Going for the Gold! Field Reports on Effective Home-School-Community Partnership Programs

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Abstract

Involving families, the school, and the community as partners in the education of children often results in higher academic achievement, an increase in participation, and community pride. This article describes effective programs based on the 2001 California School Boards Association Golden Bell Award (CSBA) winners in the category of Parental/Community Involvement in Pre-Kindergarten-8th grade. A total of 250 schools submitted proposals in 17 different categories. Twenty proposals met the Parental/Community Involvement in PreK-8 criteria for recognition; eight schools (from seven school districts) in this category received awards. The purpose of this article is to describe the common threads and characteristics of successful parent and community involvement programs in these schools. The areas addressed in this paper include description of the school district programs and their rationale, their innovation or exemplary status, ways of communicating with the community, and demonstrated difference for students. This article provides a summary of best practices from six of seven award-winning schools plus one district-wide program. Each has unique characteristics as well as common threads and experiences. These characteristics are particularly significant given the need to increase parent involvement with ethnically and linguistically diverse families.

Key Words: parent involvement, parent participation, home-school-community partnerships, parent involvement programs

Introduction

Families have long been considered a central factor in promoting student academic achievement (Abey, Manning, Thyer, & Carpenter-Abey. 1999; Hoover-Dempsey, 1987). Research indicates that when families, schools, and communities develop partnerships, student academic achievement increases and greater participation by parents is evident (Epstein, 1992; Lezotte, 1997). School-community partnerships for school development have increased from 51% to 69% within the last decade (Tomlin, 2002). Current national, state, and local legislation supports, promotes, and often mandates family involvement in K-12 schools, such as Title I which specifies and mandates partnerships to maintain funding (USDOE, 2001). Various educational programs exist and many new ones are introduced to improve and foster growth, enhance home-school relationships, and increase parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Barriers to parent involvement generally include school community characteristics, parent and teacher attitudes toward the schools and each other, parent emotional and adjustment problems, language and cultural barriers, and teacher practices (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). How can schools take advantage of the potential synergy found in school and community involvement and enhance home-school-community relationships and partnerships? How can schools ensure that all families are invited to partner with school personnel? How are "hard to reach families," particularly ethnically and linguistically diverse families, included in partnerships? What do successful partnerships look like? How can practices be effectively designed and implemented? Many of these questions need to be addressed as schools plan their school, family, and community involvement programs and partnerships.

California School Boards Association
Golden Bell Awards Program Description and Rationale

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) Golden Bell Awards program, now in its 22nd year, promotes excellence in education by recognizing outstanding programs in school districts and county offices of education throughout California. Golden Bell Awards reflect the depth and breadth of education programs necessary to address students' changing needs. These program awards contribute to the development and evaluation of curriculum, instruction, and support services in four ways: first, by seeking out and recognizing sustainable innovative or exemplary programs which have been developed and successfully implemented by California teachers and administrators; second, by recognizing and supporting educators who invest extra

energy and time to make a demonstrated difference for students; third, by promoting models that have proven effective for students; and fourth, by focusing on the commitment to meet the needs of all students.

The California School Boards Association (CSBA) believes that identifying exemplary programs serves as a way to share information about effective educational strategies with districts and county offices of education throughout the state. It also boosts confidence in public education by focusing attention on successes in schools. Finally, the Golden Bell Award allows CSBA to express appreciation to dedicated educators who strive to provide a high-quality education that challenges all students to succeed.

Program Selection Criteria and Eligibility

The Golden Bell Awards program recognizes exemplary programs in 17 major categories with a focus on curriculum and instruction. In order to receive a Golden Bell Award, programs must operate in CSBA member school districts or county offices of education in California. A program must have been in existence for at least two years prior to the Golden Bell Award entry deadline and be currently implemented. For the programs described here, the application period ended June15, 2001. Programs are judged on a scoring rubric based on program descriptors for each program category. Applications must include an official entry form, a narrative description, and three color photos. Each entry form is to be signed by the school board president, the superintendent, and the curriculum director or other appropriate district administrator.

