

Keep the Website Simple

*Family Support, Student Support Services Branch
Honolulu, Hawaii*

Having a website is standard practice for every organization, and the Family Support Office of the Hawaii Department of Education is no exception. This state-level office noticed that few people actually used its site. Leaders decided to revamp the existing website to communicate the importance of its partnership program and to provide district- and school-level family involvement specialists with a user-friendly resource.

The Family Support Office decided to organize the website to meet the needs of district, school and state personnel, as well as community agencies, parents and Parent Community Networking Centers. The website assists those specifically charged to implement family/ community involvement requirements with information on No Child Left Behind, English Language Learners, special education, teacher standards boards, the department of education strategic plan and Hawaii Board of Education policy.

Some of the resources include a start-up collection of local promising partnership practices shared by schools and that other schools can use or adapt. To ensure that family involvement specialists receive the best information, the website is updated weekly and additions are publicized through an e-mail list and the statewide newspaper.

While it was a challenge to redesign the website, recognizing the hard work of the original designers, it was important to make improvements and to get everyone to work toward its successful transformation. Another plus of the new website was the price: Free! Family Support completed its own web design and the Department of Education provided the site itself.

Many who have taken advantage of the new design comment that it is easy to navigate. In addition, some of the information is available only on the Family Support website, including

the electronic version of the first Hawaii Parent Guide.

Students will benefit if their parents are better informed about the types of involvement for remaining engaged in their children's education. The website also lists workshops and other opportunities that will help parents cope with the challenges of parenthood at all grade levels.

Because of the nature of websites in general, it is difficult to measure precisely how many individuals have or will benefit from the new design. Family Support Office leaders, however, estimate that more than 2,500 teachers, administrators and other staff members have already benefited from the website, as well as more than 500 parents, 200 community members and 50 district leaders.

Although the website has been operating for only 10 months, the results and feedback are extremely positive. The state's special education leader said, "You have developed an incredible website! Very exciting, informative and user-friendly! I especially liked how you incorporated the many community agencies and linked to their web sites. WOW!!!"

The family support office plans to add more resources and program areas. It is also looking for more local promising practices so that every school can be featured in sharing activities in the partnership section.

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