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Summary of Parental Support for Learning

Issue

What can school districts in San Mateo County do to increase parental involvement in children's learning?

Summary

Decades of research have shown that parents' involvement with their children's learning is a major contributor to a child's ultimate educational performance. The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) interviewed a broad base of educators in selected districts in the county to discover what techniques they use for getting parents to participate in their children's learning experience. The Grand Jury discovered promising, creative practices that are worthy of being adopted in school districts throughout the county. It is the Grand Jury's hope that this report and its recommendations will help the schools get more parents actively involved in their children's education.



Parental Support for Learning

Issue

What can school districts in San Mateo County do to increase parental involvement in children's learning?

Background

Decades of research have shown that parents' involvement in their children's learning is a major contributor to a child's ultimate educational performance. In a classroom of 20 it is possible to acquire the equivalent of 20 to 40 additional educators if all parents are fully involved in educating their children.

San Mateo County has a diverse population of students who can benefit from outreach by the schools. Students with the greatest need fall primarily into two categories: those whose native language is not English, and those from low-income families.

According to the County Office of Education, 43% of families in the county speak one of 24 languages other than English.

The 2000 census report for San Mateo County indicates that 3.5% of county families (5.8% of the population) are below the poverty level. According to Carol Welsh Gray, president of *Raising a Reader* (Peninsula Community Foundation), "the average middle-class child is exposed to an average of 1,700 hours of reading by first grade while a child in a low-income family is typically exposed to only 25 hours of reading."

Investigation

The Grand Jury interviewed school officials to determine what techniques and strategies they employ to generate parent support for the learning of their children. The school districts surveyed were large, medium-sized, and small, with varying socio-economic levels representative of the kinds of districts in the county. As well as superintendents and county education officials, the Grand Jury queried preschool providers and community college officials.

By interviewing a broad base of educators, the Grand Jury learned that there are promising practices that could be adopted throughout the county.

Findings

Parental support endeavors fall into two categories: those which take place once children have enrolled in the public schools at the kindergarten level and above and those which are available to children of preschool age. In a few cases where the district operates preschool classes, there might be overlap in programs.

The Grand Jury learned of innovative strategies to involve parents and to meet their needs as supporters of their children's education. Some of these strategies are found in several districts; others are unique to one district.

BEST PRACTICES: KINDERGARTEN - GRADE 12

- Community Based English Tutoring (CBET) programs are thriving in several high-need districts. In these programs parents learn English, receive ideas for how to work with their children in reading and math, and are encouraged to read books in English to their children. These programs help parents whose native language is not English understand how the school system works and learn how to advocate for their children at school.
 - Child-care for younger children is provided for parents attending the CBET program.
 - CBET program times are flexible, meeting during the school day or in the evenings to accommodate parents' schedules.
 - Calendars indicating parent education opportunities throughout the school year are published in both English and Spanish to reach parents of varying language proficiency.
 - Parent and community newsletters are printed in both English and Spanish. The newsletters are designed to get parents to come into the schools and emphasize parent responsibility for helping their children with school.
- At the beginning of the year, some schools offer workshops that allow parents to choose topics of interest. Teachers or other school personnel present the topics at times when parents are available.
- Title I (federal) funds are allocated to establish a Parent Resource Center and to employ a parent liaison (coordinator) at each school in the district.

- Parent liaisons (who are themselves parents of children in the school) hold weekly meetings with parents, help them to support their children, and guide them in working within the system to advocate for their children.
- Parent liaisons connect parents with community agencies and resources as needed and also meet with administration and staff.
- A special grant provides English as a Second Language instruction to parents so that they can assist in the language development of their own children. English vocabulary, grammar, oral expression, reading, and interactive language skills are emphasized, along with creative writing, poetry, and book making.
- In one school district, a library orientation to the city library provides each parent with a library card. The goal is to encourage parents, along with their children, to use the public library.
- Home visits by classroom teachers to kindergarten families have fostered cross-cultural understanding and cemented positive relationships between home and school. Typically such visits are outside the scope of a classroom teacher's responsibility and require sensitivity to the family culture and values. Training is an essential component.
- One school district allocates \$700 a year to each school to underwrite the costs of parent education and outreach. The program is designed by the parent involvement committee and includes the translation of newsletters into Spanish and workshops for parents.
- Some school districts solicit contributions of food from community restaurants. Parents serve breakfast to their children at school. These meals promote healthier eating habits for children and are social events for the families.

BEST PRACTICES: PRE KINDERGARTEN

- San Mateo County Office of Education's Early Childhood Language Development Institute (ECLDI) supports children by integrating their home language and culture into the classroom while they are learning English. The ECLDI has developed training programs for parents of children aged birth-to-5 whose home language is not English. The training is included in various early childhood programs throughout the county.
- Sequoia Union High School District operates cooperative preschools in Belmont, Menlo Park, East Palo Alto, Redwood City, and San Carlos that serve approximately 175 families. Education and training of parents are integral parts of the preschool program.

- Preschool pilot programs, Head Start programs, and state-funded preschools in the county require parent participation. These programs place high value on family participation.
- The Peninsula Community Foundation (PCF) is a major philanthropic organization in the county, with schools among its beneficiaries. The Peninsula Partnership funds city-school collaboratives in high-need communities. "Raising a Reader," also sponsored by PCF, helps parents support children's learning at a very early age by reading to and with them and by developing language skills through story telling.

Conclusions

The Grand Jury, following its investigation, concludes that involving parents is not only cost-effective; it is crucial in motivating children's learning.

Many districts in the county demonstrate creativity in reaching out to parents. School officials recognize that their efforts do reap benefits. They acquire grants and obtain community resources to fund parent education programs and generate parent support.

Preschools encourage and frequently require parents to participate in the day-to-day education of their four-year-olds. In this way, families discover the value of parents' engagement in their child's learning.

The Grand Jury believes that parents' involvement is paramount in educational achievement. Because techniques for involving parents vary, schools throughout the county can help students by sharing their best practices with each other.

Recommendation

The Grand Jury recommends that the County Superintendent of Schools distribute this report to all districts and encourage them to adopt those practices that are appropriate for their schools and their community.

**San Mateo County Office of Education Responses
to the
2006 Grand Jury Recommendations**

RECOMMENDATION

THE GRAND JURY RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS DISTRIBUTE THIS REPORT TO ALL DISTRICTS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO ADOPT THOSE PRACTICES THAT ARE APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR SCHOOLS AND THEIR COMMUNITY.

The County Superintendent of Schools agrees with the Grand Jury that promoting parental involvement in children's education is an important contributor to the child's achievement, and will distribute this report to all districts and encourage them to adopt those practices that are appropriate for their schools and their community.