

Parent Volunteer Recognition

*Fort Worth Independent School District
Fort Worth, Texas*

The promise of luxurious shopping sprees and fancy lunches helped spur 1,200 volunteer superstars from the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) toward greater involvement in their children's schools. District leaders celebrated the achievements of their 100+ hour volunteers by awarding them prizes at the Parent Volunteer Recognition ceremony.

FWISD had hosted parent recognition ceremonies in the past, but in recent years, the budget for the activity was limited. This year, the Director of Parent Engagement had enough funds for a larger, more appropriate ceremony.

The district's parent engagement team of leaders began planning the event by calling on its Action Teams for Partnership (ATP) from schools across the district. Select members from the schools' teams formed a focus group that brainstormed ideas for the recognition ceremony. With cooperation from local businesses, the group settled on a red carpet theme and planned to conduct the ceremony at a local shopping mall.

The ATPs helped publicize the event by designing three "teaser" fliers sent to area parents. The fliers, produced both in English and Spanish, told volunteers that, based on the number of service hours they completed, they may be eligible for a prizes at the end-of-year recognition ceremony. ATPs collected the names of volunteers who exceeded 100 hours of service in their schools and designed a giant display board to spotlight during the ceremony. As the May celebration date drew closer, FWISD sent bilingual invitations to eligible families. They also used the district's cable television station and web site to advertise the event.

On the day of the event, 400 of the schools' top volunteers came to celebrate their accomplishments. They were given the red carpet treatment, entering the mall on a swath of ruby rug. As they came down the aisle of the

mall, they were serenaded by a marching band from an area high school and greeted by celebrity impersonators as they made their way to the seats.

A local weatherman and district alum gave the keynote speech, while guests enjoyed a light breakfast. The top parent volunteer in the district received a \$500 shopping spree at the mall, and dozens of other parents benefited from substantial door prizes, including \$100 and \$250 mall gift certificates, lunch certificates to Neiman Marcus' Café, and gift baskets of beauty products from Origins. Mall vendors donated door prizes and awards.

All involved agreed that the volunteer recognition was a fabulous way to celebrate parent participation. "The event really made me feel like the district appreciates what we do! I feel special today," said one parent at the ceremony.

The event cost the district between \$6,000 and \$7,000 to produce. The funds were used to print promotion materials and to hire professionals to manage the lighting, sound, and screen presentations during the ceremony. Funds from the Parent Engagement Budget covered these expenses.

The district plans to conduct similar ceremony next year, perhaps with a different theme.

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