



NCPIE Update

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Strengthening the Public VOICE in Washington, D.C. Public Education

The March NCPIE meeting had a local focus as two Washington, DC area community and family involvement programs gave an overview of their efforts at empowering parents with children in the DC public schools. Erika Landberg, Constituency Building Coordinator, with DC Voice and a team from The Tellin' Stories Project (see article on page 3), spoke to the group about their experience in forming a new broad-based education reform collaborative, and how they work in partnership to increase family and community involvement in several Washington, D. C. schools.



DC VOICE, an acronym for District Community Voices Organized and Informed for Change in Education, was founded in 1998 by a group of individuals and organizations committed to providing a high quality public education for all DC students. It serves as an education reform collaborative of teachers, parents and education activists and operates under the belief that there must be an engaged

and informed public that both supports the school system and holds it and the city accountable for the education of its youth.

DC VOICE works for change and support of DC public schools and challenges the notion that change has to come from the top. Using a system's thinking approach each part of the school system, including central administration, school staff, parents, students, elected officials, business, faith and non-profit institutions and the general public are all viewed as interdependent components within the system as a whole.

Funded by a Ford Foundation Collaborating for Education Reform Initiative and Public Education Network, Local Education Fund grants dollars, the goals of DC VOICE are to:

1. Organize an informed and broad-based public. This is accomplished through sponsoring forums, providing publications, and doing research studies. One example is the Supports for Quality Teaching forums and planning currently taking place. Broad-scale, systemic reform can only be recognized if there is strong public demand for change. To be heard, that demand needs to be informed, organized and mobilized.

2. Develop and support effective practices.

Reform efforts need to be grounded in an understanding of the conditions that promote, support and sustain best practices i.e. in family-school partnerships and professional development.

3. Help develop and implement education policy.

The idea is that policy development and implementation needs to be ready to respond to public demand and involve strategic relationships, networking of key stakeholders and use of information and communication.

Among DC VOICE's partners are local schools, family involvement experts, community-based organizations and education advocacy organizations that work with families. Its community building endeavors take place city wide, but focus most significantly on a cluster of schools in the Columbia Heights/Shaw neighborhood and specifically at the Bruce-Monroe elementary school in collaboration with the Tellin' Stories Project. For more information on DC VOICE visit them on-line at www.dcvoice.org or call them at (202) 986-8535.

Tellin' Stories Project: Connecting Parents, Schools & Communities

A portion of the March NCPIE Meeting consisted of an insightful role play about what can happen when there is poor communication between school front office staff and parents. But the presentation by Tellin' Stories Project (TSP) staff members, Jill Weiler, Barbara D'Emilio, Wanda Geddis, and Doris Watkins did not end there. The group then went on to talk about the success TSP has had at engaging families and school building staff in Washington, D. C. public schools.

TSP, a project of the Network of Educators on the Americas in partnership with DC VOICE, works directly with ten schools in the District of Columbia each year to support initiatives to improve relations between schools and their communities. TSP is based on the belief that all parents-regardless of their nationality, cultural background, native language and level of formal education-have the knowledge and experience to create their own literature and to serve as sources of literacy at home, in the school and in the community.

At the heart of TSP's efforts to engage families and staff is the power of stories as a tool to connect people from diverse backgrounds, to pass on valuable information and experiences, and to organize collective action.

Through participation in a series of quilt-making workshops, parents write and share their own personal stories with their children and other parents. These stories become a part of a quilt displayed in the school and thus become a part of the life of the school and the community as it serves to document the struggles and joys of the past and creates a vision of the future.

The project provides a much-needed bridge that connects parents, educators and communities. Once the initial quilt has been completed TSP staff provide training based on the needs and requests of the parents that have now bonded and want to continue to work to build better relationships at their neighborhood school. Examples of additional training that have been provided include "Right Question Project" workshops, which build effective communications and advocacy skills for parents. Another workshop series implemented by TSP, "Rethinking Parent Involvement," is designed for educators and helps teachers analyze the challenges of current realities and create solutions to overcome them.

In the fall of 1999 TSP decided to work intensively over the long-term with Bruce-Monroe elementary school. The desire was to discover the key components in building a meaningful family-school partnership and to share those lessons with other sites. A large part of the rationale for choosing Bruce-Monroe was the school's supportive administration, its rich diversity (35% Latino, 64% African American) and staff and parents committed to parent involvement.

Through TSP parents: 1). Collaborate with other parents from different linguistic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, 2). Create a school environment that values all cultures and family traditions, 3). Play more active and meaningful roles in their children's classrooms and in the decision making process of the school, 4). Help develop the project as a model, which may be used in other communities.

Recently, TSP conducted a year-long study to better understand what meaningful involvement of families in our children's schools looks like, and published its findings in *"Between Families and Schools: Creating Meaningful*

Relationships." This action research booklet serves as a resource for everyone working to create lasting partnerships between families and schools.

For additional information on the Tellin' Stories Project, or the Tellin' Stories Action Research Project visit <http://www.teachingforchange.org/tellin.html> or contact Jill Weiler at 202-588-7204.

Collaboration Counts

1 Parent = A Nut Case

2 Parents = Nut Case and Friend

3 Parents = Troublemakers

5 Parents = Let's Have a Meeting

10 Parents = We'd Better Listen

25 Parents = Our Dear Friends

50 Parents = A Powerful Organization

Courtesy: Anne Henderson

Traditional Assumptions about Parent Involvement

Schools determine how parents are involved.

