

Added Value Activities

*Saint Paul Public Schools
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Can school districts turn a highly attended event into a useful parent involvement activity? In Saint Paul, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” The Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) developed 17 short parenting sessions, known as Added Value Activities, for schools to include at popular events such as awards ceremonies, open houses and student performances. The activities not only made the most of parents’ presence in the school, but also targeted parents who might not typically attend informational workshops.

The idea for Added Value Activities came from the parent involvement staff at various schools within the district. They expressed the need to provide parents with useful information in an easy-to-use format. A team of district administrators listened to their suggestions and took action.

District leaders wrote Added Value Activities in a user-friendly way so that any school staff member could present the 10-15 minute sessions. The activities include a short introduction, a paragraph or two about the importance of the subject for parents, and handouts on the topic in the district’s four major languages: English, Hmong, Spanish and Somali.

The sessions provide parents with educational strategies including tips for reading with children and helping them build vocabulary. Some of the Added Value Sessions tackled challenging issues that parents may not be sure how to address, such as bullying and teen depression. Many activities included a component for parents to complete at home with their children.

To ensure the activities were, in fact, user- and parent-friendly, the parent educator who wrote them had them reviewed for content by the parent involvement school staff, district staff for English Language Learners (ELL) and

the Title I program manager. To make the sessions easily accessible, they were compiled in a notebook for every school and made available on the district’s website, www.title1.spps.org.

The cost of implementing Added Value Activities was approximately \$1,500, covered by Title I funds. Payments were made for notebooks, printing and translation services.

Thanks to Added Value Activities, teachers and administrators in all Title I schools have readily available resources that add more substance to school events and that help parents on important topics.

Soon, other schools will benefit from Added Value Activities. The district presented the notebook at a conference of the Minnesota Association of Administrators of State and Federal Education Programs and everyone gave it great reviews. Saint Paul will develop ways to share this information, and activities will be added to the notebook and website over time.

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