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Parental Engagement

As America struggles to improve the education processes across the country, educators naturally focus on issues such as curriculum rigor, student transitions, developing the student's creativity and making the class work more relevant to the students. An often overlooked and understated aspect of the educational process is engaging parents in the student's academic progress. Several researchers have shown the importance of parental engagement in the educational process. This report summarizes an innovative process for engaging, educating and assisting parents that has been successfully applied in North Central Illinois.

The parental engagement program developed in this paper is based on the observation that children that excelled in school often had parents that were actively involved in their education. This observation is supported by many research studies. This research recognized that many parents wanted to help their children in school but did not have the proper tools to help.

This program was initiated by convincing local administrators and school board members to approve a pilot to test the relevance of the concept. Once administrative support had been obtained, a survey was conducted of the parents, teachers, and administrators to determine their interest in developing a program to help parents become more engaged in their child's education. The survey also assessed the topics that were critical to the local area.

The survey found that the homework and discipline were the critical issues for the area. The first workshop developed homework kits for each grade that enabled the parents to more actively participate in their child's education. The second workshop assisted parents in being better disciplinarians. A volunteer team planned a series of workshops for parents. The homework kits were created by the teachers and were distributed at the workshop.

The workshop was designed to create a warm non-threatening environment encouraging everyone to participate. Food was offered to boost participation. The volunteer team asked local merchants to donate the food and supplies for the event. The food was prepared by the school administrators and served by the teachers. Media coverage of the event made the atmosphere open and festive. The initial workshop attracted over 560 children and parents.

The parents were given an attitudinal survey, and they were also asked to complete evaluations at the culmination of the workshop.

Educational data has been monitored before and after the event and examined to determine the program's effectiveness. As a result of this study, the committee has decided to continue the program during this school year. There is definitive and conclusive evidence that there has been a decrease in the need for disciplinary action at the school since the inception of this program. Parents have embraced the workshop sessions, and parental attendance at the workshops has risen during this school year.

The program has been translated to a second school district with similar results. This program is flexible enough to be adapted to the critical issues of a given school. The second school has had workshops covering topics including substance abuse, internet safety, school transitions, reading to your child and summer educational activities.

Parental engagement is critical to the early learning process. The program presented in this paper is straightforward and relatively easy to implement in new school settings. It provides several different benefits including helping to create closer relationships between students, parents, teachers, and administrators in addition to significantly helping improve the education process at these schools.