

Family and Parent Involvement- Curriculum Enhancement Initiative

Ottawa University has been fortunate to receive two grants from The Kansas Parent Information Resource Center (KPIRC) between 2007- 2009. The grant monies were utilized by the Education Departments of both the Kansas City campus and The College campuses. The instructional goal for the two grants was “to ensure that all graduates of Ottawa University’s Teacher Education Program foster relationships with family and parents for the purpose of improving student learning.”

A survey of teacher candidates at the Kansas City campus in 2006 revealed that the candidates felt the least prepared to meet Professional Education Standard #10: The educator fosters collegial relationships with school personnel, parents, and agencies in the larger community to support all students’ learning and well-being. To implement the first grant in 2007, a learning community was formed with three adjuncts, representing both campuses. This group was responsible for researching involvement strategies and creating a workshop for the adjunct faculty. The learning community also presented the findings to the fall 2007 and spring 2008 teacher candidates during their student teaching experience. Upon reflection, the learning community discovered that the teacher candidates would benefit from deeper implementation and change in the teacher education program.

This second grant involved further research by the learning community, integration of family and parent involvement standards into the coursework of the education program, and additional workshops for the fall 2008 and spring 2009 teacher candidates. The learning community for this grant included Sharon Beems, adjunct; Paige Moxness, adjunct; with support from Dr. Maryann Benner, Director Teacher Education, Kansas City; and Amy Hogan, Division Chair, Education Department of The College.

The first learner outcome was to encourage “faculty members (to) incorporate strategies for involving families and parents in students’ learning in the courses they teach.” Presentations to the adjunct faculty were held in July of 2008 and January of 2009. During these meetings, the adjunct received updated information on the parent and family involvement standards created by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and endorsed by KPIRC. These standards are: Welcoming all families into the school community, Communicating Effectively, Supporting Student Success, Speaking up for Every Child, Sharing Power, Collaborating with Community. All were encouraged to emphasize these standards when teaching about involvement.

The key research findings supporting parent and family involvement were also emphasized during workshops for both adjuncts and student teachers

- When schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.
- Students with involved parents tend to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-education programs, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school.
- Initiatives should focus on improving student learning,

A partnership between the Learning Community members and several adjuncts from both campuses was created. During this time, the course syllabi were examined and then research and strategies for involvement were discussed. The adjuncts were then asked to weave research based strategies into the framework of the course that they teach and include those pieces in their syllabi.

Sharon Beems, Learning Community Member and adjunct at The College campus, was able to meet with three adjunct to examine their syllabi and discuss ways to include the teaching of the six standards within their curriculum. The meetings entailed Sharon discussing the six standards of parental involvement and collaboration as to where the parental involvement piece would fit nicely within their curricular framework. Sharon also shared a Powerpoint presentation of the six standards of parental involvement. A follow up discussion of how the integration process went and each adjunct's response about the parental involvement piece was held. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive, as each individual felt that it was an important piece within their coursework and they would continue to utilize this within their course.

Sharon Beems integrated this piece within her fall "Managing the Education Environment" course and found it to be a necessary component. The students were shown the attached PowerPoint and then the class held a round-table discussion of ways that teachers could address the six standards. There was a lot of constructive conversation at this point. Assessment of the parental involvement knowledge involved the students creating a parental involvement plan for implementing each of the standards. This was reflected upon at a later class session and ideas were shared.

Angie Flax, General Methods & Reading in the Content Area, also from The College campus, took part in the KPIRC Grant work. Here is what Angie shared with us concerning her work:

"When I incorporated the parental involvement piece into the General Methods course, my overall objective was for students to become aware of the importance of community involvement in the school. Along with this goal, I wanted students to be able to consider different approaches to encouraging this involvement. The students far surpassed my overall objective. They came up with fabulous ideas to bring parents into our schools and even better yet, to take our school to the parents. They shared through their class presentations how to set up a carnival night, bingo night, utilize a Community Art Exhibit, a Parent Points for Prizes program etc. I was completely blown away by their ideas and came away with much more than I had initially intended."

