

Lessons Learned



September – Focus: Transportation

Citywide workshop

- Parents were given an orientation to the parent program this year. They also received a packet that contained information about reading skills, since improving reading comprehension is one of the major goals of the program.
- They heard from a representative of the Chicago Historical Society how the way in which pioneers lived could be learned by examining a picture of the items typically found in a covered wagon.

Insights reported by parents:

- What are good reading skills and how I can build these up in my child. I will be sitting down with my child to review the “Pack Your Wagon” material and to compare our new catalogs with the old Sears and Wards catalogs.

In-school workshop

- Some parents introduced a mnemonic device they used for the cardinal directions- Never Eat Soggy Waffles, (North, East, South, West) going clockwise around the compass.
- Parents talked about the ways they learned their directions and we reviewed the intermediate directions (NW, SW, NE, SE). Using a map of the Great Lakes region, parents practiced these skills (example questions: What direction is Indiana from Chicago? What state is directly west of Chicago?)
- Many parents had their first experience using a scale to determine distances between places on a map and using a piece of paper to record a distance, then compare that to the scale to calculate the actual distance.
- Another map characteristic with which parents were unfamiliar was the reference grid; many parents thought the numbers and letters found around the perimeter of any map referred to latitude and longitude.
- Using a map of the Great Lakes region, parents looked up Chicago in the index, found a page number and a coordinate, and used their fingers to find the intersection of the coordinate components, locating Chicago. Parents were astounded at how easy it was to use the map tools.
- After looking at a map of Chicago, we studied a map of Kenya. Many of the parents’ stereotypes about Africa were dispelled as they soaked up the pictures and information provided in the World Atlas.
- In small groups, parents then drew maps of their school’s neighborhood, finding that it was hard to remember what was at the intersection down the street even though they walked by it at least four times a day. Some looked through the windows to get a better idea of how to draw the map, but tried several times before placing streets accurately.
- Many parents were very resistant towards this activity but in the end were proud of the maps they drew, which included a compass and key.
- Many parents were hesitant to begin this activity, many saying that they “didn’t know how to read a map” or “never was good with directions,” but after completing the activity they agreed it wasn’t that difficult.

Lessons Learned



October – Focus: Income

Citywide workshop

- Every parent received a calculator and used it to do one of the activities on the agenda (to add up all the money they had spent in the past two days.) Parents were surprised when they looked at how much money they ended up spending on small items.
- A representative from South Shore Bank spoke about how expenditures should reflect our values.
- Many people commented that they didn't often think about their values when making decisions about purchases. At this meeting, 48 parents opened Individual Development Accounts with South Shore Bank to save money for a home computer.

Insights reported by parents:

- One insight that I am taking with me today is how much money I waste without realizing it and that I can work out a realistic savings plan for my family.
- I will use my calculator to keep up with what I'm spending and keep a book with that information.
- What is important to me determines the way I spend and save my money.
- I will keep a close count of my money and how much I spend daily.
- To save for a computer I must budget my money to save \$50 a month.

In-school workshop

- In talking about credit, people found out that some credit card companies offered lower interest rates than they were being charged.
- Although we designed an activity for the parents to use their calculators in the citywide workshop, many parents did not complete the activity as they were using a calculator for the first time.
- Predominately older participants, first-time calculator users, asked questions about which buttons represented which calculations after getting over their apprehension about misusing their calculator.
- Our main activity was a worksheet that outlined calculating how credit card companies compound interest. Parents claimed to “not be good at math,” but were eager to learn. Several parents wanted to calculate interest for a purchase they had made, seeking assistance with substituting their cost, interest rate, and monthly payment for those on the worksheet.
- The following month a parent, reporting that he had tried to use the layout of the worksheet to run his own numbers but “ran into some snags,” asked for additional guidance with the compounding interest worksheet.

Lessons Learned



November – Focus: Food, Culture, and Technology

Citywide workshop

- Guest speakers from EthnicGrocer.com spoke on how the cultures of India, China, and South America are reflected in their foods. Specifically, the speakers talked about the relationship between geography and food.
- We also talked about how food production has changed. The UIN parent population includes a wide variety of people who grew up in rural and urban settings. Talking about how food production has changed stimulated a lot of discussion around how different their eating habits were as a child and the way they are now, for both groups.

