



Building Family Support for Student Achievement:

CABE Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program

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Educational Reform: Unmet Need

Educational reform literature identifies six areas in which classrooms, schools, and districts need to change if all children are to be provided with optimal learning opportunities, especially those children who are traditionally underserved and/or under performing. These key elements of educational reform include: Curriculum (what is taught); Pedagogy (how to teach; and how children learn); Assessment (how learning is measured); Roles and Responsibilities (how school personnel work together); Aligning School Resources to support school improvement plans; and School-Home-Community Collaboration (how parents, school personnel, and members of the community collaborate to support student learning at home, school, and/or in the community). Substantial progress has been made in understanding what is needed to develop and sustain quality in five of the core reform elements, the exception is Family-School-Community Collaboration. While parent involvement activities have been required in feder-

ally-funded and most state-funded educational programs since the 1960's, it is still the least understood or implemented of the key elements of educational reform: What is the nature of this collaboration between the home and school? More often than not this collaboration is referred to as a "relationship" between families and school, and community, suggesting something far more intensive, substantive and significant than a simple coordination of activities. What is this relationship? How does it develop? What is needed to sustain it? How do we assess the quality of this relationship over time? How do we assess its impact upon maximizing learning opportunities for and academic achievement of every child at home, school, and community? Nonetheless, great strides over the last 5-6 years have been made to begin to operationally define and examine efforts to develop effective Family-School-Community collaborations/relationships. One such effort is Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Development Program, developed and implemented by CABE and its partners.

CABE, as the lead agency received funding to create and implement a Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC-1) to increase parent involvement in supporting their child's learning throughout California. The CA State PIRC-1 is a collaborative partnership among the California Association for Bilingual Education-CABE, San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools (Southern California), and Alameda County Office of Education (Northern California).

Project INSPIRE Goals

- 1) To increase parents' knowledge of high quality schooling options for their children (especially those traditionally underserved and/or attending Program Improvement schools) and the leadership skills to take action to ensure their children have high quality educational opportunities;
- 2) To build the capacity of schools and districts serving disadvantaged students for maintaining high quality parent education and leadership programs; and
- 3) To increase the knowledge and ability of parent leaders to provide parent leadership development to other parents and to effectively participate in local school, district, county and statewide educational reform efforts.

Innovative Project Design

The CABE Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program was designed to provide three levels of parental engagement opportunities. All three levels share the same objective and goal: To increase parental engagement in their child's learning at home, school, and/or community; and thereby increasing their child's rate and level of academic achievement.

A critical component of PIRC-1, Project INSPIRE, is a randomized research study to assess the relative effectiveness of three alternative levels of parent education and leadership development to increase the number and frequency of parents actively supporting their child's learning at home, school, and/or in their community, AND thereby raising the rate and level of academic achievement realized by their child.

The California State PIRC-1 also successfully developed a Trainer of Trainers (T-O-T) leadership development program for community liaisons from school districts or from community-based organiza-

CABE Parent Leadership Development Program

All three Parent Leadership Training Levels are designed to provide parents with a strong awareness of California's school accountability system, academic content and performance standards, standards-based report cards, assessment, public school choice options, and supplemental service providers (Sec. 5563(b)(11)) in addition to addressing topics identified by parents themselves (e.g., home learning activities, early childhood education, beyond high school opportunities, goal setting and financial planning for college). Each of the levels differs markedly in its approach, strategies, methods, activities, and outcomes for parents and their children.

Level 1- Awareness Level (comprised of 12 modules and available to all schools and districts) –This level provides strong coverage of basic content and skill development delivered through traditional presenter-centered workshop format. Parents can attend as many of the modules that are available and of interest to them. Parents need not attend all 12 Level 1 modules. The intermediary outcome is increased parent knowledge with increased student achievement as a final goal and outcome.

Level 2 – Mastery Level (comprised of 12 modules and at the present time available only to schools and districts participating in the research study) - In contrast to Level 1, Level 2 leadership services are participant-centered and significantly more intensive in terms of content (deeper coverage), time, and effort. Parents are required to complete all 12 training modules, for a total of 36 hours of face-to-face project based learning activities with other parents and facilitated by Parent Educators who are fully credentialed multi-lingual educators. Level 2 training is provided to randomly selected schools (i.e., Treatment School) from the pool of program improvement schools within each partnering school district. Each Treatment School is provided with on-going follow-up coaching and mentoring to accomplish two things: first, to help parents, teachers and administrators from the same school apply what they are learning to develop and implement individual action plans; and, second, to help parents, teachers, and administrators in the same school develop the skills needed to work together as an effective Family-School-Community collaboration team [a.k.a., Joyce Epstein's Action Team for Partnerships Model (ATP)]. The school collaboration team will use what they are learning to design, implement, evaluate, and revise not only their school's parent involvement policies and parent involvement compact, but the parental component of their School's Single Plan for Student Achievement. All of these efforts are clearly linked to specific student academic performance standards.