Paige Moxness met with the adjunct faculty for the Kansas City Campus. This included Nancy Smith the adjunct for "Reading in the Content Area." Nancy was able to examine her syllabi and find a number of areas in which to include involvement strategies. One of her assignments is the creation of a thematic unit and after hearing the research and discussion the standards, she reflected that there was room to include a family piece within this assignment. Nancy also looked to her assignment on graphic organizers and

was able to include discussion on the importance of teaching parents how to use them to support student learning

When asked to participate, Mary Bloomquist, adjunct for “Managing the Educational Environment,” reflected that she taught about interactions with parents and families but had never included any specific standards or objectives in her syllabi or coursework. Upon examination of her syllabi, she was able to generate many ideas for inclusion of these strategies. Some of those ideas were having the candidate’s role play phone conferences with parents, creating surveys for parents, researching internet resources for involvement, and discussions about involvement for ESL families. Mary shared her passion for working with families from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and helping her teacher candidates feel comfortable working with these families. During the discussion, Mary felt that the research and the standards would enhance her coursework.

The second outcome objective was the “teacher candidates will demonstrate a disposition that supports the involvement of families and parents in K-12 students’ learning”. During their coursework for the Ottawa Teacher Education program, the candidates are required to develop electronic portfolios (E-Portfolio). The intention of the portfolios is that the candidates demonstrate they are developing the skills identified in the Kansas Professional Standards for New Teachers.

Paige Moxness, met with the fall 08 and spring 09 teacher candidates at their seminars. During this time, research findings and the parent and family involvement standards were presented. Then, an examination of the E-portfolio’s was made to see that every teacher candidate included a minimum of one effective parent and family involvement activity in their portfolio as evidence that they have met standard #10 (as stated above). They were to show evidence that their initiative was effective, based on their new knowledge, or write a journal entry stating how they would modify this example making it more meaningful. The responses below reflect the student teachers understanding about the importance and benefits of involving parents, families, and also community members.

“I communicate with parents by sending home a weekly newsletter. I know it is important to keep parents updated on their child's progress and to keep them informed about class activities. A newsletter will create a strong relationship between me and parents by giving them a glimpse into their child's classroom. A newsletter helps make me available and approachable to parents. My newsletter might include several different aspects such as reminders for upcoming events, current spelling words or word wall words, project updates, lesson descriptions, a place where parents can ask questions or make comments, and a look at future assignments.” Upon examination of her evidence, this candidate added, “ I noted that I would have a section where parents could ask questions or make comments, but I could take it further by asking parents to write sections for the newsletter on topics they are interested/knowledgeable in.”

“Customer Service at the ACCESS Garage Sale

During the lesson we talked about the importance of good customer service especially because of who would be attending our sale. We had sent fliers to every school in our district, board members, community businesses, parents, ACCESS graduates, and churches. Many people who we know and respect would be buying from us, thereby helping our program and we discussed how to appropriately treat customers.”

“I had the unique experience of having my practicum assignment in the school that I work in. Because of this, many of the kids knew who I was and asked questions about why I was in their classroom. This gave me the opportunity to tell them about the LIFT (Learning through Intensive Functional Teaching) program and autism. My presence in the classroom allowed me to foster relationships between the 6th grade teachers and the LIFT staff creating opportunities for peer mentors to come in and work with our kids with autism. After my practicum the 6th graders had trust in me enough to come in and work with students who can appear loud, sometimes hit themselves, socially inappropriate and sometimes scary. I believe that by creating a trust with the teachers and students I was able to make these peer mentor positions happen.”

“First, in terms of being welcoming of parents, I saw the parents of a girl (in my class) sitting with her having lunch together one day. So I asked them if I could join them and began talking to them in Spanish, to make sure that they knew they were not the "oddballs" because they are Spanish-speaking or that they are not welcome at the school. They seemed to really appreciate the gesture, and we had a very warm conversation. They loved hearing me tell them that (the student) was great to have in class because she was working very hard and because she felt very confident in joining class discussions.”

