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Interviewee: school district administrator

Interviewer: Can you tell me first a little bit about this division of the school district and what it is you guys do?

Interviewee: The Family and Community Engagement Office. So, what we do is we provide best practice supports for schools to engage with families and their community but for the purpose of student achievement and school improvement. So, we basically have a framework that we have field staff implement different programs and projects in the school. For instance, last school year, we implemented district-wide parental input meetings, where parents come in twice a year, once during the winter and once during the spring, and they participate in strategic conversations like budgeting, and forming a school-parent compact, and setting a family engagement policy, so that parents are fully committed and engaged and involved, and they have a stake. So, that's really what ours is about, is engaging parents to be full participants in their children's education.

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

Interviewee: Being in this office, the Family and Community Engagement Office, I know for a fact that most of our families come into our school about twice a year. Yeah.

Interviewer: That's fantastic. Okay, let's see ... Do you have any programs that relate to screen media mentoring?

Interviewee: We don't have any direct programs that relate to that, however we did start a brand new program here at Central Office last school year, and we plan on implementing it out into the school communities for next school year, working with the Read by 4th, and the Free Library, and even involving some other public housing type of community centers to bring workshops. So, we created this program called FACT, Family Academy Courses and Training. It's a really, really extensive ... we offer over 100 different workshops.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: We offer workshops in different languages including Spanish and Chinese. Yes. And what we do is we contract with family providers, different organizations that want to provide services to families, and they basically interview with us, and they contract with us, and we hand-pick the programs that we think are best for our families. We have different tracks: social-emotional tracks, personal growth tracks for families. But it's all gears towards making the family stronger, to be able to support children as they grow up in school-

Interviewer: This is fantastic.

Interviewee: So, we have all different types of topics from health ... We did have one topic that was giving advice and tips to parents about how much TV time

and screen time that children should be adhering to, and how best to utilize that time with families. We did pick a workshop for that last year. So, hopefully, we'll be offering more workshops in that area. Parents did participate, so it wasn't one of the ones that, you know, it was a high-participation workshop. I just think from the concept of it, it was different, and people wanting to not really restrict their children, but showed them healthy ways and how to utilize that time as opposed to unhealthy ways to utilize the time.

Interviewer: Wow, that's wonderful. Do you have any written materials from the workshop or anything you can share with me?

Interviewee: I don't, but I could go back and look and see like, what was the participation, what date it happened, what was the name of it.

Interviewer: If that's possible, that would be wonderful.

Interviewee: Yeah, no problem. Yeah, we have that FACT workshop.

Interviewer: And, very just roughly, how many people took part? But, you think it was a success?

Interviewee: Yeah, most of the workshops I would say for us, being as though it was our first year, any workshop that really had five or more families participate would be a success for us. We really saturated our market with it and sent out monthly newsletters, and weekly reminders, and we called people, and so we were really trying to market and really get this base of parents that want to educate themselves for the betterment of

their children's education. So, I cannot remember off the top of my head how many participants we had, but I think it was close to 1,000 throughout the school year.

Interviewer: Wow. That's amazing. I thought you were going to say five families and it was a success.

Interviewee: No, five at each workshop. We had over 100 workshops. And we did a soft launch in November. We launched it in January full-flash, but then we had a soft launch in November, which was Family Engagement Month. So we had like this huge big event here where we did all these different workshops, and there was like a soft launch for our January event. You know, get people signed up, tell them about it, get them excited about the new program. And then in December, we started offering workshops every week, three times a week, twice a day right here at Central.

Interviewer: That's fantastic. When people come, does the whole family come?

Interviewee: Yes. Because we offer ... in the evening time, mostly is when we get families, obviously, because the kids are in school, right?

Interviewer: People working.

Interviewee: Yeah. But, in the evening time, we offer babysitting services and dinner. So, yes and it's all free. And it's all free, absolutely. Yes, and we have a range ... I can try to get you the brochure that we have, one of the brochures that we have, but we kept the social media, trying to pump in

emails. [Name removed] was very, very supportive of the new branding that the family engagement community office went through the past two years. So, we came out with a family and community engagement newsletter, which is one of the venues that we used to market our workshops and our programs.

He allowed for every employee in the school district to receive the newsletter via email, which no other office has that ability to be able to communicate district wide with every single solitary staff member is. So, we were really, really excited about that, our newsletter is very, very popular.

Interviewer: Yay.

