Respecting Families, Classrooms, & Programs: Building a Family Component for DELL-D

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Agenda

- Introduction - why we do what we do
- Overview of DELL-D family components
- Classroom-home linkages
- Family Events
- Lessons learned

About Danville

- Population of 33,000 (2005)
- County seat of Vermilion County, population 84,000
- Located on old fur-trading road between Lake Michigan and the south
- Irish and Eastern European immigrants, as well as African-Americans, came in the late 1800s to work in the mines.
- With the coming of large GM plant, it became a vibrant blue-collar community that easily switched from mining to manufacturing.
- With the closure of GM in the 1990s, Danville and Vermilion County went into an economic slide.
On the other hand …

- College of Nursing
- Community College
- Many family-owned businesses
- Community sports teams (hockey, basketball, baseball)
- Entertainment (symphony, community theatre, award winning junior/senior high show choirs)

DELL-D Partners

- Developing Early Language and Literacy in Danville
  - University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- Danville District 118 Pre-K Program
- Head Start Program at East Central Illinois Community Action Program
- Danville Area Community College Child Care
- Center for Children’s Services Early Learning Center

About DELL-D

- 4 separate programs (5 sites)
- 12 teaching teams (25 teachers)
- 12 classrooms
  - 8 full-day
  - 4 half-day
- 16 groups of children
- +/- 250 children per year

Why Focus on Families?

- Importance of home support:
  - Relationship between family environment and child outcomes
  - Link between poverty level in families and associated deficit/delays in child learning
  - Families as THE primary, most powerful learning environments for young children
  - Early childhood as a time to “hook” families into their children’s learning and schooling
  - Most open to thinking about their own parenting roles
  - Most open to establishing relationships with schools
**Background - Why OUR focus on families?**

- Our history at the U of I
  - Focus on working with families: wanted that component in DELL-D
  - "family-centered" perspective
    - Respect importance of family's role in life of child
    - Recognize constraints on family's life with child
  - "child-centered" perspective
    - Respect child's perspective - how young child perceives the world and interactions with others (through the child's eyes)

**Goal for Family Components - Strengthen and Build Connections**

- Parent-child
  - Recognize own importance in child's literacy learning
  - Increase competence in supporting child's literacy learning
  - Build confidence in own ability to support child's literacy learning
  - Strengthen parent-child relationship

- Classroom-family
  - Linked through the classroom and through teachers versus directly to parents
    - Hook parents into the classroom-home collaboration
    - Build teacher knowledge of how to support families by providing opportunities and resources for them to experience collaboration

**Goal - More Connections**

- Program-family
  - Experience different ways of supporting connections
  - Fit each center's needs and context - location, schedule, family preferences

- Community-family
  - Build classroom & family connections to public library & other community resources
  - Build classroom & family connections across programs

**DELL-D Approach to Family Components**

- Givens
  - Different programs have different kinds of interactions with families
  - Some programs have existing family programs and activities

- Principles
  - Supplement and expand on current interactions with families within and across programs
  - Infuse family-centered practices
  - Infuse focus on parent-child pair
  - Think ahead - who will be here when we are gone?
Overview of Major Family Components

- Family Liaison
- Family Center
- Theme Newsletters
- Monthly Take-Home Activities
- Family Events
- Library Nights

The Family Liaison

- Family Liaison Roles
  - Represent DELL-D in community
  - Active presence in community family events
  - Develop Family Center
  - Develop & manage family events
  - Develop & manage classroom materials

The Family Center

- Characteristics
  - Neutral location
  - Friendly & attractive
  - Parent-child activities
  - Resources that bring teachers to Center

Classroom-Home Connections

- Materials
  - Curriculum Theme Newsletters
  - Monthly Take-Home Activities
- Design Principles
  - Attractive, colorful, easy to read
  - Consistent, recognizable format
  - Parent-child focus
Curriculum Theme Newsletters

• Matched to TROPHIES themes (25 themes)

• Letter + Letter Talk
  - F = Straight line down. Go to the top of this line. Straight line across. Go to the middle and draw straight line across (Theme: It’s Me!)

• Songs and Rhymes
  - One Potato, Two Potato (Theme: Foods)
  - Concepts
  - Letters and Words (Theme: Making Things)

• Books related to the theme
  - TROPHIES Book: I Can’t Get My Turtle to Move (Theme: Pets)
  - Additional Books: Pat Sioce and Arthur’s New Puppy

• Discover Danville
  - Farmer’s Market (Theme: Neighborhood)

• Tips for the Home
  - Play games or using things related to theme order. You might say, “What is in the sky at night and twinkles?” and your child would guess “star!” (Theme: Night and Day)

How Classrooms Use the Theme Newsletters

• Sent home by teachers each time they introduce a new theme
• Let parents know what is being worked on in the new theme
• Give parents ideas about what they can do at home to support the new theme
Monthly Take-Home Activities

- Related to season or celebrations associated with the month:
  - January = Snowflakes
  - July = Birthdays (4th of July)
  - October = Autumn Walk

- One activity that can be completed in a day
  - “The Case of the Missing Letter”
    - Parent and child search through magazines and newspapers for pictures that begin with the letter “B”
    - Collect pictures and place them in the “evidence bag”
    - Bring back to school to talk about

How Classrooms Use the Monthly Take-Home Activities

- Teachers distribute the monthly take-home activities.
  - A note is attached for the teacher to prompt them to distribute and also give them ideas on how to use the monthly take-home activities.

