

Parent Consultant Program

*Columbus Public Schools
Columbus, Ohio*

The Columbus Public Schools instituted a program to train some parents as liaisons among the school, families, and the community. District officials created the Parent Consultant Program to improve student achievement by communicating tools and skills students need for academic success.

Today, the district has two parent consultants per building. To qualify, a parent must have a child enrolled in the school where they are assigned, consult at least 10 hours per week, and attend monthly training meetings to increase the consultant's capacity to engage all families. The parent consultants are paid; the total cost for the district is approximately \$950,000.

Parent consultants take charge of school programs that will involve parents. Family literacy nights, workshops on helping children with homework, and bully-prevention awareness events are just a few of the activities they have organized. The parent consultants have also helped agencies and community groups in need of parent participation. Several of the consultants have served on various community and district committees that focus on family involvement.

The district evaluated the program by monitoring attendance at monthly meetings, the weekly schedules and activity logs of the parent consultants, and monthly "best practice" forms that document family engagement in the school.

The major challenge the Parent Consultant Program faces is the gap between when school starts and when federal dollars reach the

district. Ideally, the program would begin in September, allowing the parent consultants to participate in back-to-school events, but because of the delayed funding, the consultants do not begin working until October or November. Organizers do not, however, feel that this challenge diminished the success of the program.

One of the strongest benefits of this initiative is the relationship the parent consultants build with students and their families. Students see the consultants as links between school and home. Parents view them as mentors and advocates within the school. Because of their networking, the parent consultants connect families with community resources. The consultants themselves also benefit; as one said, "I am grateful to be a part of this program and hope it returns for years to come."

Note: The National Network of Partnership Schools approach to this practice would ensure that the parent consultants were a part of the Action Team for Partnerships in their schools.

*Darlena Jones, Program Coordinator
(614) 365-6605
djones6238@columbus.k12.oh.us*