

PROMISING PRACTICES FROM FIVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT MATCHING GRANTS

Hamilton Elementary School

Principal - Carrie Peery

How It Works

The Hamilton Elementary School Implementation Grant has enabled the school to receive funding for the development and maintenance of a schoolwide check-out program to provide parents with hands-on, family friendly home learning materials in the form of Literacy Bags, to support increased student literacy skills. The canvas bags each contain two books, a puppet, flashcards, a clipboard with reading and handwriting worksheets, and some common school supplies. Five different Literacy Bags are available for each grade level (K-5) in five different home languages. Parents receive training in how to use the materials to support literacy and develop oral communication skills with their children. Throughout the process of planning, preparation of materials, and implementation with parents by the school team, the project received ongoing support and oversight from the school principal.

Results

Impact on Student Achievement

This year the school team, under direction of the principal and with the assistance and support of classroom teachers, attempted to document whether there is a correlation between parent-child use of the Literacy Bags in the home and increased academic achievement in the classroom. In a limited study at Hamilton involving sixteen low achieving students in four classrooms (grades 1, 2, 3, 4), parents of these students worked with their children for five weeks (each week utilizing a Literacy Bag with different contents). At the end of a six month period during 1999-2000, pre and post testing indicated the targeted students showed a marked and significant improvement on the STAR and DRA reading assessments. Additionally, evaluations and comments from the classroom teachers, parents, and students involved in the study affirmed increases in student motivation and academic achievement and reflected enthusiastic support for the Literacy Bag project.

Impact on Parent Involvement

From the outset, making Literacy Bags available to parents this year has been remarkably successful in building relationships between parents and the school staff while directly increasing parent support for student academic achievement. Parents consistently rate their satisfaction with the Literacy Bags extremely high in written evaluations received after return of the materials. The most common comment by parents is that their children were very motivated and worked enthusiastically when the materials were used in the home. Most parents noted improvement in the reading ability of their children. The following are comments from evaluations completed by parents who participated in the program:

“It is very good. It is helping my child read. She really likes it. Thank you very much.”

“It’s very good because it takes the guess work out of trying to figure out on my own which books will be better for my son. The Literacy Bags provide all the necessary materials that are best for my son’s grade level.”

“My daughter learned so much. My suggestions are to keep up the bags and hopefully all schools and especially the parents get involved and get behind this program, believe me it works.”

Use of the Literacy Bags by parents schoolwide has increased to the point that there is now a waiting list to check out the materials. As a result, planning has been initiated to utilize year two Matching Grant funds to increase the number and variety of Literacy Bags available to parents for the 2000-2001 school year.

In addition to the above successes, the Literacy Bag project has had a very positive “spin off” effect in increasing the participation of Hamilton parents in other activities designed to increase parent support for academic achievement. After practicing skills and utilizing strategies at home with their children through use of the Literacy Bags, parents appear more confident and comfortable in interactions with school staff and teachers. Many parents are now eager to participate in classrooms as volunteers and participation has increased in other parent activities such as the school’s Literacy Night events, Community Based English Tutoring classes for parents, and computer classes provided by the Center for Parent Involvement in Education through a different grant.

Teacher Perceptions of Program

Teachers have enthusiastically supported the strategy and are eager to have students in their classrooms participate in the program. Due to the limited number of Literacy Bags available for each grade level this year, classroom teachers were asked to prioritize referral of the bags to parents of their low-achieving students. As a result, over 200 referrals have been made by classroom teachers this school year and an additional waiting list of referrals for 125 parents has been established. The most common observations in evaluations completed by teachers were that the Literacy Bags dramatically increased student motivation in academic work in the classroom, and appear to have a very positive influence on student achievement. The following are quotes from teachers who participated in the program:

“Students not only improved their reading skills but their motivation has increased as well at the idea of taking one of these bags home.”

“I have a K/1 classroom. The parents loved having extra books and alphabet activities to use at home. The children have all benefited from them. The kindergarten children have gone from not knowing any letters and sounds to being able to read books at level 3

and above. My one first grader who is repeating the grade can now read the first grade anthology with his classmates.”

