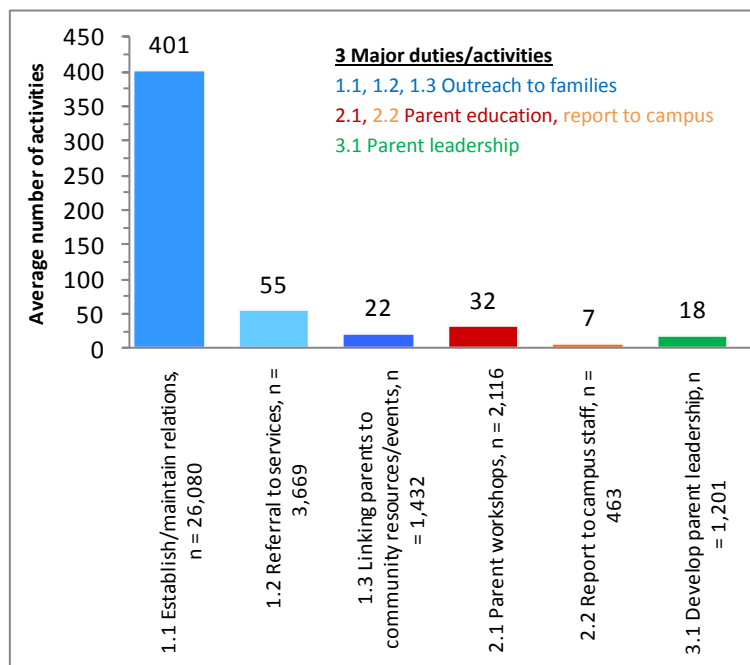
PSSs carry out five major duties: (a) conduct outreach and serve as liaison to families, (b) organize and/or conduct sessions for families and school staff, (c) develop parent leaders, (d) participate in all scheduled professional development activities, and (e) document and submit program data and reports.² Based on survey results, most of what PSSs do in their jobs pertains to one of these major duties: outreach to families, especially establishing and maintaining relationships with family members. In 2009–2010, PSSs reported 26,080 events that supported establishing and maintaining relationships with families. For example, most PSSs often made home visits and personal contacts with parents and other family members. On average, PSSs reported 401 contacts with families to establish or maintain relationships in the 2009–2010 school year. PSSs reportedly referred families to social, health, and academic services approximately 55 times, on average, at individual campuses. Together, all PSSs made referrals to services a total of 3,669 times. To support parent education, PSSs organized or presented, on average, 32 parent workshops per campus and a total of 2,116 workshops across all campuses in the past school year. Figure 1 displays averages to illustrate common patterns in PSSs' survey responses.

Approximately 18 times, on average, in the past school year, each PSS helped connect parents to leadership opportunities (major duty 3). Together, all PSSs helped parents with leadership opportunities a total of 1,201 times during the school year. The least frequent activity carried out was PSS reporting to campus staff about parent involvement, which occurred 7 times, on average, and a total of 463 times for all PSSs.

¹ Specialists at three campuses were unavailable either because they were on leave or terminated; two failed to complete the survey.

² See information at http://www.austinisd.org/academics/parentsinfo/parent_involvement/forms.phtml

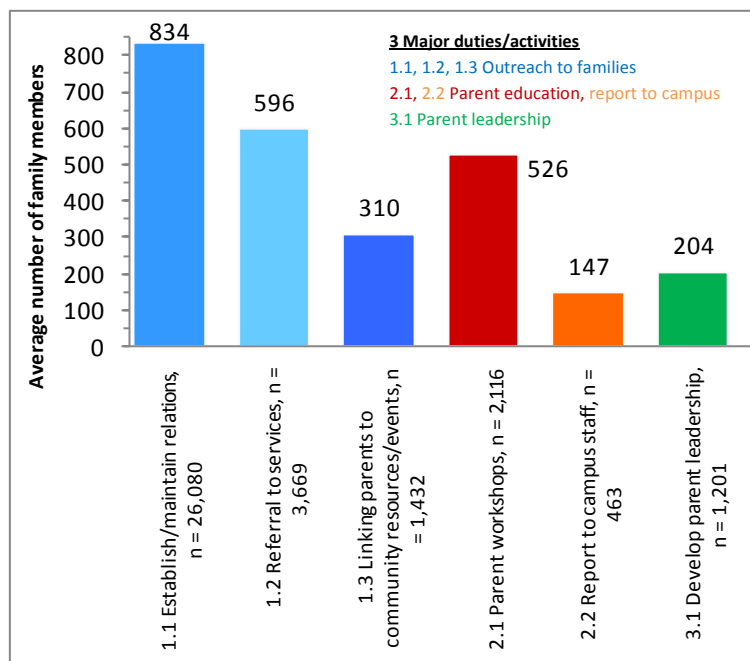
Figure 1. Average Number of Activities Per School for Three of the Major Duties and Activities of Parent Support Specialists, Across Campuses



