



IN THE NEWS



K-8 Charter Schools Closing the Achievement Gap

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION

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External Partnerships (section excerpt)

Parents or guardians are instrumental to their children's success in school, and school staff are in constant contact with them. If a student is absent, parents know to expect a phone call checking up on their child's well-being and asking why the child missed school.

The school sends narrative progress reports to and holds conferences with parents six times a year, but teachers stay in touch more frequently by phone. Because 87 percent of the students are brought to school by their parents, teachers see and speak with parents in person. At a schoolwide open house at the beginning of every year, Litt makes clear that he wants to meet and talk with parents. He starts by saying, "Don't ever call the office to make an appointment with me." After waiting to see the concerned expressions pop up on parents' face, he cracks a big smile and continues, "Come in, make yourself a cup of coffee. ... Wait [and] I will make myself available as soon as possible to meet with you. I am here every day until 7 p.m."

Parents also contribute their time to the school. They organize class parties, chaperone field trips, and sign the reading logs, homework, and tests sent home. The school PTA meetings are standing room only and have been known to last five hours. When seventh-grade teachers wanted each of their students to have a calculator at home, all of the families found money to purchase them. "You give parents a school that takes care of their kids, and you will get all the parental support you need," comments board member Fliegel. Icahn Charter School also has created opportunities for parents. At the school's math fair, students present research on professions to their parents, and then the parents learn how to navigate Excel spreadsheets to look at information students compiled and engage in learning with their children.

Within the community, the school also partners with several organizations. Staff can refer students to the Bronx Children's Psychiatric Center for counseling. Grants from the Charles Hayden Foundation support both operating expenses and camp opportunities for students. The school also arranges summer camp experiences through the New York Times' Fresh Air Fund, and it connects students to twice-yearly arts programs at Columbia University.

Community partnerships also support professional development for teachers. Icahn Charter School contracts with the City University of New York's **Creative Arts Team** to conduct storytelling and questioning skills workshops with teachers. Lehman College provides five scholarships for graduate school and, together with the New York City Mathematics Project, the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, CUN Y, provides two mathematics consultants.

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http://www.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charterk-8/report_pg11.html#icahn