Interviewee: You have to sign-up for our newsletter.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's a good idea. Let's see. Look at my questions.

Interviewee: This is ... The reason why I left this on the table is because this is ... When we rebranded this office two years ago, we created a position called family engagement liaisons and this is our framework on how they support these schools, so we get very, very specific with the ... These are the goals of the framework and these are the strategies that we used to achieve our goals. Then, under each strategy, we get into the actual things that they would do to accomplish that strategy and then each one of these things are broken down further into specific tasks in which they are to do for that.

Interviewer: How many liaisons are there in the system?

Interviewee: There are 20 family engagement liaisons, for next school year, they service approximately either nine or 10 schools, most of them have 10. Five of the schools out of our case load are chosen to be priority one schools which they attend once a week. So, once a week they go to the school and they plan out these programs with the school staff, the parents, the school advisory council are the big for our families and our schools, so they go there once a week. The schools that they don't go every week, they work with their principal on as needed appointment basis, to be able to provide mostly workshops.

Then, also our staff are the ones that deal with family concerns. So, if any family has any issue or problem, if they can't work out or it hasn't been able to work out that great with the school directly, they can work through the district to kind of like get it to the next level. So, our staff does that as well for our parents and kind of like is an avenue for them to go and help them navigate the school district.

So, it's not such a big scary behemoth thing, like, "Ah, I need this and I need help." You just have one person you can call and that one person will assist you in any way that you need.

Interviewer: This is fantastic. Let's see ... let's see. In addition to the workshop that you did on TV time, it really focused on TV time, right, and constructive-

Interviewee: I believe it was TV time, yeah.

Interviewer: And constructive use of time. Do you determine any other information about media use?

Interviewee: Not really, I can't really come up with any specific program on-screen time. It's an interesting topic. I would say that we should definitely look out for more programming that is ... Because the thing is that with us, we look out for things that families can do together. That's one of our big things. We have this really exciting board game coming out next school year.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: So, it's the school district of Philadelphia board game.

Interviewer: How fun.

Interviewee: It's a game and it's geared towards students' grade levels. So, it's like a game that ... It's kind of like [inaudible 00:10:01] leaders, dice and you roll it, and it has all these landmarks of Philadelphia.

Interviewer: How fun.

Interviewee: You ask questions, you move along as you get the questions answered. It's just a fun way for families to have a learning experience together, so we try to encourage all of those type of things. It's not that we are against screen time, it's just we ... We push things that aren't screen related. So, I think the lack of the amount of screen things that we are offering is kind of like ... Would you say, it's passive aggressive way to say, you know ...

Interviewer: So, with the game, how are you distributing it, or how many are you giving out?

Interviewee: So, when parents come to our workshop, to learn to play the game, they get one.

Interviewer: That is so neat. Let's see ...

Interviewee: We'll be offering that workshop next year at all the schools in the district.

Interviewer: Wow. This is neat, I didn't know this existed. Let's see. Are there ... Do you have any ideas for us if we were to provide you guys, as we work to creating programming? Any areas of related programming that would be useful to you?

Interviewee: Yes, so we ... Like I said, we've been kind of passive aggressive by not, really supporting any screen type of games, but what would be a good programming track or a good workshop track for families that would be engaging for them, where they would want to come and not be ...

Because our whole thing is meeting parents where they are and a lot of students are spending way too much time, either on video games or phones. My son is the phone.

Interviewer: Is he the oldest one or is he [crosstalk 00:12:10]?

Interviewee: My 12 year old.

Interviewer: The 12 year old.

Interviewee: Yeah. At that age is when they really start trying to branch out, get their own personality and things like that. So, they find different things to get

into and screens can be a good outlet for educational reasons and also for socialization, but at the same time, there's so much more out there to be offered and then how do we encourage our parents to offer all those other things, but not seem like we're coming down on the or that we are not meeting them where they are, which is our way of saying that we're trying to be above them, you know what I mean? Yeah.

It's hard because it's a lot of the times with the workshop I was telling you about or any of our workshops really, it's hard to ... Let me give you an example. If you want to have an attendance or a workshop on attendance, you would think that you would want to have a workshop on attendance to increase the attendance of students or to make parents aware, right? But the parents that would attend that workshop would not be the parents that need to hear that message.

