

CVESD Parent Academy - Chula Vista Elementary School District

[Social media posts - CVESD Parent Academy.pdf uploaded.](#)

The purpose of the First Annual CVESD Parent Academy was to provide "Professional Development for Parents." We wanted to engage parents in a meaningful professional development seminar, in much the way our teachers, principals and school communications professionals experience annually in their respective associations. The Parent Academy was a first in our District, an initiative that strived to more directly engage parents in their children's education and prepare them to provide the support needed in order for students to be more successful in school. Educators know that parents have a huge impact in their children's lives and are in fact their children's first and most important teachers. The idea for the Parent Academy arose from our parent leaders' experience at the annual California Association for Bilingual Education conferences. There is a parent strand at the conference, one of the largest gatherings of educators on the West Coast. However, the sessions for parents are limited, and often overflowing. Our parent leaders asked, Why can't we have our own parent CAFE in CVESD? This saves on travel costs, ensures a wider group of parents receive the training, and our teachers and school leaders get to present on topics that are locally relevant. Our administrative team thought, Why not? And we soon had a committee to plan the inaugural event, which was branded as the CVESD Parent Academy.

We know from experience that a number of factors impact parent engagement/parent attendance at school events and activities. This includes access to services offered in the native language of families. Another factor is childcare. Parents often have younger children, and may not have suitable care available for them to be able to attend school activities, meetings or be able to access services offered at school. In our Title I schools, our School Readiness Instructional Assistants conduct outreach by distributing flyers at laundromats and libraries, taco shops and community services agencies. This, too, reflects one of our greatest challenges in working with English Learner families, gaining trust in order to increase parent participation and engagement in educational activities. For CVESD, we need our parents involved in our schools in order to accelerate student proficiency to grade level. Here's why: Thirty-five percent of CVESD students (10,619) are English Learners. The dominant language among English Learners is Spanish (92.6%), which is a higher concentration of Spanish-speaking students than the rest of the county (84%). With this knowledge, our planning efforts led to development of the following continuum: parent attendance at events, parent engagement in schools, and parent leadership and district-level influence in decision-making. The CVESD Parent Academy was created with this parent involvement continuum in mind. Our message was: Professional Development for Parents.

The committee (planning team) modeled its work after CAFE's annual conference. Teachers, parents, and community organizations were invited to submit workshop proposals. Every committee member had a binder of their respective roles and responsibilities, which ranged from heading working groups on Booths, Sponsorships, Communications, Workshop Evaluation, among others. A website was created, with an Eventbrite link for parents' advance registration. The event was held Saturday, April 9, 2016 at one of our elementary schools.

Our target audience initially was English Learner families. However, as the event grew the committee agreed that all parents were to be invited and welcomed to the event. As the workshop proposals were submitted, there were a variety of offerings in English and Spanish.

Our goal was to provide “Professional Development for Parents.” It was our hope that as parents attended the Parent Academy workshops, they gained valuable information regarding diverse tools, strategies, and resources that help nurture students’ academic, social, and emotional development. Our means of achieving this objective was a CAFE-style event with keynote speaker, enough sessions for each attendee to participate in two workshops, and time afterward to visit a booth area of community and educational resources. Pre-registrations exceeded 400; we had set a goal of 200. Every workshop sessions was filled in advance. In addition, as part of the event, the District hosted its first “Twitter Wall.” We set up the hashtag #CVESDParents, erected a large screen at the morning kickoff, and encouraged parents to start Tweeting starting at the kickoff and throughout their workshop attendance. Content that included #CVESDParents was projected onto an oversized screen for participants to interact with, and view for immediate feedback. Thus, the audience had a real-time opportunity to add comments and ask questions. The stream of content was accessible afterward to view information/reactions about the event. This was so successful, and parents were so enthusiastic, that a Twitter wall was also utilized for our subsequent Dual Language Immersion Café for teachers. At that event, content that included #CVESDCafe or #Duallangchat was similarly projected on a screen for participating teachers. Fueled in part by “Twitter Walls” at the two District events, the Twitter handle @cvesdnews generated 33.2K impressions in the month of April 2016. An “impression” is the number of times a user viewed our Tweets. By comparison, the District had 22.1K impressions in March 2016.

We were so successful at providing “Professional Development for Parents” at our inaugural Parent Academy that plans were immediately launched for a second annual event, which was scheduled for February 2017. Our success was documented via the parents’ written evaluations, which were submitted and collected at the event. They were overwhelmingly glowing, but some common themes emerged: parents wanted a third workshop session; the cooking healthy meals workshop was among the highest rated; and they love learning and wanted a longer event. This outcome, our success was all the more impressive given a heavy downpour the day before the event, and a steady drizzle the morning of the Parent Academy. This impacted actual attendance, which was just over 200 attendees. In addition to the written evaluations, parents also posted Twitter updates from the event, including photos from workshops—yes, a good number of selfies—but photos of slides from the presentations and handouts as well. More than 20 businesses or organizations donated gift cards for opportunity drawings at the event or donated directly in the form of sponsorships. In addition to the data, the anecdotal evidence was everywhere, parents welcoming other parents, exchanging ideas and strategies. The series of inspirational workshops covered topics from ‘How to help your children in reading and math’ to bullying prevention and improving student health and wellness.