

What Parents and Educators Say About School Smarts

"I have observed a definite increase in school involvement from parents enrolled in the School Smarts Parent Academy. Many of them regularly attend our monthly 'Coffee with the Principal,' and willingly share their input regarding making our school a great place to learn." - *Principal*

"This is our second year receiving the School Smarts Parent Academy. It has been an amazing program that PTA has been able to offer to our parents. We are really lucky to have the opportunity to participate again this year and find the curriculum of the program extremely valuable. Thank you, PTA!" - *Principal*

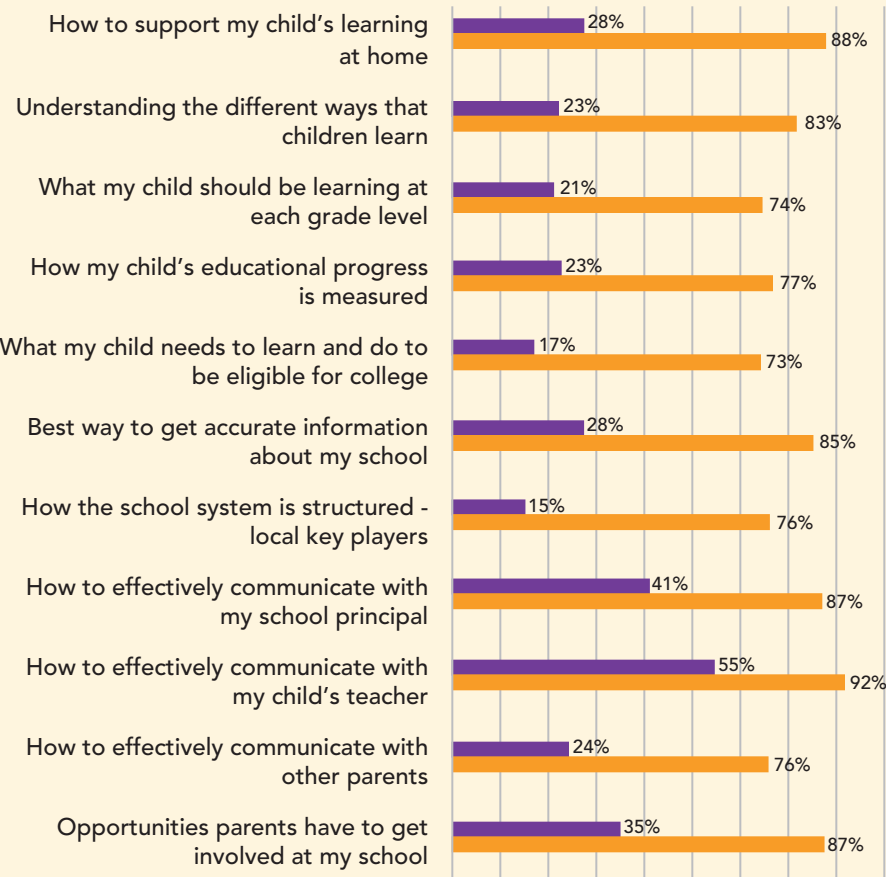
"It was seven weeks well-spent with fellow parents who share a common concern on improving our children's learning, on possibly improving the education system with our ideas, and especially on improving ourselves as parents with our teacher hats on."
- *December 2011 graduate of the School Smarts Parent Academy*

"School Smarts has created a new group of young and bilingual parents who have acquired a deeper understanding of their roles in the education of the children at the schools. Two of the PTA presidents for the 2011-12 school year are graduates of the School Smarts academies held in the spring of 2011. The parent engagement is already making a difference."
- *Marta Bookbinder, President, South San Francisco PTA Council*

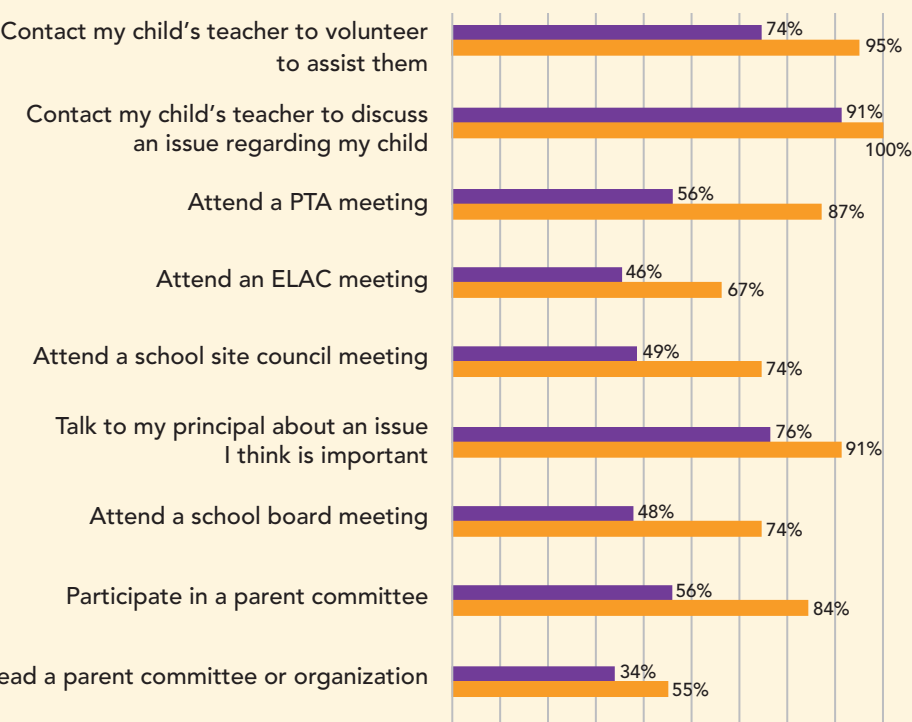
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Highlights from the Pre and Post Academy surveys completed by parents