Level 3 – Expert Level (comprised of 16 modules and available to the randomly selected Treatment schools and districts participating in the research study).. *Level 3 is a Trainer of Trainers parent leadership development effort that, builds upon the knowledge and skills developed in Level 2 training in two ways: more in-depth coverage of the topics and issues covered; and, development of specific diversity-responsive leadership skills, e.g., outreach, group process and facilitation skills to work with diverse communities, as well as to engage diverse communities in collaborative strategic planning processes to provide each child with quality teaching and learning at home, school, and in the community. Level 3-Expert Level provides parents with optimal on-going coaching and feedback as well as opportunities to "practice" teaching of the program modules to other parents and, importantly, to pursue action goals and objectives in areas that consist of: inclusive parent recruitment, action team leadership development, strategic planning, action implementation, and assessment of educational reform efforts at home, classroom, school, district, and/or state levels.*

tions to prepare parents to deliver Level 1 training to other parents using the CAFE Project INSPIRE Curriculum, thereby extending and accelerating the reach of Project INSPIRE. The goal is to build the capacity of California schools and communities to meaningfully engage all parents in their children's learning, school performance and achievement.

While Project INSPIRE describes these three training offerings as "Levels" this is not meant to imply that parent participants move progressively from one level to the next. Rather, Project INSPIRE's design is that Level 1 training is primarily informational and provides key awareness training for large numbers of parents. Participation in Level 2 training within treatment schools (for study purposes) does not require, nor does it imply, prior participation in Level 1 training. Rather Level 2 training stands separately from Level 1 and is a more intensive approach to training that includes the key informational content of Level 1 but incorporates deeper leadership, group process and school-home-community collaboration knowledge, disposition and skill development (it is a hypothesis of Project INSPIRE that this is a key level of training to offer to a critical mass of parents in order to have significant impact on student achievement in a school community and, thus, is a focus of treatment schools in the study described below). Level 3 is designed to follow from Level 2 training for a subset of parents who have completed Level 2 and are identified as having key communication and organizing skills as well as further leadership potential and a desire themselves to pursue deeper involvement as parent leaders. Thus, we find three conditions within Project INSPIRE worthy of examination for relative effectiveness: (1) parent participation in Level 1 training; (2) parent participation in Level 2 training; and (3) parent participation in first Level 2 and then Level 3 training. The study described below seeks to describe the overall effectiveness of Project INSPIRE's training and leadership development and to learn more about the relative value and effectiveness of these three conditions.

Randomized Quasi-experimental Research Study

A critical component of Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Development Program is a randomized, quasi-experimental research study designed to examine the impact of parental engagement on student achievement. This will be realized by assessing the overall effectiveness of Project INSPIRE and the relative effectiveness of three conditions of Project INSPIRE's parent leadership development (described above) in increasing the type, frequency, and intensity of parent involvement, and, in turn, positively affecting parent involvement and student academic achievement. A Treatment School and a Matched Control School were randomly selected from the pool of Program Improvement schools in participating school districts. In all, 18 Treatment and 18 Matched Control Schools were selected for a total of 36 schools participating in the study. The Project's Parent Specialists provide the intensive Parent Leadership Development Program (Level 2 or Levels 2 and 3) in each Treatment School. Matched Control Schools do not receive this intensive parent leadership development.

The purpose of the CAFE Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program is to have a positive impact on each of the mediating forces listed below and thereby to create optimal teaching and learning opportunities for parents, teachers, principals and community members to become involved in maximizing high quality learning opportunities for every child. The design of the research study allows for comparisons of Program Improvement Schools (Treatment Schools and Matched Controls) using descriptive statistics to identify student and parent characteristics and Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to examine differences in the rate and level of academic achievement, and attendance for students and schools, within and between the three treatment conditions of Project INSPIRE (versus Control or Non-Treatment conditions).