Insights reported by parents:

- Differences in cultures can be seen through the food we eat.
- I have a greater respect for the different cultures as to why certain things are eaten or not and the reason behind it all.
- We learned how in India, one part of the country is dry and another part has a rain forest. People who live in the desert eat a lot of meat and people who live in the rainforest eat mostly vegetables.
- Shopping over the Internet is an example of the change in marketing and distributing food.
- At home today I will talk with my family because I have never told them about the food my mother and grandmother used to raise. I will compare the food I grew up on to the food we buy at the store.

In-school workshop

- Parents talked about their experiences with food-- sharing their favorite, or least favorite, foods as a child.
- Conversation often sprouted into discussions about family values, such as eating every meal together or growing food as a family to support the household.
- Food as a part of ritual was an important issue as many recalled their childhood holiday dinners.
- We talked about how to use and interpret the food pyramid, how to read and interpret food labels and why healthy nutrition mattered.
- One very controversial piece among the parents was information (provided by one of the UIN schools), which outlined ten great foods and ten brand-name foods to stay away from. People commented that they “bought an item from the ‘do not eat’ list just yesterday” or that they “weren’t surprised that salmon was on the ‘good for you’ list.” While parents were interested in learning about the products, many struggled with the idea of giving up a food they had eaten their entire life. Many parents admitted that they did not eat as they knew they should, even those on medically restricted diets.

Lessons Learned



December – Focus: Housing

Citywide workshop

- A guest speaker from Building Solutions Inc., a developer of low-income housing in and around Chicago, spoke to the issue of affordable housing in Chicago.
- We examined a map, which illustrated the changes in the purchase price of houses in different neighborhoods around Chicago. This stimulated a lot of discussion about what factors influenced an increase or decrease.
- Three-fourths of the groups of parents were concerned with the situation of poor people moving into their neighborhoods and higher income residents moving out.
- One parent, who sought public housing for twelve years, spoke about her experiences, affecting many people's perceptions of public housing residents.
- Every parent was provided with a copy of the Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance, which outlines the rights, and responsibilities of both tenants and landlords. Except for Section 8 recipients, none of the parents were previously aware of the booklet's existence and many took home extra copies to distribute to family and friends. Many parents were also surprised to learn that they could access financial and legal assistance in the form of numerous not-for-profit organizations and that it was possible for them to own their own home.

Insights reported by parents:

- What Section 8 vouchers and low-income housing are (I didn't know about them before).
- Renters have many rights, but some people don't know about their rights or what to do about them.
- What are the basic requirements to purchase a home: credit, savings, income that demonstrates the ability to afford a certain mortgage.

In-school workshop

- We borrowed a Field Museum experience box that contained models of different types of homes - the Maasai people of Kenya, the Hopi Indians of the Southwest United States, and a two-flat in Chicago. Parents were surprised by the differences in house style and responded, "That's a house?" to the Maasai model and argued about what purpose specific characteristics filled.
- Holding the model houses and reading information about the houses, many parents explored the factors that determine house structure including climate, lifestyle, and materials available.
- A video, provided by the Field Museum, described the use of space by families of different cultural backgrounds. Parents answered the question of how people's values were reflected in the way they used space by describing a lady on the video who spent most of her time in the kitchen. They deduced that her heritage valued cooking and that she wished to convey her values to her children by bringing her family and community together for large meals. They also commented on how the objects in the homes reflected much about the values of the household.
- Parents were also interested in learning about the Asian exercise of Tai chi, which was displayed in the video.

Lessons Learned



January – Focus: Communication

City-wide workshop

- This meeting was held at Fourth Presbyterian Church.
- Parents were asked to look around the church and figure out what the church communicated by the pictures on the wall, the brochures that were available, and by the fact that they had welcomed us into the church at no cost. Parents also went through a mini "appreciative inquiry" training (asset-based planning that looks at the best of what exists), and discussed the power of positive questions.
- Parents explored the ways in which communication has changed over the years, and it was interesting to hear the different generations of parents talk about how the ways in which people communicate has evolved. This program not only provides an inter-cultural exchange, but is also a great opportunity for intergenerational dialogue. Some of the participants are in their teens while some are in their sixties.

Insights reported by parents:

- They learned that the way in which you speak to your child is as important as what you say. Focusing on the positive, rather than the negative aspects produces better results.
- Look around wherever you are and see what that place is showing or saying about its values. To communicate or direct a question in a positive way, find out what works and what's needed. Learn to say something positive about the things you see that are wrong. Take time to say something you appreciate or value about your child.