Program applications must demonstrate: (a) the program has made a demonstrated difference for students indicated by significant improvements in student achievement, school environment, or other outcomes and by student, staff, parent, and community evaluations or feedback demonstrating student participation; (b) the program is to be innovative or exemplary in presenting new curriculum and new methods of instruction to enhance student skills; (c) the program is sustainable through its length of operation, with a stable source of funding and high participation from students, parents, staff, and the community; (d) the program should be connected to the district, county, or state plan by addressing the district's vision statement or strategic plan and be articulated across grades or other curricular areas; (e) the program needs to be communicated to the community through dissemination of information about the program and reporting results to the community, including media, city, and county agencies; (f) the program needs to have commitment to ensure the needs of all students are met and that the students served represent the population of the school; and (g) the program can be replicated in another

school district, has staff available to discuss the program, has minimal needs for special facilities or equipment, and has a reasonable cost for implementation. School districts and county offices of education may submit up to three entries and must specify one program category and one grade/level grouping for each entry (CSBA, 2002).

Parent Involvement Characteristics Supporting Golden Bell Award Selection Criteria

Villani (1999) states, "The support of business, the willingness of parents to invest time and attention to their children's education, and the responsiveness of government agencies and private organizations all contribute to the climate of a school" (p. 104). She further states that educational reform will fail as long as it is limited to internal changes within the school. The families, the school, or the community cannot prosper without mutual support. Mawjee and Grieshhop (2002) summarize a casual model of parental involvement in which families are involved in their children's education for three primary reasons: (a) parents develop a view of their own that includes participation, (b) parents develop a positive sense of efficacy for helping children succeed, and (c) parents perceive opportunities or demands for involvement. Innovative and exemplary programs recognize these reasons and seek to address them in a variety of ways, but always through the medium of positive communication.

Jacobs (2002) describes three actions that can enhance community partnerships and create alliances in the community that promote teacher-parent-student-administrator relationships. The three actions are (1) limitations, (2) announcements, and (3) finding common ground. Many times schools are not in touch with the needs of the community; therefore, schools do all the planning and provide a "description and prescription" rather than diagnosing and designing preventive programs and actions. Action one, "limitations," describes the need for awareness of the limitations from both the school and the community, so they can be addressed via innovation. Schools that involve parents and community members as part of the instructional team can overcome limitations and barriers. Action two, "announcements," suggests that schools can no longer afford to utilize the "school flyer" approach with all families. Teachers and administrators need to find innovative ways to communicate, such as speaking to local groups at church gatherings and other community functions if schools are serious about reaching the "hard to reach" families. A wealth of instructional support can be found in community organizations, including both speakers and materials, if the school's needs and desires for partnership is announced clearly. Action three, "finding common ground,"

involves identifying views and issues that both the community and the school share. Issues of curriculum, discipline, and community resources can be better addressed when everyone is meeting on common ground in an enhanced school-community relationship.

Demonstrating one approach to making connections in a school community, Redding (2001) reports on the importance and effectiveness of the integration of four "common experience" components of the Alliance for Achievement model. As schools plan their home, school, and community partnerships they should consider providing common experiences for the members of their school community in the following areas:

- School policy (e.g., homework policy, designated reading times for all students)
- Events (e.g., Community Reader Day, service learning experiences)
- Instructional strategy (e.g., school-wide teaching strategies via staff development)
- Curricular threads (e.g., selection of curriculum by both parents and teachers, use of mutually selected books incorporated by all teachers)

In summary, qualities of effective home-school-community partnerships are comprehensive when they use all available resources. The partnerships promote mutual respect among families and schools. They are connected to teaching and learning, to curriculum planning and delivery, and to the motivation, support, and assessment of student learning. Finally, partnerships are continuously developing. Multifaceted partnerships with families and communities cannot be developed by taking one course or by providing an inservice only once per year (Epstein, 1992). These characteristics are what distinguish Golden Bell Award Winner Schools from other schools in the category of Parent/Community Involvement.

