

THE MILLION FATHER MARCH

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, LOCAL DISTRICT 8 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

This year, 24 schools in L.A.'s Local District 8 bought into a family involvement practice that had been and was being done at other schools—and they made it their own. That, after all, was the point: to join forces and make a strong statement.

District 8 schools asked fathers and other male guardians to take their places in a nationwide, unified cadre of men who demonstrated proudly their commitment to their children's education. These schools asked district dads and father figures to do one thing: Bring their children to school.

On Monday, September 8, 2009, this was how the male role models of more than 1,000 District 8 students added their number to the Million Father March.

Following a study, district leaders realized that fathers, as a group, had little direct engagement with the schools. Leaders correlated this lack of male participation with a lack of achievement among many of the district's African American and Latino boys.

"It is not until secondary school that most boys begin to have male teachers as educational role models," wrote the district's parent ombudsperson. Seeking to increase the male presence in their schools, parent involvement facilitators looked to a practice that started in Chicago Public Schools years ago—fathers brought their children—boys and girls—to school on the first day.

When the idea was presented to the Administrative Leadership Team, members voiced concern about implementing the practice on the first day of school. The planning team then decided to participate in the Million Father March on the first Monday of the school year. They also designated the day Augustus Hawkins Day after a local congressman who acted as a founder of federal school improvement funding.

All schools received an informational packet about the MFM that included a memo from the

superintendent encouraging participation. The packets contained detailed information about how to organize and promote the events. Interested principals presented the program at staff meetings and each school that was interested appointed a coordinator.

On that Monday, schools invited the participating fathers into the building, where they were met by school board members, school administrators, and staff members who thanked them for their involvement. District leaders suggested that schools provide refreshments, information, and certificates of appreciation, as well as giving the fathers information about how to support their children through all levels of school.

Organizers stressed the importance of tailoring the national activity to district culture and to school specifics. They also suggested providing a framework, while encouraging each school to enhance its own event. The result was a successful program that allowed participants to feel their increasing role in something greater—a national movement—but also in something smaller—a bond to their children.

*Juanita Coleman-Merritt
Parent Ombudsperson
juanita.coleman@lausd.net*
