

Parent/Principal Networking Session: Focus on Diversity

*Naperville Community Unit School District 203
Naperville, Illinois*

Fifty leaders from the Naperville School District put their heads together at a Parent/Principal Networking Session to solve some tough problems facing students from minority groups.

District leaders organized the session in response to a district-wide assessment conducted by the Consortium for Educational Change. The evaluators recommended that Naperville should focus more of its resources on diversity training for their staff. Like many school districts across the country, Naperville wanted to increase the academic performance of every subset of its student population. The district's School, Family, and Community Partnership's Core Team already hosted biannual training sessions for its staff. They decided to focus the last session of the school year on diversity.

Administrators sent word by e-mail to every Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and to every principal in the district. The leaders recruited two guests to speak at the event. Dr. Maria Lourdes Ferrer, from the state's regional office of education, delivered the keynote address on minority achievement in Illinois Public Schools. Dr. Mavis Sanders, from Johns Hopkins University and NNPS, discussed the national diversity picture.

Dr. Ferrer reported raw numbers and shared data about the student achievement gaps between subgroups of students in Illinois. She also discussed strategies to help teachers and administrators connect more effectively with all students in the classroom. Ideas included mentoring partnerships, creating comfort in the classroom, and in-service training for all teachers and school personnel on diversity. Using the NNPS model to provide a broader national perspective, Dr. Sanders explained techniques that were effective in schools that served culturally diverse populations.

After the presentations, participants worked in small groups to discuss how their schools' One-Year Action Plans for Partnership

could include multicultural activities. Questions included: "How can we help African American and Hispanic parents feel more a part of the school community?" "How can we help teachers become more sensitive to differences and needs in minority communities?" "What are specific problems that we want to solve?"

Participants were energized by the presentations and discussions. Many lingered long after the conference was over to exchange ideas with their colleagues. One parent mentioned that she felt the speakers made everyone feel comfortable with a topic that is sometimes uncomfortable.

The conference cost about \$760, mainly for the speakers' time and refreshments. Administrators will conduct another session in the fall of 2008 and aim to add a formal evaluation at the end of the evening to obtain feedback from all conference-goers.

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