



**California Project LAUNCH, First 5 Alameda County,
and Oakland Parents Together
Impact of Parent Café (2011-12 School Year)**

The Parent Café is a parent engagement program developed by the Center for Studies in Social Policy and structured around their Strengthening Families’ Protective Factors Framework. The cafés were designed as a method to engage parents in building the protective factors needed to promote healthy outcomes for their children. Each Parent Café consists of series of weekly meetings centered around dyad and small-group table discussions where parents and other family members converse about issues important to keeping their families strong and their children safe.

As part of Project LAUNCH, First 5 Alameda County brought this parent engagement strategy to neighborhoods in East Oakland, where California Project LAUNCH programs were focused. First 5 Alameda County chose the community-based organization, Oakland Parents Together, with their proven track record of successfully engaging parents, to deliver this program. Originally designed as a 3-week series, the Parent Cafés in East Oakland were each extended to a 6-week series. Beginning in the fall of 2011, and continuing throughout the 2011-12 school year, seven Parent Café series were held as part of a set of new services funded in Year 3 of California Project LAUNCH.

At the conclusion of each Parent Café series, each participant in attendance that day completed a questionnaire that consisted of the parent survey items required by Project LAUNCH’s cross-site evaluation, as well as additional questions about parent leadership, and open-ended items about program impact. Additionally, a small number of program participants were interviewed about their experiences with the program, what they learned, and how they believed the program affected them. Program and agency administrators and staff were also interviewed about what they had observed as far as the Parent Café’s impact on participants, as well as about their view of systems change related to the delivery of the Parent Cafés that they observed among other agencies and groups.

Table 1. Parent Cafés and Number of Participants Surveyed

Parent Café Location	Survey Date	# of Participants who Completed Surveys
Sobrante Park Elementary	November 2011	12
Lockwood Gardens	November 2011	30
James Madison Middle School	April 2012	14
Sobrante Park Elementary	April 2012	14
REACH Academy	May 2012	16
Webster Child Development Center	May 2012	23
Lion’s Creek Crossing	September 2012	19
Total number of surveys		128

Impact of Parent Cafes

A total of 128 participants from seven Parent Café series completed the participant survey at the conclusion of each series. Participants were asked a series of questions about how much, if at all, the Parent Café had helped their family in specific ways, with answers ranging from *Not at all* to *A lot*. Answers were coded as follows:

- 1=Not at all
- 2=A little
- 3=Sometimes
- 4=A lot

A mean score was determined for each item by adding the combined scores and dividing by the total number who responded to each question. Higher scores are more desirable. Across all survey questions, a strong majority of participants reported that the Parent Café had helped their family “A lot.” The highest scores were for “help becoming a better parent to your children,” the general question “helped your family,” and the “helped you to better understand what your child is feeling and how to respond.”

Table 2. How Much Has the Parent Café Helped Your Family?

Parent Survey Questions	1 Not at all	2 A little	3 Sometimes	4 A lot	Average Score
1. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped your family? (n=125)	0%	7%	10%	83%	3.7
2. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped you to be a better parent to your child/children? (n=124)	0%	3%	14%	83%	3.8
3. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped you to better understand what your child is feeling and how to respond? (n=126)	0%	5%	17%	78%	3.7
4. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped your child’s behavior? (n=126)	1%	9%	21%	69%	3.6
5. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped your child to be physically healthy? (n=125)	2%	11%	23%	64%	3.5
6. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped your child to express his/her feelings in a positive/age appropriate way? (n=125)	1%	7%	24%	68%	3.6
7. Has the <i>Parent Café</i> helped your child to be a ready for school or successful in school? (n=124)	0%	7%	19%	74%	3.7

Additionally, Parent Café participants were surveyed about whether they would be willing to become involved in future activities related to parent leadership. A very large majority responded that they would like to attend another café series, and half reported that they would like to become a table host. Approximately one-third of participants responded that they would be willing to become involved with working further with the City of Oakland and with Oakland Parents Together in neighborhood or parent programs.