- Teachers collect the completed activities and give each child a Family Center Coupon.
  - Coupon is redeemed by child and parent at the Family Center for a literacy treat (writing materials, books, etc.).

- Teachers are prompted to use the completed assignment in the classroom.
  - Use for “Show and Tell”
  - Engage children in conversation (oral language)
  - Hang in the classroom walls for parents and children to enjoy
  - Use the activities as samples for teachers to create their own take-home activities.

Family Events: Year 1

- Goals
  - Provide opportunities for families in all programs
  - Build community across programs
  - Meet individual needs of different types of centers & different families

- Decisions/questions
  - Location
  - Day of week
  - Time of day
  - Transportation
Year 1: The Events

- F.U.D.G.E. Day
- Field Trip to Prairie Farms (Petting Zoo)
- Reading Fun with Danville Dans (Baseball Team)

Take-Home Activities from Events

- Take the perspective of child
  - What we did today
  - How it helped me become a better reader
- Fun books we can read together
- Ideas for things we can do at home including a coloring, drawing, or writing sheet

Classroom Link: Teacher Participation in Monthly Family Events

- Teacher Participation in the Events
  - Part of planning process for each event
    - One teacher from each center on planning team
  - Provide support to parent-child activities during each event
    - Several teachers from each center come to support parents as they participate in activities with their children
How It Works

• Planning Process
  - “Cute is not enough”
  - Planning form
  - Planning process

• Teacher Role during Events
  - Provide encouragement, support
  - Don’t take over!

Teacher Cue Cards

Write with Me

Teachers

- “Wow, CHILD’S NAME, what did you just draw? Go ask mom to help you write down the name for your picture.”
Teacher Cue Cards

Make a Snack/Craft with Me
Teachers
- Encourage the parents to help their children read the recipe strip and make the snack/craft. (“We have a recipe for you to follow. Why don’t you help CHILD’S NAME read the recipe and make the snack/craft for you.”)

Data from the Events – What We Saw
• Day of the week made a difference
• Time of day made a difference
• Location made a difference
• Transportation made no difference

Year 1: The Numbers

What we did ..
• Added more “marketing”
  • Regular reminders
  • Different types of reminders
• Increased family incentives
  • Promote participation in multiple types of activities
• Increased classroom connections
  • Re-thought roles of Family Liaison
  • Increased materials sent home through classrooms
  • Made links between and among different activities – events, classroom take-homes, incentive system, & Family Center
More Marketing, More Connections

- Backpack sent home by teachers at beginning of school year
  - Invitations, flyer, calendar of events, incentive system

- Monthly materials sent home by teachers
  - Reminders of events
  - Theme newsletters
  - Parent-child activities

- Principles
  - Attractive, colorful, easy to read
  - Consistent, recognizable format
  - Parent-child focus

Marketing through being there

- Family Liaison-Classroom Connection
  - Family Liaison makes regular drop-in visits to classrooms to deliver materials
  - Family Center offered as a resource center for teachers
  - Family events rotate among centers or use sites selected by centers
  - Family Liaison takes Family Center directly to centers
  - Family Liaison makes connections with individual families while at the center
  - Teachers collaborate in planning and implementing family events
Family Incentives ...

- Promote participation in multiple parent-child activities

More participation = more take-home literacy goodies

Link family center, events, and classroom activities

Year 2: The Numbers

Free Stuff for attending DELL-O Events:

If you attend 1 event:
Take home a Reading Center kit

Attend 2 OR MORE events:
Receive Reading or Writing Center Supplies at every event!

If you attend 3 events:
Take home a Writing Center kit

Attend 5 OR MORE events:
Take home a $10 Gift Certificate at every event!

Visit the DELL-O Family Center at 501 Kinzie Mon.-Fri. OR DELL-O Library Days at the Danville Public Library on Mondays from 5:00-6:30 PM to take home the following:

A free book on your 1st visit! Free one year subscription to cricket magazine on your 6th visit

2008-2009 Family Events: First Time and Returning DELL-O Families

First Time Attendees

Returning Families
Note from a parent …

... when looking around at the DELL-D events, you can tell that there were several parents that maybe wanted to interact with their child, but never had the tools, guidance, or knowledge on how to. I honestly believe DELL-D has provided the opportunity to relate with their child/children. It’s amazing to see/hear the positive feedback as the families are leaving the events...smiling as they go.

(Excerpted from a letter from a parent, sent to the child care administrator)

Lessons Learned

• Takes time to get the parent component going - be patient!
• Be flexible, responsive to parents and centers (e.g., time and day of activities, transportation, location of activities)
• Try different ways to connect with parents at different centers, with different needs
• Study the data
• Marketing and incentives
  • Get them to the first event - then keep them coming back
  • Link involvement components together through incentive system and through teacher participation
  • Find a creative “designer” for your flyers, etc... we got really lucky with ours!

DELL-D Contact Information

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