

Illinois State Board of Education's Family Engagement Webinar Series 2012

During the January 26th session we experienced technical difficulties and were unable to retrieve questions posed to the presenters during the webinar. The questions, however were saved with the webinar data, and forwarded to the presenters for responses. Their responses to your questions are given below.

We apologize for any inconvenience and hope you find this information useful.

Q: Who teaches the Adult English Class?

A: We post the available positions each year, and they have always been filled by current and/or retired staff members. We run two 10-week sessions, September-November and Feb.-April, two nights a week for 1.5 hrs. per night.

Q: What would you say were the most important 3 things you did to bring parents in the first time?

- A:
1. Having the parent liaisons available at multiple school events to let parents know that they existed, and to start forming personal relationships.
 2. Ensuring that we truly were looking to establish partnerships with parents, rather than simply doing things to or for parents.
 3. Establishing a dedicated space at the school where parents knew they could go.

Q: Copy of the presentation?

A: The presentation is available on the IllinoisParents.org website on the Tool Box page

Q: Contact info? Interested in more info on the Father's Forum...

A: For more information, please contact anne.coffman@chsd218.org. Also, specifically for information on the Fathers' Forum, contact Philip Henry at Eisenhower High School--philip.henry@chsd218.org

Q: What resources do you have available in the Parent Support Centers?

A: We have computers for parent use, informational brochures on a variety of topics, and the parent liaisons typically work individually with parents on a variety of topics, ranging from accessing community resources, putting them in touch with appropriate school personnel, teaching them to use the online grading system and the school website, etc.

Q: Are you willing to accept observers to learn more about your program?

A: Definitely! We've hosted a few districts thus far, and are happy to host others. We've developed an orientation to our program, with time for questions, as well. It typically takes a couple of hours, but we can customize it to fit your needs. Contact Anne Coffman (anne.coffman@chsd218.org) or Philip Henry (philip.henry@chsd218.org)

Q: What kinds of funds did you use to create the parent centers?

A: The rooms were previously being used as other offices or storage areas, and turning them into parent centers was completed with district funding. There wasn't much money involved--just some paint and perhaps some basic office furniture (but most of the furniture was taken from other school areas). We used Title I parent involvement funding for certain start-up costs--the Netbook computers, informational brochures, basic office supplies, headsets for phone calls, etc. This funding was only needed for the first year of each center.

Q: Are parent liaisons actual parents or are they educators?

A: They are parents--in order to be interviewed they must currently have at least one student at the school. All of them have experience in some sort of educational or community-related work, but they aren't necessarily teachers.

Q: Salary of the parent liaison? Qualifications for that position?

A: The salary is the same as that of our teacher assistants. The starting salary is about \$16 per hour. They work a 6.5-7.5 hour day, with some extended hours for certain parent events or workshops. After a 90-day probationary period, they receive the same benefits as our teacher assistants. It is considered a classified position. The qualifications include having a child at the school, ability to work with a team, basic clerical and computer skills, self-initiative, and the ability to work with diverse groups of parents.

Q: What is the best way to encourage a district to see the need for attention in this area?

A: I would say that a district should analyze both the breadth and depth of its parent involvement. Are all attendance areas represented? What about representation across ethnicities and language groups? What about the parental involvement of groups of students that in general are not meeting academic standards? If the answers to these questions aren't encouraging, then this area needs attention.

Q: Do the parent liaisons meet with the counseling staff and/or the deans of your schools on a regular basis? If so, what are the recurring talking points for the agenda?

A: Currently they don't have regular meetings, but this is something that we might establish in the future. However, the parent liaisons spent quite a bit of time establishing relationships with these departments initially, so that now they are able to work collaboratively with each other on a regular basis.

The liaisons understand how and when to refer parents to counselors, social workers, and deans, and the support services personnel also regularly refer parents to the liaison office for ongoing support.

Q: Can you talk about how you went about establishing the Title I Advisory Council? (i.e. how did you identify the parents? How did you build and/or support parents and school staff capacity in being actively engaged on the council? Etc.

A: The parent liaisons recruited parents for the Title I Advisory Council in a variety of ways--sign-up sheets at large-scale events at the beginning of the year (registration, Meet the Teacher Night), referrals from staff members, referrals from other parents, personal invitations given to parents who contacted the Parent Support Center, etc.

To build capacity for active engagement, the key was to make the meetings meaningful, by having relevant and open-ended discussion questions, a small-group format so that parents were comfortable, and then making sure that the parents received feedback on what had and had not been addressed at future meetings.