

Fall Kick-Off Parent Leadership Training

*Naperville District 203
Naperville, Illinois*

The research is abundantly clear: nothing motivates a child more than when learning is valued by schools, and families/community working together in partnership . . . These forms of parent involvement do not happen by accident or even invitation. They happen by strategic intervention.

—Michael Fullan

Broadening the Concept of Teacher Leadership (1997)

The Fall Kick-Off to the 2005–2006 school year in Naperville District 203 brought together the leaders of the district’s Home and School Association and its School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) teams, two key parent groups, to find common goals for their schools and their children. The Kick-Off included a half-day parent leadership training session, called “Joining Hands for Successful Partnerships,” followed by lunch at the home of District Superintendent Alan Leis. About 70 leaders from the two organizations attended, but the organizers know that the effects of this day will ripple through many more than 70 homes and families.

A co-chair of the SFCP Core Team noted, “Recognizing that in the past these two groups have not worked together as collaboratively as we would like, we decided to bring the groups together to find common ground. We focused on our beliefs and the shared common goal of student achievement while providing tools for success.”

Using the book *Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, the 70 participants formed sev-

eral groups that used quotations such as Fullan’s to guide their discussions. Each group chose one or more quotes from those posted around the room that seemed particularly relevant to their beliefs and feelings about partnerships and school goals. Later, the participants looked at their own organization through a tool called the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. Then they came back together to share what they had decided about themselves and find common ground.

That ground, of course, turned out to be their children and their schools. “It was great to have the district support and to see that we are all here for the same reasons—our children,” wrote one participant on her evaluation.

To help that ground bear fruit, the two organizations looked for ways to bring the two groups together again. “This program was an excellent way to start off the new school year,” said one of the organizers. It generated enthusiasm for the new school year and fostered a refreshed spirit of collaboration.

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