Table 3. Parent Follow-up/Leadership Questions

Please indicate if you would be willing to join in one or more of the following activities . . .	Percent who responded “yes”
Attend another Parent Café series	80%
Become a Parent Café Table Host	50%
Work with Neighborhood Services Coordinator (City of Oakland)	36%
Join Oakland Parents Together and work on developing more parent workshops	31%

Qualitative Findings about Impact of Parent Cafes

Parent Café administrators, staff members and participants were interviewed in the spring and fall of 2012 to gather information about the perceived impact of Parent Café on participants. The evaluator developed semi-structured interview protocols that were guided by central questions and hypotheses, and interviewed 7 staff, volunteers, and administrators from agencies involved in the delivery of the program, including the director of Oakland Parents Together, who was interviewed twice. A First 5 Alameda County and Project LAUNCH administrator interviewed 6 program participants, and provided one additional participant testimonial statement. Additionally, the evaluator was a participant/observer in one Parent Café session.

Table 4. Sources of Qualitative Data about the Parent Cafe

Source	Type	Number
Administrator and staff members at lead organization, Oakland Parents Together	Structured interviews	3 interviews (1 person interviewed twice)
Administrators and staff members of other agencies involved in delivering the Parent Café program	Structured interviews	3 interviews
Parent volunteer	Structured interview	1 interview
Parent Café participants	Structured interviews	6 interviews
Parent Café participant	Written testimonial	1 written statement
Evaluator program observation	Participant/observer	1 observation
Total qualitative sources		15

These qualitative data were compiled, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes, thereby identifying the following participant and systems change outcomes related to the Parent Cafes.

Increased Social Connections and Friendship

In interviews, participants, administrators and staff members described how the Parent Cafes resulted in increased social connections and friendship among participants. This occurred in neighborhoods described by one staff member, as “places where many people experience a lack of community and tend to live their lives in isolation.” The Parent Cafes were described as a great vehicle for bringing people together, and providing an opportunity for them to communicate about important topics in their lives. Participants described how satisfying and good it felt to get to know new people and sometimes even become friends who spend time together and help one another. “That’s the best thing about the Parent Café. That you now know that you have people you can reach out to. If you can’t get it from your family, you have friends and neighbors who can help.” “It gives you a way of reaching out to people instead of being all alone.”

One staff member described how participants’ getting to know one another better leads to stronger neighborhood cohesion, “Once they’ve gotten to know one other, people will say hi and talk and really connect when they run into each other elsewhere, rather than just waving. They also start to watch out for each other’s kids.” This staff member also described how these new social connections resulted in further community-building interactions, such as working together at the school, drinking coffee, and chatting about their day, and some cases becoming comfortable enough to exchange phone numbers, and begin to rely on one another. The director of the agency that runs the Parent Cafes described how in the majority of their internal parent surveys, people wrote about how they met new people, made friends and built community.

Another participant described how the Parent Café helped remind her that looking out for other people “is how it should be. I grew up in the suburbs, everybody knew everybody and watched out for each other’s kids.”

Increased Cross-cultural Connections.

Because the Parent Cafes have been held in multi-cultural neighborhoods, the new social connections and friendships that develop cross ethnic, language and cultural lines. One staff member described how in her neighborhood there is generally a separation between the African-American and Spanish-speaking residents. She described that due to the Parent Cafe, “that barrier is breaking down.” “People used to be fearful of one another, but not anymore.” A staff member described how one Latina mom had communicated to her that she had felt isolated and unwelcome in her neighborhood, but that the Parent Cafes had made her realize that we can “talk together, exercise together, and that our kids can play on the streets together.” In fact, the cross-cultural connections that developed among parents who first met at the Parent Café have resulted in participants from varied backgrounds engaging in further activities together through the school’s parent center, such as Zumba and yoga classes, and walking the track together.

At another Parent Café, strong connections developed between African-American and Asian families who attended. Three women, with limited English, who came to almost every session, were initially keeping to themselves during the rotating table discussions, along with their translator. However, during the third session they attended, the translator was absent, so these three started to rotate among the regular groups and connect to other families. A staff member described how several of the African-American participants went out of their way to look out for them, make sure they felt included, and even competed to get them to sit at their tables. These three women continued to attend and added a lot to the community spirit, being neighborly and bonding with the other participants. “It took a little while for people to warm up and start to cross boundaries, but it did happen. People just realize that we are all parents who are struggling in the same ways.”

The Parent Cafes also demonstrated how language barriers could be transcended. At one Parent Café session, the evaluator observed a dynamic mix of Spanish, English, skillful simultaneous translation by a staff member for the whole-group elements, and spontaneous ad-hoc translations by bilingual participants during the table discussions. The evaluator also observed a playful, friendly, cross-cultural social dynamic. One staff member described how the Parent Café is really good bridging cultural gaps, “The Parent Cafe is really good for incorporating and absorbing lots of diverse points of view, and doing this in a really positive way.”