*For standard # 10, the first grade classrooms utilized parent volunteers within the classroom to introduce new concepts and practice other concepts. Parent volunteers were asked if they had a subject matter that they would like to teach to the class. One parent offered to come do a mock trial with the students b/c he was a lawyer. Another parent volunteered to conduct a lesson within the classroom that the teacher made. Both of these activities foster great participation and enthusiasm from the students. The students enjoyed having parents come in and act as a teacher. The parents were given a brief review of how to "run" their activities. The students were very engaged and involved through each activity. Other parents were made aware of the volunteers coming and the children were able to journal and respond to the activity that they completed.”

“7th grade students will hear a presentation and have time for a Q&A session with Mark Cameron. Mark is a local resident who was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident, but has continued to live life to the fullest and move forward with hope and determination. 7th grade students just finished reading Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick which told a story of two boys, one with a learning disability and one with a physical disability (Morquio syndrome). The book had a theme of believing in yourself and that you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it. Students also had to write a children’s story including a character with some type of disability, as a performance assessment. Mark’s willingness to come and share his story with the

students will allow them to actually meet someone similar to characters they've read and written about. They will be able to be in the presence of someone who has lived the theme of Freak the Mighty. They will also be made aware of someone in their community who chooses to live life to the best of their ability, even with a disability. Students will also be able to ask questions and gain understanding of life as a quadriplegic."

The third outcome stated that the "teacher candidates will apply the Six Standards of Parent Involvement". During the previously mentioned student teacher seminars, the candidates were taught about the standards, given an opportunity to share observations of the standards in their student teacher experience, and able to collect the ideas shared through a "Gallery Walk." There were great discussions and the students left the meetings with a list of effective ideas for involving parents, families, and community members.

At one of the meetings, the following ideas were generated:

Parental Involvement Grant Standards and Ideas – September 5, 2008

Standard 1: Welcoming all the families into the school community

- Getting more involvement from dads and not just moms
- Parent volunteers
- Back to school night, ice cream social, and open house
- Parent day
- Open door policy for parents

Standard 2: Communicating Effectively

- Parent Access (online program to check grades), Edu star, website
- Letters home
- Phone calls and emails - positive
- PTA
- Parent teacher conferences

Standard 3: Supporting Student Success

- H.E.L.P. programs
- Beneficial for ELL students
- Inform parents of student's progress
- Encouraging parental involvement
- Banquets for awards

Standard 4: Speaking up for every child

- C.A.S.A
- Watch D.O.G.S.
- After school program
- An event to share right of students

