



# **Special School District Program Evaluation for Family Services**

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### Executive Summary

#### *Introduction*

The in-depth program evaluation of Special School District's parent program, Family Services & Diversity, reflects the commitment of the Board of Education to continuous improvement and accountability for special education programming. The Family Services & Diversity Program Evaluation took place from January through June 2005 with a stakeholder committee comprised of parents, teachers, administrators, related service staff, facilitators, community agency members and partner district staff.

The questions submitted by the committee and approved by the Board were intended to review the programming activities of Family Services & Diversity across the county and to reflect the standards set by the Missouri School Improvement Program for parent involvement:

7.5 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about the intellectual and developmental needs of their children at all ages and to participate constructively in their child's education.

8.7 Patrons, parents and students have opportunities to discuss concerns with the district, file complaints, and serve on committees, including those required by state or federal regulations, to study specific issues and problems.

The focus for the In-depth Program Evaluation for Family Services and Diversity is to answer the following questions approved by the SSD Board of Education:

1. What are the resources, training and support opportunities offered to parents by the Family Services & Diversity program to assist with their understanding of the needs of their child and their involvement in their child's education?
2. How does the program communicate and disseminate information about the resources, training and support services available to parents?
3. What opportunities exist for parents to serve on committees, discuss concerns with the district and study specific issues and problems?
4. Are the services of the parent program accessed equitably throughout the district?

## *Literature Review*

As an outcome of parents becoming more involved and educated, the literature indicates that they become more effective advocates for their child and for their schools, participating in the decision-making process as a team with educators. The literature on parent involvement that pertains to special education looks at a parent's understanding their child's disability and its unique challenges, understanding the special education system that serves their child, and understanding the laws that govern special education and their rights under those laws. An important component of this process is parent education, as parents learn how to help their child improve in their schoolwork, monitor homework, ask appropriate questions about their child's progress, model and promote desired behavior, and assist their child at home with social skills and friendships.

Research in the following areas was explored in regard to best practice for this program evaluation:

- Laws, legal mandates, and opportunities provided for parent involvement in special education
- Effect of parent involvement on student outcomes
- Types of parent engagement activities
- Parent training and technical assistance programs
- Parent advisory councils
- Culturally responsive practices

## *Methodology*

A matrix of quality indicators was developed from the literature review and used to evaluate data and make recommendations.

Questions 1 & 2 are answered with a comprehensive look at every aspect of the Family Services & Diversity: what the program offers and how the information is communicated. Parent outcomes are reported from the Parent Workshop Survey and the 2004-2005 Parent Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey. For the purposes of this program evaluation, the committee has described the services and resources offered by the parent program, Family Services & Diversity. Additional services for families provided by SSD schools, technical education schools, early childhood, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), career training and other areas are addressed in less detail.

To answer Question 3, the committee took an in-depth look at Parent Advisory Council (PAC): its history, how it functions, the barriers and what makes a PAC successful. A survey went out to all SSD directors with PAC responsibility and current I-PAC representatives. A second survey was developed and sent out to randomly selected parents to gather data about their awareness of and participation in PACs in their districts. A public forum was held during the I-PAC meeting to give a larger group an opportunity



to address the issues of the program evaluation and a case study was done of two partner districts to look at what makes a PAC successful.

To determine if the services of the parent program are accessed equitably throughout the district, Question 4, the committee used extensive data compiled for the past five years on the population the program serves such as parents, staff, agency members, university students, private schools, out-state, out-of-state, etc. It also looked at the number of requests by the partner district and SSD schools and what specific topics are requested. This information was compared from year to year and analyzed to determine what specific areas need additional attention.

### *Results*

#### **Cost Analysis**

The total annual cost of the parent program, \$188,644, was divided by the student count of 28,501 (27,936 students who receive special education services in five SSD schools and 23 partner districts, plus 565 students who receive services in SSD tech schools) to arrive at an estimated per pupil cost of \$6.62 for the 2004-2005 academic year.

#### **Growth of the Program**

When the parent program began in 1992, it served 19,906 students during the school year with two 10-month 3/4-time staff members (60 hours a week total). It currently serves 28,501 students with two 10-month 3/4-time staff members and one 10-month 1/2-time staff member (80 hours a week total). While the number of students who receive services has grown by 43%, the number of staff hours has increased by 33%. Data from just the 2000-'01 through 2004-'05 school years indicates the year-to-year average increase in the number of requests is 19% and the total increase in requests is 94%.

#### **Strengths**

The Parent Program has a comprehensive calendar of more than 80 workshops for parents with more than 1,000 in attendance this school year. Parents report that attending workshops helps increase their knowledge base, understand the issues they are facing and look to the future for their child. Seventy-five percent of parents who attend workshops report that they are better able to participate in their child's education as a result of attending the workshop. The majority of parents contacted through survey report that they receive the Parent Connection newsletter.

The Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) provides a wealth of books, videos, information packets and other resources. The average yearly increase in the number of requests from the FCRC from 2000-2005 is 19%. The total increase from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005 is 94% (from 1,228 requests to 2,387 requests). The number of staff served and the number of agency collaborations has increased markedly. The FCRC has been able to respond to the increase in request for materials in specific areas (autism, Asperger syndrome, bipolar disorder, etc.) by having an adequate budget with which to purchase new books and videos.

The results of the 2005 Parent Satisfaction Survey indicates that parents have a high level of agreement with the following statements: “I understand my child’s diagnosis” (78%); “I have good home-school communication” (76%); “I feel my input about my child is valued by other team members” (75%); “I am comfortable with my role on my child’s planning team” (73%); “I believe my child is being educated in the least restrictive environment” (73%); and “My calls to SSD staff are returned in a timely manner” (70%).

Parents have a variety of opportunities to have input in district issues through Parent Advisory Council, board of educations meetings, Public Review Committee, Technical Education Guidance Advisory, Federal Programs Advisory, ABA and SEB Advisories, district technology plan, program evaluation committees and more. There has been continuous parent advisory activity since the late 1980s.

### Challenges

The committee identified the following as challenges of the program:

**To reduce the inconsistency of the district’s communication to parents:** Parents and staff report the need to repeat the same parent program awareness activities from year-to-year and to address the barriers of follow-up with other staff members (administrators, teachers, support staff) and departments the parent program is dependent on to communicate its services and materials. The parent survey indicates low awareness of the program’s Family & Community Resource Center. Staff, parents and community members on the advisory committee report that the name “Family Services & Diversity” is confusing to parents and does not well reflect the program’s activities and resources. The advisory committee and public forum report the need to create a presence of parent program materials on the website for dissemination of resources, that the method of sending communication home in the student’s backpack is often unreliable, and that email is emerging as a preferred means of communication for those with access.

**To create more effective collaboration between parents, SSD and partner district staff for Parent Advisory Council:** Director and parent surveys reveal PAC participation varies widely from district to district. Surveys and case studies show that support is needed to assist in membership recruitment, communicate meeting information and to provide a forum for parents to address district issues. Parents report that is difficult for them to communicate with two districts. The literature review indicates the law on confidentiality (FERPA) makes it all the more difficult for parents to network and get support, and that it is beneficial to redefine typical definitions and have a common language: “parent,” “parent involvement” and “meeting” to be understood to reflect the variety of ways to look at parents and how they may be involved; and use of People First Language by administrators, teacher level and support staff to respect the dignity of students.

**To broaden program outreach to underserved, hard-to-reach families:** The literature review indicates that cultural, language and socio-economic barriers impede parent



involvement. Data collected and analyzed further show areas of student population where these barriers exist and the parent program is not being utilized.

### **Limitation**

The committee also identified one limitation of the parent program that needs to be addressed for future evaluations of programming.

- The method of data collection by Family Services & Diversity does not reflect all of the parents and other participants reached by the program.

### ***Recommendations***

The recommendations are based on the challenges and limitations determined by the literature review and data collected. Action plans will be developed to implement the improvement activities for the program.

- Design a more consistent and effective system and schedule for communication and dissemination of parent program information and resources (outreach to partner district staff, access to web site, email for parents and teachers, schedule for materials dissemination, change name of program).
- Increase parent involvement in Parent Advisory Council through collaborative efforts of parents, SSD staff, Governing Council and partner district staff.
- Develop specific strategies to communicate and provide support to parents in underserved areas (satellite sites, outreach with partner district counselors and outside agencies, parent involvement through problem-solving model).
- Improve data collection method to more accurately assess the effectiveness of the parent program's resources, training and support services.

## Chapter I — Introduction

### *Background and Purpose*

The in-depth program evaluation of Special School District's parent program, Family Services & Diversity, reflects the commitment of the Board of Education to continuous improvement and accountability for special education programming.

The Family Services & Diversity Program Evaluation took place from January through June 2005 with a stakeholder committee comprised of parents, teachers, administrators, related service staff, facilitators, community agency members and partner district staff (Appendix 1-1).

The questions submitted by the committee and approved by the Board were intended to review the programming activities of Family Services & Diversity across the county and to reflect the standards set by the Missouri School Improvement Program for parent involvement:

7.5 The district provides opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about the intellectual and developmental needs of their children at all ages and to participate constructively in their child's education.

8.7 Patrons, parents and students have opportunities to discuss concerns with the district, file complaints, and serve on committees, including those required by state or federal regulations, to study specific issues and problems.

"Parent counseling and training" is listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as a related service: counseling to provide information and support, and training to focus on acquiring skills needed to support their child's education.

### *Focus for the Program Evaluation*

The focus for the In-depth Program Evaluation for Family Services and Diversity is to answer the following questions approved by the SSD Board of Education:

1. What are the resources, training and support opportunities offered to parents by the Family Services & Diversity program to assist with their understanding of the needs of their child and their involvement in their child's education?
2. How does the program communicate and disseminate information about the resources, training and support services available to parents?



3. What opportunities exist for parents to serve on committees, discuss concerns with the district and study specific issues and problems?
4. Are the services of the parent program accessed equitably throughout the district?

### *Design of the Evaluation Report*

The report describes in detail the parent program, Family Services & Diversity, and reviews the family involvement literature that pertains to the manner in which it serves families whose children receive services from SSD.

The methods used to evaluate the parent program are described and the results are based upon the data collected and the quality indicators derived from the literature review.

Recommendations of the program evaluation committee are presented and action plans will be developed to implement the improvement activities for the program.

## **Chapter II — Program Description**

### **What is the Family Services & Diversity Program?**

SSD's parent program, Family Services & Diversity, which began in 1991, is in its 14th year and serves all parents/guardians of students who receive SSD services, SSD and partner district staff members and the community. It currently has two 10-month 3/4-time staff members and one 10-month 1/2-time staff member who administrator the program under the supervision of the SSD Learning Center at the Central Administration Office.

The goal of the parent education component of Family Services & Diversity is to provide support and training to parents to help their children develop skills to increase independence, and to use more effective parenting and positive behavior strategies to support their child's education.

The goal of the Family & Community Resource Center component is to serve as a clearinghouse of information and a resource to families who have questions about their children with disabilities, and to research and design materials to inform them of the resources and services available within SSD and the community.

By answering the first and second Board-approved questions, the parent program will be described in detail.

**Question #1 — What are the resources, training and support opportunities offered to parents by the Family Services & Diversity program to assist with their understanding of the needs of their child and their involvement in their child's education?**

**The SSD parent program, Family Services & Diversity, consists of:**

- 1. Parent Education**
- 2. Family & Community Resource Center**
- 3. Information & Referral for parents, staff and the community**
- 4. Staff Development**

### *1. Parent Education Component*

Parent education begins at intake. Parents are first given sections of the parent handbook (specifically, the sections on the Evaluation Process and the IEP Guidebook for Parents) as they go through the intake and diagnostic process. Brochures specific to their child's disability are given to them at the diagnostic conference and refer them to the parent program for services and support. They are sent an invitation to an orientation to SSD and special education, where they are given training to assist them in understanding the special education process and how to support their child's education. They are given additional sections of the handbook, a tour of the Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) with access to books and videos, brochures with referral to outside agencies that will assist them, a contact sheet for their district that includes Parent Advisory Council (PAC) member representatives and a copy of the Parent Connection Newsletter that lists the parent workshops that take place throughout the school year.

Follow-up occurs with parents checking out materials from the FCRC, attending workshops specific to their needs and becoming involved with their district parent advisory councils (PACs). Parents use the Family Services & Diversity staff members as a resource and referral as they have questions about SSD, the special education process or community resources.

In addition, the parent program staff members serve as a liaison to SSD administration to provide training and input on systemic issues in regard to parents.

The Parent Education component of Family Services & Diversity consists of:

**Orientation for Parents to Special Education & the IEP Process** — the workshop is held each month, in the morning and in the evening, throughout the school year. It gives parents an overview of special education services and how they are provided through Special School District, discusses educational rights, community resources & supports and how to develop an effective Individualized Education Program. Parents are given the SSD Parent Handbook and a tour of the Family & Community Resource Center with an opportunity to check out materials on their child's disability or a disability-related area.

**Parent Workshops** — in addition to the orientation workshops, 1-to-3 parent workshops are facilitated or provided weekly throughout the school year on topics such as:

- Helping Children Develop Friendships at Home and School
- Common Sense Parenting
- Helping Your Child Learn Anger Management, Impulse Control and Empathy Skills
- Insights and Perspectives on Cerebral Palsy
- Choosing a College for Students with Special Needs
- Understanding Depression, Other Mood and Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adults
- Medication and Treatment of Children with ADHD



- Understanding the Neurology of LD/ADHD
- What to Do This Summer
- Sexuality Education for Children with Special Needs
- Dealing With My Greatest Fears — Planning for the Future
- Sharing Our Strengths Mentor Training
- Helping Your Child with Homework
- Effective Practices for Challenging Behavior for Parents of Young Children
- Signs with Families In Mind
- Transition Fair — Through the Doorway to Adult Life

Additional parent workshops are offered at SSD by local agencies such as MPACT (Missouri Parents Act):

- Transition to Empowered Lifestyles
- Parents as Effective Advocates
- Special Education Law, IEP Process and Disagreement Resolution Processes
- Functional Behavioral Assessment & Positive Behavior Intervention: What Parents Need to Know
- Evaluations and Measuring Progress
- Developing the Present Level of Performance and Writing Measurable Goals and Objectives

And from the St. Louis Learning Disabilities Association (LDA):

- Understanding Learning Disabilities
- Strategies for Helping Your Child with Learning Disabilities

Several SSD professional development activities also are available to parents such as:

- An Overview of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)
- Differentiated Instruction for Diverse Learners
- Introduction to Boardmaker
- Sign Language: Beginning & Intermediate



### *Parent Outcomes*

Parents complete a workshop evaluation after attending each of the more than 80 parent workshops offered. Workshop attendance this school year was 1,056. Parents report the following skills and knowledge learned as a result of the information provided in the workshops:

- 73% are better able to advocate for their child
- 70% are better able to support their child's education
- 51% are able to help their child become more independent
- 47% are informed about community resources that will help their child or family
- 44% better understand their child's disability
- 43% are able to use more effective parenting and positive behavior strategies

And the following comments:

- Great presentation & delivery. Super detailed information. Enjoyed the workshop.
- Excellent speaker – thank you!
- A little less on meds and more info on dealing with specific behaviors as parents or teachers.
- Presenters were excellent & well organized. Information was clear, concise and to the point.
- Please have again for other family members to attend.
- Very informative – covered many aspects of helping with homework.
- Very worthwhile presentation! Lots of good ideas that I have not heard.