In-school workshop

- This session comprised of learning the parts and functions of a computer, and how computers have affected the way in which people communicate.
- Parents in all the schools then had a chance to use a computer for word processing. Many of them wrote letters to their children saying that they were using the computer for the first time, and were very excited about it. About 75% of the parents were first time computer users.
- This session was particularly popular because 73 of the parents were participating in the IDA match program, which would enable them to receive matching funds for each dollar that they saved up to \$500 to purchase computers for their homes.
- Many of the parents indicated that they wanted additional computer classes. However, the challenge was reserving the computer labs in the school for use by the parents because that would require that classes for the students be cancelled. Some schools organized the classes at times when the computers were not in use by the students e.g. after school, and one school made arrangements with a neighboring non-profit organization to hold the computer-training classes there. Both classes were very successful.

Lessons Learned



February – Focus: Health

City-wide workshop

- This meeting was held at Illinois Masonic hospital. There were two key speakers, one of who focused on the importance of an overall well-being – the body, mind, and spirit.
- Parents had a chance to do a wellness test, which was evaluated by staff from Advocate Health Care, and mailed to parents.
- They also learned about the “Healthy Steps Program”. The director of the program explained the developmental stages of children from childbirth to adolescence and what parents should expect at each stage.
- One activity helped to highlight the fact that parents were connecting the information they were receiving in various workshops. When asked to draw a picture of what they considered to be a healthy person in a healthy community, one of them drew a well-nourished person with a food pyramid on his head. The food pyramid had been studied in the Food and Culture workshop that had taken place in November. It was very encouraging to see the connections being made.

Insights reported by parents:

- What I understand health to be is the best quality of life that you can live. To feel as healthy as possible in the mind and body. To take care of yourself as well as possible.
- You can improve the health of your family by setting a good example for them, buying healthier foods, setting limits on how much junk food they eat, exercising together, and cutting down on driving everywhere.

In-school workshop

- This session focused on having parents look at the human body as a system. They worked in groups to figure out how the various systems worked. We used a book entitled *The Human Body* as the main resource. Parents broke up into groups and investigated how different systems in the body function and then reported back to the group.
- We also used brochures from the Chicago Department of Public Health to investigate some common illnesses such as asthma and diabetes. Many parents had first hand accounts about the illnesses and shared their experiences with others.
- The brochures were particularly popular because they were simple, had illustrations, and were easy to understand. They also came in English and Spanish and listed names of clinics available in the Chicago land area where parents could receive services. It was helpful to have the brochures as a point of reference because participants were not always sure of the causes and effects of some of the illnesses.

Lessons Learned



March – Focus: Energy

City-wide workshop

- Two representatives from Peoples Energy presented information about the reasons gas prices have been increasing and ways to conserve energy in the home. Parents received the book, *Energy*, written by Jack Challoner and published by Dorling Kindersley. Using this resource book and the museum exhibits concerning energy they researched the uses, conservation techniques and other information about different types of energy.
- This topic was particularly relevant because of the sky rocketing prices of gas in the past few months. Participants were very interested in the topic and got into heated discussions about what was causing the rise in the prices and what if anything, could be done to lower the cost.
- This showed us that when you present topics that are relevant to the participants, you get more engaged participants.

Insights reported by parents:

- The cost of the distribution of gas to our homes is a wholesale price.
- There are many tangible ways to conserve energy. Price of natural gas is based on supply and demand.
- Water, solar, nuclear, and mechanical energy are all forms of energy, which can be converted to make electricity.

In-school workshop

- Parents were very excited to learn how to read their gas bills. We discussed all the charges incurred on the bill and what specifically they referred to. Parents often complained that they were charged for so many aspects of getting the gas into their house. They were frustrated that there were three different taxes, city, state, and federal, and that there was an environmental charge (\$.00250 per therm), which goes towards conservation and efficiency research and spill clean-ups.
- Parents also learned about renewable resources that were new to them such as biomass, the burning of garbage to produce usable energy, and thermal energy, creating usable energy from the heat escaping from the core of the earth.
- Parents also had an opportunity to think about ways that they can conserve energy. They used the “Commitment Sheet” provided by the Community Energy Cooperative a community-based organization that trains different communities on how to conserve energy.
- It was a great opportunity for parents to exchange ideas on practical ways that they could conserve energy in their homes.

Lessons Learned



April – Focus: Education

City-wide workshop

- Parents brought their families to the Harold Washington Library Center for an evening outing. The focus of the night was practicing focused research.
- A representative from the library spoke about the family programs available and special departments located at the library.
- Children chose topics and went out into the library with their parents to research the topics, learning how to use the computer card catalogues. They were to find at least two different types of resources to gather information from.
- For some of the parents it was their first time to visit the library and it was wonderful to see their faces light up when they realized what a great resource it was. It was particularly exciting for the Spanish-speaking participants to see an entire floor of the library dedicated to foreign language material. Many said they would return with their children.