"I feel very well informed" pre and post Academy



"definitely or very likely" pre and post Academy



A New Model for Creating Meaningful and Diverse Parent Involvement

school smarts PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

A partnership of the California State PTA with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation



California State PTA everychild. onevoice.

What is School Smarts?

School Smarts is a parent education program whose operating principle is inclusion – reaching across all parent groups, bringing them together in support of their common interest in helping their child succeed. The program is designed to:

1. Expose a wide range of elementary school parents to the big picture of how the education system works, and empower them to maximize the success of their own child at their elementary school.
2. Provide deeper, more extensive training for a cadre of diverse parents, strengthening parent leadership at the school site and equipping them to become advocates for quality education.

How did School Smarts start?

Extensive qualitative and quantitative research and planning conducted by the California State PTA and supported by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation found a high level of interest among parents in learning more about their schools and how they can help children.

Based on that research, the California State PTA received a multi-year grant from the Hewlett Foundation to develop and offer in 14 pilot schools a School Smarts program, consisting of the parent academy plus an initial parent-engagement night to which all parents in the school are invited. This is the second year of the pilot program, which is currently being offered in 23 schools.

Why is it needed?

Research has shown that parent engagement in education improves students' chances of success in school, across all socioeconomic groups. Parent engagement is a longstanding focus of the PTA and is a proven, low-cost way to help schools.



The School Smarts Model

School-wide Parent Engagement Event

(cast the net wide!)



School Smarts Parent Academy

(attract a diverse, core group of parents willing to learn more)



More effective involvement in child's education

Increased participation and leadership roles in school activities, parent groups

Join local and statewide outreach and advocacy efforts

Parent Engagement Event

This school-wide event is designed to attract parents from all sectors of the school, to enjoy a social and educational evening and learn about the “School Smarts” program.

Each event is customized to fit the needs of the school and includes an art activity, dinner, childcare, and professionally developed materials.



School Smarts Academy

Training format: 7 sessions, 2 hours each **Class size:** approximately 15-35 parents

Led by local facilitators who are trained adult educators, often teachers at the school

Sessions are interactive: professionally developed curriculum, multimedia presentation of material, individual and group activities, arts activities, homework assignments and discussion

Sessions conducted in Spanish and English, with Cantonese, Arabic or other interpretation as needed. Childcare and refreshments provided each night.

What parents learn in each session:

I. Parent involvement

A key ingredient in student and school success

- Their role as their child's first teacher
- How to create a home environment that helps their child succeed
- Components of being “ready to learn”
- Types of parent involvement

II. Preparing for a lifetime of learning

- How children learn (different styles, brain research)
- Effects of participation in the arts
- Educational options beyond high school
- Basics of college readiness

III. Understanding our education system

- Structure of the California public school system
- No Child Left Behind/ESEA
- Parent rights and responsibilities
- How legislation and funding policies work
- Academic standards and standardized tests, performance measures

IV. Understanding our school

- How schools are governed and decisions are made
- Roles and responsibilities of the school board, superintendent, administration, teachers, staff, parents
- School's parent involvement plan
- School committees, volunteer and leadership opportunities (SSC, PTA, ELAC, etc.)
- Specialized academic and enrichment opportunities

V. Becoming an effective communicator

- Importance of communication between families, schools and other audiences
- Eliminating communications barriers
- How and when to use different modes of communication
- How to deliver a powerful message (skills training)
- How to build a culture of parent involvement and inclusive school communication

VI. Standing up for quality education

- What it means to be a leader
- Definition of a quality, equitable education
- How to effect change at the school and beyond (skills training)
- About PTA and other state networks
- How to build a strong and dynamic community through the arts

VII. Taking action/celebration

- Create personal and group action plans



Outcomes

The School Smarts pilot program was evaluated through internal assessments and surveys as well as a formal evaluation conducted by SRI International. Findings included:

- Principal, parent and child feedback was highly positive.
- The program attracted parents from diverse educational, cultural and economic backgrounds.
- A surprisingly large number of fathers participated – in both Parent Engagement Nights and Academies.
- 88% of academy participants attended 5 or more sessions and earned a certificate of completion.
- Parents have formed bonds, met parents from across the school, and continued to participate in volunteer activities.
- Facilitators/teachers have gained a new appreciation for parents and how to communicate with them.
- Program has attracted media interest.
- All 14 first-year pilot schools requested that the program return for a second year.