
PARENT LEADER GROUP

Hawaii Parental Information and Resource Center

Parents and Children Together

Honolulu, Hawaii

A major role of the Hawaii Parental Information and Resource Center (PIRC) is to bring resources to the schools. For the Castle Complex Schools, rich resources in the form of parent leaders already existed. To build on this asset, the PIRC Coordinator assisted the schools by bringing together these leaders as a network.

Castle Complex Schools includes Castle High School, King Intermediate, and their eight feeder elementary schools. Each school has organizations focused on family and community involvement including Parent-Teacher Associations, Parent Partnership Teams, and Ohanas (a Hawaiian word for family, which represents the community of the school). The purpose of the Parent Leader Group was to convene quarterly the presidents of these organizations from each school to share resources and ideas and to organize advocacy efforts in Castle Complex policy making.

The PIRC Coordinator, in collaboration with the organization presidents, served as the primary facilitator for the Parent Leader Group. Together, the coordinator and the group members generated agenda items for each quarterly meeting during the school year. A typical meeting had three to four agenda items such as sharing fundraising opportunities and experiences, brainstorming ideas for increasing parent participation, discussing leadership development for parents, and addressing the challenge of getting people to commit to filling board offices. The PIRC Coordinator used these meetings to convey information on pertinent pending legislation, available parenting resources, Department of Education or district proposals, and new leadership development materials. Each meeting also included time for group members to share activities and progress updates of their respective schools. These school-by-school updates often led to other topics of discussion as members of the group posed questions. If major discussions seemed to be developing, the topic would be held as a future agenda item. The group recognized the need to balance accomplishing the written agenda and allowing for related discussions.

To accommodate the parent leaders' very busy schedules, the facilitator made certain that meetings ran on time from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The meetings were usually informal and

involved much laughter and food, of course. There was no budget for the practice; the group partnered with another non-profit, Queen Liliu`okalani Children's Center, for the use of free meeting space.

The group members appreciated these structured opportunities to share the trials and tribulations, as well as the fulfillment and positive impact, of being a parent leader. The meetings provided time for encouragement, empathy, and inspiration for the leaders by the leaders. Leaders left meetings energized: feeling that they were not the only ones struggling with issues and that the work they were doing was making a difference. The schools' parent organizations benefited through better coordinated fundraisers, open houses, and activities. The meetings also enabled the PIRC personnel to develop relationships, share information, and encourage community building between the schools.

Although still in its infancy, the potential of the Parent Leader Group is tremendous. Plans for the future include using the group as sponsors, trainers, and recruiters in parent leadership training for the Castle Complex schools, developing a stronger e-mail communication system to disseminate parent relevant resource materials, and planning a major Complex-wide fair or carnival as a fundraiser. This asset-based network of leaders cultivates and organizes resources that should benefit the school experiences of Castle Complex students.

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