Alliance for Achievement Conference

Principals, AFA facilitators, and parent education facilitators from 13 first- and second-year AFA schools met for an annual Networking Conference in Erie, Pennsylvania, on November 16 and 17. They were joined by 11 AFA Education Specialists.

Judith Baseman, the principal of Stephen Foster Elementary School in Appleton, Wisconsin, and Anne Karch, the school’s AFA facilitator, presented to the group on their school’s use of Student Learning Plans to individualize and differentiate instruction for the school’s diverse student body. The presentation included samples of Student Learning Plans created by the school’s Instructional Teams.

AFA staff led sessions to help the schools manage change and prepare to sustain the positive effects of comprehensive school reform. They also modeled an AFA classroom and led a discussion of ways to identify and support students in need of assistance to meet their learning objectives.
Parent education facilitators attended sessions to brush up on the Solid Foundation component of AFA and guide their School Community Councils. At the same time, principals and AFA facilitators worked through the unit planning process with the Unit Builder computer program.

During a visit to Grover Cleveland Elementary School, the group heard a spirited presentation by Bea Habursky, principal, Debbie Brasington, AFA facilitator, the two parent education facilitators—Andrea Loeffler and Sharon Ferringer, and the four parents who serve on the School Community Council. The Grover Cleveland hosts led the group on a tour of the school, showing the Parent Resource Library, home visit hall of fame, and other innovations of the SCC.

**NCLB Guidance Sessions**

Family Guidance Sessions for parents are provided by ADI’s partnering Community-Based Organizations and Faith-Based Organizations, including Interfaith Leadership Project in Cicero, West Town Leadership United in Chicago, Peoria Boys and Girls Club, Christian Women of the New Wave in East St. Louis, and John A. Logan Child Care Resource and Referral in Carterville. The purpose of the sessions is to help parents understand how to match available educational options, including school choice and supplemental services, with their children’s learning needs.

Each partner has been involved with meeting individually with parents and explaining the ISBE accountability system. During the session, parents receive information to help them understand school report cards, adequate yearly progress, learning standards, testing, school safety, and discipline. The partners explain NCLB school choice and supplemental services by showing parents how to assess the level of learning, safety, and discipline at their child’s school. Parents are informed about eligibility and transportation for school choice and how parents can match the learning needs of their children with supplemental service providers applicable to their locality.

The Christian Women of the New Wave have reported that they really enjoyed doing the one-on-one family guidance sessions. They liked the personal touch these sessions provide while talking to parents about NCLB. They also enjoyed exploring a variety of issues around the NCLB information with the parents. The Christian Women of the New Wave thought that the whole process, from the NCLB workshops to the Family Guidance Sessions, was an educational and rewarding experience for their organization and the families with which they personally interacted.
After the initial session, parents receive a follow up call within 45 days to clarify any questions and to gather information from the parent about what action has occurred as a result of the new information. Each organization has experienced overwhelming positive feedback about the information provided, and many parents have taken advantage of the new choices available to them on behalf of their children.

**Spotlight on Alliance for Achievement**

**ADI Welcomes New AFA Schools for Fall 2004**

Congratulations and welcome to **DePue Elementary School** and **DePue High School** in DePue, Illinois. The DePue School District Leadership Team is already hard at work. The team includes Janie Narczewski as AFA Facilitator, Lydia Jones as Parent Education Facilitator, as well as Annabelle Bryant, Clare Gonzalez, Sue Cocking, Adam Zbrozek, Mary Ashlock, John Suarez (Principal) and Marsha Burress (Superintendent). Welcome to **Penn Hebron Academy** in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania! Penn Hebron’s AFA team includes Laura Small (Principal), Mary Jo Novi (AFA Facilitator), and Lauren Bossick (Parent Education Facilitator). We also welcome **Lovejoy Elementary** in Lovejoy, Illinois to Alliance for Achievement, under the direction of Principal Catherine Calvert, AFA Facilitators Wilbur Campbell and Stefon Humphrey, and Parent Education Facilitator Vanae Chapman. Congratulations to **Chicago Mathematics and Science Academy** (CMSA) as they join AFA. Their team includes Principal Salim Ucan, AFA Facilitators Kemal Kaman and Chris Austria, and Parent Education Facilitator Ali Yilmaz.