“The students were very excited when the program began and they thoroughly enjoyed it.

I strongly believe that Hamilton should continue the Literacy Bag program as the students and the parents both benefit.”

Implications for Replication of Program

The Hamilton Literacy Bag strategy appears replicable and could be implemented in other district schools. In fact, the strategy is described in the *Blueprint For Student Success* parent involvement component and may be implemented in the eight Focus Schools identified in the Blueprint. It is important that schools understand that this strategy to provide home learning materials to parents should be considered as a building block of a comprehensive plan to increase the participation of parents in activities designed to increase student academic achievement. This strategy would be equally successful at any school with the infrastructure in place to launch and maintain it.

How It Works

Ericson Elementary School received an Implementation Grant to host four Family Nights: Primary Grade Literacy, Upper Grade Literacy, Primary Grade *Family Math*, and Upper Grade *Family Math*. Funding was used to purchase one book for each family to help build home libraries, purchase small prizes and gift certificates as incentives, and supplies to produce the learning activities. These events were an expanded component of the total parent involvement program at Ericson.

The school staff and parents formed two teams, one for primary grades and one for upper grades. They made extensive outreach efforts to inform families about the Literacy Nights (classroom incentives, flyers, newsletter advertisements, and teacher conversations with parents). Over 200 parents attended the first night. Both evenings produced substantial increase in parent's attendance compared to last year's activities (an increase of 60% for primary and 32% for upper grades). The teachers designed their own presentations but used the *Passport to Literacy* kit, produced by the Parent Involvement Department, as a foundation. The team creatively developed questionnaires that asked about Ericson's recruitment strategies. Parents who did not attend the activities were also contacted to find out what kept them from attending.

Family Math Night drew 123 parents and 13 teachers who did interactive activities with upper and lower grade students.

Results

Impact on Student Achievement

Since Ericson just completed the grant activities in late June, data is still being gathered to measure the impact.

Impact on Parent Involvement

Most of the parents reported being very pleased with the opportunity to learn specific skills that could be practiced at home with their children. Parents learned about the literacy curriculum, standards, portfolios, classroom expectations and instructional techniques, and word games. Teachers observed many parents taking notes, smiling, and nodding their heads during the sessions. A few parents reported being overwhelmed with the challenges presented. The parents appreciated the opportunity to choose an appropriate book for their child. One parent said that she learned a new skill or strategy from both literacy workshops:

"As a parent of a GATE student, a mainstreamed special education student, and a regular kindergartener, I learned some useable ideas about literacy, literature, vowel work [phonics] and word work, topic building [story starters], and game activities like anagrams."

The *Family Math* Nights elicited evaluation comments from parents such as, *"I liked Family Math because it illustrated the daily use of math in typical activities"*, and *"I got to interact with other people and do projects together with my family."* Another parent wrote, *"We saw how math can be fun."*

Following the sessions, the principal hosted a set of parent meetings to answer questions and address issues brought up at the sessions. For next year, the PTA has already earmarked \$1,000 to provide the school matching funds for the grant and to continue parent involvement efforts. Team members are also exploring an idea to host "coffee chats" with

parents in small groups to address homework, learning styles, behavior management, learning disabilities, and other related topics.

Teacher Perceptions of Program

The literacy event was successful and the school staff reported they felt that these sessions were a valuable experience for parents and need to be conducted on a regular basis. Teachers enjoyed seeing the parents interact with their children. Another substantial benefit of the program was getting feedback about what went well and how the evenings could be improved. Next year's plan will address specific skills based on parent needs, rather than to present a general overview. Also, it was recommended that childcare be provided for the youngest children.

Implications for Replication of Program

The activities can be replicated at other sites. It will be successful at schools with willing teachers and good outreach strategies to encourage parent and student participation.