Parents' roles are limited to fundraising, chaperoning, and attending PTA meetings.

Starting point: Hold a PTA meeting and have parents sign up for committees.

Parents need to have specific skills to be involved. Many lack the capacity or willingness to be involved.

Diversity is a challenge.

Decisions are handed down. School knows best and passes knowledge to families.

Accountability is determined by a system-chosen standardized test.

If a parent is not visible at the school, s/he is not involved.

Underlying message, parent involvement is not important for school success.

TSP Assumptions about Parent Involvement

Families and school staff together decide meaningful ways for parents to be involved.

Parents play multiple roles: teachers, supporters, advocates, decision-makers, ambassadors, and monitors.

Starting point: building trust through sharing our stories

All parents are resources to their children's schools.

Diversity is strength.

Decisions are made collaboratively. Everyone is knowledgeable and has children's best interest at heart.

Families, schools and communities hold each other accountable.

Involved parents include those who help their children be ready for school each day in the home.

Parent involvement/family-school collaboration is required for school change.

Courtesy of: Tellin' Stories Project

Upcoming NCPIE Meetings and Presentations

April 24, 2002

9:00 a.m. - Noon

NEA Building

Conference Room B

Catch Up Meeting

Bring your brochures, new materials, etc. and tell us what you've been doing.

May 29, 2002

9:00 a.m. - Noon

NEA Building

Conference Room B

Panel Presentation Come participate in a discussion on the implementation of the ESEA "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001." We'll discuss its impact and implications for family involvement.

FAPE Update

IDEA Partnerships Award State Replication Grants

The Project Coordinating Committee of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Partnerships has awarded grants to eight states to replicate on a state level the IDEA National Summit held in June 2001 in Washington, D.C.

Colorado, Louisiana and West Virginia were awarded \$25,000 each to implement their state summit proposals. Connecticut, Indiana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and South Carolina will receive \$20,000 each. A key requirement for the awards was that proposals reflect a collaboration of community stakeholders in planning and executing their summits. The grants are being awarded through the state education agencies.

The IDEA Partnerships, a network of 106 organizations, collaborates to inform families, professionals and the public about IDEA, and to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The U. S. Department of Education funded four projects to build the Partnership, drawing on organizations from four key interest groups: families and advocates (FAPE); teachers and related service providers (ASPIIRE); administrators (ILLIAD); and policymakers (PMP). The Project Coordinating Committee leads the Partnership.

Improving Teacher Quality

In a speech in Minnesota President Bush recently restated his goal of having a quality teacher in every classroom. The administration plans to invest more than \$4 billion in 2002 to enhance teacher quality and recruitment in the U. S. This initiative extends to special education teachers and regular education teachers who provide services to students with disabilities in their classrooms. The program includes efforts to address the shortage of teachers able to teach students with disabilities. President Bush has provided funding for state-administered grants for professional development and training for teachers that will include reading intervention and modification of standard curricula to help students with disabilities. Mentorship programs, partnerships with universities, and recruitment are other important parts of the initiative. To find out more about the President's initiative, go to www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/teacherquality.

***NCPIE is a core partner in the FAPE Project
For more information on FAPE visit them on-line at
www.fape.org***

New Teacher-Parent Engagement Toolkit Now Available

In response to the critically important issue of family involvement in education, the National Association of Partners in Education, in collaboration with the MetLife Foundation, has developed the Teacher-Parent Engagement Partnerships initiative to provide resources needed to develop successful and innovative teacher partnerships in and out of the classroom.

The product of this collaboration is The Teacher-Parent Engagement Through Partnerships Toolkit, which addresses five elements critical to the development of comprehensive teacher-parent partnerships. The five elements are:

- Effective Communication
- Engaging Families of Diverse Backgrounds in Improving Student Success
- Facilitating Time and Access for Families and Educators to Work Together
- Effective Schools and Community Leadership
- Professional Development

Each of these areas is addressed individually in the Toolkit and they work in concert to create effective teacher-parent partnerships. The Toolkit consists of

an Issue Card for each critical element. Each issue card contains an overview of each topic that better defines the issue, then there is a Best Practice Section where sites, and programs that have successfully addressed this issue is detailed. Finally each issue card lists publications, organizations and web-sites, and training available based on each critical element (WORK THIS PART)

Through its 7,500 grassroots member programs, Partners in Education has a direct link to local school districts and community leaders throughout the country. These partnerships connect children and teachers with corporate, education, volunteer, government, and civic leaders. Partners in Education and its diverse membership represent millions of volunteers involved in more than 400,000 partnerships nationwide. The MetLife Foundation is a longtime Partners in Education supporter with grants in excess of \$600,00 for trainings, materials, and other initiatives that promote partnership on key issues such as school-to-work transition and after-school programming.

For additional information on these toolkits please contact the National Association of Partners in Education at 703-836-4880 or visit them on-line at www.partnersineducation.org. You may also visit the MetLife Foundation at www.metlife.com

***NCPIE Update* New Guest Column Feature**

In each issue of *The Update* we'll feature your stories about successful parent involvement programs. If you are interested in contributing an article about what's going on in your state or organization we would love to share it with the NCPIE community.

E-mail your articles to *NCPIE Update* Editor, Jocelyn Walters-Brannon, at jocelyn@ncea.com. All articles should be 500 words or less and if possible include a copy of your organization's logo.