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## DISTRICT PARENT NEWSLETTER

### Memphis City Schools

### Memphis, Tennessee

The Title I Family Ties newsletter is a monthly publication of the Title I Center for Parental Involvement. It is distributed to 134 schools in the Memphis City School District in an effort to fortify positive communication between school and home. It is available in print and online, and provides effective tools for parents to use to assist them with their school-age children beginning with Pre-K. Also, we use the newsletter to share information on local events and activities offered to increase parents' development.

The newsletter has several goals. First, it is designed to increase parents' capacity for involvement by helping them make informed decisions in their children's lives based upon the most current and practiced information. In this way, this practice is in alignment with *No Child Left Behind*. Also, the messages are conveyed in a reader-friendly manner, and are published in English and Spanish to accommodate the diverse readership and to leave no family behind. Prior to this project, there was no broad-based communication vehicle in place to supply this information to the district's families in an accessible form. With all the rights and responsibilities made available to parents and families as a result of Title I and *No Child Left Behind*, the district Center for Parent Involvement took the initiative, and it grew.

We developed a needs assessment survey and asked Title I parents if they would support the production of a monthly newsletter informing them of current events and research to enhance their parenting skills. Based on the results of this survey, and the existence of other national parent-friendly publications, we decided to write a newsletter catered to our district's needs.

A district staff member writes and edits the newspaper. This person researches and extracts materials from credible sources, such as respected national organizations and the Department of Education, on the pertinent issues of parenting and child development. This person also selects exceptional parent volunteers and parenting programs to be featured in the newsletter. This section is particularly appealing to parents because many have been able to see themselves or their child's school featured. Printing and distribution of the newsletter are performed by the editor. Proofreading is a staff effort.

Various members of the school district have supported the Family Ties newsletter. District leaders have participated as interviewees; they have given input and suggestions on how to improve the publication; and they have publicized and praised the project. Action Team members meet regularly to plan for better productivity and appeal. Families, students, and community give input about the

types of issues that they are interested in reading about in the newsletter. Importantly, parents and students make regular appearances in the newsletter.

The major challenge was distributing the newsletters. In the beginning, we outsourced to print, and made multiple copies for schools. Although this was convenient, it was not cost effective and often printing was delayed. We started printing the newsletters on site by distributing an original to be copied by each school, while simultaneously stressing the importance of the documents. This has worked well and is more effective. The other challenge was the Spanish version. We encountered a glitch in the interpretation of the newsletter. There are many dialects in the Spanish language, and we had to find a translation of the materials that fit our community through a service that has a short turnaround time. We have an on-site Spanish teacher, but having this person interpret the newsletter was not time efficient. Eventually, we found an online interpreter that has been effective.

Parents have benefited from this practice in that they have an increased awareness of and understanding of meaningful ways to assist their children academically, socially, and behaviorally in all age groups, both at school and at home. The newsletter has helped parents learn about the school district in terms of policies, procedures, events, and activities. For teachers and administrators, the newsletter serves as an easy-to-use tool to communicate positively with parents. Students benefit from this practice as their parents are more knowledgeable partners in their schooling.

Other districts interested in distributing a parent newsletter district-wide may find the following advice helpful: Have a plan for each person's role and have a backup plan. Use credible sources for information. Plan in advance the topics for the newsletters and have the newsletters ready at least one to two months in advance. Utilize community members as media subjects; when people read about themselves in print, it is a boost for the reader morale and an excellent publicity tool. Keep it light and simple. Use humor, and connect with people. Advertise, advertise, advertise, in all forums, using all methods.

The Title I Center for Parent Involvement is inspired by parent reactions to the newsletter like this comment from one mother: "I have learned so much, and I try to put into practice many of the tips and suggestions..." In an effort to leave no family behind, Memphis City Schools will continue to publish the Family Ties newsletter to communicate helpful information that supports family involvement for student success.

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