How It Works

Grant Elementary's application for funding was initiated and driven by a parent-led school team comprised of three parents, the site administrator, and three teachers. The Planning/Organizing Grant enabled the school team to conduct two enjoyable evening literacy events for parents and students of grades K-3 and 4-6 to celebrate literacy and attract parents for the purpose of:

- Interviewing parents about their level of participation in their children's formal and informal education, and the means by which parents carry this involvement out at home and through the school.
- Interviewing teachers to identify educational areas, both in and out of the classroom, where the involvement of parents in their children's education is most needed, as well as to identify avenues, from the perception of teachers, by which this involvement can be most effectively carried out.
- Using the obtained information to target areas of need, focusing on those areas for which parents would welcome training and would attend events to learn how to improve the quality and effectiveness of their involvement to support the achievement of their children. This information will be used by the school team during development of the school's Implementation Grant for year two to ensure that the benefits of additional funding available in 2000-2001 will be maximized and spent in the most productive and cost effective manner.

Previous experience with parent events conducted at the school indicated that fun, interactive events designed around a theme elicited good parent participation in the past, such as the school's annual Halloween Carnival and Pig-Out Pajama Party. With this in mind, the school team used grant funds to enlist the assistance of two guest performers for each of the two events: Mrs. Frizzle from the Magic School Bus presented a literacy activity for parents and students in grades K-3; and Harland Glysler featured ghost stories for students of grades 4-6 and their parents. In addition to distributing and collecting surveys from parents in attendance at the two events, the school team (assisted by additional classroom teachers) distributed information and materials to parents regarding the district language arts program (grade level content and performance standards, Home Learning Activities booklets, booklists, and Grant teachers' tips).

Almost one hundred parents and thirty-three teachers returned the twenty-six item questionnaire. The information collected from the surveys is now being used to 1) inform the school team as to what parent activities are needed to help parents increase their support for student achievement; and 2) develop the proposal and plans for the school's Implementation Matching Grant activities for the 2000-2001 school year.

Results

An analysis of the information collected from surveys showed that:

- Parents of the school want workshops addressing how they can assist with the development of their children's written language arts skills. In all age groups/grade levels, parents overwhelmingly identified writing as the biggest problem their children have. Other academic issues appear to be age specific. For example, a need for increased attention to skills in mathematics was reflected by parents of students in grades 2 and 3, and Social Studies appears to be an important issue for parents of students in grades 4 through 6.

- Teachers at the school strongly concurred with parents on the the need for students to increase their written language arts skills. Teachers reported that for adequate classroom performance, students in grades 1 through 4 should write at home at least two hours per week (averaging 15 to 20 minutes per evening). This number increases to three to five hours each week for students in grades 5 and 6. In addition, teachers emphasized that all students should read at home from two to five hours per week. Based on the performance of students in class, teachers suspect that these minimum goals are not being met and that outside of homework assignments, these activities are not being encouraged or implemented by parents.
- Generally, parents allowed more television and a little less time on leisure reading than teachers would recommend. Public libraries were used primarily to check out children's books and videos, but reading for pleasure was minimal. Indoor activities of choice were movies and games. A future goal may be to conduct trips to the local community library to discover the many resources offered and encourage reading for pleasure.
- Previous attendance records and survey results indicated that parents of upper grade students generally participate in fewer school activities than parents of lower grade students. The school team plans to make a special effort to retain parents for school activities at every grade level by providing a variety of incentives and a program designed to meet their interests.
- Parents of nonresident magnet students who comprise forty-three percent of the student population participate considerably less in school events than parents of resident magnet students. The team will target these parents with additional surveys in order to gain insight to better meet the needs of these parents.

Fortified with this insight and data, a strategic plan is now being developed by the school team for year two Implementation Grant activities with parents. Results will be shared in the Grant parent newsletter and at the fall Open House. In the fall, an additional survey will be conducted to more closely define the needs and obtain input from parents new to the school.

Implications for Replication of Program

The focus and concept of Grant Elementary School's Planning/Organizing activities could be replicated in schools with:

- strong administrative support
- a committed planning/organizing team (composed of parents, teachers, and support staff) to develop the proposal, conduct activities, and analyze/evaluate the results
- a creative literacy event to attract large numbers of parents and students
- well-designed surveys for parents and staff
- a plan to use what is learned to more effectively develop an Implementation Grant proposal during year two.