Method of Gathering Program Report Data

The focus of this article is on the 2001 California School Boards Association (CSBA) Golden Bell Award winners in the category of Parental/Community Involvement in Pre-Kindergarten/K-8. A total of 20 schools from various school districts in California submitted proposals for recognition and only 8 schools received awards (from 7 different school districts). With the consent of CSBA and school district personnel from each program, this author reviewed the eight Parental/Community Involvement Award winner program application narratives and used the comparative and contrast method of analyzing archival data. Through content analysis, themes from the CSBA eligibility criteria were identified and where possible matched with the others' data

sources to evaluate their consistency and representative value (Batt & Seiburth-Montero, 2001). A summary of each program theme was then compiled in order to provide consistency in reporting the findings. Further, each school site principal or a designated contact person was interviewed by telephone and asked to clarify themes and anwer questions regarding their program document. Permission was also requested to use their school and program name and sections of their program narrative in analyzing and writing about their programs. The areas addressed and interpreted in this article include a brief description of the program rationale, its innovation or exemplary status, how it is communicated to the community, and how it demonstrated a difference for students. The descriptions below provide a summary of six of the seven schools and one district-wide program, each with their unique characteristics, as well as common threads and experiences shared by all programs. There is a difference between many of the programs as to what and how they addressed each of the program criteria, since the option of whether to report student achievement data such as standardized tests or other desired outcomes, including descriptive and qualitative surveys, were left open. Some programs did not report the breakdown of the ethnic make-up of their students or community. They all did report that the majority of their students and families were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with the majority of their populations being Hispanic/Latinos.

Report Summaries of the Golden Bell Award Programs

"Parents Take P.A.R.T.: Parent Assisted Readiness Training" - Franklin Elementary School, Redlands Unified School District, Redlands, CA

Program Rationale

The P.A.R.T. program targets siblings of identified English Language Learners and Title I students that would be entering kindergarten at Franklin the following year. Fifteen tubs with developmentally appropriate materials and activities were created for use in home visits from parent-donated materials and kindergarten classroom instructional surplus. As a result of its effectiveness, the program evolved into an on-site parent participation preschool program.

According to Principal Christina Christopherson (personal communication, 2002), Franklin Elementary School implemented the Parent Assisted Readiness Training (P.A.R.T.) program in 1999. Franklin Elementary is a year-round Title I school with 740 students in K-5. School personnel felt a need to assist families and their children to be better prepared academically at the start

of kindergarten and to have families feel a stronger connection between the home and the school.

Innovative and Exemplary

To implement the program the administrative staff and a community liaison contacted ten families to participate in the initial pilot program. Each week a representative from the school made home visits with each family, delivered a tub with the appropriate instructional materials and demonstrated their use in a developmental and sequential manner. The preschooler and parent were invited to the site for weekly parent education meetings. The positive response led to the development of a parent participation preschool program at the school. The scope of the program increased from serving ten tubs to eighteen tubs and served thirty preschool children and their families.

The program has had a positive effect on teachers, families, and the community. First, it provided students and parents the opportunity to attend preschool at the student's future elementary school, providing a preview and a unique sense of belonging for parents as well as students. Second, open communication developed between the preschool teacher and the kindergarten teachers as they planned and facilitated a stronger sequential instructional program. Third, children in the program were screened for any speech and language services, learning disabilities, health services, and other primary intervention as needed. The P.A.R.T. program also offered parent workshops on language development, effective reading strategies, parenting skills, emotional and physical development, academic readiness, and community service. Literature in Spanish and English and developmentally appropriate games were also made available for parents to check out from the parent resource center. Parents in the program also developed a stronger connection with community organizations through presentations and workshops by the library, Healthy Start, YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and Family Service Association of Redlands.