Insights reported by parents:

- How to use the map and go to general areas in the library. How to use different resources to get information such as: books, videos, and the Internet.
- I learned what kinds of programs are available in the library. You can use the Internet for 30 minutes at the library if you sign-up.
- All information at the library can now be accessed on the computer. How important it is to know how to use the library.

In-school workshop

- After the family field trip to the Harold Washington Library Center, each parent wrote a five-step guide to doing focused research, which was helpful to do as a large group because it was difficult for parents to articulate what steps they had taken.
- Using materials from the Center for Urban Education, the parents learned about the different levels of questions asked of their children on standardized tests. We read a story about the Chicago Fire and created questions as a large group that were literal, analytical, inferential, and evaluative. Then the parents worked in small groups to read another non-fiction story and created questions for each level.
- It helped to give examples, but parents still struggled to come up with questions beyond the literal level. Some parents also had difficulty creating answers for their questions as if they were writing a standardized test.
- We talked about how the parents asked their children questions of different levels all the time, and that they could easily become more conscious of and active about the types of questions they asked. While watching television, cooking, or walking down the street, they could ask their children to order the day's events (analytical), make predictions (inferential), and make and support a judgment on an event (evaluative).

Lessons Learned



May – Focus: Recreation

City-wide workshop

- We visited the Chicago Botanic Garden and parents were sent out into the garden to look for patterns. Parents searched for different shapes of plants, names of plants, and descriptive words for plants that began with the first letter of their first name.
- Instead of the usual evaluations, parents were given *Transformation Sheets* which asked them to write “I(We) used to be... but now I(We) am(are)...” statements about themselves and their families. The idea was to gauge how they felt they had developed through their participation in the program.
- They were also given readings on gratitude and stationary to write a letter to someone who helped them through the program this year.
- A family event celebrating recreation also took place and each parent received two free tickets to a base ball game in which the Chicago White Sox were playing.
- For many of the parents it was their first time to attend a professional game. Some thought that baseball would be boring to watch but realized that there was a lot more than baseball that took place at the park.
- It was an introduction to one of the recreational opportunities that exist but that people do not always take advantage of.

Insights reported by parents:

- My family used to spend more than the usual time watching TV. But now we spend more time communicating with each other and doing family things together.
- My family used to think that education happened only at school but now they see they can learn things through visiting museums.
- My children used to study alone uninterested. Now we do group studying and discussions, homework as well as personal interests. We continue practices learned at school to improve social activities at home.
- My family used to spend as fast as they got but now they save. They see you can save a small amount and see it add up, save for what they want.

In-school workshop

- One of the most productive components of the program is the forum naturally created in meeting spaces; parents constantly exchange ideas and information.
- As we talked about educational activities that parents could do with their children during the summer, people passed out flyers about summer programs available free or at a fee.
- Parents took notes on the activities mentioned by the other parents and became excited about the being able to borrow museum admission passes from the public library.

Lessons Learned



June – Focus: Graduation

- Graduation took place at one of the partner museums. Parents who had attended at least 7 in-school workshops, and at least 8 citywide workshops were eligible to graduate.
- Transportation was provided from their schools, and parents were asked to invite two guests. Many of them invited their children as the ceremony took place after school was out. This is a particularly powerful way of demonstrating to their children that learning is important, and that perseverance pays.
- Graduates were called up to the stage by school and two or three representatives from each school were given an opportunity to say a few words about what they had learned. “I have learned patience” said one participant “I have visited places that I ordinarily would not have visited and met people from other cultures.” “We learned, we grew, we enjoyed ourselves, we have definitely had a valuable experience. We thank you for the program from our hearts” said a representative from a school in which 99% of the participants are Spanish-Speaking.
- Graduates then received their diplomas, and a copy of the activity book for which they had provided input amidst cheers from their family-members and friends. Graduate were then invited to a buffet luncheon. Those who were participating in the IDA program also received \$100 to purchase software for their computers. Those who were not in the program received \$100 as a token of appreciation for completing the program.
- We learned that it is very important to recognize participants for their work. For some of the participants, this was the first time that they were graduating in their lives and so it was an emotional, exhilarating experience.
- Going back to one of the museums is a powerful way of reminding the participants what the focus of the program was – reading Chicago and understanding city systems. It also gives them an opportunity to visit the museum with their guests at no cost to them.