

Parents Participating on School Committees

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This past spring, I was invited to join a Strategic Planning Retreat for my children's school district. Of course, the name of this meeting is intimidating because it sounds so formal. And if you are anything like me, most of the names of school committees (for example, School Site Council, District English Learner Advisory Committee, or District Advisory Committee) make me shiver and hesitate to think what additional responsibility (like more work) might come my way if I attend! But this time, the words "strategic" and "planning" suggested something promising about its purpose in shaping future plans for the school district. So, despite having to take some time away from my day to attend the meeting, I found that the experience was really positive!

To give you a brief overview of the meeting, the attendees represented school board members, school

administrators, teachers, community members, and students. The time started out with listing the district's accomplishments within the last six months. In a matter of minutes, over 50 achievements were called out. Talk about starting a meeting on a positive note! From there, the group started listing needs and identifying internal and external factors that may benefit or hinder student success. Keeping those factors in mind, the current school year's goals were then reviewed so as to see what action items need to be accomplished in the next six months.

From a parent's perspective, the whole process was so incredibly powerful. Not only was I able to see the commitment of the teachers and school administrators, I really got to see how everyone's contributions made a big impact on shaping the school district's goals for the next six months. Here are some of my perspectives on how parent participation was esteemed and appreciated during the meeting:

Parent Input Is Valuable

The meeting facilitators made sure the conversation included all participants, whether voiced in a large group, shared in small groups, or written suggestions on index cards. All perspectives were taken into account when talking about student needs.

Parent Insight Is Needed

Schools welcome honest, genuine and sincere observations from parents. The more parents can give candid and

constructive feedback, the sooner and better all parties can come to a consensus.

Parent Involvement Is Key to Success

School districts genuinely want to know how their decisions make an impact on students and their families. When parents contribute to conversation, school committee meetings can be positive, effective and productive when the objective is focused on student achievement.

Parents, don't be intimidated by school committees! Partnering with schools as a parent leader in a school committee gives a much more accurate view of how a school can meet the needs of its students and its community. Participating in a school committee also sends the message to your kids that you lead by example in contributing to the decision-making process which benefits the larger community. You'll be able to show your children that being involved makes a difference.

Be a parent leader; lead by example!

Jaime

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