Increased Participation in Volunteerism and other Community Activities

Several staff members described the impact the Parent Cafes had on strengthening a sense of community within one East Oakland neighborhood. In the past, the neighborhood had been a close-knit African-American community but had experienced a large influx of Spanish-speaking residents, as well as issues with violence, drug dealing, and family trauma. Bringing the Parent Café to this neighborhood helped make residents from different backgrounds comfortable communicating with one another, and this began to spin off into other activities. Several of the Parent Café staff and participants helped start a monthly “community play date” in the elementary school yard, where for three hours on a Saturday afternoon, local kids could ride scooters, skateboards and bikes, and play games together in a safe and supervised outdoor environment. For the opening play date event, local fire fighters played basketball with the kids, and there was even a sing-along. The ongoing play date led to physical improvements in the school yard, including shade, raised planter boxes, and improved play elements. “It’s really helped recapture the community spirit.”

Several staff members also described how the Parent Café structure intentionally encourages participants toward increased community participation. At the beginning of each session, there is a time for announcements where participants and staff pass out flyers, and inform each other about other upcoming events, activities, or programs. “We encourage everyone to support other programs and spread the word. It definitely helps people connect to what else is going on, and motivates people to be more involved.” For example, staff members will inform participants about nearby tax services, medical clinics, food programs, phone numbers for city services or for reporting on crime, summer job programs for teens, or other neighborhood resources, such as the library or the YMCA. “People often don’t even know it [the YMCA] exists in their neighborhood and that they can get free passes for their kids.” Another program that Parent Café participants have been connected to is a “time banking” program, which is a structured barter system exchange, where people offer work or services and then get work in return. “One person talked about it at the Parent Café, and as a result lots of other people in the neighborhood joined the Time Bank.”

Increased Parent Leadership

The structure of the Parent Café also promotes parent leadership by working through neighborhood leaders when starting a Café in a new location, and by hiring as “table hosts” residents who are trained to enhance the experience of the Parent Café by facilitating and deepening table discussions. One such leader was attending a neighborhood council meeting, sponsored by the City of Oakland, when she heard about the Parent Café that had been recently launched elsewhere in East Oakland. She was invited to attend, became involved, and then advocated to bring the next Parent Café series to her neighborhood, where it became a huge success, expanding from one school to two school locations, and continuing to organize and run several cafes series even in the absence of funding. She also became involved in the volunteer parent center at one of the schools, helped bring the community play date (described above) to her neighborhood, has spoken at other venues promoting the Parent Café, and was even the focus of a *NY Times* newspaper article in the spring of 2012.

Similarly, six resident leaders at a public housing development were trained and paid as table hosts for the first Parent Café series that took place in the fall of 2011. According to a staff member interviewed, they continued to engage with these residents after the program ended about the possibility of continuing another series or of spinning off into other interest groups. With the second year of Project LAUNCH funding for Parent Cafes that began in the fall of 2012, a new café took place at a second public housing development. Again, the housing authority staff requested that their own residents be trained as table hosts.

According to administrators and staff members interviewed, several participants have continued to stay engaged in school or community activities after their Parent Café series concluded. Some have continued to support their school community through involvement at the parent center, others graduated to become table hosts for Parent Cafes at other locations, and others have become involved in additional programs through Oakland Parents Together.

One Parent Café participant described his own personal development that occurred because of his participation in the program. “I learned a lot of things from the Parent Café as far as communication, as far as listening, and as far as becoming friends with people. Now I take the time to find out who’s living in my community, who they are as a person, and communicate with them. Those are things I wouldn’t do before.” He described how lots of neighborhood children would cross the street right in front of his house on their way to school, and that they were often not accompanied by adults or crossing the street safely. “Now I stand out in front and tell them how to hold their brothers’ hand, or look both ways. I wasn’t doing that before coming to the Parent Café.” He also described starting to be attentive and helpful to his neighbors. “There is an elderly lady on the right side of my grandmother’s house, and another lady on the other side of my grandmother’s house, and my grandmother. So basically I’m watching out for three elderly women. And it takes a lot of patience to deal with the elderly.” He also described since attending the Parent Café how he started volunteering at the local elementary school. “I wasn’t doing that kind of stuff before I started the Parent Café. So it actually changed my life for the better. I’ve learned not to be a selfish person. I’m giving.”

