

Family Partnership for Math and Reading

Anoka-Hennepin School District
Coon Rapids, Minnesota

When life gave Anoka-Hennepin's district leaders lemons, they made lemonade. In other words, a 40 percent budget cut in 2003 spurred the Minnesota district to step up efforts to involve parents more directly in their children's education.

A survey indicated that parents were ready to become more involved, but needed guidance and information on how to help their children at home. This survey gave birth to the Family Partnership for Math and Reading, a district-wide initiative that provides materials to parents of the district's 17,000 elementary students to help them work with their children on math and reading skills.

Elementary school teachers assembled and distributed the following materials at parent-teacher conferences:

- Math games that directly support the elementary math curriculum
- Math and literacy "tip cards" with specific grade-level information
- Refrigerator magnets asking "What did you do in school today?" These promoted communication between parents and children about school. A "prompt card" was provided for parents to use in helping students reflect on what they learned or did in school that day
- Promotions for other district resources for parents

Teachers also distributed educational materials at the spring kindergarten registration. These included an alphabet placemat, activity book, parent handbook and a booklet with math and science tips. Kindergarten teachers and principals discussed the materials with parents and encouraged them to use them throughout the spring and summer to help their children prepare for kindergarten.

Monthly newsletter articles reinforced how parents could use the materials, offered additional math and reading activities and served as general reminders about the initiative.

The most important addition to the program this year was the translation of the math and literacy "tip cards" into the district's top five non-English languages: Spanish, Russian, Hmong, Vietnamese and Arabic. Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes received translated versions of these cards to share with their students' families.

District curriculum and Title I funds paid for the initiative. In addition, the district's student services department, including ESL, paid for a portion of the translation costs for the "tip cards."

In a random sample survey in the spring of 2006, 75 percent of the elementary parents surveyed said the materials were "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." "Playing math games with my child at home increased my knowledge of what was going on in the classroom" said a surveyed parent.

Positive parent and teacher comments encourage the district to continue to provide the materials. It also plans to add science "tip cards" to the collection, because science will soon be part of Minnesota's state-mandated test program.

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