The totals in Figure 1 include overlapping information. For example, if a PSS met with one parent 10 times and another zero times, the total number of activities counted would be 10. The same parent could be counted more than once in any of these duties. Thus, these totals do *not* indicate that more than 26,000 parents or family members were contacted just one time. Rather, the numbers indicate the total number of events, regardless of how many times a PSS contacted each person.

Source. Parent Support Specialists Survey, 2009–2010

Figure 2. Average Number of Family Members Per School who Attended Events Held by Parent Support Specialists, Across Campuses



In all cases, the number of parents and family members involved was greater than the number of parent activities (see Figures 1 and 2). For example, the number of people involved in events in which PSSs established and/or maintained relationships was twice as large as the number of activities (55,011 people contacted, in contrast with 26,080 events). Similarly, on average, 526 parents and family members participated in workshops on a campus, but only 32 parent workshops or classes were held during the school year, on average. For referrals to social, health, and academic services, 596 parents and

Source. Parent Support Specialists Survey, 2009–2010

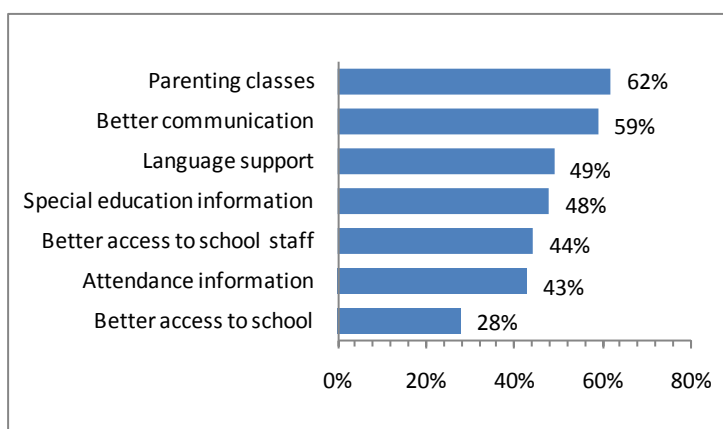
family members, on average, were involved, but only 55 events, on average, occurred on each campus. On average, 204 parents were connected to leadership opportunities on each campus during the school year. Again, these numbers reflect the total number of times all parents participated in various events, even if one parent attended 20 times and another attended only once.

Taken together, Figures 1 and 2 suggest that although PSSs work primarily to establish and maintain relationships with families, family members of AISD students participate in a variety of activities that constitute the major duties of PSSs.

PSS Reports About Needs of Parents and Family Members

PSSs were asked to report any training or information needs from their campus families. In establishing and maintaining relationships with parents and family members, PSSs most likely would listen for ways to support and improve relations between families and the schools. Sixty-one PSSs reported about different topics and activities that parents and family members on their campuses were requesting (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Percentage of Parents who Requested Different Topics, 2009-2010



Source. Parent Support Specialists Survey, 2009–2010

Parenting classes and better communication were reported by about 60% of the PSSs as needs of parents and family members. About half of the PSSs indicated that parents and family members would like information about special education and support for communicating in another language (e.g., Spanish or Vietnamese). The least frequently reported topic was better access to the school (28%).

School Environment

School environments across campuses were generally positive and welcoming to families, according to the PSSs who responded to the survey. For each of the four statements in Table 1, 85% to 90% of the PSSs agreed with statements that families on their campus feel welcome, can view posted welcome and informative signs at the schools, visit freely, and are treated with respect by staff at their child's school.