How It Works

Kroc Middle School received an Implementation Grant to improve the quality and quantity of their parent informational sessions and workshops. While they already have many active committees and organizations on campus, these groups often operate in isolation. The goal was to promote a collaborative relationship among the parent groups, increase parent involvement to raise student achievement levels, and empower parents to become leaders and advocates for their children. Kroc has a Parent Center, works with Social Advocates for Youth, Parent Alliance for School Success (PASS) Program, funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, coordinates parent advocacy and informational sessions with multiple special education groups, and participates in Madison cluster activities.

A comprehensive, multi-faceted array of workshops with interrelated components comprised Kroc's grant activities. Based upon the results from a parent survey, monthly workshops were created to address parent needs. Transportation, meals, childcare, and translation services were provided. Newsletters announced workshops and summarized activities. The series entitled, "Passport to Student Success" included the following topics:

- Homework without Tears
- College Information Night
- Effective Test Taking Skills
- Enhancing Your Child's Self-Esteem
- Standards and Portfolios - Genre Studies
- Making the Connection – Reading to Teens
- Parent Forum PARTS (Parents and Adolescents Recovering Together)
- *Literacy Survival Kit for Parents and Teens: Dynamic Mini Study Skills.*

"Coffee and Teas" for parents were formed to embrace the parents in a warm and comfortable setting, to enhance the home school connection, to provide an opportunity to chat with the principal and network with other parents.

Four workshops were held at Brooklyn and Emerson-Bandini to serve the nonresident population. Oral presentations and extensive written materials were translated into Spanish. The north Clairemont area schools Parent Involvement and Volunteer Liaisons planned and implemented several workshops together and made a special effort to reach out to welcome parents of incoming sixth graders to the Kroc campus.

Results

Impact on Student Achievement

Parents report that students' grades have improved, more homework is being completed, and students are asking for tutoring assistance more often. Some parents report that their children's self-confidence has improved as well.

Impact on Parent Involvement

While considerable efforts were made to recruit parents to the different activities (phone tree, mailings, personal contacts), parents initially did not turn out. But once at the activity, the evaluations completed indicated that parents were overwhelmingly impressed with the information available. They appreciated the prepared meals, childcare, and translation services. Parents' attitudes have changed as they don't feel that the "problem is out of our

hands.” Teachers reported that parents seem more positive and upbeat after attending the workshops and sessions. Since the parents feel empowered and more comfortable “onsite,” they have requested the possibility of the Community-Based English Tutoring (CBET) and other community college programs brought to the campus.

Teacher Perceptions of Program

At the beginning of the school year, teachers expressed that the students were not serious about academic achievement and that they lacked motivation, self-confidence, and self-discipline. Teachers reported in the PASS survey conducted at the end of the school year, that after the workshops, the parents who attended seemed to be more confident in both their interactions with the teachers and with the students. Teachers also reported that parents who attended the sessions were “more cooperative” since they seemed to have an understanding of the standards and both the teachers’ and the district’s expectations of students’ academic performance. Generally, the staff’s overall sense of parent involvement is that “*the parents now have a capacity to increase student achievement.*” Teachers viewed parents as having a greater capacity to assist their children and in taking a more active role in promoting their children’s school success. Teachers were also grateful for the opportunity to distribute information about grades and expectations. Teachers see the necessity for a positive, open, ongoing relationship between parents and staff, and understand the importance of connecting parent involvement efforts to increasing student achievement. The staff is now dedicated to implementing a series of parent workshops to increase self-esteem and motivate students for school success. They have also requested that workshops start at the beginning of the school year and offer as many options as possible to accommodate as many parents as possible throughout the school year.

Implications for Replication of Program

The P.A.S.S. program already exists at many middle schools and will be expanded to all district middle schools. Other schools could use the same or similar topics and speaker workshops. Sites could replicate some or all the components of this program with a team to coordinate efforts for:

- parent recruitment
- arrangements for facilities, food, childcare, and translation services
- obtaining motivational, knowledgeable, and experienced speakers, workshop presenters, and discussion group leaders
- evaluation management.

How It Works

Memorial Academy's Implementation Grant has enabled the school to fund the new *Middle School Family Math Program* in three sets of six-week sessions. Memorial is committed to increasing student achievement by making parents true partners in the education process. *Family Math* was chosen because it promotes access and equality in math education and the process helps participants discover the practical application for math in the real world. It is a nationally recognized, well-researched, expertly written program of validated activities for middle school students.

