

PA PIRC is pleased to provide you with the Spring Newsletter. This newsletter is intended to provide useful information to parents, educators and administrators. Each issue will contain information about early childhood education, No Child Left Behind, family-school-community partnerships, and dates of up-coming events.

PA PIRC serves parents, schools and communities across Pennsylvania. Our goal is to help parents take a leading role in their children's learning by providing information about school readiness and student success and by helping schools welcome families and community members as active and effective partners in student achievement.

Between January and April 2008 PA PIRC held regional workshops across Pennsylvania. Please take the time to read the article about those workshops and put the dates of the 2008-2009 regional workshops on your calendar.

Summer will soon be here. It is a time for children to have fun and continue their learning during the summer months. Studies have shown that children do not forget as much of what has been learned in school when families provide opportunities for children to learn during the summer months. Provide time during the summer for children to read, take walks and observe what they see and hear, keep a journal, study the night sky and look for constellations, and have your child help to plan some day trips or longer vacations by researching sites to visit and have them plan a budget. These are only some ideas for summer fun. Schools and community organizations often have summer programs for children. Work with educators and community groups to provide these programs for children and youth in your community.

You are encouraged to copy and share this newsletter with others and visit our website at www.center-school.org/pa-pirc for up-to-date information and resources.

Linda Dolan
PA PIRC Director

The Pennsylvania PTA and the Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center Partnership: Using the Pennsylvania PTA Convention to get the word out!

by Caroline Allen, President, Pennsylvania PTA

In mid-April, the Pennsylvania PTA invited Ines Vega and Dr. Linda Dolan of the Pennsylvania Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) to present at our annual convention. Often times, one of the most frustrating topics concerning parental involvement revolves around getting parents engaged at the middle and high school level. As we looked to experts to answer this question, we had to look no further than PA PIRC.

Dr. Dolan and Ms. Vega helped parents to understand how important parental involvement is at the secondary level. They discussed how there are key elements to understanding such as the quality of a child's school experience, what academic expectations there are and how to provide the necessary logistics when supporting their child.

I personally believe that a child needs their parents more than ever as they enter middle school and move onto high school. So how parents' are involved will change. They no longer need to supervise the class party, but instead, must be attentive to what classes their child may need to get into the college of their choice. They must be aware of who their children's friends are and what extracurricular activities are available for them. In other words, there are still concerns, but these now have become bigger concerns with bigger consequences.

The Pennsylvania PTA would like to thank the Pennsylvania PIRC for sharing their expertise at our annual conference. The more information and training parents receive, the better off their children will be. And in the end, that means the betterment of all society.

2008-2009 PA PIRC Workshop Date Saver

September 19 - 20, 2008	Western PA Parent Leadership
October 17 - 18, 2008	Eastern PA Parent Leadership
February 3 - 4, 2009	Central PA Collaborative Action
March 31, 2009	Western PA Family-School-Community Partnerships
April 2, 2009	Eastern PA Family-School-Community Partnerships

PA PIRC Regional Workshops – *Family-School-Community Partnerships in Action!*

PA PIRC sponsored Family-School-Community Partnerships in Action workshops in January through April 2008 that were attended by 293 people that included school staff, community organization representatives and parents. These four two-day regional meetings were held in Camp Hill, King of Prussia, Wilkes Barre and Cranberry. Keynote speakers were: Anne Henderson, co-author of *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*; Eileen Kugler author of *Debunking the Middle-Class Myth: Why Diverse Schools are Good for All Kids*; Robert Witherspoon, Senior Research Associate with RMC Research Corporation in Arlington, VA and a former training specialist and Executive Director of the National Coalition of Title I Parents and Don Clark, consultant and former Director of the Bureau of Curriculum and Academic Services at PDE and currently serving on many community groups in Abington Township, PA including the Abington Human Relations Advisory Committee and Communities that Care Project. Breakout sessions included research findings, best practice, peer sharing and family-school-community partnership development.

Several best practices were featured during the best practice panels. Below are highlights of three programs shared at the Regional Workshops.

School District of Lancaster Committed to Parent Involvement

Jill Martin, Parent Involvement Coordinator for the School District of Lancaster, reported that the School District of Lancaster set goals for the 2007-08 school year to (1) improve two-way communication between schools/families (2) targeted training for families related to student achievement and district initiatives (3) increase opportunities for parents to develop as leaders and to be involved in programs throughout the district. To meet the state goals the district implemented the following programs throughout the district: (a) Parent Advisory committee (district and schools), (b) Solid Foundation provided by PA PIRC and the National Network of Partnership Schools models, (c) district trainings that include the Special Education Series, Adequate Yearly Progress, Dinner with Leaders, PSSA and (d) School Improvement Planning Meetings. The programs targeted to parents/guardians are district-wide and involve approximately 6,500 families.