Communicating with the Community

The P.A.R.T. program is communicated through presentations to school boards, service organizations, parent advisory committees, and has been featured in the local newspaper, *The Redlands Facts*. Program activities were featured in a monthly newsletter, and parents were invited to participate in "Coffee with the Principal," a time for families to share their concerns and suggestions for improvement of school programs.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Evaluation of the program has been conducted through parent and teacher surveys. Already there has been an increase in parent participation and attendance by as much as 30% at family night programs. More parents now participate in weekly parent education classes, tutoring, and volunteering.

Results of the parent-teacher survey indicate that parents feel more connected to the school and their children, particularly Non-English- and Limited English-Speaking families. The parents also report that their own English skills have improved as a result of volunteering to help in the preschool classroom. Kindergarten teachers report that students are entering kindergarten with better verbal skills and higher levels of cognitive development, compared to students without the P.A.R.T. preschool experience. All kindergarten and 90% of all first grade students who have participated in the P.A.R.T program were assessed, and their tests results indicate they are at or above grade level expectations, including English Language Learners who came in with enriched vocabulary. The success of the program has prompted two other elementary schools in Redlands to develop on-site preschool programs. Further, in 2002 the school received both the California School Distinguished Award and the California State Title I Achieving School Award from the California Department of Education.

"Involving All Families" - Bryn Mawr Elementary School, Redlands Unified School District, Loma Linda, CA

Program Rationale

Through the results of parent surveys in 1996, Bryn Mawr's principal and staff felt that an increase in parent and community involvement was desirable, and innovative strategies were needed if all families were to be reached. In particular, families whose children were on the reduced fee lunch program were not actively participating in school programs or activities. Bryn Mawr Elementary is one of fourteen schools in the Redlands Unified School District, and has an enrollment of 915 students in grades K-5. The school is ethnically diverse with 27 different languages spoken and maintains a free or reduced lunch percentage of 55%. Bryn Mawr has been selected to receive the Theresa Hughes Family-School Partnership Award because of its effectiveness in working with families and the community. The main foci of the "Involving All Families" program has been on its "Home Visits" component and on the training of parents in how to best help their children academically.

Innovative and Exemplary

According to Principal Dale Whitehurst (personal communication, 2002), "Involving All Families" has implemented many successful and innovative partnering strategies. Some of the activities include Family Literacy Nights that are held at the school and Family Literacy Rallies that are held in the parking lot of one of the most economically challenged apartment complexes. Families receive training on how to help their children develop study skills, be better

readers, better writers, and better students in general. Families receive free books, as well as information on social service agency referrals, adult literacy, how to complete Healthy Families Insurance forms, and the local library's services. Free bus transportation, childcare, and translation are provided for all of the activities at the school. A Grandparent Reading Day and a Family Reading Day have been instituted, allowing family members to visit campus and read with their students. The Rolling Readers and Reading Parties are also held. The Family Reading Partnership is a written agreement parents sign stating that they will monitor their child's reading for ½ hour each evening. Guided reading books are also provided for parent and child to read together.

The Home Visit Program has had a positive impact on school community relations. The entire staff has received training on home visits through the Nell Soto Parent Involvement grant. The parent-teacher survey results indicate that there has been a change in how the teachers view the families they serve. The technology component in the Home Visit Program allows families to check out portable computers and keyboards; they may also use the computer lab at the school in the evenings with full internet access. The Academic Organizer Program, funded through the Parent Teacher Association, provides each student with a binder to record daily assignments on a calendar. This allows parents to be aware of and monitor the homework assigned each day. The Community-Based English Tutoring Program conducts classes twice per week for families wishing to enhance their English skills. The Parent Education Training Program has provided training sessions in the areas of "Productive Parenting," "40 Developmental Assets," "Kids and Guns," "What Parents Can Do to Keep the Home Safe," "Mega Skills," and "Pre-Kindergarten Parent Training." A new Parent Outreach Program provides training and materials for preschoolers. The principal has also implemented a "Pastry with the Principal" event when families can meet with the principal for coffee and pastries to discuss recommendations regarding school programs. In addition, school administrators schedule fifteen minutes before and after school for parent conferences.