In the 2004-2005 Parent Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey sent out to all parents through the Parent Connection newsletter, 117 questionnaires were returned, representing parents in 17 of the 23 local districts, parents with children in SSD buildings, and parents with children in the Special Non-Public Access Program (SNAP).

The results of the Satisfaction Survey indicated that parents have a high level of agreement with the following statements: “I understand my child’s diagnosis” (78%); “I have good home-school communication” (76%); “I feel my input about my child is valued by other team members” (75%); “I am comfortable with my role on my child’s planning team” (73%); “I believe my child is being educated in the least restrictive environment” (73%); and “My calls to SSD staff are returned in a timely manner” (70%).

Parents have a low level of agreement with the following statements: “My child is involved in community activities” (32%); “I am aware of transition activities for my child from grade to grade” (33%); “I understand the role of local support agencies” (38%); “I believe my family receives the information we need to prepare for our child’s transition to adult life” (42%); and “I understand the technology used by my child” (48%).

The most critical needs selected by parents on the needs assessment are as follows:



1. Friendship and social skills
2. Community resources and service providers
3. Building self-esteem
4. Autism/Asperger syndrome
5. Positive behavior support
6. Behavior strategies
7. (tied) Reading
  - Speech and language disabilities
  - Leisure/recreation skills and programs
8. Attention deficit disorder

(See Appendix 2-1 for 2004-2005 Parent Needs and Satisfaction Survey;

See Appendix 2-2 for results from 1997-'98 through 2003-'04)

In the Parent Satisfaction Survey 2004 sent out by the district, parents report a high level of agreement with the following: “I believe my child’s achievement has increased through my involvement as a parent” (60%); “I believe my child’s achievement has increased though my having better understanding of the special education process” (79%); “I believe my child’s achievement has increased through my support of my child’s learning at home” (88%); and “I am satisfied with the SSD staff and parent communication process” (74%). (See Appendix 2-3)

**Autism-Asperger-Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) Resource Fair for Parents and the Community** — for the past four years the parent program has offered this well-attended fair in the fall. The 4-hour fair brings together representatives from SSD (early childhood behavior facilitators, ABA Program, school-age autism facilitators, Family & Community Resource Center, occupational therapy) and more than a dozen community providers of autism services (such as Judevine Center for Autism, Department of Mental Health — St. Louis Regional Center Autism Project) and other agencies to allow parents and staff to network and gather resources and support.

This year’s fair, October 2004, 101 persons signed in (many other did not) representing parents and staff from SSD and 20 partner districts, 13 college students, 6 agency representatives and 3 private schools. The Family & Community Resource Center gave out 150 packets on autism and Asperger’s syndrome, 70 resource lists of books and videos, and checked out 36 books and videos.

**Early Childhood Parent Speaker Series** — beginning this year, with a 3-year grant from The Special Education Foundation, the parent program has offered parents of children birth to age 7 a series of monthly workshops titled, Facing the Challenge—Raising a Child with a Disability. Topics in the series have included: acceptance and inclusion of your child with friends, family and the community; adjusting to the challenge; getting through the early years parent panel; sibling issues; using community resources; instilling positive attitudes and a mother and son perspective.

### *2. Family & Community Resource Center Component*

**Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC)** — the FCRC, which serves as a clearinghouse of information and referral on all disabilities and disability-related areas, is the largest collection of such materials for parents in the state.

The center houses approximately:

- 4,500 books
- 250 videos
- 70 notebook binders filled with hundreds of "take-along" articles
- 34 resource packets
- Disability awareness materials (posters, curricula, etc.)
- Brochures
- Agency pamphlets
- Catalogs
- An iMac for parents to use for word processing, browsing the internet and making visual supports with Boardmaker software

Parents can make an appointment to come into the center for information or can call or email to request information be sent home through school mail. Materials also can be checked out after parent workshops.

**Resource lists from the Family & Community Resource Center** — the center's materials are organized into various lists that can be picked up in the center, sent out through school mail or emailed to those looking for assistance:

- Complete list of books
- Publishers/vendors
- Videos
- Posters and awareness materials

plus annotated bibliographies for:

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| ▪ Ability awareness                    | ▪ Inclusive education       |
| ▪ Advocacy/law                         | ▪ IEP                       |
| ▪ Attention deficit disorder           | ▪ Learning disabilities     |
| ▪ Autism                               | ▪ Multiculturalism          |
| ▪ Blind/visually impaired              | ▪ Paraeducators             |
| ▪ Bullying                             | ▪ Parenting                 |
| ▪ Challenging behavior                 | ▪ Physical disabilities     |
| ▪ Children's books                     | ▪ Post secondary            |
| ▪ Cognitive disabilities               | ▪ Recreation                |
| ▪ Deaf/hard-of-hearing                 | ▪ Related services          |
| ▪ Diagnostics                          | ▪ Self-esteem/social skills |
| ▪ Early childhood                      | ▪ Sexuality                 |
| ▪ Emotional disturbance/mental illness | ▪ Speech/language disorders |
|  | ▪ Transition                |



- Tourette syndrome
- Traumatic brain injury

**Ability Awareness Resources** — the Family & Community Resource Center houses materials (books, videos, articles, simulations, posters, curricula) to assist parents and staff in coordinating awareness programs in the schools and throughout the community. Staff members assist with the planning, securing speakers and supplying resources for the events.

**Parent Connection Newsletter** — 32,000 copies of the parent program newsletter go out through school mail at the start of each semester to all students who receive services from SSD. Parent Connection explains the parent program and its contacts for each region, lists workshops for the upcoming semester, lists new additions to the Family & Community Resource Center and offers information to parents of upcoming events and other resources.

**Family & Community Resource Center Calendar** — as a service to parents and the community, the center puts together a listing of meetings, workshops and conferences by SSD and other agencies in the community. The list is distributed through the resource center, the First Class email to all staff, the SSD website, Parent Advisory Councils and parent and agency email lists.

**Resource Packets** — the resource center has collection 30-plus packets with articles on the most requested topics:

- Ability Awareness
- Advocacy
- Asperger Syndrome
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Autism
- Behavior Strategies
- Blind/Visually Impaired
- Central Auditory Processing Disorder
- Cognitive Disabilities
- Deaf/Hard Of Hearing
- Depression
- Down Syndrome
- Dyslexia
- Encouraging Independent Living Skills
- Estate Planning & Guardianship
- Friendship & Social Skills Strategies
- Homework Strategies
- Including Students With Disabilities
- Learning Disabilities
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Parenting Strategies Parent-Professional Collaboration
- Positive Behavioral Support
- Post-Secondary Education
- Reading Strategies
- Rights/Laws/Advocacy
- Self-Esteem Sexuality
- Siblings
- Speech And Language
- Supported Employment
- Supported Living
- Technology
- Transition Planning
- Tutoring And Summer Recreation Resource



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**Brochures** — 14 brochures have been developed for the Family & Community Resource Center to assist parents and staff in accessing the resources that are available to them through SSD and the community. They provide information about training and support services, books, videos, informational packets, support groups, local agency and district contacts, the IEP process, the Parent Advisory Council and information for students being tested and parents whose children do not qualify for services:

- SSD Parent Program: Family Services & Diversity
- Parent Information: Attention Deficit Disorder
- Parent Information: Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Parent Information: Behavior Disorder/Emotional Disturbance
- Parent Information: Early Childhood
- Parent Information: Learning Disabilities
- Parent Information: Cognitive Disabilities
- Parent Information: Speech/Language Disorder
- Parent Information: Special Education & Disability
- Parent Information: What to Do If Your Child Is Found Not Eligible for Special Education Services
- Parent Information: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Facts
- Parent Advisory Council (PAC)
- Student Information: Information for Students Who are Being Evaluation for Learning Problems
- Teacher Information: Special Education and Disability Resources

**SSD Parent Handbook** — yearly updated handbook is available in sections and given to parents as needed as they progress through the special education process:

- Section I: Overview of Special School District, laws and parental rights in special education
- Section II: The Evaluation Process
- Section III: The IEP Guide for Parents\* (see below)
- Section IV: Individual disability sections with state eligibility criteria and resources for each
- Section V: Transition Process
- Section VI: Local, state and national resources on disability, plus support, advocacy organizations, sibling support and technology
- Section VII: Guide to People First Language, Glossary of Terms & Acronyms

**\*IEP Guide for Parents** — 50-page guide provides information about the IEP process, what to do to prepare before the meeting, how to participate effectively during the meeting and strategies to use to follow-up after the meeting. The guide is the most requested material in the resource center.

**Parent Advisory Councils (PAC)** — the parent program serves as a liaison and helps coordinate and assist the PACs, which consist of the Interdistrict Parent Advisory Committee (I-PAC), an elected body of parents who represent each of the 23 local districts



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and each SSD building; and the District Parent Advisory Council (D-PAC) and Building Parent Advisory Council (B-PAC), which work individually with districts and schools to assist parents in networking with other parents and helping them become as informed as possible about their child's special education services and the schools that serve them.

PAC members consult with Family Services & Diversity staff members for topics and speakers for their meetings and are provided resources: contact sheets for each district, Family & Community Resource Center brochures, packets with order forms, calendar of upcoming events, parent and transition handbooks, awareness materials, articles pertaining to the topic of the meeting, and more.

The program also assisted with grant writing and supervision when PAC grants were offered through DESE 2002-'03 and 2003-'04. Family Services provided direction for these PACs in expending grant funds with recommendations for speakers, book and video purchases, organizational issues and conferences.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *3. Information & Referral Component*

A major function of the parent program is to counsel and advise parents and to collaborate with SSD and partner district staff and others in the community to support parent needs.

Family Services & Diversity received 2,387 requests for information and referral during the 2004-'05 school year. Requests were up 17% from '03-'04 (2,035 requests) although three fewer weeks of data were counted.

The program served or collaborated with more than 100 agencies and support groups during the 2004-'05 school year to meet the needs of parents and staff (See Appendix 2-4)

Information on autism was the most requested educational diagnosis (447), followed by behavior/emotional (202), mental retardation (174), learning disabilities (172), attention deficit disorder (152), and speech language (68) — (2003-'04 ranking: autism, behavior/emotional, LD, MR, ADD, speech language).

Parents requested information most frequently from Parkway (177 requests, 14% of total students served by SSD), Rockwood (112 requests, 14% of total students served by SSD), Kirkwood (60 requests, 4% of total students served by SSD), Hazelwood (56 requests, 11% of total students served by SSD), Mehlville (50 requests, 8% of total students served by SSD), Webster Groves (34 requests, 3% of total students served by SSD) — (2003-'04 ranking: Parkway, Rockwood, Webster Groves, Hazelwood, Mehlville, Kirkwood).

North County parent requests went up from 18 to 29 in Normandy, 21 to 22 in Riverview Gardens, 30 to 52 in Ferguson-Florissant, 40 to 56 in Hazelwood, 17 to 22 in Ritenour, 7 to 8 in Jennings and stayed the same with no requests in Wellston.

Total requests from parents requesting information rose from 748 parents in 2003-'04 to 882 in 2004-'05 (as of March 31, 2005).

Requests for information from SSD and partner district staff decreased from 587 in 2003-'04 to 539 in 2004-'05 (as of March 31, 2005).

Partner district staff requests were received most frequently from Parkway (87), Rockwood (51), Hazelwood (29), Normandy (25), Kirkwood (20) and Lindbergh (16) — (2003-'04 ranking: Parkway, Rockwood, University City, Mehlville, Hazelwood, Ladue and Jennings).

(For more detailed information, see Appendix 2-5)



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *4. Staff Development Component*

Training for SSD Staff — the Family Services & Diversity staff also participate in other staff development activities within the district and the community to create a greater awareness of how to work with parents and what resources are available to them. Training has taken place in the following areas:

**Multicultural and Diversity** — Family Services & Diversity provides and coordinates multicultural and diversity staff development for the district and works with the administrators and facilitators in Learning & Assessment to insure that multicultural and family diversity areas are infused into district plans and training.

**New Teacher Orientation** — the “parent” strand in new teacher orientation assists them in supporting parents. The training includes understanding the parent and student perspective, respecting the dignity and diversity of families and how to collaborate with parents at meetings. Information on the parent program and Family & Community Resource Center is given out so staff can communicate to parents what resources are available for them in the district.

**New Paraeducator Training** — parent and student perspective is highlighted in the two-day training along with parent communication, multicultural and disability awareness, special education history and laws, and resources within the district.

**Washington University pediatric residents** — SSD’s parent program is working in its second year with the Pediatric Residents in the Community (PIC) program to assist in educating new doctors about children and parent needs. A workshop was given for residents at Children's Hospital in fall 2004, and each month 1-3 residents visit the Family & Community Resource Center to learn about district resources, the IEP process and special education.

**Training for SSD bus drivers** — 1-hour training new this year gives district drivers an understanding of various disabilities, how to interact with students and understand the parent perspective.



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### *Other Parent Involvement Methods In The District*

For the purposes of this program evaluation, the committee has described the services and resources offered by the parent program, Family Services & Diversity. It is important to note, however, that SSD offers additional services for families through its schools and other programming:

**Special Education Schools** — Each of the SSD Schools has a Parent Involvement Plan. The plans have three major components: communications, parent-school compact (learning agreement) and building capacity for involvement at the building level. Communication involves providing an Open House, informing parents about their child's instructional programs through IEP conferences, quarterly progress reports, communication log/notebooks and phone conversations. Parents, students and staff are encouraged to sign and return a Parent-School compact as a "sign" of the shared responsibilities of educating the child. Parents are encouraged to be involved in PTO meetings and the Parent Advisory Council. They are also encouraged to donate their time and talent to school activities throughout the school year. The Parent Involvement Plan is shared with students and parents through the Student/Parent Handbook.