Therapeutic Emotional Support

The structure of the Parent Cafes also provides an opportunity for communication, self-disclosure, and the giving and receiving of emotional support that staff members and participants described as “powerful” and “therapeutic.” One staff member described how discussions in the Parent Cafe often bring up participants’ traumatic past experiences. “This ignites a lot of emotion that has been unexpressed and shunted away as too painful. “I’ve been to some Parent Cafes where everyone’s crying.” For example, one staff member described how in the very first meeting of a Parent Cafe series, they began with what they thought was an easy question: “As a parent, when and why is it important to let go.” Right away, one woman started talking about her daughter who had died. “It was a real emotional catharsis for everyone, and really brought the group together quickly.”

Another staff member described how the Parent Café had helped reunite a family where an adult son had been emotionally estranged from his mother. “He had anger issues around abuse and neglect that he had experienced as a child.” The table questions and supportive listening really impacted him, particularly the discussion question about how your parents’ parenting affects you. He invited his mother to a café session where they experienced a reconciliation that was described well in a testimonial written by a table host who was there that day. During the table discussion, the man talked about how, due to his abusive childhood experiences, he had grown up, in his words, “hating women” and it was something he had fought hard to overcome. His mother, hearing this for the first time, apologized to him. “He accepted and they tearfully embraced each other. That was a powerful moment when I realized that there was more to this ‘Café’ than just gift cards.”

Another person interviewed described how during one Parent Café session a participant during the table discussion began to talk about sexual abuse she had survived as a child. Suddenly, other women at the table described their own experiences of abuse, and they began to cry and support one another. It was described as a powerful example of the bonding and support that occurs during Parent Café discussions, and an emotionally cathartic experience for all participants and staff who witnessed it.

Stress Reduction

Several staff members and the written testimonial described how various benefits of the Parent Café – expressing oneself, increased social connections, friendship, support, and feelings of safety -- helped reduce stress among participants. “Just getting out of the house and away from the kids and spending time in conversation with other of adults helps to relieve stress.” Another staff member relaying comments from Parent Café participants who said since getting to know their neighbors at the Parent Café, now felt safer walking to the corner, described how “feeling safer in your neighborhood helps reduce stress.” Other participants and staff described how the Parent Cafes teaches new techniques for dealing with “the stress of parenting.” One staff member described how several participants told her how much they look forward to coming and talking to other parents, adding that, “It is very stress-reducing being able to give and receive this type of support.”

Increased Parenting Knowledge and Skills

Each parent café session is structured around a sequence of discussions that encompass some aspect of parenting or family relationships. Many participants and staff members described experiencing or observing how Parent Cafés can change the way people interact with their children. One staff member described how the Parent Café principle of *giving children the love and respect they need* is very powerful and shifts the relationship and view parents have of their kids. “Most parents have not really thought that much about the ‘respecting’ part.” This emphasis on respect for the child is fairly unique among parent engagement programs, and encourages people to grasp and respect the uniqueness of each of their children. “People really seem to learn during the cafes to have more consciousness about their relationship with their children, and about what their kids really need.” Parents interviewed described becoming much more patient and having more skills to deal with parenting challenges as a result of what they had learned. “What was useful to me was that I wasn’t that patient and didn’t have lots of ways to deal with children other than yelling or [threatening]. I didn’t know to just take a good ten seconds before I react to anything, and then to just talk with them. And then to just listen, rather than going into a rage sometimes.” One staff member described how he had observed a parent who, during the course of the café series, had become much less harsh with her somewhat active child, and had improved the way she interacted with him and disciplined him.

Peer-to-Peer Learning. An important and unique element of the Parent Cafes is that it relies to a large extent upon peer-to-peer learning. As one staff member described, “It feels like they are among equals and colleagues, as opposed to being talked at like a lot of other parent education forums.” The structure of the cafes also capitalizes on the collective wisdom of the group. Table hosts are trained to draw out participants who have wisdom and experience to share, to help guide conversations to deeper levels of understanding, and to help summarize and reinforce learning. At the end of each session, each table host shares-out to the whole group and summarizes important parts of their table discussions. “This is where the real learning takes place. It plays to people’s strengths.”

Cross-Generational Learning. The Parent Cafe also provides an opportunity for cross-generation communication and learning. Many people who attend the cafes are helping to raise grandchildren or nieces and nephews, so a cross-section of ages is represented. These intergenerational exchanges, described by one staff member as “more and more rare in our society,” allow parents and grandparents of different generations to learn from one another. Having grandparents participate in the cafes was also described as an asset because it provides “a parent figure” for the younger participants.

