

Staff Development Training

*Verona Area School District
Verona, Wisconsin*

A growing bilingual program in the Verona Area School District spurred three of its VISTAs to create a staff development training to increase awareness of the program and the families, students, and teachers in it. “When students feel understood and supported, they are more likely to excel in school,” said one of the volunteers.

The Spanish-speaking population in Verona has grown so rapidly over the past few years that the district built a new elementary school to house the bilingual program. Most of the students in the program are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The volunteers used this information to guide their training topics, which included low-income families and parent involvement, racism, and urban and rural poverty.

About 20 staff members and administrators from all grade levels used flex time to attend the three 90-minute afternoon workshops. On the program were videos, role-playing, and world café discussions. The activities and research changed with the topics.

The volunteers used resources from schools, such as PowerPoint and CDs, so the cost was minimal. They recommend using PowerPoint and creativity to keep participants energized and excited after a long day at work. As a result of the volunteers’ hard work, evaluations were very positive. One staff member even suggested conducting the same professional development training for all of the educational assistants at the beginning of the next school year.

“Teachers and staff were able to use their flex time in a fun way and attend our workshops, which taught them about issues faced by students in their district. Hopefully they walked away with their eyes and hearts more open to the students around them,” said the volunteer.

The school district is certainly more open to continuing and expanding professional development sessions. It plans to increase advertising to entice a larger number of school staff and administrators.

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