Lydia Jones, Parent Education Facilitator (on left), and Janie Narczewski, AFA Facilitator, both of DePue, attend the AFA Conference in Pennsylvania.

**Parents and Learning Workshops**

Educators and families share a common interest in enhancing children’s learning and promoting successful development. Learning and education occur both at home and school, and thus have become viewed as the shared responsibility of parents and teachers. Transactions between home and school influence children’s development and achieve-
ment, and research suggests that the relationship between parents and teachers influences children’s capacity to learn (Epstein 1986; Rich, 1988). When parents are involved in their children’s education, children learn and achieve more. Schools with well-planned and structured school-family partnership programs have demonstrated benefits not only for students, but also for parents, teachers, and the community (Henderson & Berla, 1987; Swap, 1993). *References available below.

To assist schools in fostering such home-school collaboration, ADI staff provided a 3-hour workshop titled “Parents and Learning” for over 575 teachers in Solid Foundation and Alliance for Achievement schools this fall. Pictured are teacher participants from around the state, writing strategies for engaging parents in education to enhance student learning. As the workshop culminates, the “petals” they are writing on actually transform into a colorful butterfly.

Parents and Learning Workshop objectives are to…
Enhance teacher effectiveness in preparing parents to address the curriculum of the home.
Examine ways to connect schools and families to ensure student success.
Develop an action plan for Parents and Learning for your class, school, or district.
Spotlight on Solid Foundation
Catlin Elementary School, Catlin, Illinois

The Catlin Elementary School, a rural district in East Central Illinois with approximately 400 students in early childhood through 8th grade, started the Solid Foundation program in the fall of 2001. Superintendent Guy Banicki reports that every year in Solid Foundation the school has seen an exponential increase in parent involvement. He said “we are so pleased to get parents into the building” and see them in conversation and getting increasingly involved, and he also notes the end result is increased student learning. Catlin recently received an Academic Improvement Award from the Illinois State Board of Education by showing at least a 7.5 point improvement in test scores between 2002 and 2003. Principal Crystal Vowels said, “I believe one of the keys to Catlin’s student success is the dedication of the staff and support of the community.”

Catlin’s mission statement reflects their commitment to a thriving school community: “Catlin Schools, in partnership with family and community, will provide a positive and safe environment where students can believe in themselves, respect others, and experience the excitement of learning. Catlin is a school district committed to helping all students excel and prepare for a changing world.” Catlin held a Family Reading Night on Friday evening, November 12, and were very pleased when over 275 people turned out for the event.

Congratulations to a superb Solid Foundation community!
**Spotlight on Early Childhood**

**Site Visits**

Four PAT consultants have been hired to conduct site visits for Illinois PAT Programs: Polly Mittag (Aurora), Janet Oyler (Decatur), Linda Swanson (Elgin), and Nancy Wherry (Pekin). All four received training from the PAT National Center in how to observe a personal visit and give feedback. They will utilize the PAT Standards and Quality Indicators and self-assessment tools on their visits. The on-site services we are now able to offer include:

☆ Orientation Visit—for new PAT programs
☆ PAT Implementation Visit—including observation of a personal visit and/or a parent group meeting
☆ Standards Self-Assessment Visit—including introduction to the PAT Standards and self-assessment in two areas: personal visit and program management (for supervisors)

Participation in these visits can be counted toward recertification inservice hours. Programs may request a visit by contacting Clare Eldredge at 217-732-6462, ext. 24 or at celdredge@adi.org

**Illinois Training Team Debuts**

With funding from a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) grant, ADI has established an Illinois PAT Training Team. Two experienced parent educators, Carol Johnson (Greenville) and Marjorie Wheeler (Alton) completed their PAT National Center training in September. The first Illinois training team institute was held on November 1-5 in Springfield. Twenty-one parent educators and supervisors completed the PAT *Prenatal to Three Years* Institute.