Communicating with the Community

Much effort has been put forth in building business partnerships and communicating the programs to the community. The principal seeks community input and makes many presentations throughout Loma Linda on current trends in education and needs of the school. Business partnerships include Shakey's Pizza providing meals for recognition of each Student of the Month, Rite Aid providing gifts for the Perfect Attendance Program, and Home Town Buffet providing food for the Family Literacy Night and Family Literacy Rallies. A telephone calling system providing families with various language options allows all families to be made aware of school activities, important dates, and ways to get involved.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Based on a parent survey conducted by the school, the findings report excellent results as evident in an increase of 320% in parent volunteerism and participation; 97% of the parents taking the parent survey indicated high satisfaction with services provided. Student attendance is the best in the district with "in seat" student attendance at 96.6%, as per the school district attendance records. According to school district data, student academic achievement has also increased in the areas of math (26 percentile points) and reading (10.4 percentile points) as evident in the Academic Performance Index (API) scores based on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9) over the last three years. Parents and staff have indicated a tremendous enhancement in teacher/parent relationships through the Home Visits Program. In 2002, the school received the California Distinguished School Award, a California State Title I Achieving School from the California Department of Education; in 2001 they were named a National Blue Ribbon School.

"School, Family, Community Connection" - Mojave Mesa Elementary School, Apple Valley Unified School District, Apple Valley, CA

Program Rationale

According to Phyllis Carnahan (personal communication, 2002), Principal at Mojave Mesa Elementary School, the Apple Valley Unified School District's core values include the belief that all students can learn and that teamwork and partnerships foster student learning. In support of those core values, the School, Family, Community Connection program at Mojave Mesa Elementary believes that schools are more successful when the entire community works together to help each child succeed, and that difference is made possible by encouraging parents to participate in school activities with their children. Mojave Mesa is a K-5 school with 650 students; 78% of the students are eligible to receive a reduced price lunch. Mojave Mesa consists of a very diverse ethnic student population with close to 50% ethnic minority students, the majority of whom are Hispanic/Latino students.

Innovative and Exemplary

The School, Family, Community Connection program focus is on providing opportunities for families to participate in school activities through evening programs including academic family nights in math, science, literature, geography, and musical performances. Families also participate in parent training sessions to better assist their children in academic subjects and in personal development. All activities are planned to be interactive and beneficial by involving teachers and community members along with the families.

Communicating with the Community

The School, Family, Community Connection is disseminated to the local community and school families through its monthly newsletter and through the principal's open door policy. A key component of the program is the training offered through family workshops in the areas of parenting through participation in the MegaSkills program, the Accountability Pyramid program, and the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT 9) standardized preparation class. The program's focus is on teamwork, effort, responsibility, and caring. Teachers also assist families in learning how to teach their children about trust, self-control, responsibility, attitude, work ethic, and resiliency.

The community is also involved through its Community Readers program that involves adults and Victor Valley Community College students in assisting elementary students on an individual basis by listening to them read and helping them with areas of difficulty. Community members, school staff, families, and students also participate in service learning programs such as the yearly community clean-up day.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Since the inception of the School, Family, Community Connection program several benefits are evident. First, according to school district data, the Academic Performance Index (API) scores have increased by 104 points. Student participation in at-home programs also increased as evident by the length of time spent reading and amount of minutes and books read by students in the California Reads program. Kindergarten-2nd grade students have spent over 6,500 minutes in recreational reading. In grades 3-5 students have read over 32,423 books. All this is attributed to the support of their families and time spent reading at home. It is evident that the Mojave Mesa staff has made a commitment to take the time to plan and work with families on activities that draw the community to the school and forge the bond necessary for all children to be successful academically and to become well-rounded, responsible, and productive citizens.