Table 1. Parent Support Specialists’ Reports About Quality of School Environment

Measure of school environment quality	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Families feel welcome in my school.	34%	54%	5%	7%
There are signs posted at my school that welcome, direct, and inform families.	43%	46%	8%	3%
Families feel free to visit the school.	46%	39%	10%	5%
School staff are respectful and polite to families.	36%	54%	4%	6%

Source. Parent Support Specialist Survey, 2009–2010

Campus and District Support for Parent Involvement

PSSs reported their level of agreement or disagreement with statements about support for parent involvement from campus staff and community members. Most PSSs (82% to 100%) agreed that they consistently received a variety of support from school staff and community (Table 2). They reported sufficient facilities, services and resources, staff and family support, and compensation or flex time for parent activities. The one area in which a large portion of PSSs (52%) reported a lack of support for parent involvement on campus was parents having access to child care staff during family involvement activities.

Table 2. Parent Support Specialists’ Agreement or Disagreement About Campus and District Support

Measure of support	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
My campus has appropriate space, room, or facilities for parent activities.	53%	29%	7%	11%
My campus has available parent support services or resources.	65%	27%	3%	2%
My school's staff support family involvement activities.	59%	36%	5%	0%
Parents at my school support family involvement activities.	54%	40%	6%	0%
Community organizations support family involvement activities.	55%	43%	2%	0%
District office staff and resources support family involvement activities.	57%	41%	2%	0%
Planning or meeting with my vertical team staff supports family involvement activities.	73%	27%	0%	0%
I received compensation or flex time for increased work hours involving family involvement activities.	44%	40%	10%	6%
I have access to child care staff to support family involvement activities.	18%	30%	41%	11%

Source. Parent Support Specialist Survey, 2009–2010

Support From the Parent Support Office

When asked about the leaders in the PSO, most PSSs (92% to 94%) who responded agreed or strongly agreed that the AISD PSO was responsive to and supportive of PSS work, the parent support coordinator provided useful and relevant help, and the PSO staff development/training was useful and relevant.

PSS Needs for Professional Development Activities

PSSs were asked to report their professional development needs (Table 3). The most urgent need expressed was training in technology resources and how to use them. About one-fourth of the PSSs who

responded requested immediate training and another 30% needed this training within six months. Similarly, nearly half of the PSSs who responded to the survey reported needing training either immediately or within the next six months on district initiatives such as Positive Behavior Support (PBS) or Parenting with Love and Logic. About half of PSSs reported that they needed training on AISD or Title I budgets that support family involvement, and training on delivery of services such as conducting workshops or public speaking.

Table 3. Timing of Parent Support Specialists’ Needs for Professional Development Activities

Measure of need	Need immediately	Need within six months	Need by end of next year	Don't really need	Not sure
Training about district initiatives (e.g., Positive Behavior Support, Parenting with Love and Logic, attendance, other)	16%	31%	18%	26%	9%
Training about AISD or Title I budget supporting family involvement	9%	24%	12%	49%	6%
Training about delivery of services (e.g., how to conduct a workshop, public speaking)	15%	15%	17%	49%	4%
Training on technology resources and use	26%	29%	18%	23%	4%

Source. Parent Support Specialist Survey, 2009–2010

Communication of Policies

A majority of PSSs (88%) reported on the survey that they were involved in reviewing and/or communicating campus parent involvement policy to parents, and 84% reported they were involved in developing or reviewing the campus improvement plan (CIP). Most PSSs (95%) also reported that they played a role in assisting with the district's collection of information from parents through the AISD annual parent survey.

Title I Campuses

According to PSSs’ survey responses, nearly all of the PSSs at Title I campuses had access to Title I funding to support parent involvement activities. Sixty-one of the 67 survey respondents worked at Title I schools during the 2009–2010 school year. Most of those PSSs (90%) reportedly were involved in reviewing and/or distributing the campus Title I parent-school compact document. Nearly all of those (95%) reported having access to Title I funds for parent and family involvement activities.

