

Advancing Parent-Professional Leadership in Education (APPLE) Project*

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APPLE Project Purpose

To test and further develop a model of
training to *promote partnership* between
parents of children in special education and
their schools



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About the APPLE Institute

- 3 day **parent leadership development seminar** for parents and SPED administrators in district teams intended to:
 - Improve parent-professional collaboration
 - Build parent leadership skills
 - Build functional capacity of Parent Advisory Committees
 - Required by MA State Law to exist in every school district.
 - The purpose of PACs is to advise the special education program

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APPLE Institute cont.

- Teams, consisting of 1 special education (SPED) staff and 4-5 parents who are PAC members
- Districts have daily Team Action Plan Process- (**TAPP**)- to develop next steps to develop further leadership opportunities for families back in the district in the next 6-8 months-
- Researchers conducted confidential surveys pre and post the Institute, and interview SPED Administrators (see poster handout)

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Training Modules

- Focus on awareness of community demographics, diversity, reciprocal outreach,
- Communication methods-”Respectful Conversations,” useful for teams, and parent/professional relationships
- Personal leadership styles- Using True-Colors © to recognize and utilize strengths of team members

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Research design

- Research questions:
 - Does the APPLE Institute **improve leadership skills** of PAC parents?
 - Do parents who participated in the APPLE Institute perceive **a change in effectiveness of their PAC** in working with the local school district?
- Design components:
 - Quasi-experimental design with an untreated control group
 - APPLE Institute = Intervention
 - Comparison of intervention (n=40) with control groups (N=61)
 - Comparison of baseline with follow up data
 - Time delay component- control become intervention group

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Study sample

- Parent-professional teams
- Target sample of 50 parents per Institute
- 5 teams participate in the Institute (**intervention group**), the remaining 5 teams comprise the **control group**.
- The control group becomes the intervention group in the following year (**time delay**).

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Data collection methods

Sample/ Data collection	Intervention parents	Control parents
Baseline	Survey	Survey
2-4 months after the Institute	Survey	Survey
6-8 months after the Institute	Survey	Survey
8 months after project enrolment	Interview	Interview

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Instrumentation

- Survey questionnaire (baseline, 2-4 and 6-8 months later)
 - Three modules:
 - 1) Child demographics (9 items)
 - 2) Parent leadership and PAC effectiveness (14 items)
 - 3) Parent demographics (16 items)
- Interview protocol (parents)
 - Questions (15) follow a semi-structured format and address two topic areas:
 - 1) Parent leadership
 - 2) PAC effectiveness incl. PAC-school district collaboration

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Preliminary Findings

- Year 1 - 3 aggregated data
- Participant demographics
- Survey findings
 - Within-group comparison (intervention group)
 - Cross-group comparison (intervention & control groups)
- Interview findings

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Participant Demographics

- A total of 79 parents participated in the project (baseline):

Group/Project Year	Intervention parents	Control parents
Year 1	14	23
Year 2	20	22
Year 3	18	20
Total	52	65

- PACs parents from 19 local school districts.
- Participants were predominantly white, non-Hispanic, and female, with an average age of 45.
- Parents had a generally high level of education.
- Most parents had medium to high annual household incomes.

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Participant Demographics cont.

- The majority of children of participating parents were male.
- Children ranged in age from 6 to 16.
- The largest percent of children had developmental disabilities; more than 1/3 (38%) had multiple disabilities.
- Forty percent were in regular classrooms and 36% were in both regular and separate classrooms; only a few children were in separate classrooms only.
- Most children were in grades 1 to 6.

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Survey findings: Within-group comparison

Intervention parents...	Baseline (N=52) (in %)	6-8 Months after the Institute (N=40) (in %)
Considered themselves to be “active” PAC members.*	77	93
Reported feeling “really part of their PAC.”**	54	73
Considered themselves as leaders.	60	75
Felt that as a parent leader they were making an impact at the school district level.	37	51
Felt that they were reaching out to non-PAC parents.*	63	87
Felt proud to be a PAC member.	72	78
Thought their PAC was <i>effective [ineffective]</i> in getting important things accomplished in their school district.	58 [19]	58 [30]
Thought their PAC and the school district collaborated <i>well* [poorly]</i> on important issues.	37 [29]	48 [38]

*The findings are statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

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Comments from intervention parents 6-8 months after the APPLE Institute

We are so **much better organized** since APPLE! It's my goal to recruit more members, build awareness and let folks know of all the support we have to offer.