The district has been intensively working with improving parent-engagement events for the past seven years. Each year, a new component is added to the opportunities for parental involvement. These goals began with a group of parents and district administrators to address Title I and NCLB compliance. Funding sources for the current initiatives are: Title I Parent Involvement, Safe Schools/Healthy Students Grants and other grant sources as appropriate. The partners include: District Parent Advisory Committee Representatives, Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Coordinator for Title I and Federal Programs, Coordinator for Parent Involvement, School and Community Network and parent specialists, building principals, teachers and parents.



Pictured here, keynote speaker at the first day of the PA PIRC Regional Workshop, **Anne T. Henderson**. To her left, **Bonita Allen**, to her right, **Karen Shanoski** and **Suzy Gerst**.

PA PIRC Regional Workshops – Family-School-Community Partnerships in Action! (continued)

Bethlehem School District Family Centers and Project ASPIRE

Bethlehem School District is working to provide a seamless system of service delivery that focuses on academic success, access to basic needs, health services, after school programs and community services. The target populations for these programs are families with school age children and children from birth to 5 years of age. Programs are offered throughout the Bethlehem School District buildings. Some after school programs are offered off site. The school district has established Family Centers at two schools in the district where pediatric, women's health clinic, family practice and other health related services are available to families. Bethlehem School District has offered these health services since 1994 and has had after school programs since 1999. In 1994 the PA Department of Health provided the school district with funding for the Family Centers.

Under the Governor's PA Accountability Block Grants the Family Centers were able to provide additional staff to support the centers. Additionally, the United Way has been instrumental in getting lead agencies to provide additional support. Most after school coordinators are funded under the Community Schools initiative. Collaborative working efforts have been developed with the County Office of Children, Youth and Families Division: the Family-to-Family Initiative and the Time-Limited Family Reunification Grant. Community partners met and identified mutual goals and community needs. Together they developed mutual outcomes and worked closely with the initiatives. The partners involved are: St. Luke's Hospital and St. Luke's Community Health Department, Northampton County Office of CYF, The Partnership for a Healthy Community, Bethlehem Health Bureau, PA Department of Welfare, Just Born, Inc., Private Donors, United Way of Greater LV, Northampton Community College and many more. Funding and sustainability of programs depends on grants, Cash Match, private donors and support from the local businesses.

Family Involvement Monthly Content Activities Night

Donna McManus, Parent Engagement Specialist for Allegheny Middle School states that the Family Involvement Monthly Content Activities Night is a parent engagement program that serves parents and students who attend Allegheny Middle School. The goal of this program is to improve the understanding of parents with the middle school curriculum and provide them with the necessary resources that will help them improve their child's academic performance. All content related activities are offered monthly at the school auditorium, cafeteria, gym and/or classrooms (depending upon the activity). The Parent Engagement Specialist together with the school staff coordinate and develop the family activities. For the past two years the school has implemented this program, however the school has been promoting family engaging activities for the past five years. This program is sustained with Title I funds. Additional funding is provided by the Healthy Program which is a Type 2 Diabetes prevention program sponsored by the University of Pittsburgh.

What parents, schools and communities can do together

Parents, schools and communities are important to school and student achievement. Review the standards below and think about how you can help develop a partnership that includes these updated 2007 Parent Teacher Association Standards.

- Welcoming all families to the school community.
- Communicating effectively.
- Supporting student success.
- Speaking up for every child.
- Sharing power.
- Collaborating with the community.

PA PIRC Regional Workshops – Family-School-Community Partnerships in Action! (continued)

We Can Each Contribute to Student Success through Family-School-Community Partnerships - Notes from Peer Groups at Family-School-Community Partnership in Action Regional Meetings (January - April, 2008)

At the regional meetings participants met with a small group of peers, teachers, parents, administrators and community organization representatives. They discussed issues related to family-school-community partnerships and enhancing family engagement all aimed at improving student achievement. They shared goals and experiences, challenges and successes. Each group focused on generating a list of ideas about what people in that role can contribute, or what actions can be taken to reduce the challenges and build on the successes of family engagement and family-school-community partnerships aimed at increasing student achievement. Following are some of their recommendations:

