



Nebraska Association of **School Boards**

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Gov. Heineman Will Present 2008 Awards for Parental Involvement in Education

(Lincoln, Neb.) Gov. Dave Heineman will present the second annual Governor's Initiative Award for Parent Involvement Programs at the 2008 State Education Conference, hosted by the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators on Nov. 21 at the La Vista Conference Center.

The Governor is collaborating with NASB on the Nebraska Governor's Education Initiative Award for Parental Involvement Programs, which is designed to highlight the successful efforts of school districts that reach out to involve parents in their child's education. This fall, Grand Island, St. Paul, and Garden County will be honored with the award.

"Parents are a child's first and best teachers and I've challenged our education community to find better, more creative ways to get parents more actively involved in their child's education," Gov. Heineman said. "We need to create an environment where learning takes place not just in a classroom, but is central part of family life. This award is one way to recognize the efforts of school districts that put a priority on building stronger relationships with parents by engaging them more fully in their child's education."

NASB President Kathy Danek (a school board member from Lincoln) said, "Parents play a vital part in every student's success, and it's important that schools work together with families and communities to provide the best learning environment possible. This award is an opportunity to recognize the leaders in this field and help others develop strategies to get parents more involved in their local schools."

Sponsored by All Lines Interlocal Cooperative Assurance Program (ALICAP), the winning school districts will be announced Friday, Nov. 21, during the NASB State Education Conference held at the La Vista Conference Center at Embassy Suites. The 2008 honorees will be invited to share strategies and discuss the impact improved parental engagement has had on student achievement during the conference. The Governor's Award is presented to school districts of varying size, one with enrollment of less than 499 students, 500 and 999 students, and more than 1,000 students.

A committee made up of school board and superintendent representatives, the head of the Nebraska Parent Involvement and Research Center and an NASB representative selected the three school districts to be recognized.

To learn more about the Governor's Award, visit the NASB Web site, at <http://www.nasbonline.org>.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE WINNING SCHOOLS'

GARDEN COUNTY SCHOOLS

Consolidation created ample opportunities to increase parent input in Garden County's educational system. The district utilizes PowerSchool as a means for parents to have continual updates on their children's academic progress. A school website keeps parents in the know with the latest events and upcoming activities. Phone contacts are made using SchoolMessenger to communicate frequently with families. Open Houses are held each fall, companioned with conferences to provide parents the opportunity to meet teachers and familiarize themselves with the curriculum.

This fall, a Parent Advisory Council (PAC) was formed that meets twice monthly. Parents from all age groups are working together to help take a more active role in their child's education in Garden County. Parental support is an integral part of this rural district's quest for educational excellence!

ST. PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Incoming Freshman Registration: During their 8th grade year, students complete a career unit using a program called "Career Cruising". One of the goals of the program is to get students to find a career cluster of high interest and develop a four-year educational plan identifying their path toward graduation and beyond. Students are periodically required to take their research home to their parents/guardians to discuss their pathway. The plans are then used to guide course selection throughout high school. Finally, to aid in the transition from Jr. High to High School, parents are requested to attend an evening meeting to receive information regarding next year's classes and to review their son's or daughter's four-year educational plan. Individual times are scheduled for parents who do not or are unable to attend.

Elementary School: As the importance of parental input into early education more apparent than ever, the school/community library developed the "read-at-home backpacks". The packs, for pre-school and kindergarten students, provide a direct home-to-school connection using language rich activities that target critical early literacy skills at home. They include age-appropriate titles familiar to children and are perfect for read aloud or shared reading. These packs help bridge the gap by bringing reading home to our youngest readers. Twice a year, the elementary holds Study Buddies. At Study Buddies, a volunteer is paired with an elementary student to work on homework and basic skills. The buddies meet twice a week for 10 sessions each fall and spring. Volunteers include parents, grandparents, community members, and high school students.

GRAND ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The school social worker program and ConnectEd phone message system are two strategies that the Grand Island Public Schools uses to improve parental involvement.

The school district launched its school social worker program after receiving a three-year U.S. Department of Education grant in 2006. The grant funded hiring five elementary school social workers. A sixth elementary school social worker was added this year, and the district funds two middle school social workers. The social workers have received training to teach the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting Skills in individual and group settings. School social

workers conduct home visits, provide parent counseling, offer parent training, make community resources referrals, and give community and educational resources to parents.

The superintendent, principals, athletic director, and others use ConnectEd to communicate with parents on issues including school closings due to inclement weather, school emergencies, and school events. For instance, through ConnectEd, the superintendent can record an announcement about cancellation of school because of a blizzard, then transmit the message simultaneously to all students' homes. Principals use ConnectEd to contact parents about upcoming events, then send a ConnectEd reminder the day of the event. This has increased parents' attendance at school activities.

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