

Parent Engagement Mini-Grants

*Los Angeles Unified School District—Local District F
Los Angeles, California 90032*

District-Level Leadership

Los Angeles School District—Local District F backed its commitment to partnerships with money. The district offered its NNPS school members the opportunity to apply for small grants up to \$2,500 to fund a parent engagement activity linked to an academic goal identified in their school improvement plan. The schools could expand a successful activity currently at their school or could adapt a best practice from another school. In order to apply for the mini-grant, the school needed to match the requested funds.

The district leadership team for partnerships instituted the mini-grant program in response to schools' concerns that funding constraints limited their family involvement efforts. The district team hoped this leadership strategy would motivate schools to link partnership activities with student achievement goals. They also wanted to recognize the extra efforts of NNPS schools and inspire others to join the National Network. In fact, the Parent Engagement Mini-Grants have helped several schools to think creatively, try new activities, and identify school resources to support their partnership plans.

At the district's parent engagement team training in October 2003, Local District Superintendent, Richard Alonzo, promised schools that he would fund matching grants for District F schools that were members of NNPS. If a school was not yet a member of NNPS, the district offered to pay the school's initial \$100 membership fee so that it could join the National Network and be eligible to apply for the district mini-grant. Every Dis-

trict F principal received a copy of the grant application. The review team included Superintendent Alonzo, who read and approved each school's mini-grant application.

Criteria for awards focused on how well the school's proposal supported the identified student achievement goal and the proposed activity's potential for sustainability. Schools received between \$1,000 and \$2,500 in matching District F grants. The total funding of \$25,000 came from the matching funds commitment in the *Parents as Learning Partners* grant. This venture is an outgrowth of the district's work with the Weingart Foundation.

School Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs), composed of an administrator, a coordinator/coach, classroom teachers, a school-community liaison, and parents, implemented and evaluated the mini-grant programs. Some of the funded activities included:

- Literature circles for parents;
- Creating books of families' histories;
- Literacy club;
- Website for parents with school information, course outlines, and homework assignments;
- Support materials and activities for at home;
- Family nights in science, math, and language arts; and
- Teacher-led parent workshops on a variety of instructional topics.

The mini-grant rules required that funding target implementation expenses such as materials, professional development for staff, and professional expert compensation for development of workshops. The mini-grants did not fund positions or personnel. Programs received funding only when the parent en-

agement team could demonstrate how the school would sustain it.

Funding in school systems can be tricky. In some cases, identifying the school's matching funds was a challenge. This required an understanding of school funding and the budget process. Another challenge was to ensure that the funds transferred to the school were placed in the correct budget category to allow the schools to fund the activities as designed. This required constant communication with the fiscal services manager and staff, as well as school personnel.

As part of the grant process, each school submitted a brief written evaluation of findings that resulted from implementing the new or expanded activity at their school. Principals, parents, and ATP members recognized the impact of having extra support via the mini-grant. One principal stated, "The mini-grant allowed our school to be more creative and try something new in our work with parents. As a result of learning together, parents from many different ethnic backgrounds became more comfortable with each other and enjoyed working together in this common experience. We have begun to create a community of learners."

District F will continue to offer the Parent Engagement Mini-Grants, even if it is on a smaller scale. For future grants, the district plans to start the application process even earlier, share the evaluation of activities with others in either written form or at a meeting, and include the number of people who benefited as part of the evaluation.

Linda Ariyasu, Coordinator
(323) 224-3178
linda.ariyasu@lausd.net