Project INSPIRE's research study posits four factors that are critical for improving or blocking parent involvement and, thus, supporting or hindering the rate and level of student learning. These are:

- **Types of Parent Involvement** (what types of engagement and the extent to which parents are: introduced to each type of engagement at home, school, and within the community; and, provided with opportunities to "practice" each type of engagement);
- **Frequency of Involvement** (i.e., how often parents are provided opportunities to learn, practice, and reflect on each type, as well as, once learned, the opportunities they are provided to implement each type of involvement);
- **Intensity of Involvement** (amount of time parents spend learning, practicing, and reflecting on each Type of involvement, and, once learned, the duration and strength of opportunities they have to implement each type); and
- **Teaching and Learning Strategies** (drawing from Learning Sciences, Critical Pedagogy, Multicultural Education, Language Development, Second Language Acquisition, and Community Learning Theory to help each parent learn, practice, and reflect on how they can support their child's learning at home, school, and in the community as well as how to work with other parents, teachers, school administrators and community members to engage in on-going team activities that include outreach, preparing meeting, agendas, facilitating groups, using learned processes to create active participant-centered and inclusive meetings, and participating in effective strategic planning and implementation activities for effective family-school-community collaboration.)

Research-Based Parent Leadership Program Design

The Parent Leadership Program is grounded in Community Learning Theory¹ (CLT) originally theorized by Roberto Vargas and Francisco Hernandez. CLT not only provides a framework for operationally defining the nature of diversity-responsive "relation-

Project INSPIRE's randomized study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the demonstrable positive effects, if any, of Project INSPIRE's training and parent leadership development offerings? What are the impacts on student achievement?
2. What is the relative effectiveness of Project INSPIRE's three different conditions of parent education and leadership development for increasing parent involvement in support of their child's learning at home, school, and in the community? (Particularly for traditionally underserved families of color, English Learners, and low-income.)
3. What is the relationship between the type, frequency, and intensity of a parent's involvement efforts to support their child's learning and their child's rate and level of growth in academic achievement (especially among parents of color, low-income, and/or English Learners)?
4. What is the relationship between parent involvement and school-wide educational reform efforts for improving student academic growth (especially among parents of color, English Learners, and low-income)?
5. What is the nature of the relationship between and among parents, teachers, and principals in schools with an effective family-school-community collaboration team?
6. What is the relative effectiveness of the CAFE Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program in supporting the development of an inclusive effective family-school-community collaboration team leading to significant school-wide improvement in student academic growth, particularly in facilitating the involvement of parents of color, low-income, and English Learners?

ships" of individuals within, among, and between the home, school and community, but also addresses how these relationships develop and are sustained over time. Simply, the CLT framework is useful for identifying, implementing, and assessing diversity-responsive strategies that build on the life experiences both of people as well as of formal and informal organizations that impact the teaching and learning experiences of children (e.g., parents, teachers, school administrators, other educational personnel, community-based organizations supporting student learning and relevant members of the school community). CLT recognizes parents as the primary teachers of their children and maintains the perspective that the process of empowerment begins with the recognition that each of us possess the knowledge needed to address challenges that arise. Through the strategic use of diversity-responsive approaches to identifying and sharing this wealth of individual and collective knowledge we not

only are able to realize our individual goals of increased academic achievement of our own child, but that of all children in our school and community.

Diversity-responsive processes, strategies, and activities are essential for developing the critical relationships that provide the foundation for individual and community empowerment, action, and change. Acknowledging and building on existing cultural "funds of knowledge" not only increases the likelihood of success in training, but also is a critical link to improving student achievement.² This approach goes far beyond the provision of culturally-responsive training, although cultural responsiveness and providing services through culturally-competent personnel are key components.³ The design template for all modules used throughout the Parent Leadership Program are carefully structured to create inclusive and diversity-responsive relationships and collaborations within, among, and between

parents, teachers, school administrators, community-based organizations and personnel (e.g., sharing what each knows about the topic at hand, and what each would like to learn about the topic; at the end of the session, sharing a significant learning and plans for incorporating it into one's individual Action Plan; opportunities for individual reflection on the module's topic; facilitation of the Parent Specialist who constantly takes opportunities to highlight shared knowledge and experiences and support the creation of a "sense of community.").

The goal is to build the capacity of California schools and communities to meaningfully engage all parents in their children's learning, school performance and achievement.

Research in adult learning and professional development clearly indicate that successful adult learning opportunities

must minimally provide opportunities for adults: 1) to learn and understand the underlying research and theory; 2) to observe how these understandings are implemented; 3) to practice implementing these understandings frequently and across several different contexts; 4) to receive on-going coaching and mentoring; and 5) to participate in on-going study/working groups with colleagues to share and discuss one's learning, new insights, successes, and challenges. The extensive use of on-going coaching and technical assistance as a capacity-building strategy has a strong research base.⁴ The design template for each training module includes each of these learning opportunities.

Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Development incorporates Joyce Epstein's six types of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with community) as user-friendly categories to organize the many different ways in which parents can support their child's learning at home, school, and within the community. These categories are initially introduced and discussed within the first and/or second Parent Leadership Development Program module regarding parent responsibilities in their child's teaching and learning at home, school, and/or in the community. As training progresses Parent Specialists begin to use specific group processes and facilitation activities to prompt participating parents to expand their List of Parent Involvement Activities.

Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Development Program staff work in collaboration with the California Department of Education and will be the pilot sites for their new statewide parent involvement initiative, i.e., using the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) model. The ATP will be used in Program Improvement Schools, particularly those where students persistently fail to meet state grade level academic content standards. The ATP delineates the steps in which parents must be involved, collaborating with other parents, teachers, and school administrators to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate their School's Single Plan for Student Achievement. Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Development Program provides the diversity-responsive processes (i.e., strategies and activities) to be used to ensure meaningful collaborative relationships within and among parents, teachers, school administrators, and community agencies and individuals in completing each step of the ATP process.⁵

There is no question that the preponderance of the research indicates that programs that reach out to families and engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student academic achievement.⁶ However, even higher levels of student academic achievement are linked to sustained parent involvement in advocacy, decision-making, and oversight roles, as well as in the primary role of home teacher.⁷ For English Learners and socio-economically disadvantaged students, understanding and addressing cultural, linguistic, social, economic, and political barriers in parent training and outreach programs is the key to unlocking high levels of achievement for students.⁸ All of

this research supports the diversity-responsive approach used in CABE's Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program, as well as the effort to build future capacity within schools by providing on-going leadership development through a self-renewing cadre of parent leaders at the school and district levels. Finally, research has validated the use of technology as a tool to support collaboration as well as learning.⁹ Similarly, these strategies and activities have been demonstrated to effectively support educational reform.¹⁰

Program Impact: Parent Engagement

Several indicators suggest significant changes in parental involvement among parents participating in the Parent Leadership Development Program than among non-participating parents. Individual Interview and Focus Group data from parents, teachers, and school principals and teachers in every Treatment School overwhelmingly report significant differences in the type, frequency, and intensity of interactions they have with participating parents.

Parents were asked to reflect on their participation in the Parent Leadership Development Program, to share a significant learning, and the impact if any of this learning. Parent focus group and individual interview data consistently pointed out that they had minimally learned the following: the significant role that parents have in American schools and in their child's learning; how the state's accountability system is comprised of content standards, performance standards, and the assessment process to identify not only how each child is learning, but how well each school is successfully helping the majority of students to meet or exceed grade level student performance standards; the range of ancillary services that might be available to support student learning; and, when and how parents can exercise their rights under School Choice. During the last three years of the project, on average, 95% of the parents (over 12,500 served in 2008-2009) rated the program for content, skills/knowledge gained, and presentation as above average to outstanding.

The most significant change identified by every parent focus group and almost every individual parent interview was that each parent realized for the first time that they were not alone, that other parents shared similar dreams for and encountered similar challenges to their children's success. Participating parents reported that a direct result of the teaching and learning activities in the Parent Leadership Development Program was that they not only learned important information about schools and their child's academic growth, but they had opportunities to share what they know, their life experiences, and their thoughts with other parents. This process allowed them to get to know one another beyond superficial recognition. As the class progressed and they worked with their classmates in small and large groups on the various learning activities, a sense of trust developed as they learned whom they can turn to for support. Moreover, the increased trust building in

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Project INSPIRE Parent Specialists, Carlos Maya and Reina Parada with Project INSPIRE parent graduates and their children, who also received certificates and medals because they reached Proficient and/or Advanced levels on the California Standards Test in English Language Arts and/or Mathematics. These parents, Veronica Villa, Melissa Saiz & Leslie Olmos attended Hillside Elementary in the Los Angeles USD as children, and now their children also attend the same school.

each group of participating parents in turn began to transform into an emerging sense of community and collaboration with one another to support student learning.

Participating parents who joined school and district level committees eloquently spoke of what they are learning from parents from other schools in their district, and the important and urgent needs of students and their parents across their school district community. These initial findings suggest the effectiveness of the Parent Leadership Development Program in: helping parents learn what they need to know about the educational services their child needs as compared to what they receive, how their child is progressing academically, and alternative action the parent can take to secure ancillary services or alternative schooling options for their child. Secondly, these tentative findings suggest that the Parent Leadership Development Program is effectively fostering the development of a sense of community by facilitating and sup-

porting the development of relationships within each group of participating parents, that is slowly including teachers and school administrators.

