
FAMILY INVOLVEMENT NOTEBOOKS

Minneapolis Public Schools

Minneapolis, Minnesota

As Minneapolis Public Schools worked to increase both the level and quality of family involvement in the education of students, many phone calls came to the Office of Family Involvement and Title I from schools seeking additional information and help. As a result, the two offices jointly developed the Family Involvement Notebook to serve as a resource in the school building for sites seeking to form more effective partnerships with their families.

Designed in the form of a three ring binder that can be expanded and updated, the notebook addresses services, policies, standards, and strategies. It contains both information for staff and materials that can be reproduced and sent to parents. There is a copy of the MPS Family Involvement Standards and copies of “Bright Ideas for Family Involvement, Vol. I and II.” These “Bright Ideas” booklets contain examples of the best practices in Minneapolis classrooms and schools for building partnerships with families.

Developed for use in K-12 schools, the notebooks are currently given to principals, Title I contact teachers, and family liaisons at all ninety-seven Minneapolis school sites. We distributed the notebooks and demonstrated their use at principal, Title I contact teacher, and family liaison meetings. We personally met with and delivered notebooks to people who did not attend these meetings. Key district administrators, including the superintendent, area superintendents, and directors of Teaching and Instructional Strategies, Title I, Communications, and Special Education, have received copies.

In addition to being a resource, the notebook also serves as a place for schools to keep records of their family involvement efforts. There are sections for evaluation, budget information, newsletters, and computer disks, in addition to two blank sections in the notebook for the school’s use.

Schools are using the information in the notebooks to answer their questions. After the initial distribution in fall 1997, calls to our office with the most frequently asked questions or requests for materials remained the same for several months. As schools started to use the Family Involvement Notebook, these calls decreased and now are rare. In response to current school requests, we plan to

provide templates, on computer disks, for frequent flyers and announcements in the major languages used by Minneapolis families.

Since our district increasingly uses the six types of involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein as a framework for implementing our MPS Family Involvement Standards, we decided to change the notebook section on “Strategies for Family Involvement” to reflect this typology. We added a separate section for each type with information, resources, and ideas for successful implementation. The notebooks were collected in the spring of 1999, revised and updated over the summer, and redistributed in the fall.

Continually updating the notebooks once they are in the schools so that they have the most current information is a challenge. Family liaisons at each site were sent supplemental information and revisions periodically, and asked to keep the notebooks updated. This approach had moderate success.

Originally, notebooks were distributed to schools with a specific copy for principals and family liaisons and a general staff copy. In collecting the notebooks for revision, we could see evidence similar to what our written evaluations had told us: staff copies were not being used. To the contrary, the family liaison and some principals’ copies were heavily used with extra materials and school information inserted in them. When we redistributed the notebooks in the fall, the staff copy became the Title I contact teacher’s copy. This increased the collaboration between the family liaison and Title I contact teacher in the school, and put the notebook in the hands of another person who had seen its use demonstrated and who could act as a resource to other staff.

Our evaluation data indicated that classroom teachers knew of the notebooks, but did not use them. We now use the notebook in teacher trainings, refer to it in newsletters, display and talk about it at new teacher orientation, and mentor teachers use it with their new teachers.

Each notebook costs about \$27 to produce. This includes the 3-ring binder, 15 colored section dividers, and copies of “Bright Ideas Vol. I and II” (\$5 each), cover and spine inserts, loose-leaf diskette holders, and the informational pages. It does not include the staff time spent on development or distribution which was funded by Title I and the MPS Office of Family Involvement.

These notebooks are one of several successful collaborations between Family Involvement and Title I in Minneapolis that have gotten rave reviews from school sites.

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