

Parent University

*Carstens Elementary School
Detroit, Michigan*

Carstens Elementary School's Parent Involvement Planning Team established a Parent University, where the parents of at-risk children could brush up on or acquire the skills they need to be effective partners in their children's education. The Parent University offered 16 weeks of classes on relevant parenting topics. The program also familiarized parents with local school policies and procedures, giving them an opportunity to be more actively involved in school governance through the PTA and School Improvement Team.

The Parent University was specifically targeted to parents whose children had been identified as "at-risk" because of previous expulsions, chronic absences, or academic deficiencies. The administration at Carstens devised the program after surveying 300 parents about what they wanted at the school. The planning team developed the curriculum.

In the weekly three-hour sessions, parents learned about parenting skills, family communications, peer mediation, family budgeting, parent involvement, activity planning, healthy practices, school governance, and advocacy. The school provided a structured curriculum for these sessions. While the parents were in class, their children enjoyed recreational activities in another part of the school. This allowed parents to attend without worrying about child care. Twelve staff members helped serve breakfast and lunch and cleaned up.

Parents were assigned weekly homework to be turned in, and they took midterm and final examinations to reinforce the course

material. At the end of the program, the school held a "promotion ceremony" and luncheon, and presented certificates of graduation.

The school publicized its Parent University in weekly school letters, community bulletins, and staff newsletters. It also established a phone bank to reach out to potential participants.

The overall cost was \$15,000. The Metro Detroit's Promise program and the Warren/Conner Development Coalition provided the funding.

Before Carstens Parent University began, the school was expelling 40 to 50 students per year. After the program, none of the university "graduates" children were expelled or even reprimanded for fighting. The school has also experienced a sharp decrease in student expulsions, chronic absenteeism, and delinquency. One Parent University participant commented, "Now I get the help I need so I can calm down and really show my daughter discipline that is firm, yet kind and fair."

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