

Breakfast with the Principal

*Berendo Middle School
Los Angeles, California*

The principal of Berendo Middle School wants parents to feel comfortable and be involved in the school, so he invites them to breakfast once a month. This gives parents an opportunity to meet the principal, teachers and staff and learn first-hand what's happening at Berendo.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) initiated the breakfasts, which run just over an hour. They include a principal's update, a guest speaker on topics such as school safety or grading policies, or a hands-on demonstration. The April breakfast, for instance, showed parents how technology is used throughout the curriculum. Then, the parents have an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns. By telling the principal their ideas, parents can also influence decisions on school activities and policies.

The urban middle school has a majority of Latino students, many from low-income neighborhoods. The open door policy of the breakfasts helps parents get acquainted and discuss issues that are important to them. "Having parents participate will enable them to feel at home when visiting the school," said the principal. "I want them to be part of our school community."

At the beginning of each breakfast, the principal introduces himself and his guests of the day. He also updates parents on what is happening at the school and tells them about upcoming events. After the guest speaker or presentation, the principal opens the floor for questions, comments or concerns from parents and community members. On other occasions, the parents receive a form on which they can write questions and comments. Students, teachers, administrators and parents contribute ideas for discussion at each breakfast, which increases the sense of partnership.

Effectively publicizing the breakfasts is key to parent participation. Berendo has many ways to reach parents and community members, including a monthly parent newsletter, a school brochure, a school web site, the Phone Master system that generates calls to all students' home phones and take-home fliers. In addition, representatives from the Parent Center make personal calls to families.

Despite all the publicity, Berendo still is working to increase the number of parents at the principal's breakfasts. Each meeting has seen a steady increase in attendance, however, and the responses have been extremely positive. "Thank you for making me feel welcome!" said a parent. A student added: "My mom and dad like coming and hearing about what I do at school."

This year, 50 parents attended, along with 10 teachers and administrators, and 5 community members. ATP members hope to increase participation next year by generating more publicity and providing more hands-on activities for parents.

The relaxed breakfasts give the school staff an opportunity to welcome parents who might otherwise feel isolated. Parents attending the breakfasts also gain practical skills, such as computer training. Most importantly, students benefit greatly from having their parents know more about their school and how it operates.

The school uses its Title I funds for the breakfasts, which cost from \$50 to \$75 each.

*Mary C. Argandon
Title I Coordinator
(213) 382-1343
margando@lausd.net*