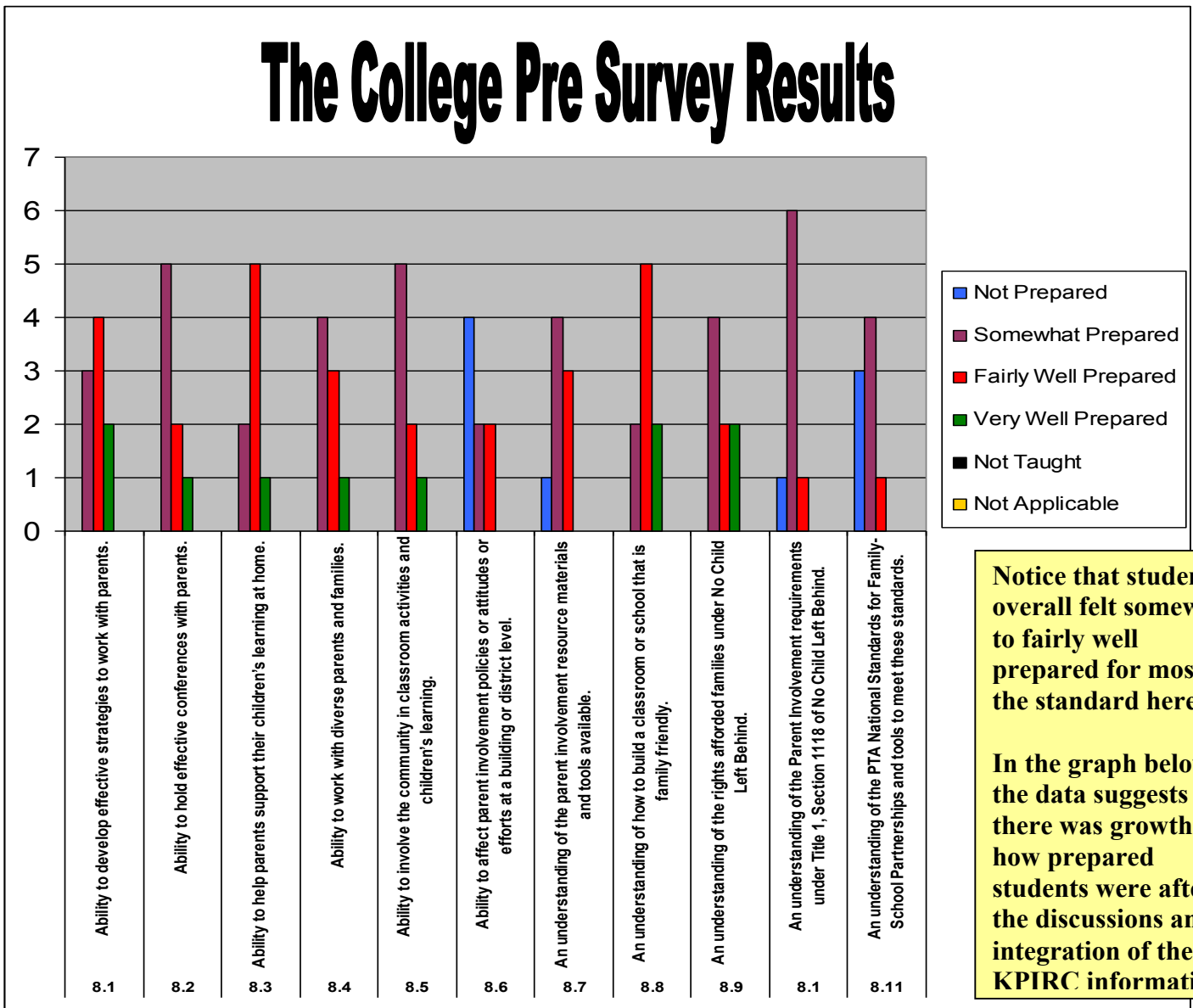
Standard 5: Sharing Power

- Collaborative
- Round-robin discussions (PT3 Program)
- Committees and councils
- Parents help outside the classroom and a positive learning environment

