Parent Academy and Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success Exit Surveys: 2007-08

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At a Glance

Parent Academies 2007-2008

Between the dates of 7 February and 26 April, 2008 the Dallas Independent School District hosted Parent Academies at 12 schools. Attendees at these events were surveyed to learn their impressions of the information provided. Some 550 attendees responded to the exit survey with machine-readable responses.

The Parent Academy with the highest number of readable responses was the one hosted by Long (150 responses). The Parent Academy with the fewest respondents to the exit survey was A. Maceo Smith, with one readable survey response. Most respondents were the mothers of students (80.5%), followed by fathers (14.3%). Respondents had students spread across all grades, but the elementary grades tended to higher representation than either middle school grades or high school grades. Respondents representing students in grades between PK and Grade 6 represented at least 50 students for each grade. Grades 10, 11 and 12 were the least represented with 21, 17 and 8 respectively. The availability of child care at the Academy was instrumental in making attendance possible for about 85% of attendees.

Respondents represent a fairly active group of parents in their children’s schools and schooling. More than 68% reported spending at least one hour per week helping their children with homework and 67% reported direct conversations or meetings with their child’s teachers 4 or more times per year. Some 37.8% reported participating in PTA activities at least 4 times per year. Only 23% reported never participating in PTA activities. Site Based Decision Making (SBDM) participation lagged PTA participation somewhat, as fewer than 17% of parents reported participating more than 3 times per year in SBDM activities. About 58% reported never participating.

Respondents were pleased with the Academy’s offerings. Some 95.9% of respondents reported that the physical layout of the event made it easy to locate the things of interest to them and 95.8% reported interest in attending another Parent Academy. Almost all respondents (98.6%) reported that the Academy helped them understand more clearly how to help their child succeed in school.

Respondents reported wanting more information on how to become more involved with their child’s school, how the home, family and neighborhood environment affects student performance and how to prepare their children to deal with gangs, drugs or truancy (93.5%, 92.5% and 92.5% respectively).

Summary

Although the Parent Academy sessions proved popular with parents, these parents are very likely among the most active in the schools. Parent Academy planners may want to evaluate ways and means of reaching out to the less active parents. Most respondents were parents of elementary-aged children. Parent Academy planners may also want to evaluate ways and means of attracting more parents of middle and high school students. While it is an excellent strategy to capture the attention of parents of younger children, it is clear that there is much to offer the parents of older children that may help them become more effective parents as their children progress through the school system. Strategies to attract parents of older children and to attract the less active parents seem indicated by these results.

Further attention to the technical aspects of the exit survey questions may also be warranted. For example, although 92.5% of parents reported wanting more information about drugs, gangs and truancy, and although these all are highly correlated with each other in terms of their effect on student behavior and performance,
unless Parent Academy planners plan to present a single session covering all three of these topics, the survey questions do not provide as much guidance as to what would be the most needed topic as might have been possible with different survey wording. It is likely that these questions were crafted as they were to accommodate differing agendas between Parent Academies. In the past, uniform agendas between the several Parent Academies offered served to boost attendance and stabilize the message, enhancing the experience of attendees. This was accomplished because some attendees attended more than one Academy so that they could attend more of the break-out sessions offered. If different Academies do not offer the same agenda, this cannot happen.

The survey devoted considerable space to open-ended questions not evaluated here. Unless plans are made to code and analyze these open ended questions, the space on the survey might be put to better use with well-constructed closed-response questions. Additionally, open-ended questions frequently fail to provide the quantity or quality of information for which planners hope at the time the questions were written. Response rates are often very low for open-ended questions as compared to closed-response items. The responses themselves frequently fail to address the question asked, or to provide any actionable information. Reasons for this have to do with well-understood technical aspects of survey response patterns. Recommendations for improvement include that open-ended questions be replaced with professionally crafted closed questions. It is likely that planners will find the analysis emerging from such a response strategy more directly meaningful to the planning task.

**Spring 2008 Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success Exit Survey Analysis**

The Spring 2008 Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success college fair was held on February 23, 2008. Some 220 students and 35 parents completed the exit survey. Some 65.2% of responding parents reported themselves to be parents of 11th grade students. Only six students responded to the what grade are you in question, rendering the result meaningless. The reasons for that are unclear, but may be because the only choices offered were 11th or 12th grade. Both parents (96.8%) and students (93.8%) agreed that the sessions were interesting and helped prepare the student for college. Both parents (100%) and students (91.6%) believed that friends could benefit from attending a Llaves event.