"Lunch Bunch Club" - Richman School Program, Fullerton School District, Fullerton, CA

Program Rationale

According to Yolanda McCombs (personal communication, 2002), Principal at Richman Elementary School, their program titled "The Lunch Bunch Club" is an innovative and exemplary program that involves students, teachers, and community members. It targets at-risk fifth and sixth grade students for developing academic and life skills. Many of the students who are considered

at-risk perform below grade level in core subjects, demonstrate behavior problems, come from homes impacted by high levels of poverty, and are exposed to substance abuse, gang activity, and domestic abuse. The school is K-6 with an enrollment of 1000 students; 90% are Hispanic and 740 students are designated as English Language Learners. The rest of the students are comprised of 3% Caucasian, 3% Asian, and 1% African American.

Innovative and Exemplary

In order to address the issues, the program implemented three components to assist students: community speakers, enrichment activities, and field trips. Many activities are conducted during the lunch hour; therefore, minimal academic classroom time is taken. Student volunteers from the local community college participate by helping to organize, plan, mentor, and supervise the club, and in return receive credit toward their community service requirement. Community volunteers are available to speak to the students on various careers and services available to them and their families. Students are able to witness many positive role models within their community through both the speaker series and through field trips. The program is funded by a Star Power grant provided by the Fullerton Educational Foundation.

Communicating with the Community

The program is communicated to the community through articles in the newspaper and through presentations to service clubs such as the Rotary Club and the Fullerton Chamber of Commerce, as well as to classes at California State University, Fullerton and the local community college.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Teachers report that the 75-100 students who participate regularly in the Lunch Bunch Club have improved their attendance rate, homework quality, and behavior when compared to previous classes in which at-risk students did not have access to planned and organized activities. Teachers' also report that many times there is a strong connection between what they are learning in class and the Lunch Bunch Program activities. The school also received Distinguished Award status by the California Department of Education in 2002.

"Parent Power" - Ben Lomond Elementary, Covina Valley Unified School District, Covina, CA

Program Rationale

According to Jane Cross (personal communication, 2002), Principal at Ben Lomond Elementary, the school has 476 students. Parent Power is a family-school partnership program based on the National Literacy Program, whose goal is to enhance basic skills for students' parents based on the premise that

parents and children can learn together and enhance each other's lives. Parent Power offers educational activities in which teachers, parents, and students work collaboratively as an education team. Activities include a camp-out on the playground, a family field trip, "Take Your Parents to School Day," community speakers, and a four-week parent education workshop involving parents in working on academics with their children.

Innovative and Exemplary

The Parent Power program provides many exciting activities such as having parents ride on the school bus to various events, assist in setting up camp at the school playground, and volunteer in the classrooms. Parents learn about the California State Standards, STAR testing, curricular study areas at each grade level, and school and state expectations. Presentations on academic subjects include reading, writing, science, and assessment. At each event, between 400 and 500 hundred parents attended during the 2001 school year.

Teachers lead the workshops for parents, who are welcome to bring their children, too. Spanish interpreters are provided via wireless headset systems; day care for younger children is also available. Community speakers have included city councilmen, district principals, and the district superintendent.

Communicating with the Community

The Parent Power program is widely publicized. An article appears yearly in the Covina Press Courier and the San Gabriel Valley Tribune informing the community of all activities including the parent workshops. It includes photos of Camp Lomond and "Take Your Parent to School" day. Advertisements for Parent Power events go well beyond the school flyers. Posters in both English and Spanish are displayed around the school campus so parents can see them when they drop off and pick up their children at school. Various service clubs also participate in providing free food for the parent workshops and camp-outs. In addition, high school students present sessions on drug education.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Parent Power has made a difference not only statistically, but also on a personal level, by developing stronger relationships for students and parents and teachers. According to school district data, statistically, the students Academic Performance Index (API) scores have increased the past two years based on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9). Collectively, students have gained 5 points on the API. Of most significance is the improvement of the schools socioeconomically disadvantaged students (42% of the school population) who gained 32 points on the API scores. A parent survey conducted by the school district indicated that 92% of the parents felt that the Parent Power program was very effective. Teachers have also noted an increase in the completion of homework and amount students read to their parents.