**Title 1 Federal Programs** — SSD's Title 1 Program is implemented in the Special Education Schools (see above), Bridges and Court Programs. Parent involvement in the Title I Program includes participation of parents in ongoing and meaningful communication about student academic learning and other school activities, ensuring that parents/guardians play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and are notified of the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status of their child's school building. At least one percent of the Title I allocation for parent involvement includes promoting family literacy and parenting skills.

The district must have a written parent involvement policy jointly developed with and distributed to parents of participating children that should describe how it will: • involve parents in the process of program evaluation and review of achievement data • assist Title I schools to plan and implement more effective parent involvement activities that will result in improved student and school performance • achieve coordination with other existing parent involvement programs • conduct with parents an annual evaluation of the policy's content and effectiveness in improving academic performance, including identifying and alleviating barriers to greater parent participation (especially those who are economically disadvantaged, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background).

In addition to the district policy, each Title I building must jointly develop with and distribute to parents of participating children a written parent involvement plan.



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To the extent that is practical, districts and schools must provide full opportunities for the participation of LEP parents, parents with disabilities, and migrant parents. Facilities used for parent involvement activities should be accessible to all parents. To allow greater parent participation, Title I funds may be used, if needed, for transportation to the activities and for child-care.

**Technical Education Schools** — While parental input is essential and welcome, those parents who offer jobs and/or continue training are key to the success of technical education. Each program has an advisory committee composed of a membership broadly representative of the business/industry. Parents also serve on a Tech Guidance Advisory committee. Teachers and/or counselors meet with entering Technical Education students and parents to develop a graduation plan. Parents are provided with information on student progress through progress reports, conferences, and test results, including academic levels found on the Work Key evaluation.

**Early Childhood Special Education** — Family involvement in early education is approached through a variety of methods. Many parents and teachers communicate on a regular basis through the use of a spiral notebook exchanged via the child's backpack. Announcements for workshops from the Family Services program are sent home with students each semester. Other parent activities are offered within the local school district. Parents are referred to the Family & Community Resource Center for books, videos and other materials on their child's disability. Classroom and therapy observations are encouraged and parent volunteers are welcomed.

Through the use of a Parent Handbook for Early Childhood Special Education, parents are given information on participating in their child's IEP. The ECSE Developmental Curriculum Checklist is included in the Handbook so that parents may reference a scope and sequence for early child curriculum based on Project Construct and the Brigance Inventory of Early Development. The Handbook contains a contact guide of helpful numbers for SSD staff.

Support to families is offered through conferences with teachers, therapists, behavior facilitators and social workers.

**Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) program** — The ABA program has a high degree of parent involvement in planning services through the IEP process. Data on the child's progress is reported at least quarterly. Parents are also linked with Family Services & Diversity parent workshops and the Family & Community Resource Center, as well as community agencies, support groups and other resources. In addition, there is an ABA Advisory Committee comprised of several parents, SSD administrators, an SSD facilitator and teacher.

**Career Training Program** — Transitional consultants meet with parents and students in the IEP process to advise and plan for the application of students to the Career Training Program. They also assist student and their families with the transition from school to work by coordinating with Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies and services. Parents are surveyed yearly regarding their satisfaction with the program. There is a high



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degree of family participation in the Career Training graduation program. The Transition Program Evaluation committee included parents. Teachers report IEP progress to parents quarterly and share program information with parents regularly. Information from the Family Services program, including information on parent workshops and the Family & Community Resource Center is sent home through the students.

**Social Work program** — District social workers help parents participate effectively in their child’s IEP, better understand and meet their child’s social-emotional and special education needs, better understand and effectively utilize school and community resources available to help students and families, and provides counseling services to families.



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### **Question #2 — How does the parent program communicate and disseminate information about the resources, training and support services available to parents?**

**Parent Connection Newsletter** — 32,000 copies of the newsletter are printed at the start of each semester that explain the parent program, Family Services & Diversity, and how to contact its staff. It lists the parent workshops for the upcoming semester, new materials available in the Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) and additional items of interest to parents. Second semester the newsletter includes a needs assessment and satisfaction survey.

*How it is disseminated:*

- Copies are sent to each district secretary to send out to teachers; teachers, in turn, are instructed to send a copy home with each student
- 600 copies are mailed directly to parents who indicate they do not receive it through school mail
- Copies are given out at the Interdistrict-Parent Advisory Committee (I-PAC) meetings for its representatives
- Additional copies are taken to district PAC meetings
- Copies are given to all SSD directors, area coordinators, principals
- Copies are distributed to all early childhood special education (ECSE) programs, both SSD and coalition districts
- Copies given out to First Steps program
- Copies are given to Special Non-public Access Program (SNAP) and Homebound program for parents
- Copies are sent to all principals in partner district schools
- Copies are given to all SSD social workers
- Copies are given to Learning & Assessment (L&A) staff developers
- Copy posted on the SSD website

**Parent Workshops** — 2-3 workshops are scheduled each week, day and evening, each semester. **Orientations for Parents to Special Education and the IEP Process** is held morning and evening each month throughout the school year.

*How parents are informed:*

- Workshops are listed in the Parent Connection newsletter
- Workshops are listed in the Learning & Assessment Professional Development Resource Guide, in print form and on the SSD website
- Workshops are listed in Family & Community Resource Center calendar
- Information about the workshops is included in each of the Family & Community Resource Center brochures
- Flyers for specific events are sent to targeted audiences (i.e., emailed to all administrative staff, sent through inner-office mail to specific programs such as early childhood, sent to agencies for dissemination)
- Newsletter, calendars and flyers are given out at PAC meetings



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- Workshops are posted on the SSD website

**Parent Handbook** — consists of eight sections that are given to parents as needed or requested: I. Overview of SSD and special education, laws, rights; II. Evaluation process; III. IEP Guide for Parents; IV. Disability sections with state eligibility criteria and resources; V. Transition process; VI. Resource section with agencies, support groups, recreation, siblings, technology, advocacy; VII. Glossary of terms and acronyms.

*How handbooks are disseminated:*

- Handbook is given out at parent orientations
- Evaluation section is given out by Intake department
- IEP section is given to parents at initial diagnostic conference
- Menu of handbook sections listed in Parent Connection newsletter so parents can request the sections they need
- Handbook available in Family & Community Resource Center
- Handbook information on the SSD website

**IEP Guidebook for Parents** — most requested item in the center

*How parents receive the guide:*

- Copies are given out by early childhood staff
- Copies are given out from diagnostic staff at the initial conference
- Copies are available in the Family & Community Resource Center
- Copies given to Parent Advisory Council members
- Information about the guide is on the SSD website

**Family & Community Resource Center** — currently consists of approximately 4,500 books, 250 videos, 70 notebook binders filled with hundreds of articles, brochures, packets, newsletters, awareness materials, iMac computer and software

*How parents are informed:*

- Family & Community Resource Center brochures and materials are given out at PAC meetings
- Brochures about the center are sent to all schools in the partner districts with copies for principals, counselors and teachers
- Center brochures are given to diagnostic staff to give to parents at each conference
- Center brochure copies are given to social work staff
- Center is publicized in Parent Connection and Special Edition newsletters
- Meetings for PACs and other groups are held in the center
- Information about the center is listed on the SSD website

**Resource packets (34 topics)** — collection of articles for the most requested topics in the center

*How parents get copies:*

- Copies are sent to parents and staff members by request



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- Sample copies with an order form are given out to Parent Advisory Councils so parents can sign up for copies to be sent to them through school mail
- Copies are taken to parent meetings with sign up sheets
- Information about packets is listed in each Family & Community Resource Center brochure
- Parents request packets after workshops
- Packets are used to fill requests from the Parent Needs Assessment second semester
- Packet topics are listed on the SSD website

**Parent Advisory Committee/Councils (PAC)** — parent program assists the PACs, which consist of the Interdistrict Parent Advisory Committee (I-PAC) and the Parent Advisory Councils for the 23 partner districts (D-PACs)

*How parents are informed about PACs:*

- Information is included in the Parent Connection and Special Edition newsletters
- Information about PACs is included in each Family & Community Resource Center brochure
- Parents receive information at district PAC meetings
- PAC information is posted on the SSD website
- Parent program refers parents to PAC representatives in their district

**FCRC brochures** — there are eight disability-specific and two generic brochures for parents and staff, one for students found not eligible for services, one for students to explain why they are being tested, one on the IEP process — packets offer specific resources available through SSD and the community such as training and support services, books, videos, informational packets, local agency and district contacts

*How parents get brochures:*

- Copies are distributed to all schools in SSD and the 23 partner districts with an order form for additional copies so staff can display them or give them out to parents (copies sent to liaisons, principals, counselor, teachers)
- Copies are distributed by diagnostic staff at conferences
- Copies are given to social work staff to give to parents
- Copies are taken to PAC meetings
- Copies are given out at parent workshops

**Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) Calendar** — lists upcoming workshops, support group meetings, conferences and events in the community

*How information is distributed:*

- Calendar is given out at PAC meetings
- Copies are available in the Family & Community Resource Center
- Calendar is emailed to all administrative staff
- Calendar is posted in email “News” folder for all SSD staff members
- Copies are distributed to community agencies
- Information is posted on the SSD website



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**Ability Awareness Resources** — books, videos, articles, simulations, posters, curricula; parent program assists parents and staff in coordinating awareness programs in the schools and throughout the community

*How parents find out about the resources:*

- From Parent Advisory Councils
- Information in the Parent Connection newsletter
- Family & Community Resource Center Brochures
- Family & Community Resource Center lists

**Training for SSD Staff** — there is a “parent perspective” strand in new teacher, administrator and paraeducator orientations

- Information is given on how to work more effectively with parents to partner in their child’s education
- Information on the parent program is disseminated so staff can communicate to parents what resources are available for them



### Chapter III — Literature Review for Parent Involvement

As an outcome of parents becoming more involved and educated, the literature indicates that they become more effective advocates for their child and for their schools, participating in the decision-making process as a team with educators. The literature on parent involvement that pertains to special education looks at a parent’s understanding their child’s disability and its unique challenges, understanding the special education system that serves their child, and understanding the laws that govern special education and their rights under those laws. An important component of this process is parent education, as parents learn how to help their child improve in their schoolwork, monitor homework, ask appropriate questions about their child’s progress, model and promote desired behavior, and assist their child at home with social skills and friendships.

There are numerous articles and reports with research on the effect of parent involvement in education. Much of the traditional parent involvement literature looks at the parent-school relationship; i.e. volunteering in the classroom or for special events, home-school communication, joining the PTA/PTO, attending school activities and programs, parent-teacher conferences. This form of parent involvement typically takes place in individual partner districts and SSD schools, with teachers and principals determining the practices for parent involvement to meet the needs of their families. Although this type of parent involvement is not the function of the SSD parent program, some of these more “school-specific” activities are described in the response to Question #1 of this program evaluation. (See page 12, Other Parent Involvement Methods in the District)

For the purpose of this literature review, the committee looked at the parent involvement research as it relates to special education and how it applies to the unique role SSD plays in providing special and vocational education services throughout St. Louis County, keeping in mind the nature of SSD’s parent program, Family Services and Diversity, in serving the needs of parents of approximately 28,500 students in 23 partner school districts and seven SSD schools.

Research in the following areas was explored in regard to best practice for this program evaluation:

- Laws, legal mandates, and opportunities provided for parent involvement in special education
- Effect of parent involvement on student outcomes
- Types of parent engagement activities
- Parent training and technical assistance programs
- Parent advisory councils
- Culturally responsive practices



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### *Laws, Legal Mandates And Opportunities Provided For Parent Involvement In Special Education*

#### **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**

Parent involvement was first mentioned in the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Although this legislation has changed through several reauthorizations, it became a catalyst for future efforts to guarantee the involvement of parents in the education process.

#### **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

Since IDEA was first enacted in 1975, it has promoted parent involvement in special education citing the need for parents to understand the special education process and how they can actively participate in their child's program. Parents are mentioned throughout the legislation and specifically are given the right to be involved in statewide policy development, local policy development and program implementation, decision-making about evaluation and eligibility, decision-making about the IEP, decision-making regarding placement, and making decisions with respect to procedural safeguards.

"Parent counseling and training" is an important special education related service in IDEA that can help parents with the role they play in the education of their children. Counseling generally refers to providing information and support and training focuses on the development of skills. Part B of the current IDEA legislation states that parent counseling and training can include:

"Assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child; providing parents with information about child development; and helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child's IEP or IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan, document that guides the early childhood process)." [Section 300.24(b)(7)]

Benefits for families from this service include:

- Parents will gain a better understanding of their child's disability
- Parents will be better informed to be an equal team member
- Parents will have a better understanding of future implications for their child
- Parents will be better equipped to discuss the disability with their children
- Parents will be able to active participants in developing and implementing the IEP goals and objectives
- Parents can help other parents who have children with the same disability (MCREL 1999)

Each state has at least one Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) funded under IDEA to help families in becoming effective partners in their children's education. In Missouri, the statewide PTI is MPACT, with seven regional offices that assist parents in education and advocating for their children's educational rights and services.



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### **National Education Goals Panel in 1994**

The National Education Goals Panel, a bipartisan and intergovernmental body of federal and state officials created in July 1990 to assess and report state and national progress toward achieving the National Education Goals, stated in 1994 that “by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.”

### **Goals 2000: Educate America Act**

Parent involvement was also a provision of Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Its Goal 8 mandated that every school promote partnerships to increase parental involvement in decision-making and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) were created through the legislation to provide support, training and information to all parents.

### **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), most recently amended by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, has strengthened parent involvement to give parents “substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.”

Most specifically, all Title I schools must:

- involve parents and consult with them about the program and how they will be involved
- hold an annual meeting for parents to explain the program and the parents’ rights to be involved
- work with parents to develop an approve written parent involvement policies and school-parent contracts
- offer information and training to help parents and teachers work as partners to improve student achievement

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) calls for home-to-school partnerships to help parents become more educated consumers and assist their children achieve higher standards. It also provides for more opportunity for parents to be involved in school governance and reform plans.



