

Parent Center Institute

*Local District 8, Los Angeles Unified School District
Gardena, California*

Local District 8 in Los Angeles has been on a quest – searching for the best in school/family/community partnership (SFPC) team practices and concepts. For the practices it has found and those it plans to develop, the district set up a Parent Center Institute (PCI) to develop partnerships that will help improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.

The PCI provides opportunities for school teams and district leaders to learn and share the best practices, concepts and skills for increasing parent involvement and school partnerships. Its specific goals are to provide opportunities for these groups to learn about latest research; plan partnership annual programs; exchange ideas for parent outreach, and share information and resources for parent centers/programs.

The institute does much of its work through bi-monthly training workshops for school teams that include parent leaders, school volunteers, parent-community representatives, parent center coordinators and others working to build parent partnerships. These workshops are important professional development activities that provide “high-quality training for raising student achievement,” said a parent liaison.

PCI provides additional support by six parent community facilitators, who visit schools and work with institute participants to improve programs and outreach. This approach helps the district’s parent involvement unit and school practitioners obtain current information and continually improve how they build partnerships within a learning community.

The institute also helps the local district implement activities to meet NCLB goals for engaging parents in ways that will help raise achievement, especially for minority students. It answers the call to action for a grassroots movement to promote and support all students’ high achievement in school.

The district realized that one-shot workshops are not effective. Continual training, including attendance at NNPS conferences in Baltimore, enables district leaders to disseminate information and use best practices immediately. Facilitators keep abreast of developments as they train others.

One of the Six Types of Parent Involvement is the focus of each of the three-hour sessions that are conducted by PCI. The presenters demonstrate techniques for effective presentations so that participants can bring the information from the workshop to their schools. The institute also schedules presenters from within and outside the district, who share resources and ideas. Participants usually receive videos, books, pamphlets and copies of materials that they can use with their parent/community volunteers.

“This is the best training I have been to in many years...very practical,” commented one Title I coordinator.

To increase participation, PCI sends information about the workshops to schools early in the year and follows up with fliers and individual mailings. Participation is supported by the local district superintendent, who approves the scheduled practices and sends memos to all administrators, encouraging them to send teams from their buildings.

“More practitioners are working to engage parents,” said one administrator. “We need to keep monitoring to document concrete evidence of how students benefit. We do see evidence of more welcoming school climates, which help children and families feel more comfortable at school.”

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