

Connecting Parent Involvement to School Improvement

*St. Charles Parish Public Schools
Luling, Louisiana*

Administrators in the St. Charles Parish School District used a contentious scene from a popular romantic comedy to spur administrators to think creatively about solving their parent-involvement conundrum. During their Connecting Parent Involvement to School Improvement seminar, 80 teachers and administrators worked on effective ways to connect parents with their schools.

District administrators came up with the idea for the seminar at the annual meeting when school leadership teams came together to review the School Improvement Process. Past conferences had focused attention on general policies and standards, but district officials noticed that there was a lack of follow-through by some schools. They decided to dedicate two sessions of the conference to specific ways that schools' Action Teams for Partnership (ATP) could connect parental involvement to the goals in their School Improvement Plans.

Officials offered five sessions to school teams, with 80 people attending the two identical seminars. Each session opened with a district facilitator talking about the purposes of parental involvement, how involvement is linked to student achievement, and showing results of statistical analyses that compared schools that did and did not involve families in student learning. They encouraged all teams to track their parent involvement activities and responses so they could see the results for themselves.

"We believe that if we can have schools connect to student data in one way or another, it will foster an excitement and new thinking for school teams in the area of parent involvement," said the director of federal programs.

This is where the scene from a romantic comedy came in. Teams watched a short video clip from *Father of the Bride*. In the segment, the daughter announces her engagement at the dinner table. Each family member has a different reaction: The father is opposed; the

mother tries to see all sides and make it work; the daughter is excited at first but her enthusiasm wanes as she sees others' reactions; and her brother is glad all of this isn't happening to him. The scene includes "all the same emotions that educators and parents often face in developing programs of parental involvement," said the director. "It simply brings to the forefront the emotions people feel when dealing with high-stakes issues."

The facilitator asked each team to take the perspective of one character, and to try to understand that person's views of various emotional situations. The attendees considered likely reactions and ways to handle challenges to build better communications between home and school. The session ended with an example of an action plan that both anticipated parents' concerns and met the needs of a School Improvement Plan.

"It helped me to see the connection between parent involvement and academic success," one teacher said.

"Active engagement helps keep us focused toward the future," another said.

The conference cost \$2,000, mainly for copying materials and hiring substitute teachers. The district used its own funds to pay for the seminar.

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