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### *Effects Of Parent Involvement On Student Outcomes*

In a 2004 survey of parent involvement literature, Suzanne Peyton of the Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils found that there has been little research in special education that looks specifically at parent involvement.

She found, however, that “there is now 30 years of research to support and validate the commonly held belief that when parents are engaged in their children’s learning, children do better in school – and the schools get better. ...Research also supports and finds that students with disabilities can be assured those same outcomes if the parents become knowledgeable about the disability and learn to become effective advocates for their children while they are in school. ...One way to engage parents in their child’s schooling is to provide education opportunities that enhance their learning of disabilities, special education, advocacy and increased understanding of a school culture – how to get things done that will help their child in school.”

Comprehensive surveys on parent involvement also were done in 1981, 1987 and 1995 for the southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) by Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla. This series of publications includes more than 85 research studies that indicate the benefits for students when parents are more involved in their child’s education. In the most recent 2002 survey in the series, authors Henderson and Mapp look at 51 studies and conclude, “the evidence is now beyond dispute. When parents are involved in their children’s education at home their children do better in school.”

Some of the findings cited by the authors include:

- The more extensive the parent involvement the higher the student achievement
- When parents are involved, students exhibit more positive attitudes and behavior
- Different types of parent involvement produce different gains – to have long-lasting gains for students, parent involvement activities must be well-planned, inclusive and comprehensive
- Children from diverse cultural backgrounds tend to do better when parents and professionals collaborate to bridge the gap between cultures at home and the learning institution
- The benefits of involving parents are not confined to the early years; there are significant gains at all ages and grade levels
- The more the relationship between parents and educators approaches a comprehensive, well-planned partnership, the higher the student achievement
- A significant challenge to an effective program is the lack of instruction on parent and family involvement that educators receive in their professional training

SEDL work also mentions the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement in career and vocational educational programs.

A further review of parent involvement literature from the South Carolina Oversight Committee in April 2002 explores practical barriers to parent involvement and cites: lack of time, economic constraints, lack of transportation, neighborhood safety, lack of



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appropriate childcare, language-communication barriers, diverse linguistic and cultural practices and work schedules of parents. They offer the following as possible solutions to these barriers: give parents plenty of notice, or plan around their work schedules and other obligations; offer transportation and childcare; link parents to programs and resources for their families; provide multiple methods of communication; meet with parents away from the school; schedule performances, workshops, and conferences during times when more parents can attend such as during the evenings or weekend; and provide a range of parental involvement activities.

**Parent-Related Personal Barriers:** reminders of their own past negative school experiences; reawakening of old fears and frustration; anxiety about their child's performance or behavior; mistrust of the educational system; anxiety and apprehension of what the school expects of them; lack of knowledge about how to become involved; lack of support from partners or spouses; limited parental education, making it more difficult for parents to assist their children in schoolwork; financial concerns that limit participation in activities requiring them to donate money to the school.

**Parent-Related Solutions to Personal Barriers:** create an environment where parents feel welcome; educate parents on the importance of their involvement; encourage parents to become involved; address parental expectations of their child's educational attainment.

**School Related Personal Barriers:** teachers may be unaware of how they can encourage parent involvement; school staff may believe that promoting parental involvement is too time-consuming; teachers may believe that parents are troublesome in the classroom or that they do not have the skills to assist in their child's education; educators may equate parents' lack of involvement with lack of interest in their child's education; educators may have limited views of the ways in which families can be involved.

**Teacher-Related Solutions to Personal Barriers:** train teachers how to effectively involve parents; provide opportunities for parents and school staff to interact in informal ways (South Carolina Oversight Committee).

The National PTA in 1992 surveyed its leaders in regard to barriers to parent involvement and found that lack of time was the highest factor, followed by not understanding the system, lack of child care, not being available at times schools needed them, lack of transportation and not feeling welcome.

In its Rubric for Determining Excellence in Professional Development, the Missouri Staff Development Leadership Council (2002) cites as best practice for family involvement as student outcomes consistently linked to involving the learning community, preparing parents to support student learning by school and community partnering, staff members are trained and use two-way communication consistently to report student achievement, partnerships are beneficial to all, and continuous collaboration and communication promotes improvement.



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### *Types Of Parent Engagement Activities*

One of the most widely referenced parent involvement studies is from Joyce Epstein of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University (1997). Based on her research, she identified the six types of parent involvement, which in turn was used by the National PTA to develop its national standards for parent/family involvement programs. (*In Chapter V Results, the National PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Self Assessment was adapted by the committee to develop its quality indicators.*) Important to note is the recommendation that each school system define for itself what the most important goals are to meet the needs of its families.

Epstein's six types of involvement are:

**TYPE 1--PARENTING:** Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

**TYPE 2--COMMUNICATING:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

**TYPE 3--VOLUNTEERING:** Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

**TYPE 4--LEARNING AT HOME:** Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

**TYPE 5--DECISION MAKING:** Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

**TYPE 6--COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY:** Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

In each of the six types of involvement the author includes a set of sample practices, a list of challenges that need to be met, redefinitions of basic principles of involvement, and outcomes for students and schools.



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Sample practices:

Parenting — workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child development, parent education, family support programs, and surveys.

Communication — conferences at least once a year, a regular schedule of notices, memos and other forms of communication; effective newsletters, and surveys.

Volunteering — a family center for resources and meetings, and surveys.

Learning at Home — information on required skills, how to monitor homework, and the ability to participate in helping set academic goals.

Decision Making — parent organizations such as school and district-level advisory councils or committees; networks to link families with parent representatives and independent advocacy groups.

Collaborating with the Community — connecting with partners in the community to set student goals for success and “one-stop” shopping for services through community partnerships.

In the area of challenges and redefinitions, Epstein cites:

Parenting — challenge is to provide information to all families, not only to those who are most visibly involved; redefine “‘workshop’ (as) not only a *meeting* on a topic held at the school building at a particular time, but also as the *content* of a topic to be viewed, heard or read at convenient times and varied locations.”

Communication — challenge is to include create an easy-to-use two-way channel from home-to-school and back; redefine communication to be multi-channeled ways to connect schools, families and the community.

Volunteering — challenge is to recruit widely and have flexible schedules; redefine “volunteer” as not only including those parents who are physically present, but also those who are actively supportive of the school’s goals for their child’s learning.

Learning at Home — challenge is to involve families in curriculum-related decisions; redefine “help” at home not as how parents just “teach” their children skills for school, but also how they encourage them, listen to them, praise them, guide them and monitor them.

Decision-Making — challenge is to make sure there is diversity represented in parent leaders and to provide training for parents to develop their skills in representing other parent; redefine decision-making as a process of partnership in working toward desired goals and having leaders who share and obtain information from other parents and not just attend meetings.



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Community Collaboration — challenge is to have equal opportunity to obtain services or to participate in programs; redefine community to mean not just the immediate neighborhoods, but all locations that have an influence on learning and development.

The outcome for students and schools according to Epstein's research indicates that the six types of involvement lead to numerous gains for students, parents and schools:

Parenting – students' gain respect for parents and awareness of importance of school; parents' acquire knowledge of child development, self-confidence, awareness of challenging in parenting; schools' gain an understanding of families' cultures, concerns, needs and goals; respect for families' strengths.

Communicating – students' acquire an awareness of their own progress and role in the school and family partnership; parents' gain understanding of the school and its policies and programs as well as understanding their child's progress and how to monitor it; schools' develop a diversity of communications and the use of a network to be effective.

Volunteering – student's have increased skills and awareness of the skills of others; parents' gain an understanding of the roles of others and the self-confidence that comes with gaining new skills; schools' acquire an awareness of parents' talents and additional time gained by having the assistance of others

Learning at Home – students' develop an awareness of the similarity of teachers and parents in the learning process and a more positive attitude about homework; parents' have an appreciation of the skills of teachers and awareness of their child's abilities; schools' gain a respect of family time and satisfaction with the parent support

Decision Making – students' become aware of the family role in education; parents' develop a feeling of ownership and shared connections with other parents; schools' develop an awareness of parent perspective in school policies and decisions

Collaborating with the Community – students' gain self-confidence and skills from enriched experiences and explore options for the future; parents' gain from interactions with others in the community and gain an appreciation of local resources; schools' obtain resources to enrich their curriculum and have knowledge for referrals for families

In its 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report to Congress of the Implementation of IDEA, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) looks at literature on what most affects a parent's decision to become involved in education and at the types of involvement most benefit students with disabilities. The report uses the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parent involvement process, noting in particular that many opportunities for involvement are afforded by special education. The five levels of the model are:

- The decision to become involved in the child's education
- The decision to choose particular types of involvement
- The mechanisms through which involvement affects child-centered outcomes
- The factors mediating the benefits of involvement, and
- The outcomes of involvement as they relate to the child



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Recommendations from the report include:

- Improve the communication between parents, teachers, and administrators to increase the level of involvement — parents need more information on special education services for their child, their rights and what the schools' commitment is to their involvement. Resource centers and training opportunities provide parents with the information that changes their perception of their role in their child's education.
- Cultural sensitivity is critical — through ongoing professional development, teachers need to learn to appreciate cultural differences and understand how their own set of beliefs affects their interactions with parents.
- Use the expertise of parents — parent involvement can be strengthened and outcomes for students can be improved when parents are recognized to have valuable knowledge about their children and possess skills that can enhance the services their children receive in school.



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### *Parent Training And Technical Assistance*

Parent education is an important tool to engage parents in the educational process.

Sally L. Smith, founder and director of the Lab School of Washington and author of many books and articles on learning disabilities and related disorders, says finding support is critical for parents for children with disabilities. Smith says parent of children with disabilities have unique challenges: “Parents must become the analyst, the interpreter, the problem solver, the cheerleader, the lawyer, the psychiatrist, the spiritual advisor, the organizer, the note-taker, the friend, the companion advocate and disciplinarian. Most parents use every resource they have to help their child flourish, and yet, they worry they are not doing enough or a good enough job.”

She says parents of children with disabilities can feel helpless and incompetent and that support and education is needed to help them build their confidence and competence. Attending lectures by specialists in disability issues and participating in support groups can help parents become better advocates for their child, but these resources are not commonly offered in traditional school settings. Finding the support they need to improve their skills is a constant challenge for parents of children with disabilities.

Research has shown that when parents are offered services such as education and support, the outcomes for their children improve. High-quality parent education programs are collaborative relationships between parents and educators where the purpose is to assist parents in understanding their role in their child’s education and to respond to their needs. (Powell, 1988)

The most effective type of family-professional partnership is collective empowerment, an expansion of family-centered partnerships. It seeks to expand the capacity of families by providing sufficient information to families about options to make meaningful choices, mobilizing informal resources to participate in a network of support and providing meaningful and equal participation of families and professionals in decision making at all levels. The professional becomes a coordinator rather than an expert, and has the capacity to help mobilize collective partnerships with the team and community. Power in this model is redefined as access to resources rather than control. The group works together to make creative decisions that best meet the needs of the child and the family. (Ann P. Turnbull, Vicki Turbiville, and H.R. Turnbull)

In their 2002 survey of 80 research studies and literature reviews, titled *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Henderson and Mapp indicate the following as methods for schools to use to assist families in supporting education:

- Engage families so they understand what children are learning
- Give them a voice in what happens to their children
- Provide them with information about how to help their children at home
- Foster connections among families and with teachers



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- Build families' understanding of the education system
- Offer access to social services and community agencies
- Identify and build on strengths in the community and among families

And they suggest the following actions to assist in creating programs that will build vital parent-school relationships:

- Recognize that all parents, regardless of income, education or cultural background, are involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well.
- Design programs that will support families to guide their children's learning, from preschool through high school.
- Develop the capacity of school staff and families to work together.
- Link efforts to engage families, whether based at school or in the community, to student learning.
- Build families' social and political connections.
- Embrace a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power. Focus on developing trusting and respectful relationships. Make sure that parents, school staff, and community members understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise.
- Build strong connections between schools and community organizations.
- Include families in all strategies to reduce the achievement gap between white, middle-class students and low-income students and students of color. (Henderson and Mapp)

In regard to orientation and training for parents who want to become more involved in their children's education, research studies that have compared parent involvement programs that include orientation/training components with those that do not indicate that providing orientation and training enhances the effectiveness of parent involvement. Research in this area indicates that parents generally want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness. And while research shows that orientation and training activities have positive benefits for parents, researchers have found that the programs that have extensive training components do not better student outcomes than those with only basic training, and they sometimes experience higher drop-out rates. (Cotton and Wikelund)

Kohler and Hood (2000) indicated family involvement in career and technical education should be supported by training to increase parents' knowledge and skills in advocacy, planning, support and legal issues.



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### *Parent Advisory Council (PAC)*

The most extensive work in PACs is being done in Massachusetts, where special education law mandates parent advisory councils. (In Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Division of Special Education encourages the development of PACs, but does not mandate them. (See Appendix 3-1, Question 4)

Massachusetts statute lists as PAC duties to advise districts on the education and safety of students with disabilities, and to meet regularly with school administration to plan, develop and evaluate special education programs. One of the PAC's most important functions is to build parent participation and collaboration. Parent input is important as school personnel cannot always know what works best for each child with a disability and how to assist them to gain access to the general education curriculum. (Peyton)

Schools need to give up some of their decision-making power if parent councils are to be effective and problems occur when the needs of parents are different from the professional judgment of educators.

Successful PACs have a clear mission to support parent involvement and provide the educational opportunities parents need to be effective in supporting their children and their school districts.

Peyton says research suggests parents of children with disabilities are uniquely qualified to help each other, and that a parent-to-parent component promotes parent involvement and provides a critical support network. The benefits for parents are substantial when they have access to guidance from parents "who have been there."