So, that's why I say, it's a way to ... You would need to get the parents there that ... Or, make it attractive to the parents that are allowing their kids to have too much screen time, otherwise it's pointless. If it's a workshop for parents that are the parents that never let your kids use screen time, you're preaching to the choir, so it's not helpful. So, we try to find ways, as Bobby was saying with the board game, it's the passive aggressive way to not come down on people about the screen time.

Interviewer: Yeah. Our focus is more positive. That's actually one of the main goals of the project is to try to make the narrative more positive, because the

public narrative related to screens is always, "Don't do this, don't do that."

Interviewee: Absolutely. We tend to find that we get more word of mouth participation and more people gravitating towards things when it doesn't seem like you're trying to come down on them or make someone feel bad that they're doing something, kind of thing.... We want to affect those kids who were actually in jeopardy of getting too much screen time and not just the parents who are already aware of that and already monitoring that.

Interviewer: Let's see ... Have you received any training about anything related to families and electronic devices. You or anyone else in your office?

Interviewee: So, other than ...

Interviewer: Actually, how many people are in this office, first?

Interviewee: Wow, that's a good question. So, the family community engagement office is extremely vast, as far as the ... So, I told you about the 20 family engagement liaison that we just brought on two years ago. They also have coordinators that service as their supervisors and there's five of them. They're led by two assistant directors.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Okay. I, myself, am a director of operations, I supervise a team of five call center customer service representatives and two staff and the parent and family resource center under the district houses out here behind the

security desk. Then, also I have a data analysis, a data specialist, and two office assistants. Then, there's the whole multi-lingual aspect to our division, which are possible for all the translation and interpretation work that goes across the district.

So, that's also very important to us as being able to be all inclusive and make sure that all parents have the opportunity to benefit from all these programs. So, whenever we do any program, we always have a multilingual aspect. So, Spanish and Chinese are our main languages, but we have eight official languages that we service.

Interviewer: Oh, really.

Interviewee: There are over 150 languages spoken amongst our families.

Interviewer: That's wild.

Interviewee: Yes. So, with our multilingual division, we have this upcoming school year we're increasing to 85 full-time bilingual counseling assistants. They have between one and five schools assigned to them and they go to the school and they speak for families that don't speak English.

So, any family that comes there that needs to communicate with the teacher, the principal, the secretary, whoever it is, they have live interpretation available to them at all times.

Interviewer: That's fantastic.

Interviewee: Yes, then we do that. That bilingual counseling assistance speaking about 40 different languages and then we also have our own language line,

which every school has a number that they call and if there is no live interpretation available through a bilingual counseling assistant, they can just call and they call a language line, they can do an over the phone translation. Put the person on speaker and you translate it that way. So, we have eight full-time, sorry, nine full-time, language access coordinators that coordinate all the work of the bilingual counseling assistance. Also, they do live interpretation here for our central office. They do majority of the translated documents.

Interviewer: Wow, that's incredible. Okay, but I digress. Back to [crosstalk 00:18:33].

Interviewee: We also have our teen parenting program, let me not forget them. Yes, we have our teen parenting program, which is, we believe to be very, very important for the screen time thing, if you want to in vile that because with that program is, we get them really young. We get them from the time the mom is pregnant with them. So, it's kind of, you know, we have ... That program is about making sure that our teen parent, our teens who experience pregnancy or parenting graduate from high school and continue our education from that point on, whether it be trade school or community college.

The program stands for education leading to employment in career training and that is also a federally funded grant program, I think their grant is about 3.2 million yearly and they service about approximately 1,000 students a year. They provide students with motivational aspects of

staying in school, as well as intensive case management. So, every week they meet with the case manager and they're motivated financially, whether it be with attending school, doing homework, increasing their grades and also participating and personal growth workshops.

So, they get ... We have a store here called the Baby Boutique, yes, where they get baby clothes and strollers and we have a crib program and a car seat program and they can get multiple cribs and multiple car seats because a lot of them have situations where they need that.

Interviewer: More than one kid?

Interviewee: Yeah, more than one kid or even if you have that one kid or you have one in grandma's house, one at your house because you're on the bus and you can't be lugging a car seat around. That type of thing or a playpen, that type of thing. They get diapers and clothes. But, the outings are the best part. About participating in the program, they also get the family outings and that's when the whole family, mom, dad, and the child are invited to do things like [inaudible 00:20:41] Museum and Dorney Park and Crayola Factory. All of those little fun things that normally at that age a kid, parenting in high school can't afford to do.

Interviewer: Can't afford. Yeah.