The Title I Resource Teacher, Parent Coordinator, Vice-Principal, and four bilingual math teachers designed a program based on the expressed needs of parents and the School Site Council (SSC). The program started October 1999, and is still in progress. The sessions are presented for two hours every Monday evening for six consecutive weeks. The teachers formed two teams which meet monthly to plan curricular activities for the weekly workshops and make progress reports to and receive advice from the SSC. All participants complete a *Family Math* portfolio with work samples and a reflective journal book. Sessions are interactive opportunities for parents and students to have fun together using manipulatives, calculators, and other didactic materials while exploring and discovering math strategies. "Homework" is assigned in the form of games or a mathematical activity that extends the learning experience and promotes mathematical discussion between parents and children. Incentive mathematical "prizes" are awarded. The program focuses on:

- increasing home school collaboration
- enhancing parents' and students' pre-algebraic and algebraic skills
- increasing parent-student collaboration
- teaching math skills that can be easily applied at home and at school
- emphasizing the importance of taking college preparatory math courses starting at the middle school level and
- improving student achievement in mathematics courses.

Results

Impact on Student Achievement

Parents and student evaluations and teacher feedback and observations report the following: Students who participated in the *Family Math* Program have developed a genuine enthusiasm and love not only for math, but often an increased enthusiasm for the rest of their subjects as well. Students are absent less often and have become more responsible in academic work in the classroom (i.e., completing homework and studying for exams). Teachers and parents expect this to reflect directly in improving grades and self-esteem. *Family Math* student participants are more confident and positive in math class. Students experience a feeling of success in the *Family Math* sessions with their parents and this appears to transfer to the daily math classroom.

Impact on Parent Involvement

Workshop evaluations completed by the parents reflect that they were extremely pleased with the program. Their own comments state that they learned graphing; learned how to play math games at home with children; learned how to use math everywhere, even in the kitchen; learned to count with variable units of measurement; learned how to work with

geometric shapes; discovered relationships of numbers; enjoyed family time together, and built respect for teachers. Here are a few short quotes:

“I learned more about math to help my children and I hope we have more sessions.”

“One of the best parts of the program was the good communication between the parents and teachers.”

“I respectfully ask the school principal to recognize the instructors as ‘Teachers of the Year’.”

Teacher Perceptions of Program

The following are several quotes taken directly from Memorial Academy teacher’s evaluations of the program:

“I love the way Memorial is opening its doors to the community to involve its parents in the educational process. Parents sometimes need ‘an excuse’ to get together and spend time with their children. Seeing this interaction makes me feel like I am really making a difference with the students and in the community.”

“I truly believe that our program is providing a learning environment that is helping to bring the participating families closer together. This has become evident to me from seeing the enthusiasm and energy that the parents and their students have shown week after week. They concentrate, encourage one another, and laugh together while they learn. In my point of view, this is what the Family Math Program is all about: bringing families closer together so that the education process is meaningful and special not only to our students but to their families as well.”

“It is really exciting to see parents and students working together whether it is solving math problems or whether it is discussing ways to learn math. As a teacher, I have become even more aware of the parents’ needs and aspirations. Parents really appreciate when teachers empower them and constantly tell them that all their children have a chance at a bright future. We must continue working towards informing the parents about advanced math courses and about other opportunities that will enable their children to enter a four year university.”

“The more information parents have about their student's education, teachers, classroom environments, and school facilities, the more empowered they feel to be more actively involved in the process. Secondly, the students discovered how much their parents actually knew from their own educational and life experiences. ...If nothing else, they [the participating students] are setting a better example for their peers about the “O.K.ness” of both parent involvement and extra-curricular school activities that strengthen family time together.”

Implications for Replication of Program

Middle School Family Math can be easily replicated at other middle schools in the district. The EQUALS Program (Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California at Berkeley) publishes this program in English and Spanish. It would be successful at schools with teachers willing to be trained and teach the program and with good parent outreach strategies to recruit participants.