To be successful, PACs need to have a clear mission for parent involvement. A sample of the goals and objectives from the Amherst-Pelham, Massachusetts, PAC:

- Promote a network for parents of children with disabilities and provide a forum to share information and discuss matters of relative interest and concern regarding our children
- Collaborate with the school district to continually improve the educational opportunities available within and without our schools that promote improved educational outcomes for children with disabilities.
- Stimulate meaningful dialogue between the school district and parents.
- Organize educational workshops for parents about special education topics

Parent involvement programs also need to be aware of the diversity represented in families if they are to be successful and to recognize the unique barriers that may prevent parents from becoming involved in the education of their children. (Peyton)

A Canadian study of the effects of support groups for parents of children with disabilities found that:



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- Membership was important for any family, regardless of the disability; that their challenges were similar
- The most important reasons for membership are to achieve a sense of belonging, receive information, tackle day-to-day issues of raising a child with disabilities and to talk about strategies for working with systems in which their children are involved
- The three main functions of parent support groups are providing support, sharing information and education, and advocacy activities
- The size of the group was not an indicator of its effectiveness, more the involvement of the members and the ways meetings were structured
- Making a one-to-one link with another parent was the most effective way to bring in new members
- Changing membership is a natural part of any group; parents come and go based on time and getting their needs met; it is normal for groups to go up and down
- The style of the group is dependent on the people running it and no one way is most effective
- Each group needs to have leadership for overall effective functioning
- It is important that the groups be led by parents, though outside service providers can assist with some of the functions and resources required
- The use of speakers can impede discussion and sharing ideas between parents is more useful (Law)

The type of involvement that gives parents the opportunity to take part in decision-making about district programs is one of the most controversial. While research indicates most parents would like to play a more active role in this type of involvement, most administrators and teachers are more reluctant to include parents at this level. Research has shown the following as benefits gained from parents being involved in school governance:

- Elimination of misconceptions between parents and school staff about each others' motives, attitudes, intentions and abilities
- Parents serving as resources for the academic, social and psychological development of their children
- The development of parents' skills and confidence that may further their own educations, upgrade their jobs, and provide an improved role model for their children
- Increased number of parents to serve as advocates for the educational system throughout the community (Cotton and Wikelund)



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### *Culturally Responsive Practices in Regard to Parent Involvement*

Parents of different backgrounds, beliefs and values want and need to be involved in the education of their children. In a booklet that looks at culturally biased beliefs in education, “Culturally Responsive Parental Involvement: Concrete Understandings and Basic Strategies,” King and Goodwin suggest ways to bring about an understanding of what culturally responsive parent involvement is and how educators and parents can explore beliefs and assumptions and work together to benefit children. They look at “parents” as any adults responsible for the care of a child, such as grandparents, older brothers and sisters and same-sex couples.

Key assumptions from the booklet:

- Changing demographics demand that teachers and administrators alter preconceived notions about a child’s family experiences and structure
- Diverse cultural backgrounds of families demand new strategies to encourage parental involvement
- Meaningful parental involvement can enhance student success
- Parents want to be involved in their child’s education
- Parents who are involved do not represent the views and needs of all parents
- Parents need to be informed about what is happening in schools
- Partnerships are key to successful reform
- Parents and schools must develop strategies to work together

Misconceptions cited by King and Goodwin include: parents who don’t visit school don’t care, good parent involvement looks a certain way, all parents respond to the same strategies, parents who struggle financially cannot support the school, and all parents have the same goals for their children.

An important finding in the research on parent involvement is that parents of disadvantaged and minority children make a positive contribution to their children's achievement if they receive sufficient training and encouragement in the types of parent involvement that will make a difference. Research also indicates that parents can make a difference regardless of their own educational level, income and whether or not they are employed. The involvement of parents who are well-educated, well-to-do, or who have more time to be involved has not been shown to be more beneficial than the involvement of less-advantaged parents. It is important for schools and parents to be aware that all parent involvement works and works well. (Cotton and Wikelund)

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2000) reported on the “Seven Steps to Engaging Hard-to-Reach Communities” and listed the following strategies: know your community, identify the issues, designate facilitators who can have the sometimes difficult conversations on how to improve education, train the facilitators, recruit participants, locate meeting site/handle the logistics, and follow-up with participants.



## Chapter IV — Methodology

This chapter describes the methods used to collect data for the Family Services & Diversity program evaluation.

The 27-member advisory committee for this program evaluation represents SSD family services, special and technical education administrators, instructional staff, facilitators, social work, SNAP, Title 1, early childhood, legal services, communications and diagnostic staff; plus partner district personnel, community agency members, and parents. The advisory committee met twice; a smaller work committee met six times.

A review of the literature was completed to look at areas of parent involvement relevant to SSD's parent program. The areas of focus for the review are:

- Laws, legal mandates, and opportunities provided for parent involvement in special education
- Effect of parent involvement on student outcomes
- Types of parent engagement activities
- Parent training and technical assistance programs
- Parent advisory councils
- Culturally responsive practices

A matrix of quality indicators was developed from the literature review and used to evaluate data and make recommendations.

### **How the committee collected data to answer the evaluation questions:**

**Question 1** — What are the resources, training and support opportunities offered to parents by the Family Services & Diversity program to assist with their understanding of the needs of their child and their involvement in their child's education?  
and

**Question 2** — How does the program communicate and disseminate information about the resources, training and support services available to parents?

Both of these questions are answered in Chapter 2 in an expository method with a comprehensive look at every aspect of the Family Services & Diversity: what the program offers and how the information is communicated. Parent outcomes are reported from the Parent Workshop Survey and the 2004-2005 Parent Needs Assessment & Satisfaction Survey.

**Question 3** — What opportunities exist for parents to serve on committees, discuss concerns with the district and study specific issues and problems?

This question takes an in-depth look at Parent Advisory Council (PAC): its history, how it functions, the barriers and what makes a PAC successful. Other opportunities for parent involvement are addressed in less detail.



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- a) The committee expanded on a previous PAC survey done in 2003. It went out to all SSD directors with PAC responsibility and current I-PAC representatives. (See Appendix 4-1)
- b) A separate survey was developed and sent out to 2,618 randomly selected parents to gather data about their awareness of and participation in PACs in their districts. (See Appendix 4-2)
- c) A public forum was held from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., April 20, during the I-PAC meeting to give a larger group an opportunity to address the issues of the program evaluation. The forum was advertised to the public through the SSD website, emails to a Family Services & Diversity parent list and a community agency list, and to all SSD staff through First Class email and voice mail systems.

The questions asked at the forum were also emailed to the parent list for those who wished to participate and could not attend. (See Appendix 4-3)

- d) A case study was done of two partner districts to look at what makes a PAC successful.

**Question 4** — Are the services of the parent program accessed equitably throughout the district?

Family Services & Diversity has kept extensive data for the past five years on the population it serves — parents, staff, community, students, private school, post school, out-state, out-of-state, etc. It also looks the number of requests by the partner district and SSD schools and what specific topics are requested. This information was compared from year to year and analyzed to determine what specific areas need additional attention. Information also was gathered from the Public Forum.



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## Chapter V — Results

### *Parent Involvement Quality Indicators*

Based on the literature review the committee decided to adapt the National PTA National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Self Assessment (See Appendix 5-1) to create quality indicators for parent involvement relevant to special education and how SSD’s parent program serves the needs of parents of approximately 28,500 students in 23 partner school districts and seven SSD schools. The indicators were used to evaluate data and make recommendations.

#### **Communication — Communication between home and school is regular, two-way and meaningful**

1. Improve the communication between parents, teachers, and administrators to increase the level of involvement. (OSEP)
2. Use a variety of communication tools to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium. (National PTA)
3. Communicate with families about school programs. (Epstein)
4. Disseminate information on policies, discipline procedures and assessment tools. (National PTA)
5. Translate communications to assist parents with limited English proficiency. (National PTA)
6. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and parent and family involvement. (Henderson, Mapp)
7. Through ongoing professional development, teachers need to learn to appreciate cultural differences and understand how their own set of beliefs affects their interactions with parents. (OSEP)
8. Provide a parent-to-parent networking component to promote parent involvement. (Peyton) (Turnbull)
9. Expand the capacity of families to make meaningful choices by providing sufficient information about options, and linking them to a network of support. (Turnbull)
10. The term “parent” is limiting and should be used inclusively to included grandparents, older siblings, same-sex parents and other responsible adults. (King an Goodwin)

#### Parenting — Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, to understand child and adolescent development, and to set home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

1. Provide workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child development, parent education, family support programs, and surveys. (Epstein)
2. Resource centers and training opportunities provide parents with the information that changes their perception of their role in their child’s education. (OSEP)
3. Expand the capacity of families to make meaningful choices by providing sufficient information about options, and linking them to a network of support. (Turnbull)
4. Provide culturally responsive training and encouragement to parents of different



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backgrounds, beliefs and values. (King, Goodwin) (Cotton, Wikelund) (OSEP)
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services. (National PTA)
6. Use the expertise of parents — parent involvement can be strengthened and outcomes for students can be improved when parents are recognized to have valuable knowledge about their children and possess skills that can enhance the services their children receive in school. (OSEP)
7. Provide parents with information to understand their child’s development and develop their parenting skills. (Epstein) (Henderson, Mapp)
8. Provide opportunities for parent involvement throughout the student’s school career. (Henderson, Mapp)
9. Redefine “workshop” as not only a <i>meeting</i> on a topic held at the school building at a particular time, but also as the <i>content</i> of a topic to be viewed, heard or read at convenient times and varied locations. (Epstein)

### **Student Learning Outcomes — Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning**

1. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers. (National PTA)
2. Provide orientation and training for families. Activities do not need to be extensive in regards to the number of sessions. (Cotton, Wikelund)
3. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each, where parents are full partners. (National PTA)
4. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child’s education. (National PTA)
5. Involve families in learning activities at home. (Epstein) (Henderson, Mapp)

### **Volunteering — Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought**

1. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty. (National PTA)
2. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing childcare, transportation, work schedule needs. (National PTA)
3. Parent involvement can be strengthened and outcomes for students can be improved when parents are recognized to have valuable knowledge about their children and possess skills that can enhance the services their children receive in school. (OSEP)
4. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful. (National PTA)
5. Redefine “volunteer/parent involvement” as not only those parents who are physically present, but also those who actively support the school’s goals for their child’s learning. (Epstein)

### **Decision Making and Advocacy — Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.**



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1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems. (National PTA)
2. Encourage the formation of Parent Advisory Councils or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents. (National PTA) (OSEP) (Peyton)
3. Include families as participants in decision-making, governance and advocacy. (Epstein) (Henderson, Mapp) (Peyton)
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data. (National PTA)
5. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in decisions that affect students, such as student placement and individualized education plans. (National PTA)
6. Treat parent concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions. (National PTA)
7. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues. (National PTA)
8. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making. (National PTA)

### **Collaboration with the Community —Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, student learning**

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community. (National PTA)
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families. (National PTA)
3. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education. (National PTA)
4. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources. (National PTA)
5. Coordinate resources and services for families, students and the school with community agencies. (Epstein) (Henderson, Mapp) (Turnbull)
6. Promote a process of partnership in working toward desired goals; share and obtain information from other parents and not just those who attend meetings. (Epstein)



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**Question #3 What opportunities exist for parents to serve on committees, discuss concerns with the district and study specific issues and problems?**

SSD offers parents many opportunities to receive information regarding school policies and practices at the administrative level, and to identify, respond to and have input on issues that affect their children.

The SSD Board of Education promotes parent involvement by offering the opportunity to speak at its public meetings and through policies such as Parent/Family Involvement in Instructional and Other Programs (IGBC), Public Information Program (KB), Community Involvement In Decision Making (KC), Public Complaints (KL), Public Complaints About the Curriculum and Instructional or Media Center Materials (KLB), and Relations with Parent/Guardian Organizations (KMA). (See Appendix 5-2)

Opportunities for parent involvement also are afforded in methods such as participation in Interdistrict and District-Level Parent Advisory Councils, the Public Review Committee (Missouri Senate-mandated to review SSD every four years), the more than 60 parents serving on the district's Program Evaluation committees (See Appendix 5-3), 25 parents serving on the Federal Programs Parent Advisory Committee, 19 parents who served on task force committees for the 2001 Partnership Plan, committee work for the 2003 SSD Reorganization Plan, SSD Technology Plan, BOE-directed ABA and Social/Emotional/Behavioral Advisories, Technical Education Guidance Advisory, and committees in partner districts such as the Webster Groves Special Education/504 Committee.

For the purpose of this program evaluation, the Advisory Committee recommended the focus of Question #3 to be on SSD's Parent Advisory Council.



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### *Parent Advisory Councils (PAC) — History of PAC at SSD*

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#### **Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council**

In the late 1980s, two parents in the Parkway school district asked the superintendent of SSD to start a Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council. There was no formal membership, but the plan was to have representatives from each of the 23 partner districts and SSD schools to gather once a month to discuss issues. Two councils were formed: one for the parents whose children were served in the SSD schools (SSD Parent Advisory Council), and the other for parents of students in the 23 partner districts (LEA Parent Advisory Council). The councils met for several years and were productive on many issues, but never were able to get equitable representation from all of the districts.

#### **Parent Planning Committee**

In 1993, SSD's parent program initiated the Parent Planning Committee (PPC) with representatives from the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council. Derrick Dufresne, a facilitator who does consultative work throughout the country, was brought in to assist the committee with the planning phase. The committee adopted as its mission statement:

To develop a formal plan that ensures parents will have a strong and equal voice in special and local district issues, and will be involved in planning and decision making at all levels of the educational process of children with disabilities.

The plan had the following goals:

- To become a functioning entity with a strong representative voice and an established method of presenting concerns in order to effect change.
- To develop an organizational chart of the key audiences to be reached and a key plan to reach them
- To have parents sit in on administrative and committee meetings within SSD
- To have a written policy on parent involvement to be adopted by LEA and SSD boards of education

The PPC continued to meet and plan for approximately two years, but interest in the committee was difficult to sustain.

#### **Parent Liaison Committee**

In the fall of 1995, the SSD Board of Education asked the superintendent to start parent groups at the partner district level. The parent program was asked to coordinate this effort, which resulted in the Parent Liaison Committees (PLC). A plan was implemented whereby parents were to meet monthly or quarterly in their districts with SSD and partner district administrators. A representative from each district was to serve on a district-wide PLC that would meet monthly with the superintendent. The goals of the PLC were as follows:

- To assist parents in networking and communicating with other parents (because of FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, districts



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cannot disclose personally identifiable information, making it very difficult for parents to connect with each other)

- To help parents become as informed as possible about their child's special education services and the school districts that serve them
- To improve communication and promote general goodwill between the partner districts and SSD
- To create a positive understanding and awareness for students with disabilities in all of our schools
- To establish a network for advocacy for local, state and national disability issues

The intent of the Parent Liaison Committee was to have SSD administrators develop and lead meetings until parents were comfortable enough to take over and continue on their own with district support. By second semester of the 1995-'96 school year, PLC had parents who had volunteered to be a parent liaison in more than 200 schools in 19 partner districts. In January through May of 1996, 60 PLC meetings were held.