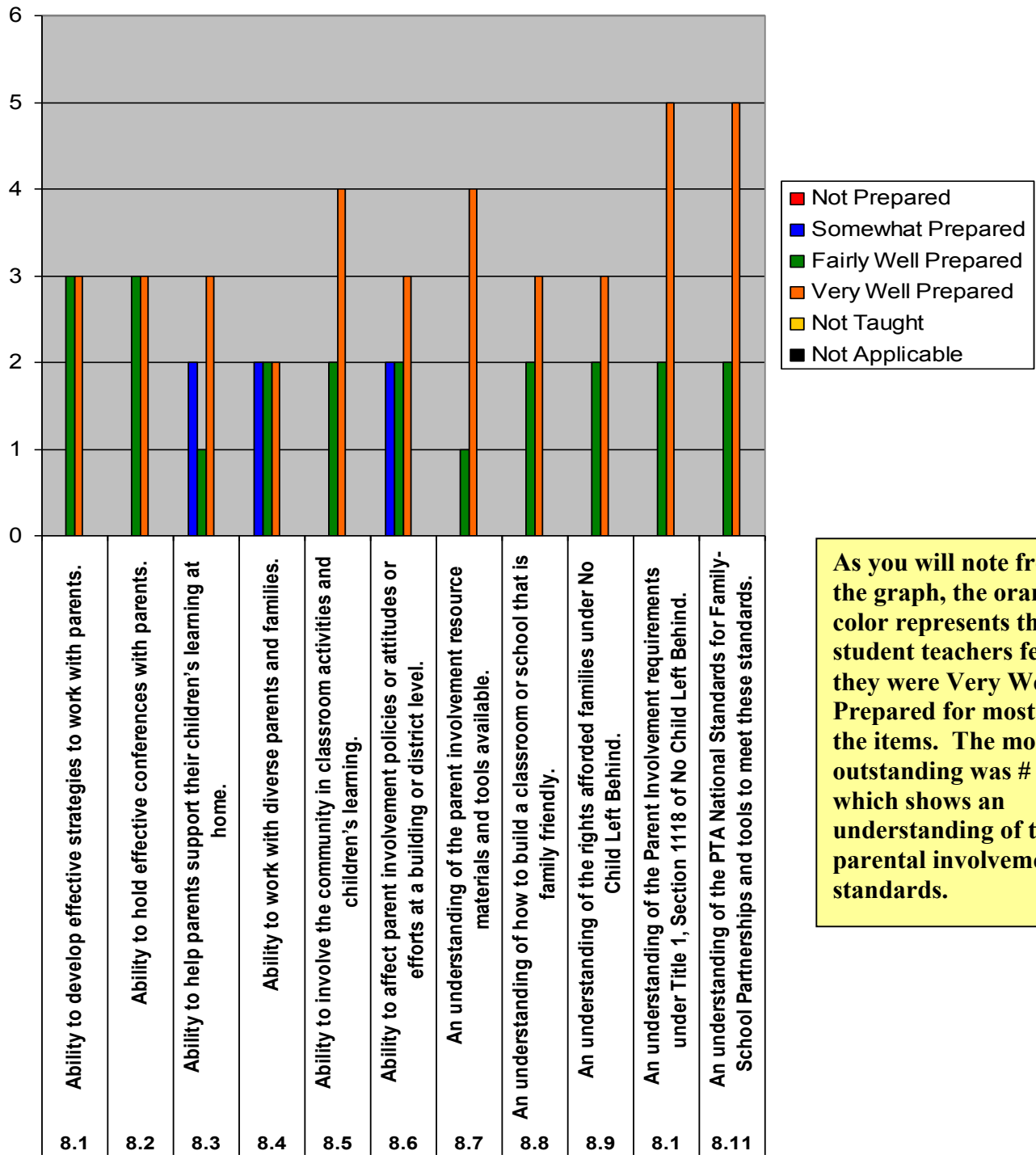
Standard 6: Collaborating with Community

- Using art building to display student work
- Bring community members into the classroom
- Shoe donations, dollars for dragons, food drives
- YMCA, boy scouts, youth in government

During the student teacher workshops, the student teachers were given the Parent Involvement Teacher Survey prior to the presentation and post presentation. A sampling of the results follow with a brief commentary.



The College Post Survey Results



As you will note from the graph, the orange color represents that student teachers felt they were Very Well Prepared for most of the items. The most outstanding was # 8.11, which shows an understanding of the parental involvement standards.

The Family and Parent Involvement – Curriculum Enhancement Initiative has made an impact on the Education Department of Ottawa University. Through the meetings with adjunct to implement initiatives in their coursework, and workshops sharing the six standards of involvement with the student teachers we have seen change. This work will help to ensure that all graduates of Ottawa University’s Teacher Education Program foster relationships with family and parents for the purpose of improving student learning. The learning community looks forward to seeing that this growth continues.

References

Henderson, A, & Mapp, K. (2002). "A New Wave of Evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement."

Henderson, Anne T., Vivian Johnson, Karen L. Mapp, and Don Davies. Beyond the Bake Sale. 2006

www.kpirc.org, Kansas Parent Information Resource Center, Great free resources!

www.sedl.org, Search under the "Family and Community" heading. You will find some great newsletters and self-paced power points to assess involvement in your school.

www.hfrp.org , Harvard Family Research Project. There are some fantastic articles here.

www.education-world.com, Education World. "Ten Ideas for a Successful Take Your Family to School Week" "Planning for Parent Involvement"

www.pta.org , Parent Teacher Association. On this site you will find the definitions of the Six Standards as well as other involvement resources.