Parents reported that the information provided showed them that they could afford to send their child to college (100%). Both students (74.6%) and parents (71.0%) found the hands-on FAFSA help productive. Even so, the leading reason respondents reported for not attending college was financial. Some 33.3% of students and 41.4% of parents report cost as a primary reason the student may not attend college and about 10% of both parents and students report a reliance on the student by the family for financial support. Parents (90.9%) and students (87.1%) found the assistance at completing college application paperwork to be helpful. About 14% of parents and students believe the student’s legal status to be an impediment to college attendance. About 41% of parents reported that their student had taken the SAT or ACT. About 35% of the families reported at least one parent to be a college graduate.

**Fall 2007 Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success Exit Survey Analysis**

On October 27, 2007, Dallas ISD joined with the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) in hosting the fall 2007 Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success (Llaves) college fair for area high school students and their families. The fair was organized along two complimentary pathways. The parent path offered sessions on financial aid and how to prepare one’s child for college. Sessions also featured information on new Texas state law governing graduation requirements. At the same time, students were offered sessions on financial aid and how to prepare one’s child for college. Sessions also featured information on new Texas state law governing graduation requirements. At the same time, students were offered sessions on financial aid, PSAT, SAT and ACT testing strategies and other information related to standardized testing. Students also participated in a panel discussion featuring successful members of the community: what decisions did these leaders face, what barriers did they face and what helped them overcome these barriers?

Some 303 parents attended, up from 109 in 2006. Student attendance was also up, with 771 attending in 2007, versus 530 in 2006. These figures represent increases of 178% for parents and 45% for students. In order to evaluate the
utility and effectiveness of the fair, students and parents were asked to complete an exit survey during the final sessions of the day. Some 114 parents and 498 students complied. This represents a response rate of 64.6% for students, and 37.6% for parents. The Llaves fair attracted parents of students from across all grade levels. Some 32.9% of respondents were parents of elementary aged children. Another 15.2% had middle school aged children and 52.0% reported their children to be of high school age. Student respondents were primarily high school (56.1%) and middle school (41.7%) aged. About the same number of students and parents reported that internet access was available in the home (67.0% and 74.4% respectively), and that at least one of the parents was a college graduate (38.4% and 32.5% respectively).

Virtually all attendees, 100.0% of parents and 95.0% of students, agreed that Llaves helped increase their understanding of how to prepare for college. Slightly more parents than students (95.9% vs. 81.7%) reported that the information presented helped them realize that college was financially attainable. Students were more uncertain than their parents (15.4% vs. 3.1% answered I don't know) about whether the information they received helped them realize that they could afford to go to college. Some 78.6% of students did report, however, that they learned something useful about financial aid at the Llaves fair. Some 36.2% of students and 42.3% of parents report that the family depends on the student for at least some financial support.

Both parents (97.8%) and students (85.1%) agreed that the information about how to complete college application forms was helpful. One-hundred percent of parents and 87.9% of students reported learning something useful about the admissions requirements themselves. Students were asked about the information they received to complete scholarship applications, and most (85.5%) reported the information to be helpful. Parents were more likely than students to realize that one’s immigration status was not a barrier to college admissions (95.7% vs. 78.6% respectively). Overall, 86.6% of students and 96.7% of parents report that they can see a way for the student to go to college. Further, 90.9% of students and 96.6% of parents agree that the student’s primary intention after high school is to attend college. Both parents and students (100.0% and 88.9% respectively) agreed that they knew of others who would benefit from attending future Llaves fairs.

Approval ratings for schools concerning the delivery of college preparation information was a bit lower. Only 64.4% of parents and 75.7% of students report their school to have been a consistently helpful provider of college preparation information. When asked if the school emphasized the importance of taking the right courses in preparation for college, only 69.5% of parents and 80.7% of students answered in the affirmative. When asked when they were first given information about college, 21.0% of students and 31.3% of parents reported during elementary school. Student and parents reported middle school as the first time they were provided information, 40.8% and 21.7% respectively. Some 42.2% of parents and 38.2% of students reported high school as the first time they received college preparatory information from the school.

Summary

The general finding emerging from the exit survey is that the fall 2007 Las Llaves del Exito the Keys to Success college fair was a successful event.

Attendance continues to improve and the approval of attendees with what they found was reflected in the survey results. Of particular note is the sharp increase in parental attendance generally, and the relatively high proportion of parents of elementary aged children.

A word of caution is in order. First, Llaves attendees are among the most involved parents and focused students in the district. The district needs to continue to strive to attract students and parents who may be more ambiguous about the possibilities of college attendance.

Second, the perception among about half of respondents that the schools did not provide them with information relating to college-bound curriculum until their high school years is disturbing.

Only about 3 out of 4 students, and fewer parents, consider the schools as reliable providers of information promoting college preparation and readiness.
Apparently the information delivery mechanism for college readiness information is not reaching a sizable proportion of elementary and middle school students. These findings suggest that schools should take steps to insure that college preparation and admissions information is disseminated more widely and begins in the elementary grades so that students have time to respond to the information and prepare for college readiness.

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