At-a-Glance

The year 2013-2014 saw the School Leadership Division receiving $301,397 in Title I, Part A funds to pay for five Parent Resource Specialists (PRS), one for each School Division. These specialists reported directly to the Assistant Superintendent leading the division to which they were assigned. Although organizationally not connected, these specialists often provided assistance and support to the Office of Family and Community Engagement as presenters and by providing other assistance at various workshops, presentations and meetings around the Dallas ISD community. PRS usually worked directly with parents in a one-on-one problem solving or training role. PRS provided opportunities for parents to become familiar with the district’s policies and procedures, serving as guides and facilitators through whatever procedural steps were necessary to address the parents’ concerns. PRS, often in conjunction with their respective Executive Directors, also presented more formal training programs on the application of district policy, including Site Based Decision Making (SBDM).

The PRS were directly concerned with parents and their encounters with schools. Examples of what these specialists encountered are:

- parents concerned with the air conditioning at particular buildings,
- parents concerned about students’ personal property,
- in divorce situations, concerns about custodial and non-custodial parents’ access to school records and other related concerns,
- parent concerns about teacher treatment of students (being mean or unpleasant),
- general maintenance concerns, such as peeling paint or replacing broken windows promptly,
- and other concerns a parent may have regarding their children’s experience with the Dallas ISD.

The PRS tried to deal with parental concerns fairly and at the lowest administrative level possible. For example, one father contacted the PRS by telephone with a concern that his son’s teacher was being rude or unpleasant to his son, being generally mean spirited. The PRS talked with the father and ended by advising the parent that he needed to start his complaint by asking for a meeting with the campus authorities, beginning with the teacher. Most problems could be managed by meeting with the teacher or the principal. If these authorities were insufficient to resolve an issue, the meetings produced adequate documentation for the parent to move to the next step. The PRS provided the parent with appropriate contact information for an effective follow-through to resolve the complaint. A follow-up contact between the PRS and the parent confirmed that in the example sited, the parent had requested and successfully scheduled a meeting with an appropriate campus authority.

In another situation, the mother of a 2nd grade student came to the PRS after trying unsuccessfully to advise local school authorities that she had legal custody of the young student, and not the father. The PRS requested documentation supporting the claim while advising the mother that custody claims were very sensitive issues that were addressed with great care and deliberation. After discussing this case with the campus Principal, the PRS determined that there were concerns sufficient for the Principal to have contacted the legal department for guidance. The PRS helped the parent contact the legal department and set up an appointment to review the case documentation. In a follow-up email, the Principal confirmed that district lawyers had determined that the mother had legal custody.

The parents of older students also have concerns. One father believed that the school should reimburse his son for the loss of a cell phone. The PRS investigated and determined that, although the father had spoken with the school, he was not prepared to accept the school’s response to the situation. The school’s Principal had correctly informed the parent that Dallas ISD was not responsible for lost or stolen cell phones. The PRS referred the father and student to the Student Code of Conduct Handbook, page 11 where it reads, “The District is not liable for lost or stolen cell phones”. The parent was unhappy with that resolution to the case, but decided to drop the concern. The PRS followed up with both the Principal and the parent to make sure all was resolved, even though the parent was unhappy.
PRS were able to access district databases on a limited basis to help them prepare for meetings with parents on issues such as a student’s attendance and what the district expects and why that is important. PRS reported that sometimes parents did not expect anything to change when they call; they just wanted to get their concerns out into public view. PRS personnel saw a major part of their job as making the schools more user friendly for the parents.

Careful review of the PRS activity logs showed that these individuals were placing themselves front and center, available to parents when they had questions, and for preparing and delivering training presentations as needed. Many of the Executive Directors of the district’s feeder patterns were very active with their PRS and took a lead role in activities to improve the way schools were viewed by the community. The PRS sought to present the schools as very approachable. They wanted parents to feel comfortable about visiting the school or communicating with school staff about any problems or questions they may have had about policy or rules at their school, the district or the Texas Education Agency.

**Summary and Recommendations**

Overall, the PRS provided much needed help to parents. The PRS focused on helping individual parents when they had a problem with a school or the district. These specialists helped parents navigate the bureaucracy of the district to gain the access they needed to address problems or concerns, usually at the school level. Examples of the types of problems PRS may address include building air conditioning or other physical plant concerns, student schedules, student disciplinary issues, including bullying and other concerns usually restricted to a single parent or student. Occasionally the PRS may address staffing issues or conflicts involving their student(s).

The PRS often participated in the more formally orchestrated programs developed by specialists in the Office of Family and Community Engagement (CFR) such as Parent Portal, PREP University, PREP Leadership Academy and others. These programs were designed to attract and benefit larger numbers of parents at a single event.

The PRS specialists provided parents with opportunities to interact with their students’ schools in meaningful ways. The PRS work was primarily one-on-one and designed to help a parent solve a problem.

After the end of the 2012-2013 school year, on July 1, 2013, the district announced that the Family and Community program would move administratively from the Communications Division to the School Leadership Division. This move served to alleviate friction between the PRS and specialists in the Office of Family and Community Engagement, by placing both under the same division leadership. This move seems to have satisfactorily addressed the recommendations made in the EA13-151-4 report.

For more information, contact Program Evaluation at 972-925-6457.