Evaluation of the Office of Family and Community Engagement Program 2013-2014

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At-a-Glance

The Office of Family and Community Engagement (OFCE) has been operating in the district for more than a decade, though the name has changed and the mission has been adjusted in order to meet the district’s evolving needs. The 2013-2014 OFCE was staffed by eight staffers, one director, one manager and six coordinators, specialists and trainers whose primary task was to bring parents into active involvement in their children’s education and schools.


Evaluation Component

The evaluation was guided and informed by the Title I, Part A 2013-2014 Federal Funding workscope. The workscope was prepared by the Project Manager and staff and clearly outlined the project(s) to be undertaken, the approach to implementation, the goals and expected results of the program, and metrics by which program success may be measured and evaluated. The workscope requested $490,392 to fund the program.

Program Components

PREP University Family Workshop Series

One of the key programs the OFCE offered to help foster parental involvement was the PREP University Family Workshop series (PREP U). The family workshops were divided into two versions, the evening series and the Saturday series, called Super Saturday. The Super Saturday events presented parents with the opportunity to attend up to three different sessions in one day. Overall, the Office of Family and Community Engagement presented a variety of workshops in 41 sessions. Parents were surveyed about the workshops they attended. The OFCE scored 90 percent or above on approval ratings in virtually all categories.

Parent Portal Registrations

The OFCE was responsible for training parents how to access and effectively use the district’s Parent Portal website. The Parent Portal system was a gateway into a comprehensive look at student performance that included classroom assignments, test scores, and attendance records. The website also offered an opportunity for parents to communicate with teachers.

Video Library

The OFCE made a goal to develop a training video library consisting of at least three videos in 2013-2014. As of April, 2014, the library was available at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/9791 and contained three videos, all addressing some aspect of registration for Parent Portal. The videos appear to be professionally produced and were visually appealing, and that may have encouraged viewers to view the entire video.

PREP Leaders Program

The PREP Leaders program trained parents to be leaders and skilled parent-educators as they took a significant role in fostering their children through the educational processes. The immediate goals of the program were to “increase parental involvement and to empower parents to become leading advocates in their children’s education.” In 2013-2014, the program expanded to seven feeder patterns. The program collaborated with community liaisons and school officials from 76 target schools to select one or two parents to invite into the PREP Leaders program. At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, the district had 76 participating campuses, but only 42 campuses had active PREP Leaders, as some campuses had multiple leaders.

District Parent Advisory Council

The District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) was made up of parent and community leaders that met monthly November through June. The DPAC served as an advisory council to the Office of Family and Community Engagement. The subject of interest to the DPAC was barriers to substantive or meaningful parental involvement and ways to overcome those barriers districtwide. Processes for determining needs were presented as part of the annual Title I Comprehensive Needs Assessment conducted by the DPAC. In 2013-2014, DPAC was formed by volunteers selected from each feeder pattern.

Training Academy

The Dallas ISD Training Academy began operations in 2012-2013. The Academy offered both required courses and courses of interest for district community liaisons. Some of the required courses were Parent Portal, School Messenger, and the Uniform Program.

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The Academy also helped with courses required to operate other programs housed with the Office of Family and Community Engagement.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The Office of Family and Community Engagement has successfully executed the requirements of their Title I workscope. The workscope’s Key Results section, goals, and the program’s performance are summarized here.

The Project Key Results section of the workscope specified an increase in Parent Portal registration of 15 percentage points. They needed to reach 35 percent registered to achieve that. As of May, 2014, the OFCE had registered 52 percent of Dallas ISD households.

The next workscope goal was to increase PREP University Attendance by 10 percent. The baseline attendance was 2,092. The program needed to register 2,301 parents for the workshops to achieve that. At the end of May 2014, 3,213 parents had attended workshops, a 54 percent increase.

The Office of Family and Community Engagement signed up to recruit and train a minimum of 60 PREP Leaders by the end of the year. A total of 65 parents completed the training and remain active at the end of 2013-2014. This figure was cumulative and included any persons trained prior to the 2013-2014 school year.

The PREP Leader training goal is the least successful aspect of the program. By the end of May, each PREP Leader was to have hosted a minimum of four parent workshops or meetings. Toward the end of the year, there were not enough workshops left in the year for all of the parents who trained to handle a minimum of four workshops as the lead trainer. However, the OFCE made sure that all of the PREP Leaders took part in the production and presentation of a minimum of four workshops.

According to the workscope, one of the key program goals was for at least 65 percent of parents to indicate the district offered adequate workshops and resources. Eighty-eight percent of the evening sessions and 91 percent of the Super Saturday sessions participants either agreed or strongly agreed that: The district offers adequate workshops and resources to support the child’s education in the home. These results indicate that parent approval is much higher than the target goal.

The OFCE was unable to document meeting the workscope goal that says “60% of community/parent liaisons/other designees will have attended a minimum of three training sessions through the Training Academy on Parent Portal, School Messenger, Six Types of Parent Involvement, successful PTA/PTO, Launching a PREP U Campus Series, etc. and will be able to develop and launch parent engagement initiatives at their campus by hosting and leading parent workshops and events.” This is an overly complicated goal that could be greatly simplified into two or three less complex and more easily documented goals. That would likely help with compliance. The OFCE was able to document at least 47% of schools in compliance with another 14% documenting two out of the three required sessions, narrowly missing the 60 percent goal. We strongly recommend breaking this goal into at least three separate goals and we recommend positive documentation processes in place at the beginning of the year.

Recommendations

We see two areas where significant gains can be made. First, many of the program's goals were difficult to document, or were documented at the end of the year from data collected along the way. We recommend avoiding overly complicated goals, making several simpler goals instead. Simplified and clearly written goals make it easier to develop and maintain recordkeeping and allow program staff to monitor progress throughout the semester.

Second, this department has the opportunity for significant growth over the next two to three years. In 2013-2014, Parent Portal registrations were reported as exceeding 52 percent, using the number of students with at least one parent registered for Parent Portal as of June 1, 2014 as the representative measure. This means the district now has access to slightly over half the households in the district. PREP University, other programs hosted by the Office of Family and Community Engagement, and other district service groups must continue to reach out and find more innovative and engaging ways to attract and serve the families of students, if the district is to reap the positive effects of parental involvement so much of the literature suggests. The growth rate for this and other programs suggests that the district should expect more parental involvement and should prepare to support parental demands for services and to leverage opportunities to harness parental volunteerism to help in the schools and promote their goals. The full potential for impact on student lives is difficult to imagine, though surely it is enormous.

The full 2013-14 Office of Family and Community Engagement evaluation report can be found at http://www.dallasisd.org/Page/888.