We have had both **some steps forwards and some backwards** re: the trust issues with our [school] administration. There are varying degrees of desire to work on the trust issues as opposed to some of the other goals from the [APPLE] meeting.

We still need to do more outreach and let people know we're here to help. Initiatives raised at the APPLE Institute are **not really being executed** due to time constraints of PAC leadership and other activities going on administratively within our district. We need to re-focus and come up with timeframes/deliverables before the end of the school year.

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Survey findings: Cross-group comparison

6-8 months after the Institute, parents ...	Intervention parents (n=40) (in %)	Control parents (n=61) (in %)
Considered themselves to be "active" PAC members.*	93	75
Reported feeling "really part of their PAC."**	73	39
Considered themselves as leaders.*	75	53
Felt that as a parent leader they were making an impact at the school district level.	51	38
Felt that they were reaching out to non-PAC parents.*	87	62
Felt proud to be a PAC member.*	78	58
Thought their PAC was <i>effective [ineffective]</i> in getting important things accomplished in their school district.	58 [30]	49 [16]
Thought their PAC and the school district collaborated <i>well [poorly]</i> * on important issues.	48 [38]	38 [28]

*The findings are statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

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Interview findings

1. Parent leadership
2. Challenges to PAC leadership
3. Impact of the APPLE Institute

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1. Parent leadership

- Most parents were PAC members and held PAC positions
- Most parents had some leadership experience and felt that the acquired skills were transferable.
- Being a parent leader also required a new/ different set of skills and confidence.
- Parents' description of a leader

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“A good leader, I think, would be someone who has great listening skills, someone who can think outside the box, someone who doesn't quit answering a question.

[A good leader is] someone who takes the time to process what the concern is, look at different avenues that might help with the concern. A good leader. A great listener. A great communicator.”

- Year 2 Intervention parent

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2. Challenges to PAC leadership

- Separating the personal from the public: parents' emotions as barriers to leadership.
- Confidentiality/ self-identification issues
- Working with school districts and dealing with "school politics"
- PAC specific issues

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Separating the personal from the public

“When I go in as an advocate for team meetings, I’m fine, but when I go in for my son, my stomach hurts, I have a headache, I’m exhausted, it’s very different.”

- Year 2 Intervention parent

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Confidentiality/ self-identification

“I think there's this confidentiality piece [which] is pretty big ... I haven't quite figured it out, but I think that there are a lot of people who do not want to be open in public.

And it's just really hard to have a group and advocate for the group as a whole when you have people who are not willing to reveal themselves.

...so it's hard to lead a group that doesn't want to be led that doesn't want to be identified.”

- Year 2 Control parent

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Working with the school district

- Misperceptions that PACs and the school districts have of each other.
- Lack of mutual trust between PACs and school districts.
- A “school philosophy” that emphasizes academic excellence and where children with special needs are perceived as holding other children back.
- Funding issues as a barrier to organizing PAC events and activities.
- Dealing with “school politics.”

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“So I'm working on this for the PAC. And it's a lot of politics and I always said I would never be a politician and I'm dealing with politics every day now.

I don't want [our PAC] to be a political organization and I think that's what we've become, so we need a political spokesperson. And that's what I think we need our chairperson to be.”

- Year 2 Intervention parent

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PAC specific issues

- Not having a clear mission or a vision.
- Lacking a (formal) structure and consistency.
- Issues with recruiting and retaining PAC members, and increasing PAC member diversity.

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3. APPLE Project Impact: Parent Level

- Became better listeners and more patient in groups meetings.
- Felt encouraged/ inspired/ empowered to make change.
- Gained a better understanding of SPED staff's role & responsibilities, SPED staff expectations.
- Gained a better understanding of diversity.
- Connected with other parents and shared experiences.

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APPLE Project Impact: PAC level

- Created a friendlier/ more supportive atmosphere in PAC meetings.
- Helped PAC members to better understand each other/ their individual strengths.
- Helped organize PAC more efficiently.
- Raised PAC members' awareness of diversity.
- Learned about other PAC, their issues, & effective strategies
- Improved PAC-SPED staff communication.

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