Participation and Learning by Fathers. While the majority of participants in the Parent Cafes were women, there was also significant male participation, which is often not the case among parent engagement programs. The program staff and table hosts include a balance of males and females, and men hold key leadership roles. One male participant described his view of the impact on men, “I think the Parent Café can help fathers figure out how to be a good parent, a good communicator, and to love harder than they normally do, be more caring.”

Improved Communication and Listening Skills

Many of the staff members and participants interviewed emphasized how the Parent Cafés help people learn new communication skills, particularly listening skills that “are really useful for improving relationships with family members.” Each Parent Café session begins with a dyad discussion where participants take turns speaking and listening carefully to one another. These dyads are often eye-opening experiences that teaches people the power of real listening in supporting and connecting to others. This modeling and practicing each week of how to communicate, listen and support one another appears to be among the program’s most important impacts on participants. As one staff member described, “Not everyone comes having the ability to listen well. The Parent Café really helps them with that.”

One participant who was interviewed described that the Parent Café had changed him by making him better at communicating to his child. “I used to always just talk. This program taught me how to listen and be attentive to my child. Just like when I was growing up, I always wished my parents would listen to me.” Another staff member described that it is often an “aha moment’ when people learn how important it is to listen to their child. He described the importance of the Parent Café in helping participants become more aware of their children’s needs and their children’s perspectives, something that “often gets lost in families that are overwhelmed economically.”

Another participant explained that she had learned at the Parent Café “not to get so stressed out, but to listen and talk to [her children.]” Another participant mentioned, “If I see myself getting angry, now I won’t talk to them in that tone. I will calm down. I’ve also learned to let my kids express the feelings they have. That they have feelings, too.” Another staff member described how a large percentage of the written comments mentioned having increased conversations with their children as a result of attending the Parent Café.

Improved Interactions and Relationships with Family Members

Improved relationships with children. As described above, participants and staff members both talked about improved relationships, parenting, and communication with children occurring as a result of the Parent Café experience. As one staff member said, “People really seem to learn during the cafes to have more consciousness about their relationships with their children, and about what their kids really need.” He described the Parent Café idea to give children the love and respect they need as simple and powerful. “It helps people take the time to focus on how important it is to make their child feel special.” Another staff member described a written comment he remembered, “It’s

taught me how to be a better man and a better parent.” He relayed other written comments where people described that, as a result of coming to the Parent Café, they had started to discipline their children differently.

The focus on just being there for the child, rather than on doing something for the child, is a message strongly emphasized at the Parent Cafes. A staff member described this focus on “special time” as very powerful, where people are asked to focus on what their family time looks like, and to even sometimes reverse roles and let the child be in charge. “If you do this, kids will trust you more, and will open up and tell you stuff.”

One staff member provided an example of this from his own relationship with his teen-aged son. He described how when they drive together, he always chose the music that they would play in the car. But in thinking about the concept of “special time” and letting the child be in charge, he started to let his son play his music during their drives, which “led to really great conversation and communication.” He described how he was surprised by his son’s interest in old-school R&B, and how his son started talking about wanting to get an internship in radio, and opened up more about his plans and dreams for the future. He described that due to this shift and increased communication, he now knows his child better, and knows what inspires him. From this experience, he learned how powerful the “special time” concept can be, and that it really works.

Improved relationships with spouses. Several staff members and participants described how the communication and listening skills they learned at the Parent Cafe had really improved their relationships with their spouses or partners. One staff member described a couple on the verge of divorcing who both started attending the Parent Café, and attributed the cafe to having saved their marriage. “The husband had stopped talking and withdrawn, but coming to the café got him communicating with his wife again. The staff member described that the couple started to listen and communicate with each other better by applying the Parent Café’s *six agreements*, that include using “I-statements,” and applying the “I can’t fix you” agreement. Another staff member described how he had also observed husbands and wives being brought together by the Parent Café. It helps people view their relationships from a different perspective. “It’s like good counseling -- and in the inner city, we don’t have counseling.”

Improved relationships with others. Several staff members and participants also mentioned similar examples of how the Parent Cafés had helped improve relationships with friends and with other family members. For example, the adult son and his mother described above overcame a long-time emotional estrangement and began to heal their relationship marred by previous abuse due to the Parent Cafe. Another participant helping to raise her grandchildren spoke about using the new listening techniques she learned at the Parent Café to improve her relationship with her adult daughter and mother of the grandchildren.