Parent Liaison Committees ran successfully for several years with SSD administrative support. Unfortunately, only a few of the districts had parent groups strong enough to sustain themselves without SSD in the lead role.

### **Parent Advisory Council**

In 1996, Missouri Senate Bill 687 changed the governance of SSD and along with the legislation mandated the formal creation of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) (See Appendix 5-4). An SSD Governing Council made up of board members from each partner district also was created by the legislation and it was given the responsibility of establishing a process for PAC members to be "independently selected by parents of pupils of the special school district" and to consult with them.

In April 1997, the Governing Council approved its process for selection of PAC members:

- An election in which all parents of pupils in the Special School District must have the opportunity to cast a ballot
- The Governing Council member in each LEA district shall serve as the election coordinator
- The election may be held at a general meeting of parents, by a mail ballot, or other process provided that all parents are notified of the election and given the opportunity to vote
- Beginning with the 1998-'99 school year, the election procedure will be determined by the SSD PAC

The first Interdistrict Parent Advisory Committee (I-PAC), made up of parents from each of the 23 partner districts and each SSD school, was elected in May of 1997 and represented a parent group that was for the first time independent of SSD. This committee became the foundation for the restructuring of the Parent Liaison Committees into the current Parent Advisory Council with three levels of participation:



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Inter-District Level (I-PAC) — representatives are elected/selected from each of the 23 partner districts and each SSD school to represent their district/school at the I-PAC level (although elections may still be held in some districts, most representatives on the I-PAC have volunteered to serve)

District Level (D-PAC ) — parent representatives from each building (B-PAC) in the district come together to represent their school at the D-PAC district level

Building Level (B-PAC) — all parents whose children receive special education services may participate at the B-PAC level

The I-PAC has been meeting monthly since the fall of the 1997-'98 school year. More difficult, though, has been getting PACs organized and sustained at the partner district level (D-PAC). Through grants offered by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in 2002-'03 and 2003-'04, district-level PACS were up and running in more districts, but it has been difficult to keep up the effort for a variety of reasons.



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### *SSD Parent Advisory Council—Director and I-PAC Survey*

Surveys were sent to 25 SSD directors who may have PAC responsibility and all 18 current SSD I-PAC parent representatives, a total of 43. All 25 SSD directors and 9 SSD I-PAC parent representatives returned the survey, yielding an 84% return rate.

The perceptions of Parent Advisory Council (PAC) between SSD directors and SSD I-PAC parent representatives are comparable. The majority of the directors and I-PAC parent representatives indicate the following:

- Their districts have a special education PAC (directors 59%, parents 78%)
- Average PAC meeting attendance is 1-5 people
- Each building in the district does not have PAC representative, or do not know
- No building-level PACs exist in their districts
- PACs have no funding, or do not know.

In terms of involvement in PAC, the majority of directors and I-PAC parent representatives point out that administrative involvement from SSD and partner districts is by attending PAC meetings only. Furthermore, I-PAC parent representatives indicate that the I-PAC parent involvement is to organize or coordinate the district PAC (50%). This evidence may indicate that I-PAC parents are comfortable enough to take over the lead and continue on their own with district support.

SSD directors have a different perception. They see I-PAC parent involvement in district PACs as attending meetings only (38%), or the district PAC was organized by a parent other than the I-PAC parent representative (31%). However, 3 directors indicate in “other” that the I-PAC parent representative assists with organizing and coordinating the district PAC, which would bring this category up to 31%.

In terms of the goal of PAC activities, the 3 common goals perceived from both groups are as follows:

- Dissemination of information to parents
- Promote communication/collaboration with parents and school personnel
- Provide resources and supports to parents and school personnel

Another important goal perceived by SSD I-PAC parent representatives is advocacy for students; the other important goal perceived by SSD directors is to provide parent education according to parent’s needs.

In terms of topics discussed at PAC meetings, the top 4 topics indicated by both groups are as follows:

- IEP
- District & community support
- General education staff understanding of disabilities
- Transition



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Parents also report that PAC meetings afford them the opportunity to address many other concerns with district administrators: friendship and social skills, homework, transportation, discipline, 504 plans, reauthorization of IDEA, advocacy, life after high school, bullying, medications, psychological services, curriculum and instruction, self-advocacy, life skills, testing skills and the MAP test.

(See Appendix 5-5 for total survey results.)



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### *SSD Parent Advisory Council — Parent Surveys*

Surveys were sent to 2,618 parents/guardians who had been randomly selected and were returned from 340 families, yielding a 15% return rate. Response was received from SSD special education and technical education schools and each of the 23 partner districts. The purpose of the survey is to understand to what extent parents of children who receive services from SSD are aware of SSD's Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

In comparison of the percentage of the student population served by SSD in each district, the returned percentage for each district is comparable to the percentage of the student population served by SSD within 2% except in Hazelwood, Mehlville, and Parkway. Of the total number of students served countywide by SSD, 11% are from Hazelwood, but only 8% of the sampled parents returned the surveys. 8% of the total countywide students served by SSD are from Mehlville, but 11% of the sampled parents returned surveys, and in Parkway, 14% of total students served countywide by SSD are from Parkway, but 17% of the sampled parents returned the surveys. (See Appendix 5-6 for details in regard to the number of parents who returned the survey in each district.)

The majority of parents surveyed are aware of SSD's parent advisory council, but only 42% are aware of a parent advisory council in their school district. Parents are informed about the parent advisory council by newsletter (62%), flyer (34%), and teacher (17%). A majority (92%) of parents do not go to parent advisory council meetings.

Parents indicated the best way to get information to them was by mail (73%) followed by send information home with my child (42%) and email (29%).

In terms of the barriers that keep parent from attending PAC meetings, the top 4 barriers indicated by parents are as follows:

- Lack of time (38%)
- Poor communication about the meetings (24%)
- Not interested (15%)
- Inconvenient time/day (13%)

However, when you factor in the responses written in for "other," 45 parents wrote in that they did not know about the meetings, which would mean that "poor communication about the meetings" would actually be the top barrier. (See Appendix 5-7)

Geographic and socio-economic reasons may play a role in preventing parents from attending meetings. The reader should be cautious in interpreting the following district data due to the low number of respondents. These barriers are indicated by more than 40% of the parents in each district who returned the survey (see Appendix 5-6):

- Lack of time (Total N=106):
  - Affton (2 of Total N of 3)
  - Clayton (2 of Total N of 3)
  - Kirkwood (6 of Total N of 12)
  - Parkway (27 of Total N of 57)



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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Wellston (1 of Total N of 2)

- Poor communication about the meetings (Total N=70):
  - Clayton (2 of Total N of 3)
  - Maplewood RH (2 of Total N of 3)
  - Wellston (1 of Total N of 2)
- Need childcare (Total N=31):
  - Wellston (1 of Total N of 2)
- Location of meeting (Total N=22)
  - Technical Schools (4 of Total N of 8)
- Need transportation (Total N=11):
  - Jennings (2 of Total N of 3)
  - Wellston (2 of Total N of 2)

Information they most wanted discussed at meetings was the IEP (63%), general education staff understanding of disabilities (52%), friendship and social skills for students (48%) and transition (33%).

While 60% of the parents indicated they receive the Parent Connection newsletter, only 35% were aware of the Family & Community Resource Center.

(See Appendix 5-8 for full parent survey report)



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *Case Studies of Successful PACs*

Surveys show the success of district PACs varies widely throughout partner districts. The common theme in districts where PACs have sustained membership and achieved longevity is by the continual support and commitment of the partner district. The following two districts show evidence of this collaborative effort between parents and administration:

The Clayton School District parent advisory (called Clayton Special Education Parent Advisory Council – CSEPAC) meets 6 times a year with average attendance of 6-to-10 parents. Each building in the district has a representative, however, there are no building-level advisories at this time. Meetings are organized, planned and facilitated by the parent co-chairs. SSD and Clayton administrators attend the meetings. PAC goals are to disseminate information, advocate for students, promote collaboration, and provide resources and awareness of district programs. The commitment and involvement of the Clayton School District has been key in the success of its PAC. The district gives PAC parents access to its communications director to disseminate information, devotes a web page to the PAC, prints PAC representative names and numbers in each school buzz book along with other important numbers, and maintains a district email user list for further communications. The parent co-chairs are also included on the Superintendent’s Cabinet.

In the Parkway School District, the parent advisory (called Parkway Parents Advisory Council for Children with Disabilities - PACCD) meets 6 times a year with general membership, 8 times a year with the Parkway and SSD administrative team and 9 times a year with its parent steering committee. Average attendance is 30 parents for general membership meetings, 5 parents for administrative meetings and 6 for the steering committee. Each building in the district has its own PACCD representative, but there are no building-level PACs. Parkway and SSD administrators work collaboratively with PACCD parents to plan and sometimes implement meetings, however, the PACCD steering committee takes the lead. Parkway provides a \$2,500 budget for the PACCD to operate, gives PACCD access to its communications director to disseminate information, maintains a web page for the organization, and prints PACCD representative names in the district’s Survival Guide and in each of the school buzz books. PACCD goals are to disseminate information, advocate for students, promote collaboration, provide parent education and provide resources and awareness of district programs.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *Public Forum*

A public forum was held during an Interdistrict Parent Advisory Council (I-PAC) meeting to elicit additional input for the program evaluation. Ten parents participated the night of the forum. Eight-of-the-10 parents at the forum were I-PAC parent representatives. The 10 questions posed at the public forum also were emailed out to a parent list and four parents (non I-PAC) participated electronically.

The need for better communication and more information was cited throughout the parent responses: to be involved, parents want more communication from teachers and more information on services and options. For barriers, lack of or poor communication was cited. Parents in this group indicated that email was the best way to communicate with them, followed by the parent newsletter. Workshops and the resource center were given as the ways the parent program has assisted them in their child's education and the top recommendation for the parent program was to communicate more widely. To the last question, how to better engage parents in collaborative activities, again, communication was the top response: the need for more information and communication on activities and ways to be involved.

Two hundred fifty-five responses were given to the 10 questions with the following as the top responses (See Appendix 5-9 for full report):

1. How are you involved in the education of your child? The top answers given by parents are: homework (9), IEP (8), teacher contact (7), parent advisory council (6), attend regular team meetings (4).
2. How would you like to be involved in your child's education? Parents indicated they wanted more communication with teacher/team (3), to see work samples, study guides, know what they students are learning (2), have more information on services offered to their child and how they can be involved (2), are satisfied with present level of participation (2).
3. What are barriers to your involvement as a parent? Parents answered lack of communication or poor communication (13), not understanding options (3), childcare.
4. What recommendations do you have to address the barriers? Parents indicated the need to increase communication (8), general education teachers need more awareness and training in regard to kids with disabilities and need to be held accountable for their education (3), workshops (2).
5. How do you receive information about SSD programs for parents? The top answers were: email (7), parent newsletter (5), in child's backpack (4), snail mail (4), word of mouth/other parents (2), ask for it (2).



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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6. How would you like to receive information about programs for parents? Parents answered similarly to the previous question: email (13), newsletter (5), snail mail (4), my child's teacher/SSD staff (2), website (2).
7. In what ways have the services of the parent program assisted you in understanding the needs of your child and your involvement in your child's education? Parents indicated the services of Family Services & Diversity: Workshops/speakers (10), Family & Community Resource Center (9).
8. What recommendations do you have for the parent program? The single answer given with multiple responses was to promote the program more widely (3).
9. What opportunities exist for parents to serve on committees, discuss concerns with the district and study specific problems? Parents answered most often PAC (6), program committees (2), Board of Education meetings (2).
10. In what ways can SSD engage parents in collaborative activities? Again, communication was the top response: more information/communication on activities/ways to be involved (5), surveys, *although one response was "surveys don't receive enough response to be considered valid,"* (4) electronically: online groups/discussion board/listserv (3), engagement effort needs to be more at local school level and not district level (2)

After the above questions were answered at the public forum, discussion centered on what is needed when a parent starts out in the special education process. Parents said they needed to know who and how to contact someone, what and where the resources were and what it all means. Suggestions offered were to add numbers on the Procedural Safeguards, produce a video of resources for PTO and other meetings, have short videos on the website, and to publicize the availability of workshop handouts.

Parents also indicated the following should happen when entering special education process: Mentor family connection, procedural safeguards for "dummies," contact sheet for parent and in school buzz book, access to book lists and other resources online, parent orientation meeting in partner district calendars, automated phone surveys, parent survey at the IEP meeting, needs assessment at different events, magnet with phone number, tables at open houses with information and surveys, SSD start-of-the-school year packet for every student.

It was also noted that there was much more parent contact at the early childhood level, that is was difficult for parents to have to communicate with two districts and that some parents at school-age level did not want to be identified as having a child who received special education services.



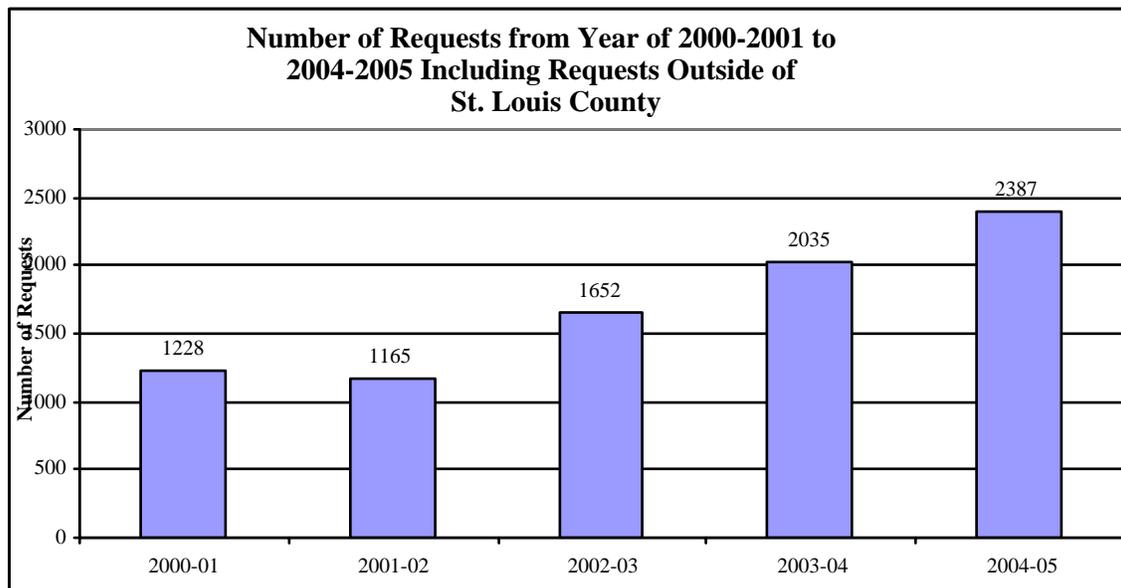
## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

**Question #4 — Are the services of the parent program accessed equitably throughout the district?**

### *Parent Program Data Analysis*

Family Services & Diversity received 2,387 requests\* for information and referral during the 2004-'05 school year, including requests from outside St. Louis County. Requests were up 17% from 2003-'04 (2,035 requests) although three fewer weeks of data were counted. The average year-to-year percentage increased 19% from 2000-'01 to 2004-'05. Total request percentage increased 94% from 2000-'01 (1,228 requests) to 2004-'05 (2,387 requests).