**Teacher’s Corner**

**Teacher Tips for Helping Families Help with Homework**

*From the New Teachers Welcome Packet, WI Dept. of Public Instruction & Parents Plus of Wisconsin.*

Families who discuss their children’s studies do better in school. Teachers can encourage families to monitor and talk about school assignments. Here are some tips for teachers:

☆ Give parents a “homework calendar” listing all major assignments and due dates. Families can check this together and monitor progress to avoid last-minute panic.
☆ Inform families about your homework expectations. How do assignments fit in with school goals? How much time can students be expected to spend on homework?
☆ Offer basic guidelines on how to encourage children to complete homework on time, tips for setting up a place and time for study at home, and what to do if the child has trouble understanding or completing homework.
☆ Help students develop assignment notebooks with space for assignments, due dates, teacher comments, and family comments—this is an effective communication tool.
☆ Be sure students understand the assignments before they leave class.
☆ Make homework assignments meaningful and give students feedback on the work.
 Students lose interest quickly if assignments are seen as mere “busy work.”
☆ Homework assignments should be based on materials that are readily available to students. Offer ideas for further resources at the school or public library.
☆ Assignments should not require teaching by an adult at home.
☆ If homework is not being completed, call the child’s home. If a phone call does not solve the problems, arrange a meeting with the student and family.

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**Parent’s Corner**

**A Strategy to Help Your Child Succeed**

Inge Duran is an educator and mother who has developed a list of strategies to help her four children succeed at school. For a more complete article expanding on this list, please visit our website ([www.adi.org](http://www.adi.org)). Ms. Duran suggests that you use this list as a guide and adapt it to your own situation.

1. **Establish contact with teachers.** Meet them as soon as possible, even the year before.
2. **Attend parent orientation.** Find out how teachers like to handle test corrections, parent signatures, late work, lab work, and extra credit. The syllabus or handout given to you that day may highlight quiz days, test days, make-up test days, and textbook use.
3. **Obtain e-mail addresses and direct phone numbers of all your child’s teachers.**
4. **Find out when progress reports are sent out.** Often papers are “misplaced” between school and home, and therefore need some extra “protection” on the way there. The student planner can be used as a communication tool between teacher and parent, or a special brown envelope inside the front of a folder can resolve this problem.
5. **Make a weekly schedule with your child.** Help your child schedule work for a big project that is due one month from now.
6. **Fill in the gaps.** Every Monday and Friday, spend some extra time filling in the gaps in their student planner. Before starting homework, allow an extra two minutes to go over the daily homework schedule to check for changes or questions, and make sure the student is clear about what is expected.
7. **Give independent study time.** Children should take responsibility for their own learning. Make sure the independent study time takes place under ideal circumstances, free of any obstacles like hunger, noise, or distractions. My children have to do their written work at the table, but longer reading assignments can take place in the comfort of a sofa.

8. **Allow review time.** Make time to check for understanding. Did they read the entire chapter? Have they studied all vocabulary words? Did they need help on any subject?

9. **Check all written work.** This does not mean the parent gives solutions, but rather gives the student a second chance at the problem at hand.

10. **Use weekends to review difficult concepts.** Try to take a short period of time during the weekend to review any concept that was not clear during the week.

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**About ADI**

The Academic Development Institute (ADI) works with families, schools, and communities so that all children may become self-directed learners, avid readers, and responsible citizens, respecting themselves and those around them. ADI’s vision is of an American landscape filled with distinct school communities reflecting the hopes and dreams of the people intimately attached to them. To learn more about the work of ADI, please visit our website: [http://www.adi.org](http://www.adi.org)

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**References**


