
DISTRICT SUPPORT FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Los Angeles Unified School District, Local District B

North Hollywood, California

School, family, and community partnerships at the middle and high school levels decrease unless schools make concerted efforts to sustain and enhance family and community involvement. Local District B, Los Angeles Unified School District, committed to supporting its secondary schools to develop plans and activities that would enhance their school, family, and community partnership programs.

First, the district Partnership Team conducted a series of meetings for secondary school Action Teams for Partnerships. These meetings initially provided opportunities for participants to share successes and challenges. Over time, the secondary school Action Teams began to focus in on the challenges and envision partnership programs that would fit their needs.

Around that same time, the district assigned one of its district Partnership Team members to specialize in serving secondary schools. Although all of the district team members were capable to assist these schools, the district determined that a specialized facilitator, whose major responsibility was to support secondary schools, would lead the secondary schools to develop partnership programs. Accomplishments of the past eighteen months have demonstrated these strategies to be effective.

District-supported secondary school initiatives began with communication and relationship building. The initial activity, Coffee and Conversation, provided a pot of coffee, a box of donuts, and an opportunity for parents and teachers to engage in informal conversation during teachers' planning periods or before or after school. This activity was simple yet effective.

Next, the district's secondary schools recruited parents who were willing to hold meetings for ten to fifteen people in their homes. They then invited parents and two to six teachers to attend meetings at the volunteer parent homes. At these House Meetings, parents contributed food for dinner, and everyone enjoyed getting to know each other and discussing issues of mutual concern over a shared meal. Parents and teachers came to better understand one another through these meetings.

Now, the district-supported secondary school partnership activities have progressed to focus on student achievement. One project, the Parent Mentor program, invites parents whose children are having difficulty to become a mentor for someone else's child. The district trains each mentor to work with one student. Mentors talk to students about items that appear in their student planner and also spend time doing textbook walks with them. In addition, the parents have learned strategies to ask questions that cannot be answered with a single word. In return for the time that parents spend as mentors, they are guaranteed that their own child will also be assigned a mentor. The district chose to organize the project this way because of the natural urge that young adults have to pull away from their own parents and their desire to become more independent. By mentoring someone else's child, parents are learning the skills that they will one day be able to use with their own child or younger children.

These district-supported programs of school, family, and community partnerships presently operate at varying degrees in six middle and high schools throughout Local District B. Ongoing, structured district facilitation and specialized district leadership have enabled these secondary schools to strengthen and sustain partnership programs. The secondary schools now feel successful enough that they have organized and participated in a conference for secondary schools with two other school districts.

Charlotte Castagnola, Director
(818) 755-5385