

Parent Group News

Anoka-Hennepin ISD #11
Anoka, Minnesota

The Parent Involvement Program of the Anoka-Hennepin Independent School District publishes a newsletter, *Parent Group News*, that is distributed to all identified parent group officers, school principals and volunteer services coordinators. Each month, the one-page, two-sided newsletter offers a few articles on topics relevant for parent groups, a calendar of upcoming district/parenting-related events, and a list of Parent Involvement Program contacts.

Through consistent communication, *Parent Group News* provides local parent groups with nuts and bolts information and resources to accomplish their objectives. Including school principals and volunteer services coordinators in the readership has helped to strengthen collaborations between district staff, school staff, and parents by ensuring that everyone has the same information and access to resources. According to one principal, “It reinforces some basic information we need to be sure we are on the right track. It gives us ideas and information for improving our organization.” The newsletter at the same time benefits the district Parent Involvement Program by promoting its identity as a useful partner to parent leaders.

A district-level Parent Involvement Specialist and the Parent Involvement Program Coordinator established *Parent Groups News* in response to input from parent group leaders. To begin, the district team generated a list of high-interest topics based on phone calls to the Parent Involvement Program and observations from parent group meetings. Each month the newsletter features one or two of these hot top-

ics, such as obtaining legal nonprofit status, running meetings, and following best financial practices. Since many parent group leaders serve two-year or longer terms, the district team must balance topics to meet veteran and incoming officers’ needs. “Many of the articles were pertinent to things we were concerned with,” commented one parent group officer.

The newsletter is written each month by the Specialist and edited by the Program Coordinator. All topics are researched using online resources, books, and materials from the district’s own Parent Involvement Resource Center. Photocopying is done in the district print shop. A database with the names and addresses of parent group officers, gathered through volunteer services coordinators, is used to print mailing labels. The Parent Involvement budget provides the approximately \$165 needed monthly to produce and mail the newsletter.

Parent Group News is distributed to all identified officers of elementary, middle, and high school parent groups and booster clubs. Officers are usually the president or chair, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Some groups include committee chairs as members of their board, and they are included on the mailing list. Also included are 43 principals and 43 volunteer services coordinators. Parent group and booster club officers numbered approximately 134 during the last school year, bringing the total number of recipients per month to 220.

The biggest difficulty in publishing *Parent Group News* is maintaining an accurate database of parent group officers. It is hard to know if the newsletter is sent to all current offi-

cers, particularly in the first few months of school. The volunteer services coordinators, one in each school, assist by providing the names, positions, and mailing addresses of current parent group officers at least annually.

The June issue of *Parent Group News* is a readership survey that asks readers to rate the usefulness of the newsletter's articles and features. It also asks for suggestions for future topics. Comments like this one from a volunteer services coordinator have signaled that the newsletter is meeting the Parent Involvement Program's objectives: "I can't express enough how much I benefited from *Parent Group News*." *Parent Group News* will continue to be distributed on a monthly basis. It is currently offered September through June, and may be expanded to year-round distribution. In the future, readers will receive *Parent Group News* electronically in addition to a hard copy mailing. Also, current and past issues will be posted on the district's Parent Involvement web site.

Sandra Thomsen, Parent Involvement Specialist
(763) 506-1216
Sandra.thomsen@anoka.k12.mn.us