

MALDEF Parent School Partnership

Houston County School District
Perry, Georgia

Many times we Hispanics make excuses for not participating in school – too tired or I don't know English or I can't drive – but we need to come to classes like this to help our children and to learn about the schools here.

Rosa Garcia, a parent and graduate
of the MALDEF Parent School
Partnership Training

This eight-week course, a partnership between the district's migrant education office and the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF), was designed to help families understand the school system, graduation requirements for students, and how to be more effectively involved in their children's education. The specific goals of the district activity were to communicate better with the growing Hispanic community; to encourage parent involvement in the schools; and to encourage Hispanic families to plan with their children for post-secondary education.

Houston County learned about this opportunity from a Two Rivers Migrant Education staff member who had seen the program in a neighboring county. The District Parent Coordinator researched the program before deciding to contact the area MALDEF representative and put together a team to work out the details.

The coordinator and the three migrant education liaisons recruited families, arranged childcare and found a non-threatening central location for the classes at a local church. The coordinator also worked with the MALDEF teacher on handouts specific to Houston County, arranged for guest speakers and translators as needed, bought refreshments and planned a program graduation.

A survey and letter were sent to Hispanic families asking about their interest in

the class and their need for transportation and childcare. With this information, organizers choose a central location on a bus line for the workshop sessions and encouraged families to set up carpools. There was no need to provide transportation.

After the first session, parents who attended tried to persuade others to join them. The team found that once parents came, they stayed, so attendance was consistent. The program graduation ceremony included a luncheon and field trip to a local college. The 20 graduates each received a diploma/certificate and small gift for completing the series.

Students benefited from this activity because their parents became more informed about school culture and practices, homework policies and curriculum and graduation requirements. Participating parents seemed to feel more comfortable in the schools and to know more about community resources that would help them learn English.

This course also helped the district's focus on volunteering. Many Hispanic families were reluctant to volunteer because they did not know about activities and could not communicate at school. The training helped to eliminate those limitations for the participating parents. The partnership training also helped the district meet NCLB requirements, as the course included information about the curriculum, testing, Title I and Title III programs, and many ideas for families to become more effectively involved in their child's school life.

Overall, the training was an excellent way for families to get better acquainted with the school and others in their community and to share ideas and information.

Tracie Hamrick
District Parent Involvement Coordinator
(478) 988-6128
Thamrick@hcbe.net