

Helping Your Child Succeed

Lowndes County School District
Valdosta, Georgia

Parents from schools in Lowndes County were invited to Lunch & Learn at their workplaces, as the district undertook its Helping Your Child Succeed initiative. Fifty parents took the opportunity to get a closer look at how important they are to their children's educational success, and how they can stay involved, even as their children go to middle and high school.

The declining graduation rate in the county was the impetus for the program—a partnership of the Valdosta-Lowndes County Chamber of Commerce, the Lowndes County School District, and a local business, Regal Marine. These partners realized that they needed to reach out to more parents to solve the dropout problem. “We believe parent involvement is a key factor in student achievement,” said one of the organizers.

Many parents have a hard time coming to school because they cannot not leave work during their shifts. After some thoughtful discussion, the partnership team settled on parent involvement meetings at various area workplaces.

District officials publicized the program through the Chamber of Commerce. Officials also contacted staff from area schools to help with the presentations. Participating businesses notified employees with school-age children. The program was also featured on the local TV news.

The partnership located the sessions at factories and at local hotels and motels. Parents received lunch, sponsored by the marine company, obtained information on how to help their children do better in school, and asked questions.

Each session opened with a short video, *Shift Happens*. A representative from the Chamber of Commerce made a short PowerPoint presentation on parents' influence on child development. The representative stressed that parents are a child's first teacher and that

they have an enormous impact on their child's achievement of his or her goals and dreams. Half-way through the PowerPoint, a school representative took over the presentation to stress some school-related facts. Parents were shown charts tracking students' grades, test scores, and attendance for students with parents who were and were not involved. Parents also received materials to complete with their children at home, including homework tips, and a weekly planning log.

Overall, both parents and administrators were happy with the Lunch & Learn sessions. Parents were especially grateful to have the sessions at a convenient location so that they could attend.

“It's good to know that somebody understands that we can't leave our jobs and go to school meetings—thanks for coming to us since we can't come to ya'll,” one parent said.

Lowndes County will be repeating and expanding the program, as it attempts to reach every parent. The partnership will work to involve more businesses and identify more volunteer presenters. “We feel it is well worth our effort to take information to [parents], as we know they can't always come to us,” said the district parent involvement coordinator.

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