Parents	Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know your rights - learn education jargon • Work as a team • Connect the community with the school - serve as a liaison • Get past people to the issues • Build and promote leadership of parents • Serve as representatives to school teams, committees, planning efforts, etc. • Ask questions • Be the Messenger/Key Communicator/Ambassador • Don't give up or get discouraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking - connect with each other as peers • Create and maintain effective relationships with parents • Promote parent leadership • Extend the invitation to parents • Build on family advocacy groups • Be welcoming • Partner with community fairs/events • Hold the educational functions someplace other than the school • Reach out to ALL parents equally
Administrators	Community Representatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be willing to get help - share tasks, give up control, build trust-based teams, utilize resources • Model it...show importance by talking the walk - participate • Focus on positive interpersonal communications • Ensure parents are given opportunities to participate (time of day, location) • Provide information to parents in a variety of ways • Be sensitive to parent feedback • Parent perspective is their "real"- validate • Invite/Involve the community in the school • <u>Never give up!</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in collaboration with agencies and schools • Connect with parents in the community • Go above and beyond, hold hands, parents feel comfortable and supported • Serve on boards/teams • Be a voice for programs • Model/coach/mentor/advocate • Create trusting environment • Be a cheerleader • Remind schools that ALL parents have strengths • Information broker • "Go to person" for parents

Babies Brain Development

Did you ever wonder why a child flips a light switch on and off, on and off, spins the toilet paper roll until all the paper is pooled on the floor, repeatedly drops his cup, bowl and spoon off the high chair tray or pulls off his socks over and over again? Such behaviors are almost predictable in preschool aged children and with good reason.

A child's brain is not fully formed when he is born. The human brain is made up of trillions of cells. Connections between those cells are what make it possible for a child to communicate, think, move and develop relationships. At birth, the connections have already been formed for blinking, swallowing, breathing, and the many other things that a child does automatically; however, many more connections need to be formed in order for him to learn to talk, read, and complete complex tasks. Those connections are formed after he is born. In fact, experts believe that trillions of connections are made during the first three years of life.

Many connections form as a child explores his surroundings, observes the world, and listens intently to the conversations and sounds around him. He naturally begins to reach and grasp, gain control of his body and walk, and imitate behaviors in pretend play. Other connections are formed through the opportunities and experiences that you provide. Each activity helps develop connections between cells in the brain.



What can be frustrating for parents is that a child needs to repeat the same activities over and over again in order to master them. Connections in the brain become stronger and more permanent through repetition of activities.

Look for your child to:

- Want you to read the same story night after night
- Repetitively open and close cabinet doors
- Babble sounds over and over again
- Repeatedly choose the same games to play

This is evidence of your child's brain at work, building and strengthening the connections that will be needed for him to be ready for school.

You can help your child's brain develop by:

- Talking with him, singing with him, reading with him and providing opportunities for him to learn language. Talk with him throughout the day about what you're doing and seeing. Expand his language by describing objects with new words.
- Offering him writing materials, such as paper, crayons, and markers, to experiment and practice with.
- Allowing him to explore a variety of objects including both household items and toys.
- Incorporating math games into your everyday routines by counting the stairs as you climb them, sorting laundry together, and matching eating utensils.
- Guiding him to acceptable behaviors and gently redirecting away from unacceptable behaviors.
- Establishing safe and predictable routines for eating, sleeping, and play time.

When you're tempted to sneak a new book into the reading routine or bring out a new toy, remember a child needs lots of practice doing things over and over again to succeed at new skills. Your child will let you know when he's bored with an activity and ready to move on to a new learning opportunity. In the meantime, be encouraged that your child is working hard getting his brain ready for school.

A Great Opportunity: Pennsylvania Department of Education's Annual Title I State Parent Conference

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Annual Parent Conference is designed for parents of school-aged children and administrators/staff who work with parents in education programs. The conference includes keynote speakers, more than 40 individual workshops, award winning childcare and networking opportunities. Act 48 credit hours are available for educators and administrators attending the conference.

For parents who want to learn ideas and strategies to help their child at home, topics include:

- Strategies for helping children in various content areas at all grade levels
- Understanding how children learn (the reading/math learning process)
- Understanding how schools are organized
- Understanding what types of additional assistance is available for their child (Title I, tutoring, community organizations)
- Understanding standards, PSSA, different learning styles
- Using technology
- Understanding child development (pre-k, elementary, middle, high school)



For parents who want to become a parent leader at the school level, topics include:

- Working with principals and classroom teachers
- Leadership training
- Awareness of community resources/grants
- School improvement requirements
- Effective practices/parent outreach programs

For parents, school professionals and community members who want to develop Family-School-Community partnerships and develop parent involvement action plans there is a team track. Teams from a school building or a school district may apply. Teams will include parents, school professionals including an administrator and community partners. Topics include:

- Team focused workshops on developing Family-School-Community action plans, assessments, parent policies, communications plans, and linking your work with student academic success.
- Collaboration time to network with other peers individually and as teams.

Each spring, schools that receive Title I funds get information about the conference, complete with applications to send Title I parents or to organize a team to attend.



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