

The Parent Connection

By Kathi Sittner

What is the key to a child's success? Why do children in a private school seem to fare better than in a public school? Is it the ability level of the students, who are tested before entrance? Is it the excellent, well-balanced curriculum, targeted to a particular group of children? Is it the well-trained teachers, many of whom have honed their skills through years of experience and who support the school's vision with a unified spirit? Is it the administrators and support staff, who keep things running smoothly? Is it the low teacher to student ratios which allow more personal attention? Certainly, all of these are essential. But there is another, less obvious key that is often overlooked, especially by those who are disenchanting with the school they have chosen.

Private schools also have a greater chance for success because the parents and students *want* to be there! Parents have made a choice that this is the *best* educational philosophy and environment for their child. They agree with most of the goals, the rules, and the teaching methodology, and they like the results they see. They are willing to support the teachers and the administration in their quest to provide an excellent education for their child, even when it seems tough to follow the directives. They are willing to follow the school's rules and requests and to act as a back-up in disciplinary situations. They make sure that homework is done and encourage their child to do his/her best and most complete work. They attend parent-teacher conferences and try to support the suggestions given to help their child do even better. All of these are important in helping the school run smoothly and in setting the expectations for the students that will help them to succeed.

But wait, there is more to this parent connection! Positive parents seek out the positives that are already at the school or that can be created with their help. They avoid hearsay and do not spread unfounded rumors. They check with the administration instead of jumping to negative conclusions. They encourage new teachers to become the best they can be. They support the parent organizations to create extra-curricular experiences that support the curriculum. Indeed, they look for whatever ways they can assist in making the school a better place for all of the children, including their own. And they spread the word about the great education the school provides.

On November 29th, the Sacramento ABC News aired a special news segment about how parent involvement and support makes such a huge difference in a school's overall test scores and API rating. They spoke of how funding leads to higher salaries, better personnel, better textbooks, and a better environment, and they spoke of how parents can sometimes come together to make higher funding a reality. They spoke of how parents and teachers can create a positive and supportive environment that makes a school more successful.

We applaud each and every "positive parent" in our outstanding Hilldale School community! Let's face it - No school is perfect. But with a positive parent community, who support the teachers and the administrators in their efforts, and who look for ways that they can help and can build up the school collaboratively, big things can be accomplished. It is this "united effort" that makes a good school great!

Two parent groups that truly make a difference at Hilldale are the active members of the Family Association and the Advisory Council. Because there is sometimes some confusion as to who can be involved in these groups and what they do, we would like to tell you more about them.

Since the Advisory Council was only formed in the middle of the last school year, and since its purpose at that time was deemed to be different from this year and beyond, the first order of business this fall was to define the organization and mission of the Advisory Council and compare it to the organization and mission of the Family Association.

Definition of the Advisory Council:

The Advisory Council is composed of a small group of people drawn from the various Hilldale School constituencies, which meets to confidentially discuss issues that impact the general operation of the school. It is made up of the following representatives: owners, principal, 1 faculty rep, 1 Family Association Board rep, 1 lower school parent, 1 upper school parent, 1-2 owners' choice reps. All positions other than owners and principal are appointed; suggestions of suitable candidates from each constituency are encouraged. The A.C. allows the constituent groups' voices to be heard, acts as a sounding board for ideas, and offers advice and insight to the administration and owners concerning present and future actions. When unanimously agreed upon, it can also act as a means to disseminate appropriate information to the school families. The Advisory Council meets approximately once each month for about two hours when the owners and members are mutually available.

Families are encouraged to see the Advisory Council as a means to let your voice be heard in a positive manner about the overall operation of the school. This year's Advisory Council was formed in September and comprises the following members:

- Owner & Acting Principal: Kathi Sittner
- Teacher rep: Helen Yoo-Lee
- Lower school rep: Edgar Velasquez
- Upper school rep: Sardool Samra
- At large member: Ravi Bulchandani
- At large member: Rolf Knitter
- F.A. Board rep: Michelle Berner

Definition of the Family Association:

The Family Association (F.A.) is an a-political benevolent organization, similar to a public school PTA, which comprises all Hilldale families and works to directly benefit and support the academic and social life of the Hilldale students and teachers. It is directed by a small group of board members who are elected by the parent group at the end of each year to lead and represent them during the following year. Yearly activities include extracurricular events, teacher/classroom support, general campus upkeep and improvement, and activities which encourage student retention and recruitment. The F.A. is a nonprofit organization and is able to solicit contributions for its projects. As such, it is authorized to issue tax-deductible receipts for the same.

The Family Association generally meets once monthly. All parents are encouraged to attend and to actively join in their efforts, which directly benefit the students.

Thank you, one and all, who are actively involved to make Hilldale a better place for the kids!