
Annual Parent Involvement Retreat: Families and Schools... Together for Students

Covington Independent Schools
Covington, Kentucky

Covington Independent Public School District's Parent Involvement Advisory Council has coordinated an annual parent involvement retreat since 1995. The goal of this practice is to come together as a district group focused on the mission of increasing parent involvement. At the retreats we share mutual interests, build strengths, and pool resources to reach further as a collaborating team working to meet district goals.

The retreat is a day long conference held at an easily accessible location. The most recent one centered on our district's parent involvement goals. Creating more welcoming schools, increasing parent visibility, and helping parents help their children learn at home were selected as objectives based on the district wide parent involvement needs assessment survey which polled parents, students and staff. The grade levels involved were pre-school through high school. Thirty-six parents, 12 teachers, 12 administrators, 6 family resource center coordinators, 2 youth service coordinators, 10 family advocates, the chairman of the Board of Education, the superintendent, and a group of community supporters attended. Breakfast and lunch were served. Off site child care was offered to all of the attending parents. A small stipend in the form of a gift certificate to a local grocery chain was mailed in a thank you note to each parent after the conference. Expert speakers were recruited to share best practices supporting our goals and to facilitate team planning sessions. Our superintendent's attendance under-scored the importance of parent involvement as did his remarks to the group advocating the concept of interactive homework.

Evaluations from previous retreats and professional development sessions indicate that our teachers and staff are receptive to trainers from outside of our school system. It has been a challenge to recruit experts that can relate to the specific needs of our high poverty urban district. This was especially true in finding an expert on interactive homework and parent involvement with skills to facilitate 12 planning teams. It took plenty of lead time, a lot of net working, and many phone calls. By the time someone was located, the description of our needs was well-honed and gave the speaker/facilitator a solid foundation on which to build her presentation.

Each of our 12 schools ranging from pre-school to high school and an alternative center, was represented by a team consisting of an administrator, teacher, family advocate, family resource center coordinator, and 2 or 3 parents. Community representatives also participated along with our Chairman of the Board of Education. The school team was asked to take back new information and re-energized enthusiasm to their buildings to implement changes and improvements.

This practice has grown stronger over the years as we have tailored it to meet our needs. Not only has it given the whole school district the opportunity to learn and grow as a team, it has served to be an affirmation of why and how parents are vital partners in the education of their children. Our success is reflected in the following remarks taken from evaluations: " The opportunity to talk with school personnel in a different environment allowed us to focus as a group on goals and action steps to meet them Left with specific goals Became more motivated to achieve stated goals I have better insight into the schools my children attend I thought it was great.... The district as a whole is headed in the same direction Parents and teachers talked together about critical goals and expectations and figured out ways to achieve them Our school will have an improved homework policy A clear sense of goals for the district ... A collaborative spirit ... Good food for thought-questions encouraged looking some more at parent involvement

The cost to design and implement the most recent retreat was \$1900.00 which was paid with Goals 2000 federally funded - Parent Involvement funds.

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