"The Family Literacy Workshop" - James Monroe Elementary School, Madera Unified School District, Madera, CA

Program Rationale

According to Michelle Pecina (personal communication, 2002), Principal at James Monroe Elementary, the "Family Literacy Workshop" has been in existence for eight years. The purposes of the program are to improve the reading ability of students, to improve parent support of literacy and English Language Development, and to improve school-parent communication. The parents of English Language Learners in preschool through sixth grade are identified and recruited by classroom teachers. A certificate of completion is presented to each family who attends all the sessions, along with a gift of a new family literacy resource and a bilingual collegiate dictionary. The school is K-6 with a student enrollment of 930; 80% are Hispanic students and 60% are designated as English Language Learners.

Innovative and Exemplary

The Family Literacy Workshop program consists of six sessions; each is three hours and fifteen minutes long. Each session includes a visit to the parent check-out library where facilitators guide the families through the weekly experience. The workshops focus on three basic methods of learning to read. Each session begins with an introductory presentation and reading of the family book. Then parents rotate through three literacy sessions which include a second demonstration and modeling of reading. Finally, there is a whole group period of thematic unit learning. Workshop learning is presented in the Natural Learning Cycle model: everything presented is introduced, demonstrated, and modeled. Guided practice with participation follows, and learning concludes with performance assessment. An English Language Development experience is taught and practiced every week. A discussion and practice activity is conducted, along with a whole group review of the upcoming parent and child activity. Library activity time is given for families to check out books for reading and for use in the week's homework assignments. A review of the literacy learning experiences and how these will be used to do the homework assignments, a clarification of the assigned work/experience-building the family is assigned, and closing comments are followed by a grand conversation in which everyone participates.

Communicating with the Community

Community presentations have been given at several school sites regarding the success of the program. Inquiries from 12 schools have been reported and district personnel continue to support, visit, and disseminate program information. It's to be expected that the most effective means of communicating

information to other families is orally, from those families who have completed the program. Over the past three years more than 690 families have participated in the program.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

According to school district data, results indicate an increase in the Academic Performance Index (API) scores by as much as 20% over a two-year period. A school parent survey also indicates an 80% increase in the participation by families in the program. Other forms of assessment are currently being implemented to assess growth in meeting the stated program goals. Parent interaction with their children will be assessed using a Parent Interaction Observation Checklist. A parent self-assessment and a survey will also be conducted by the school to determine how knowledgeable parents feel about the various topics covered, about the fundamental literacy learning methods, and the techniques needed to teach and master them while their children are learning to read.

"CAFÉ: Capistrano Affirms Family English" - Capistrano Unified School District, Orange County, CA

Program Rationale

According to Beverly DeNicola (personal communication, 2002), Principal of Capistrano Unified School District's Adult Education, the district encompasses million-dollar hilltop homes, beach communities, middle- and high-class suburbs, and low-income housing. Within the low-income housing community, made up mostly of Mexican immigrants, a 50% poverty rate is represented, compared to a 5% rate throughout the remaining district. CUSD has nearly 50,000 students; over 6,500 are English Language Learners, who make up approximately 17% of its student population. The majority of the students and parents are Spanish-speaking, with some speakers of Farsi, various Asian languages, and Eastern European languages, as well. A community survey found that 59% of parents report having less than a sixth grade education. Many parents also reported their desire to have the opportunity to learn English but cited childcare as one of the big obstacles. In response to the needs of the community, the district implemented the Capistrano Affirms Family English (CAFÉ) program.

The CAFÉ program offers a three-pronged approach. It is first and foremost an adult education program offering classes in English Language, reading, math, and tutoring. Families also participate in district family math, literacy, and health night programs. Second, CAFÉ offers childcare at all classes and uses the time to help younger children get ready for school. This also provides an opportunity for program participants to be trained in childcare skills that

may be useful for future employment. Last, local community organizations partner with CAFÉ parents to provide educational field trips and health services for families.

