



California State  
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## School Smarts Parent Academy – Fact Sheet

**What it is:** School Smarts Parent Academy is a seven-session course that is designed to foster parent engagement in education and create parent leaders who will promote a quality and complete education that includes the arts in their schools.

**Why it matters:** 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.

**How did the Parent Academies start?** Extensive 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 a school are invited. This is the second year of the pilot program, which is being offered in 23 schools.

**What do parents learn?** Topics that empower parents are covered during the sessions, including understanding the education system, communicating effectively, advocating for a quality education, and how important parent involvement is for children and for schools. The academies and materials are provided in English, Spanish and Cantonese. During each session, parents also participate in art activities, which build a sense of community and underscore the importance of a complete education that includes the arts.

### Where have academies been offered?

In the first pilot year, 2010-2011, School Smarts was implemented in 14 schools in four school districts: Alameda Unified, Chino Valley Unified, Riverside Unified and South San Francisco Unified.

During the current – and second – year of the program, School Smarts will be offered in 23 schools in the original four pilot districts.

### Who participated?

During the first year, 345 parents graduated from 18 parent academies. These participants were diverse in cultural background and in educational experience.

- 30 percent did not complete high school
- 61 percent were Latino; 18 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander
- 53 percent were Spanish speakers



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## Outcomes

The School Smarts pilot program was evaluated through internal assessments and surveys as well as a formal evaluation conducted by SRI International. Highlights of the findings follow.

- 85 percent of participants said their knowledge of the school system and how they can help their children increased dramatically.
- 80 percent said they were more likely to take action and get involved with their schools after completing the academy.
- The program fostered a sense of community among parents of diverse backgrounds.

## Quotes

"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."

– **Ifeoma Obodozie, Principal, Sunshine Gardens School, South San Francisco**

"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!"

– **Jammie Behrendt, Principal, Los Cerritos Elementary School, South San Francisco**

"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."

– **Carlo Lacambra, December 2011 graduate of the School Smarts Parent Academy at Sunshine Gardens Elementary School in South San Francisco**

"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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*The California State PTA has nearly 1 million members throughout the state working on behalf of public schools, children and families, with the motto, "every child, one voice." The PTA is the nation's oldest, largest and highest profile volunteer association working to improve the education, health and welfare of all children and youth. The PTA also advocates at national, state and local levels for education and family issues. The PTA is nonprofit, nonsectarian and noncommercial. For more information: [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org).*