Figure 1. Number of Requests from Year of 2000-'01 to 2004-'05



(\*Currently the program counts only the number of people who actually contact its staff members and ask for information. For example, one call could be a request for 20 Transition Guidebooks, another could be request to talk and provide resources for 15 teachers. Currently the program would count this as two contacts rather than 35. Feedback from the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Resource Center and agency members on the Family Services Program Evaluation Advisory Committee, St. Louis Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) and MPACT (Missouri Parents Act), indicates this method does not fully reflect the number of people served. The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Resource Center has been in existence since 1992. In 1996 it received requests for information from approximately 500 persons. Development of the website began in 1997. Fast Facts were added to the website in 2000. By 2004, the DD Resource Center sent approximately 4,500 packets of information that were requested through their 800 phone line or from their website. In addition, there were 6,500 hits on their website to find information or to download Fast Facts. In addition to phone calls,



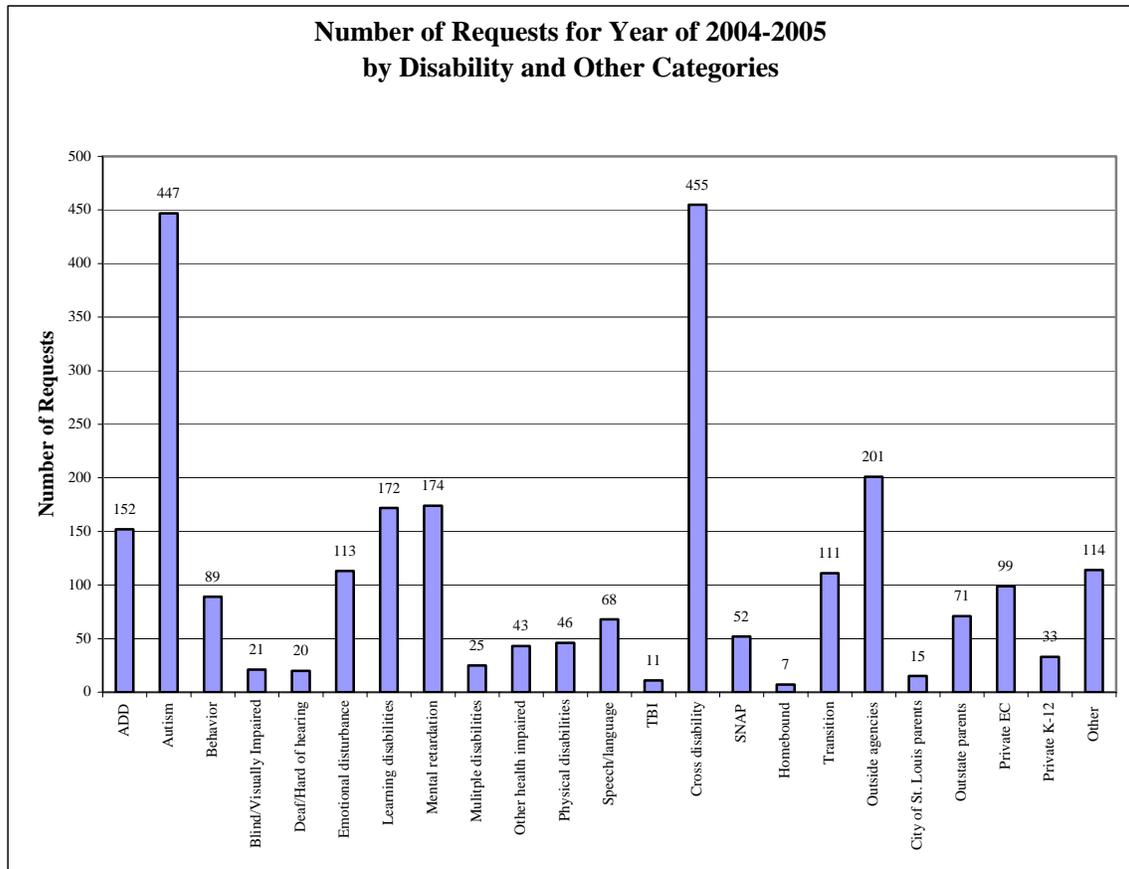
## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

both LDA and MPACT develop their total count by compiling the number of attendees at workshops and other events, website hits and resources distributed.)

Autism was the most requested educational diagnosis (447), followed by behavior/emotional (202)<sup>1</sup>, mental retardation (174), learning disabilities (172), attention deficit disorder (152), and speech language (68). See Figure 2 for details.

For the purpose of data collection, “cross disability” refers to requests for materials that are not disability specific, such as IEP Guidebook for Parents, or that the disability was not disclosed; “other” refers to community members, university staff and students, etc.

Figure 2. Number of Requests for Year of 2004-‘05 by Disability and Other Categories



Note: ADD refers to attention deficit disorder, TBI refers to traumatic brain injury, SNAP refers to special non-public access program, and EC refers to early childhood

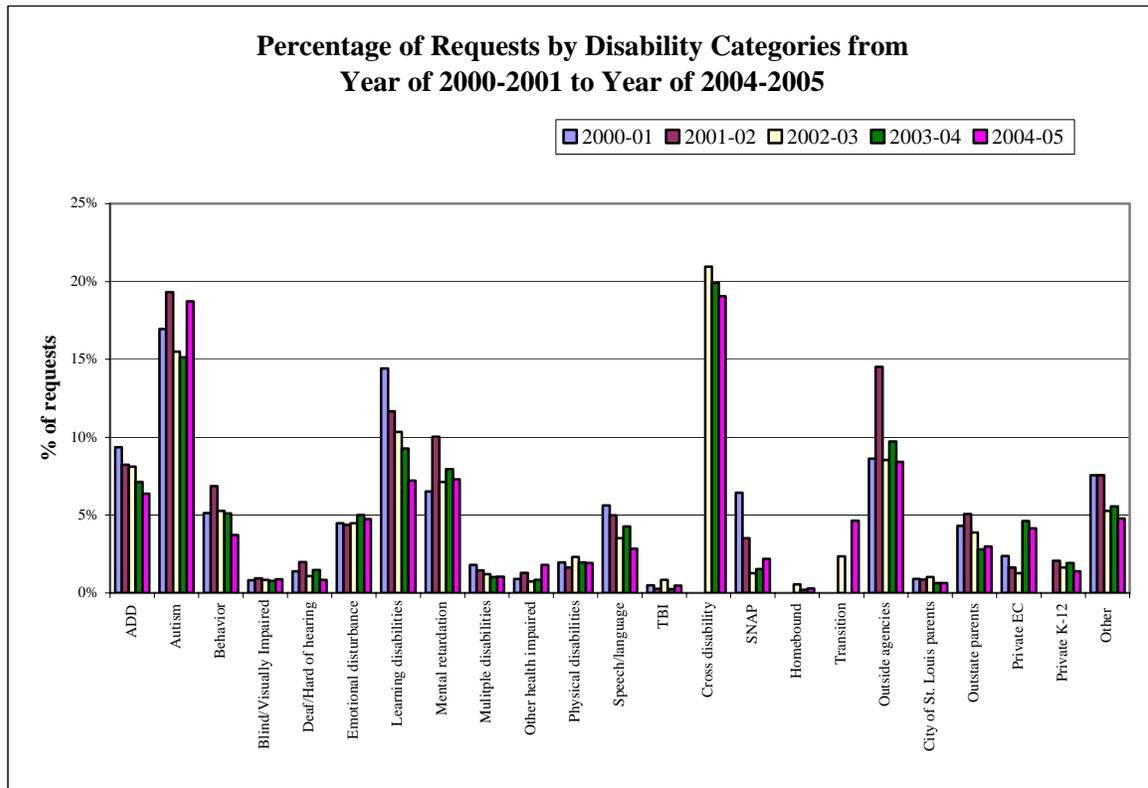
<sup>1</sup> Combining behavior (89) and emotional disturbance (113).



# Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

Over the past 5 years, requests for information on autism was the most requested educational diagnosis, followed by behavior/emotional<sup>2</sup>, learning disabilities, mental retardation, attention deficit disorder, and speech language. The requests for learning disabilities have decreased over the years. The requests from outside agencies remained about 10% over the years. Family Services & Diversity served or collaborated with more than 100 agencies and support groups during the 2004-'05 school year (See Appendix 2-2). Figure 3 displays the details.

Figure 3. Percentage of Requests by Disability and Other Categories from 2000-'01 to 2004-'05



Note: ADD refers to attention deficit disorder, TBI refers to traumatic brain injury, SNAP refers to special non-public access program, and EC refers to early childhood

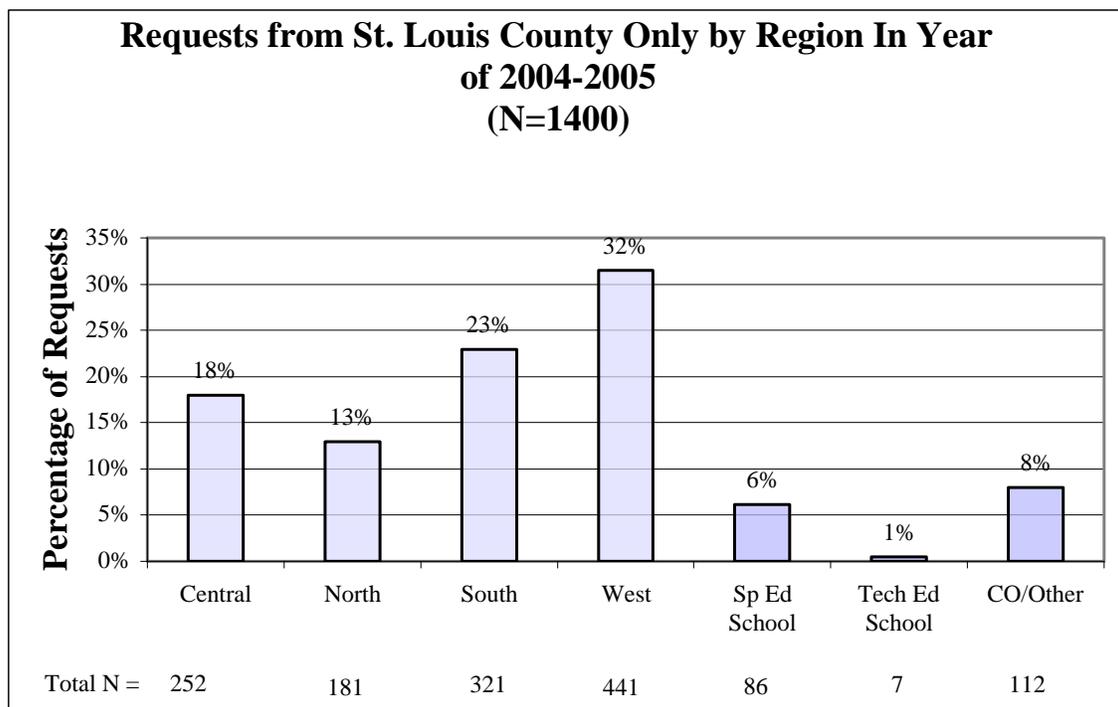
<sup>2</sup> Combining behavior and emotional disturbance.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

There were 1,400 requests in year 2004-'05 from St. Louis County: 32% from the West Region, followed by South Region (23%), Central Region (18%), and North Region (13%). (See Figure 4) In Figure 4, the number under each region represents number of requests for each region. For example, the number of requests for Central Region is 252.