Interviewee: Yeah, so it's that type of program. They do a big ... When they graduated, they throw them a huge graduation party on the spirit of [location

removed], that type of stuff. So, really, really giving them something to look forward too.

Interviewer: Are the teen parents, or the teen mothers in regular high schools or are they put into ...

Interviewee: They're in regular high school, they're in any school they want to and also the fathers as well. So, it's not just for the mom, it's for the fathers as well. So, we have our elect dads.

Interviewer: That's wonderful.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, the question, though, was any specific training that you've gotten related to media use?

Interviewee: I don't think I've gotten any specific training, I would say in this position. So, my background is actually in information systems and technology. So, in that experience, I've been to a lot of conferences, like SD and things like that, where I have self-educated myself in those areas and also me being in technology interest, done a lot of research on my own, for my own purposes with my own children.

Interviewer: Kids.

Interviewee: Yeah. So, other than that, I have not, in this position, gotten any. Because I go to a lot of conferences, but they're more focused on reading and math and how do we get family engaged in that process? Like I said, the

whole board game thing was one of the things that we found about at our conference, things like that.

So, there's not a lot of ... There hasn't been a lot of marketing towards us in that area. We get a lot of marketing for people, sales people coming to us about pitching things and I, in the past two years, I don't think anyone ... It's always been some screen related thing that people are trying to ... We haven't bought any of those things. So, I don't know if it's say we're against them or nothing like that, it's just to say that it hasn't fit into our framework.

Interviewer: That makes sense. So, how did you get from IT to family programs?

Interviewee: Well, I-

Interviewer: I thought you were a teacher in the past.

Interviewee: So, most people would think that, but I start off doing this type of work 12 years ago and straight out of college. I had a bachelors in computer information systems. All I knew is that I didn't want to be someone's secretary because that's what I have been through because I worked my way through college as a secretary.

So, that was all I knew, is that I didn't want to be anyone's secretary. So, I picked up the newspaper one day, I was being very, very picky about the job that I wanted because I knew what I wanted. I picked up the [00:23:45] Town Courier one day and I saw the job in there, it was information manager at a school, a high school. I'm like, "Hmm." The job description sounded like

what I wanted to do. They wanted to go from paper to do digital things on the computer and this was like a big thing, seen so long ago. It was only 12 years ago, right?

Interviewer: 2006, yeah. That's another world.

Interviewee: Yeah, right? I got the job and it went great and I knew nothing about education, but it was a start-up charter school and no one else around me knew anything. So, I put my big girl pants on and I called the state of Pennsylvania and I had some great trainers. I had people, the Pennsylvania department of education that would literally come down to my office and work with me for days on figuring out who to run the backend of the school. That's how I started.

I started by picking up the phone and literally begging people from [location removed] Department of Education to help you out. Still to this day, I have a lot of friends in that area. Yeah, so then I went from that school to a cyber charter school, which was even more interesting. Another startup.

Interviewer: Wow, the kids were at home online?

Interviewee: Yeah, it was [location removed] Cyber Charter School.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: That was extremely interesting. Then, from there, I went to five years at [location removed] Lane Charter School, where I was there, like I said, director of everything. I kept forgetting that they would tag on more and

more and more, until the end of it. It was a great experience. It was really ... I had some great mentors there, some great leadership, who recently left leadership with the district. So, I learned a lot from them.

I just got my experience running the back ends of schools, until I finally came here, I started off working in the [inaudible 00:25:42] program here. Yes, I took a real big pay cut to come here to work for the district. I worked for the district and I had a really great supervisor who still to this day is still my supervisor here. We built up the [inaudible 00:25:55] program from almost nothing and we increased the enrollment and we used different data strategies.

We improved the program and we went from that program to this program. We did a total rebranding, reorganization of the family and community engagement office about two and a half years ago.

Interviewer: Wow, you're such a success story.

Interviewee: We are a success story. We have a deputy chief. Her name is [name removed], she's absolutely brilliant master behind all of this. She is the mind behind all of this. I just put it concrete for her. This is her vision, I just wrote it down. That's how we operate. So, I think it's a great match because she is very vibrant and very knowledgeable and very enthusiastic and I'm very strategic and very ...

Interviewer: Practical.

Interviewee: There you go. So, we work out really well.

Interviewer: Wow, that's a fantastic story.

Interviewee: Yes, it is.

Interviewer: Okay. Let's see, is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your office or the potential of your office in serving as a mentor for parents and using devices?