District Initiatives

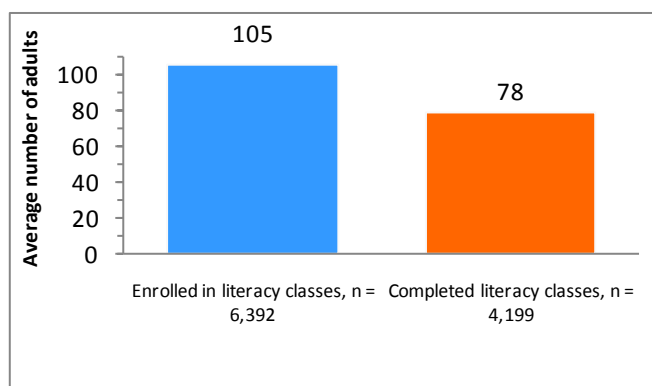
PSSs are responsible for ensuring that workshops for parents and family members involving different district initiatives take place on their campuses. These initiatives include PBS, college readiness toolkit, Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH), ParentConnection, Parenting with Love and Logic³, and attendance awareness trainings. Based on survey results, on average, each campus held three of these

³ A description of the Love and Logic program can be found in a separate report, *Summary of Parent Survey on Love and Logic Training, 2009–2010* (Doolittle, 2010). During 2009-2010, these trainings occurred at 13 schools and served 240 parents.

different workshops or information sessions, with at least one college readiness toolkit session and four PBS or CATCH workshops per campus. The number of parents and family members attending these sessions ranged from 11 for Parenting with Love and Logic to 146 for CATCH workshops.

Family Literacy Classes and Participation

Figure 4. Average and Total Number of Adults who Participated in and Completed Literacy Classes, Across Campuses



Source. Parent Support Specialist Survey 2009–2010

Title I stipulates that funding be distributed to support parent involvement. PSSs (n = 63) organized, arranged, or led a total of 1,593 family literacy classes, held either at the schools or elsewhere, with an average of 25 classes per campus (Figure 4). Of the 6,392 adults enrolled in such classes, nearly 4,200 completed classes. Although helping parents enter the workforce was not a major PSS duty, the PSSs who responded reported that a total of 236 adults (or 5 adults per campus) who participated in these literacy classes entered the workforce.

Special Parent Support Programs

In addition to the PSO and PSSs, a conglomerate of AISD specialists provided parent involvement support for diverse populations, including parents who are ELLs and require adult education, Vietnamese speakers, Native Americans, or have children in Special Education at the Rosedale School. The specialists served hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of AISD parents, families, and children. These staff members' salaries are supported through a variety of funding (local, state, federal).

At Summit Elementary School, the parent program specialist for Vietnamese families provided services to more than 200 families and about 400 adults who spoke little English and were unfamiliar with the U.S. education system. Because few AISD documents are translated into Vietnamese, the specialist helped Vietnamese families with activities such as registration, orientation, testing, and monitoring student academic progress. The specialist also provided parenting classes, accompanied families on medical appointments, and organized other special events.

The program administrator for Adult Education and ELLs worked with 1,620 adults and arranged for child care to be provided for 2,502 children during adult classes. This administrator provided pre- and post-testing in English language proficiency, and assisted adults with registration for parent education programs (e.g., literacy classes and general education development, or GED). This staff person also offered 14 workshops about project-based learning, technology integration, and student retention strategies, as well as arranged meetings about financial literacy, computer literacy, and health and wellness.

The program coordinator for Native American families worked with 244 children. A recent hire when the survey was administered, the coordinator had begun monitoring student academic progress, assisting other schools with Native American student populations, and publishing newsletters and flyers.

A social services specialist worked with 60 families, which involved 82 adults and 153 children. This specialist assisted with registrations, school family relations for special populations, interpretation during school meetings, and monitoring student academic performance.

Two family and school support specialists located at the Rosedale School helped families with children in Special Education in AISD. These two specialists worked with 1,451 adults, sent out 16,000 flyers around the district, and arranged for child care to be provided to 132 children during parent meetings. Their focus was to empower families to be informed advocates for their child at school and in community settings. Key to their assistance was listening and talking with parents about the emotional challenges of parents who have a child with disabilities, directing families to resources and special education procedures, and serving as an open door to AISD. Monthly, the Family Cooperative between AISD, Travis County Integral Care, and the Arc of The Capital Area hosted support group and informational meetings. Support meetings also were offered to Spanish-speaking families with special education students.

References

AISD (2010). AISD Parent Support Office description. Available at http://www.austinisd.org/academics/parentsinfo/parent_involvement/index.phtml

Doolittle, M. (2010). Summary of Parent Survey on Love and Logic Training, 2009–2010. Publication 09.38. AISD Program Evaluation, Austin, TX. Available at http://www.austinisd.org/inside/docs/ope_9-38_Parent_Survey_Love_and_Logic.pdf