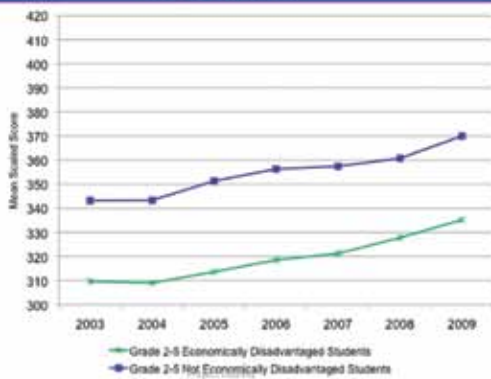
Teachers report a change in the content and quality of questions and discussions initiated by parents, especially during Parent/Teacher Conferences: rather than only asking if their child is behaving and respectful, parents are now asking relevant and detailed questions regarding the grade level content standards that their child is to meet, assessment tools used to monitor their child's progress, their child's current level of academic development,

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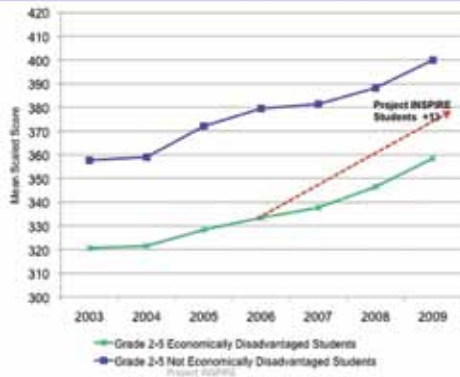
what and how classroom learning activities are directed towards improving their child's academic progress, the availability of ancillary services to support their child's learning (e.g., after-school tutoring) and what specific activities the parent can do at home, school, and/or in the community to support their child's learning.

Principals similarly report a significant increase in parent-initiated appointments by participating parents specifically to review their child's cumulative record, to learn its purpose, the information recorded, by whom, when and how it is used. This has almost never occurred before, with any parents. Treatment School principals report a sudden increase in the number of participating parents joining school site committees and the PTA and/or at district level committees, e.g., District English Language Acquisition Committee. This is evidence of increased parental engagement and involvement in their children's schooling.

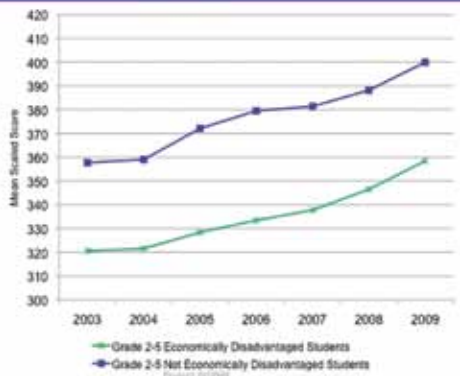
The Achievement Gap in CST English-Language Arts Scores



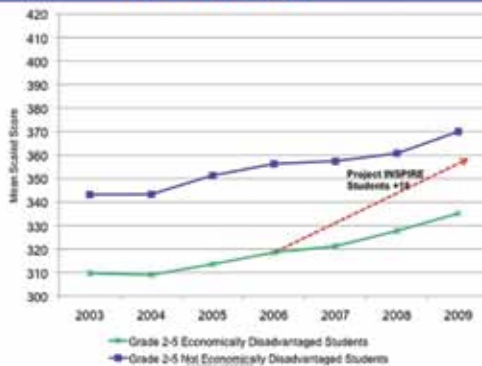
Project INSPIRE English Language Arts Results



The Achievement Gap in CST Mathematics Scores



Project INSPIRE Math Results



Program Impact: Student Achievement

A primary study goal is to examine the relationship of Project-catalyzed parent involvement to student academic achievement. Tentative findings indicate that students from Program Improvement schools whose parents did not participate in CABE's Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program (i.e., Matched Control Schools) on average improved their English Language Arts scores by 4.9 points and Math scores by 3.2 points. In contrast, preliminary findings indicate that students in Program Improvement Schools whose parents are participating in the CABE Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Program not only matched the 4.9 point increase in English Language Arts and 3.2 point score increase in Math realized by their Matched Controls, but they dramatically exceeded their rate and level of English Language Arts by an additional 12.8 score points and Math achievement score by an additional 18.5 points as compared to their peers in Control Schools whose parents did not participate in Project INSPIRE's Parent Leadership Program. While the increased achievement among the children of participating parents is statistically significant and consistent across all grade levels, they are preliminary. We await to see if these initial differences between students of parents participating in the Parent Leadership Development Program as compared to the achievement of students whose parents did not participate are sustained in Year 4 and Year 5. Cautious considerations of these tentative results indicate that students realize significant gains in both the rate and level of English Language Arts and Math achievement when their parents participate in CABE's Project INSPIRE Parent Leadership Development Program.

(Endnotes)

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