Innovative and Exemplary

An exemplary component of the CAFÉ program is based on its "grow your own" philosophy. CAFÉ seeks to employ English-Learning parents as childcare providers so they may earn while they learn. Receiving training in childcare, child safety, early childhood development, and tutoring techniques, the families learn parenting skills that will assist them in creating their own childcare business or work toward an early childhood certificate or degree, as well as with skills and strategies to help their own children.

The parents involved are highly engaged by using real life experiences, such as reading children's books and role-playing with a doctor or teacher to enhance their conversational skills. They take fieldtrips to the local library, learn math games they can play at home, and discuss school policies. Community organizations are also involved. A partnership involving a local hospital sends a weekly health van out to classes to provide diabetes and health information as well as other preventive health services to the families and their children. Community resource field trips are also provided through partnerships with other organizations, and they teach about public transportation while taking families to local health clinics, family resource centers, and a One Stop Center for career information.

The CAFÉ program organizes family science fieldtrips to places like the Los Angeles Zoo, the Orange County Center, the Ocean Institute, and the Long Beach Aquarium. A key component is the "Distant Learning Component" which enables adults who cannot attend classes to participate in an independent study program in which they study at home and receive help through telephone conversations with CAFÉ teachers.

Communicating with the Community

The program is communicated to the community through various modes and a wide range of activities. The school district has sponsored community fairs, community walks, and personal telephone calls made by bilingual community liaisons. The District English Language Advisory Committee, PTA's Family Resource Centers, and Mission Hospital have all assisted in outreach efforts. A district-wide conference for the parents of English Language Learning students is also held yearly.

Demonstrated Difference for Students

Evaluation of program services indicates that CAFÉ parents who participate in classes are now reading to their children and listening to them read. The parents are taking their children to the library, volunteering in classrooms,

and participating in parent-teacher conferences. In 2001, the CAFÉ program had over 700 parents enroll in 23 different classes offered at 17 different sites throughout the district.

Common Themes Found in All Programs

Most of the above parent involvement programs have implemented effective practices. Similarities found in all programs include: an increase in academic performance index scores; fewer reported discipline and behavior problems; an evident connection between program activities and the school curriculum; more involvement in PTA from those parents who traditionally do not participate; a stronger connection to parents and students reported by teachers; and an increase in business and service organizations partnering with schools. Further, schools provided free transportation and translation services for families and free daycare for their children. The programs were widely publicized in various languages. At many venues, college tutors were frequently utilized, and program activities varied from family math, geography, literacy, camp-outs, weekend service projects, English language courses, home visits, and a community read-aloud. Most of the programs included an annual evaluation component for students, parents, and teachers.

Conclusion

This author analyzed eight parent involvement programs and reported on seven of them. All seven programs received the California School Boards Association Golden Bell Award in the area of parent involvement. The results reported were based on each school district's program application narratives; therefore, I cannot claim conclusively that the program effectiveness was due to the parent involvement program interventions. The program evaluation designs were not reviewed nor the data collection techniques evaluated. While the majority of the parent involvement programs were located in areas serving low socioeconomic status students and families, they failed to report that there are many effective parents, strong families, and academically successful students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which could indicate a prejudgment of families and their children within a deficit model (Mattingly et al., 2002).

Based on the data reported by the various school districts, this article does show that parent involvement programs have been effective and have met the criteria set by the California School Boards Association in order to receive CSBA's Golden Bell Award. The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about each child's family. The results reported support

reasons noted in the literature for developing school, family, and community partnerships. These reasons include improving students' academic achievement, affecting student attendance, attitudes, and behaviors, improving school climate, improving school programs, providing family support and services, increasing parents' skills and leadership, and connecting families with the schools. By using innovative strategies and communication procedures, these schools involved families with the ultimate goal of helping all young people succeed in school and later in life. Programs like the ones reported here are what make schools an exciting place to be—a place where communities care about their schools and schools care about their communities.

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