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Sustainability Technology Project

### **The Learning Problem**

While pondering ideas for this project, I wanted to make sure I could apply it to my current educational environment. Currently, I teach at a Title I school on the East Dearborn and Detroit border. We are a melting pot comprised of African American, Hispanic, and Arabic students. The majority of our student base is non-English speaking and low income. One problem that we have always experienced has been parental involvement. We have low attendance at our parent-teacher conferences that our four times a year. Currently, I am head of our Parent Teacher Committee. We offer functions that assist in homework help, MEAP testing, explain our school technology, academic programs offered at the school etc and attendance is always low. At our last event, I had two parent volunteers out of a school population of roughly three hundred and fifty students. We struggle with having deadlines for activities because parents never know what is going on and try to sign up and pay for things at the last minute. When we have gatherings, children don't get picked up on time due to parents not knowing when it ended. We recently became a NCA accredited school and parental involvement was also an area of concern to the QAR team that visited our institution. Parental involvement is lacking both academically and for school functions. This problem is due to a language barrier, lack of technology in the home, transportation issues to school, and poor communication between parent and child. This is a problem that our school is constantly trying to address and better. We are constantly brainstorming ideas and trying out new ways to bridge the gap between the school and home. In this piece I would like to both discuss ideas we are currently implementing as well as concepts that could be implemented at our school. What can we do to make parents involved? What will make them care? What can make them see the importance of the school to home bond? These questions are constantly stewing in our brains every single day.

### **A Technology Based Solution**

Within the past year, we have implemented some technology based methods to improve parental involvement. We have morning announcements over our PA system daily in which I am in charge of. Over the PA system, students and I state the date, student pledge, lunch, word of the day, important school announcements and our school vision. We start school at 8:15am. We do not implement a tardy policy because then most of our students would be reported to Wayne County. We have a constant stream of students arriving from 8:15am to 9:00. I do the morning announcements at 8:30am in order to hit as many parents coming into the building as possible. We have made significant changes to our school website. There is an e-mail link for every staff member in our building available. Some teachers have links to their own personal webpage. Everything is now included on our webpage-curriculum, events, picture galleries, standardized test scores and data, information from Leona Group and Eastern Michigan University, and local city news. The most important addition has been the ability to change the webpage into different languages. This has proven helpful to our ELL population in

understanding what is going on at our school. Finally, we have purchased an automated calling service for our school. Every student's phone number that is on their emergency contact card has been programmed into the service as well as all school staff. Home phones as well as cell phones can receive the message. Any school staff member can type in a message to be sent to the parents and staff. It has really been working and we have noticed an increase in knowledge and attendance to our events and activities. We send the messages numerous times which may seem annoying, but it works.

I have some suggestions low in cost and free that I have presented to my administrator to get the parents more involved at our school. Even though our school is located in Dearborn, the majority of our students come from Detroit. We could contact the Detroit Public Television channel to broadcast some of our school information because we all know students watch television. This may cost a small fee. All of my other suggestions are free of cost but will require work from the staff. Grades three through five uses an online program called Study Island to prepare for MEAP and assist in preparation of the core content areas. Study Island offers an option where the student reports can be sent home to the parents. I feel that our principal should require each teacher to collect e-mail addresses from parents who have one and e-mail their Study Island progress monthly to those e-mail addresses. I also feel that it should be required that each staff member at our school to have their own personal webpages. The webpages should have specific requirements. Key requirements should be a link to an e-mail address, weekly newsletters, weekly schedule, assessment schedules, links for homework assistance, and pictures of activities. Our school has an extra Promethean Board that is stored in the gym. This Promethean Board can be used to broadcast school news before and after school in the area outside of the gym which is a high traffic area. The board is huge and a colorful message board would really grab people's attention.

### **Funding the Solution**

The only idea I had that would need a funding source would be putting some school information on Detroit Public Television. In the past, we have had money for advertising our school. This money went into key chains, a billboard on an expressway, and lawn signs. If we had money for all of those ideas, we could put money toward putting our school information on a public broadcasting channel. All of my other solutions are free of cost but would take time and energy from the school staff. Study Island reports sent home monthly would require time. Keeping up a webpage with required elements would require weekly upkeep. The duty of running the Promethean Board message every morning would be a large, daily responsibility. Not just the updating of the message, but the set-up of the board as well.

### **A Path for Implementation**

A quality and thought out plan to an administrator regarding funding for public television expose needs to be considered. In order for other solutions to be completed, administration needs to require teachers and staff to complete and participate in additional activities. Due to our school not being a traditional school with a union, rather charter, these expectations can be demanded of the teachers.