Figure 4. Requests from St. Louis County Only by Region in Year of 2004-'05



*Note: "CO/Other" refers to requests from SSD Central Office staff not specific to regions or schools, such as intake, related services, facilitators, etc.*



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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From 2000-'01 to 2004-'05 the number of parents in regions who access the resources of Family Services & Diversity has increased fairly steadily, while staff requests are more erratic from year to year. (See Figures 5.1 and 5.2 for details)

Figure 5.1. Number of Requests from Parents by Region from Year 2000-'01 to 2004-'05

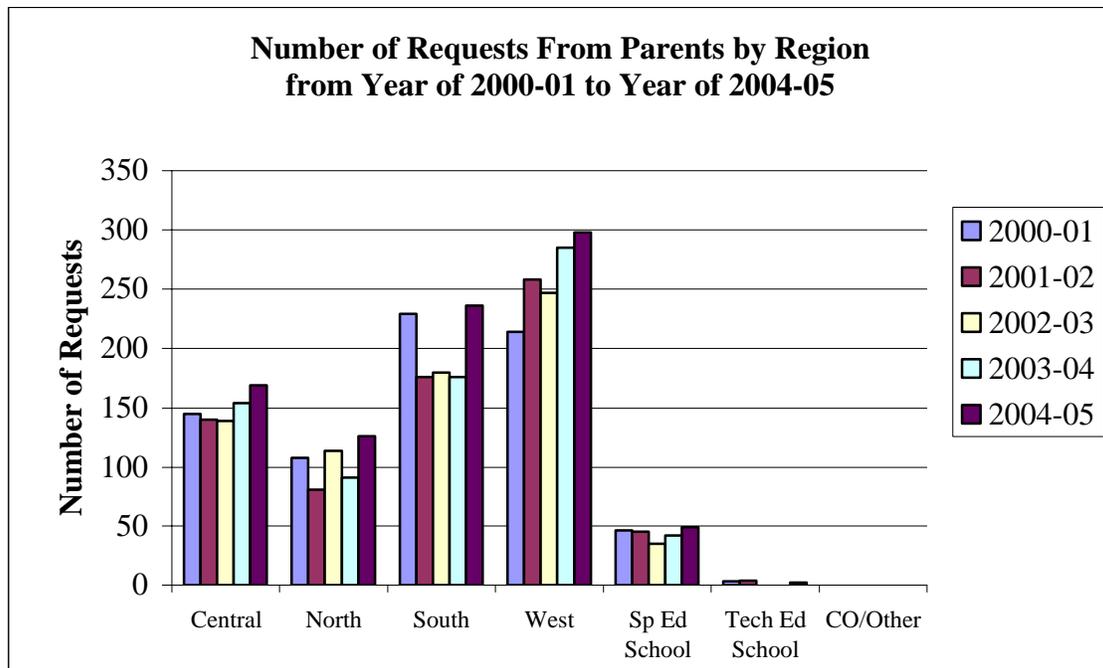
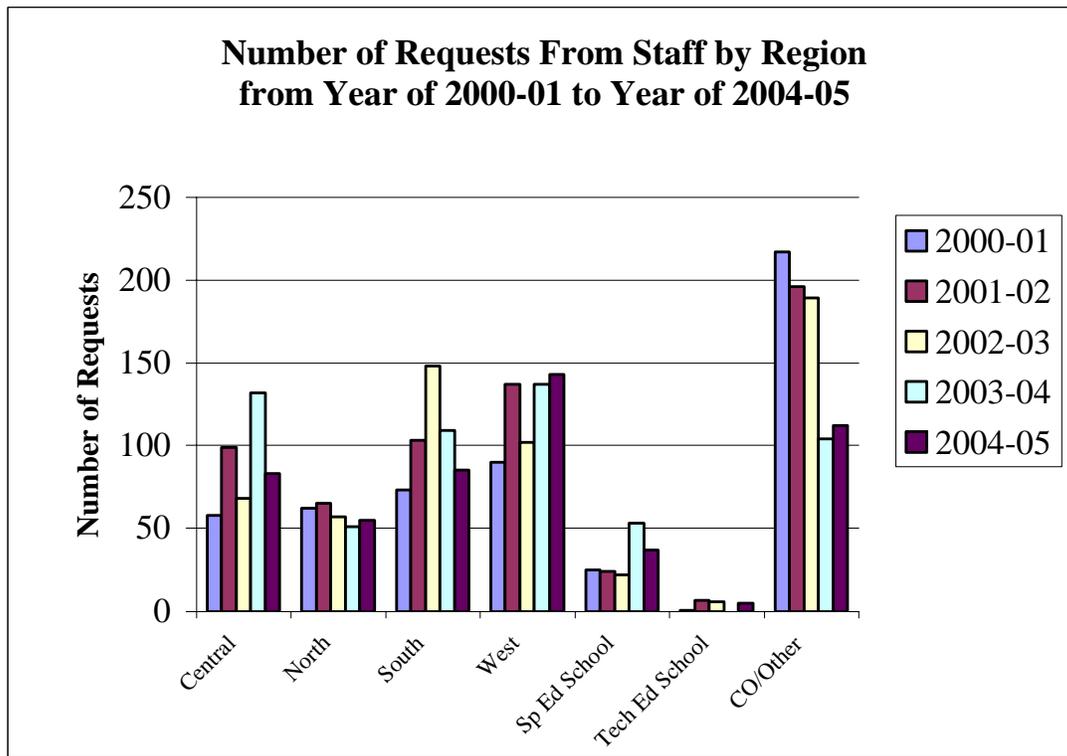


Figure 5.2. Number of Requests from Staff by Region from Year 2000-'01 to 2004-'05

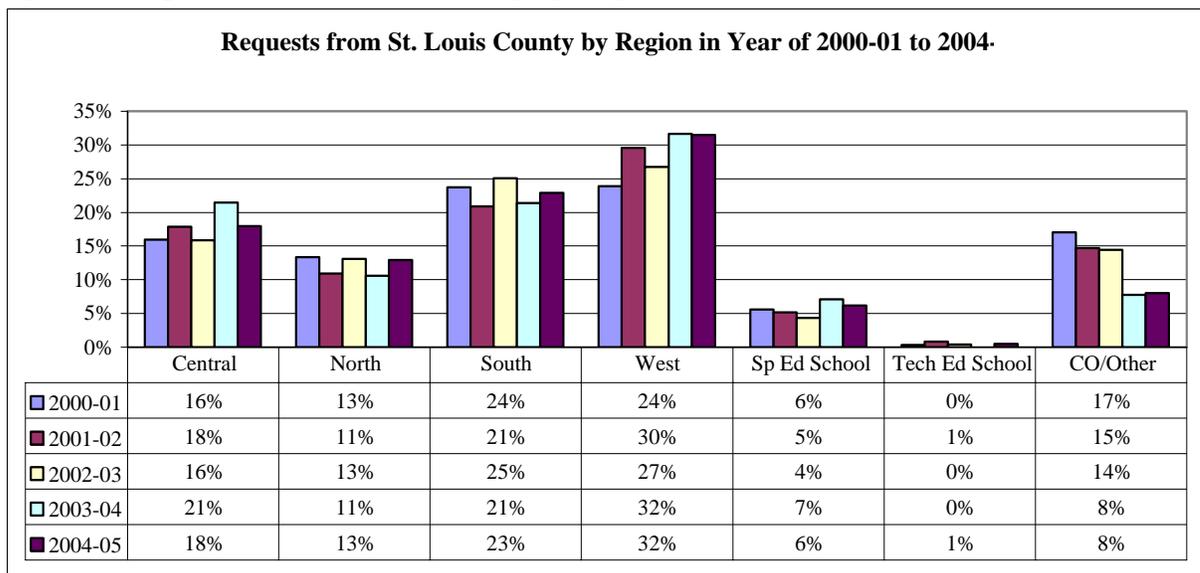


## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity



Generally speaking, over the 5-year period the increase in the number of requests was stable from Central and West Regions, while North and South Regions remained the same with limited variation (See Figure 6 for details). End-of-year reports with complete district and request information for Parent Program Data is in Appendix 2-3.

Figure 6. Requests from St. Louis County by Region in Year of 2000-'01 to 2004-'05





## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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In comparison with the student population served by SSD in December 1, 2004, there were:

- 22% of students served by SSD from Central Region, 18% of requests from Central Region.
- 24% of students served by SSD from North Region, 13% of requests from North Region.
- 24% of students served by SSD from South Region, 23% requests from South Region.
- 29% of students served by SSD from West Region, 32% of requests from West Region.

In sum, parents from West Region accessed the services of the parent program most, followed by parents from South Region, Central Region. Parents from North Region accessed the services of the parent program the least in year of 2004-05.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *Cost Analysis*

To analyze the cost to provide the countywide Family Services & Diversity program, the committee obtained the Dec. 1, 2004, count of special education students and technical education students who receive special education services, and the total cost of the program, which included the 2004-2005 salary and benefits of two 3/4-time employees, one full-time employee who devotes 1/2-time to the program, and the purchased services, printing and binding, instructional materials, library books, general supplies and capital expenditures from the budgets of the two 3/4-time employees.

The total annual cost of the program, \$188,644, was divided by the student count of 28,501 (27,936 students who receive special education services in five SSD schools and 23 partner districts, plus 565 students who receive services in SSD tech schools) to arrive at an estimated per pupil cost of \$6.62 for the 2004-2005 academic year.

Note: the committee used the Dec. 1 count based on the parent program providing information twice a year (Parent Connection newsletter) to all students who receive services. SSD does not keep records on the number of families served each year, so the committee could not determine the cost of services per family.

Growth of the program:

When the parent program began in 1992, it served 19,906 students during the school year with two 10-month 3/4-time staff members (60 hours a week total). It currently serves 28,501 students with two 10-month 3/4-time staff members and one 10-month 1/2-time staff member (80 hours a week total). (The 1/2-time employee spends the additional 1/2-time on staff development and multicultural education.)

While the number of students who receive services has grown by 43%, the number of staff hours has increased by 33%. Data from just the 2000-'01 through 2004-'05 school years indicates the year-to-year average increase in the number of requests is 19% and the total increase in requests is 94%. (See Figure 1.)



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### Chapter VI — Summary and Recommendations

#### *Summary*

##### **Strengths**

In 1997, the SSD parent program was recognized as exemplary by the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) review and the program has continued to develop since that time. (See Appendix 6-1)

The parent program has a comprehensive calendar of more than 80 workshops for parents with more than 1,000 in attendance this school year. Parents report that attending workshops helps increase their knowledge base, understand the issues they are facing and look to the future for their child. Seventy-five percent of parents who attend workshops report that they are better able to participate in their child's education as a result of attending the workshop. Parents frequently report that the program has "great workshops, great speakers." A parent also reports, "The Family & Community Resource Center workshops and materials have been very valuable in preparing me to be an active participant in my child's education." Another parent states that from the strategies she learned at the friendship workshop, her child has a friend for the first time. The Family Services & Diversity staff is experienced and knowledgeable and offers a parent-to-parent component.

The Family & Community Resource Center (FCRC) provides a wealth of books, videos, information packets and other resources. Parents report that the expertise of the FCRC staff is noteworthy. "The scope and depth of the printed information they have compiled and make available is impressive and the workshops that they present most valuable. I have been able to use this information both at home as well as to pass along this information to my child's teachers." Other parents report, "A lot of very useful information on a wide variety of topics have helped me with ADHD and homework issues," and "The Resource Library has been invaluable to us."

The yearly average increase in the number of requests from the FCRC from 2000-2005 is 19%. Total increase is 94% from 2000-2001 to 2004-2005. The number of requests by region is comparable to the number of students in all regions except North. The number of staff served and the number of agency collaborations has increased markedly. The FCRC has been able to respond to the increase in requests for materials in specific areas (autism, Asperger syndrome, bipolar disorder, etc.) by having an adequate budget with which to purchase new books and videos.

Sections of the Parent Handbook, "Evaluation Process" and "IEP Guide for Parents," are distributed during the evaluation process and through the early childhood program. FCRC brochures are distributed through diagnostic, social work and partner district staff. The majority of parents contacted through the PAC parent survey report that they receive the Parent Connection newsletter.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

The results of the 2005 Parent Satisfaction Survey sent out by the parent program indicate that parents have a high level of agreement with the following statements: “I understand my child’s diagnosis” (78%); “I have good home-school communication” (76%); “I feel my input about my child is valued by other team members” (75%); “I am comfortable with my role on my child’s planning team” (73%); “I believe my child is being educated in the least restrictive environment” (73%); and “My calls to SSD staff are returned in a timely manner” (70%).

In the Parent Satisfaction Survey 2004 sent out by the district, parents report a high level of agreement with the following: “I believe my child’s achievement has increased through my involvement as a parent” (60%); “I believe my child’s achievement has increased through my having better understanding of the special education process” (79%); “I believe my child’s achievement has increased through my support of my child’s learning at home” (88%); and “I am satisfied with the SSD staff and parent communication process” (74%). (See Appendix 2-2)

Parents have a variety of opportunities to have input in district issues through Parent Advisory Council and there has been continuous parent advisory activity since the late 1980s. Other opportunities are afforded by Board of Educations meetings, Public Review Committee, Technical Education Guidance Advisory, Federal Programs Advisory, ABA and SEB Advisories, district technology plan, program evaluation committees and more.

### Limitation

The method of data collection by Family Services & Diversity does not reflect all of the parents and other participants reached by the parent program.

### Challenges

*To reduce the inconsistency of the district’s communication to parents:*

- Parents and staff report the need to repeat the same parent program awareness activities from year-to-year and to address the barriers of follow-up with other staff members (administrators, teachers, support staff) and departments the parent program is dependent on to communicate its services and materials
- The parent survey indicates low awareness of the Family & Community Resource Center
- Staff, parents and community members on the advisory committee report that the name “Family Services & Diversity” is confusing to parents and does not well reflect the program’s activities and resources
- The advisory committee and public forum report the need to create a presence of parent program materials on the website for dissemination of resources, that the program doesn’t have the budget or ability to make copies for the more than 28,500 families it serves, that the method of sending communication home in the students’ backpacks is often unreliable, and that email is emerging as a preferred means of communication for those with access.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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- Program needs to address the areas parents indicate the lowest awareness in the satisfaction survey: “My child is involved in community activities,” “I am aware of transition activities for my child from grade to grade,” “I understand the role of local support agencies,” “I believe my family receives the information we need to prepare for our child’s transition to adult life” and “I understand the technology used by my child.”

*To create more effective collaboration between parents, SSD and partner district staff for Parent Advisory Council:*

- Director and parent surveys reveal participation varies widely from district to district. PAC surveys and case studies show support is needed to assist in membership recruitment, communicate meeting information and to provide a forum for parents to address district issues. Parents report it is difficult for them to communicate with two districts.
- The literature review indicates the law on confidentiality (FERPA) makes it all the more difficult for parents to network and get support, and that it is beneficial to redefine typical definitions and have a common language: “parent,” “parent involvement” and “meeting” to be understood to reflect the variety of ways to look at parents and how they may be involved, and the use of People First Language by administrators, teacher level and support staff to respect the dignity of students.

*To broaden program outreach to underserved, hard-to-reach families:*

- The literature review indicates cultural, language and socio-economic barriers impede parent involvement.
- Data collected and analyzed further show areas of student population where these barriers exist and the parent program is not being utilized.



## Program Evaluation for Family Services & Diversity

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### *Recommendations*

Based on the challenges and limitations determined by the literature review and data collected, the committee developed the following recommendations. Action plans will be developed to implement the improvement activities for the program.

- Design a more consistent and effective system and schedule for communication and dissemination of parent program information and resources (outreach to partner district staff, access to web site, email for parents and teachers, schedule for materials dissemination, change name of program).
- Increase parent involvement in Parent Advisory Council through collaborative efforts of parents, SSD staff, Governing Council and partner district staff.
- Develop specific strategies to communicate and provide support to parents in underserved areas (satellite sites, outreach with partner district counselors and outside agencies, parent involvement through problem-solving model).
- Improve data collection method to more accurately assess the effectiveness of the parent program's resources, training and support services.



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## Appendix