Interviewee: We are absolutely always interested in serving as a mentor at her parents, so anything that we feel like is going to help the students improve academically, social, emotionally, we are certainly interested. Like we said, we're not against anything with screen time or anything. We just had found so many other options that students can do other than screen time activities. Because even in school now, they do some instruction on computers. So, it's not all like how we went to school, chalkboard, notebook.

Interviewer: Stone tablet.

Interviewee: A lot of students have either iPads all day or laptops all day, so there is already screen time built into the school day. So, our main focus has been kind of building different experiences in bringing activities together for the family to do that are still educational but fun and the families want to do. It's not like, "Oh, we got to do this fun educational thing, you know?"

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: It's more natural and people are really getting excited about it. We had a really great end of the year, so you got to check out our website. The face website [removed].

Interviewer: I can find that.

Interviewee: Yes, you can. It is an awesome website. Like I said, I supervise it, also data analysis and data specialist. A lot of their work is putting out communications on our website and we have some awesome resources there for families, let them know what's going on, but then also for people like you, who want to learn more about what we do, and the end of the year celebration that we had, I think we had over 1,000 or 1,200 participants. It was incredible.

Interviewer: Where was it?

Interviewee: It was right out here in the Atrium.

Interviewer: You can fit 1,000 people in there?

Interviewee: Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah, because they rotate in and out. Right? They're not staying the whole three hours.

Interviewer: They're not all just standing there. Yeah, yeah.

Interviewee: We offer the free childcare and we brought professional fun people to play with the kids, it was an awesome blast. Also, we also ... We always offer free food, because as part of another federal grant program, Title I, I'm sure you might be familiar with that, you are out to fee participants

when they're coming to learn. We always have workshops and learning activities for our families, so you want a workshop, you get a meal.

Interviewer: Let me ask. So, you said, some of the kids have iPads or laptops in schools. Are those that they are bringing in themselves or are they provided by the schools?

Interviewee: They are provided by the schools for a lot of students. So, some schools have decided to go completely digital and the homework and the curriculum is actually on computers.

Interviewer: That's a local school decision as opposed to a district decision?

Interviewee: It's a local ... No, it's a district decision. This district decided they allow ... I believe the math curriculum, the book itself is online or something like that.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: I don't know all the specifics, but they have all the specifics of the website.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: You can see which ... What online digital curriculum they're pushing. The book thing is, from what I hear, very expensive. The hard book aspect, they get lost, they get damaged.

Interviewer: Shredded.

Interviewee: It's all kinds of problems with them and then it becomes a thing, "Well, my child doesn't have a book and my child does have a book." From the different schools, it's like ...

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: ... it's the inequality or equality thing that we're always concerned about. It's unfair when a whole bunch of books get lost from this school. You can't keep refunding, refunding.

Interviewer: Sure.

Interviewee: So, I do believe that for some of the curriculum they had went into electronic books. The kids are getting their full of screen time, I know my son who is in the special education program ...

Interviewer: Sixth grade.

Interviewee: Yes, he's going to the seventh grade, yes. He was getting part of his reading program online.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: It was additional support, but it was online. So, they are programs that the district buys into and that they sign kids up for, that they test into these programs, this and need, or are scientifically based, all of these different things that the people pitch to us when they market their products.

But, that's what they do. Some schools have total ... They actually give laptops and iPads.

Interviewer: Do you know about policies for kids bringing their own devices to school? Is there a district wide policy? You meant, this might be your area [crosstalk 00:32:30].

Interviewee: I don't think that there's a district wide policy, I think that schools are determining what they want to do with that and how they're to be used, and so forth, yeah. Different schools have different needs, what Central would need would be different from what maybe some other neighborhood school would need. So, I think a lot of the district is moving to having with their local community or local schools. They having a lot of autonomy about certain decisions on day-to-day operations.

Interviewer: Great. So, anything else that we should know?

Interviewee: No, I can't really think of anything. I think you're on the right track, studying, having the study and being able to at least put some information out there for what best practices for ... I think it's confusing for families to know what the limits are and what best practices are and then how to get the kids off of it without seeming uncool or being mean or ...

Interviewer: Negative, right.

Interviewee: Things like that, because you feel like punishing your child because you're like, "Read a book." That shouldn't be punishment.

Interviewer: Right, yeah.

Interviewee: So, just ... I think it's a great study and I wish you all luck with it.

Interviewer: Thank you.