Qualitative Findings about Systems Change Related to the Parent Cafes

The agency administrators and staff involved in delivering the Parent Café programs, who were interviewed in the spring and fall of 2012, were also asked about their observations of system change related to the Parent Café, including the impact of the Parent Cafes on agencies, the increased use of parent engagement strategies, and the dissemination of Parent Café-style structures and elements to other programs and events. The interviews also attempted to understand the success and enthusiasm surrounding the Parent Café model. Again, the evaluator developed semi-structured interview protocols guided by central questions and hypotheses, and interviewed seven administrators and staff members around systems change. The interview data were compiled, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes, thereby identifying the following systems outcomes.

Increased Interest by other Agencies in using Parent Cafés as an Engagement Strategy

Due to Project LAUNCH bringing the Parent Cafes to East Oakland, other local agencies have become interested in them as a way to engage families and potentially develop parent or community leaders. The City of Oakland, the Oakland Housing Authority and the Oakland Unified School District, all agencies involved in the delivery of the Parent Cafes, appear to have recognized the usefulness of the Parent Cafes in this way. A staff member affiliated with the City of Oakland described the Parent Cafes as being a good way to build relationships with citizens in specific neighborhoods, promote city services, and empower people to become more civically engaged, possibly even serving on resident action councils. The Oakland Housing Authority negotiated to have their own resident leaders trained as table hosts, and have looked for ways to continue to engage residents and capitalize on the enthusiasm with which the Parent Cafes were met. The success of the Parent Cafes at public housing developments and at several Oakland Unified School district sites spurred interest among other agencies and school principals in holding cafes at their school or agency locations as well.

Adoption of Parent Cafes (and Café-like Activities) by Other Agencies

A staff member at the Oakland Housing Authority described how his agency wants to continue programs, such as the Parent Café, that are successful in engaging residents. “We want to keep the Parent Café going. We need this. After the first session, people were really eager for the second one to start.” In the absence of continued outside funding during the first year of the program, he described talking to resident leaders about the possibility of the residents taking responsibility for some of the management of the café. He also described how his agency had incorporated elements of the café structure into other events. During this year’s Black History Appreciation Lunch, they developed a celebratory program that began with a Parent Café style discussion, which started with a dyad, and then went on to a discussion group. The topic was: “Who is your favorite black historical figure?” “People loved it! It got people thinking and talking. It was definitely the best part of the program.” He described that within his agency, the success of the Parent Café has started a dialogue about how they can continue to incorporate Parent Café-style discussion groups in their programs. “It definitely fits in well to our work.” Subsequently, Project LAUNCH has provided another year of funding for Parent Cafes, including several to be held at Oakland Housing Authority’s residential complexes.

Within the Oakland Unified School District, a similar story unfolded. The success of the Parent Cafes led parents and administrators at one school to continue holding the Parent Café, even in gaps of time between funding. As the director of the agency delivering the Parent Café program said, “We are scheduled to do one [a Parent Café series] there in the spring, but they didn’t want to wait that long. They have their parent center and their morning exercise group, and they just love the café, so they are getting it started up again now.”

The Oakland Unified School also held a café-like event this past August at their principals’ retreat. They invited parents and community members to attend, and held a community café, which is a similar model also related to Strengthening Families framework. The director described the best part as being the first of three rotations of discussions, where the principals were only allowed to listen and not speak. “That was fairly powerful, and went over really well. I’m not sure whose idea it was, but might be related to the district’s new policy on parent engagement.”

The Spread of Café-style Engagement Strategies into other OPT Programs

Shortly after being exposed to the Parent Café model, Oakland Parents Together, the agency contracted to deliver the Parent Café programs for California Project LAUNCH, began to include café-style engagement strategies into some of their other programs and activities. For example, in September 2011 they incorporated a Café-style meeting into their annual back-to-school event held at Oakland City Hall. Hundreds of Oakland parents attended the event, and 50 came to their workshop. The next time they adapted it was in November 2011 at the Oakland Mayor's Office Summit, where they led a café focused on community violence and safety issues. Their modifications at events such as these include tailored questions, skipping the table discussion rotations, but including small group discussions and "the share-out collective wisdom piece."

Oakland Parents Together has also received additional funding to build upon the success of their Parent Café program. They received a second year of expanded funding from Project LAUNCH to hold up to 12 Parent Café series in three different neighborhoods of East Oakland during the 2012-13 school year. They also received funding from the California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities grant in East Oakland, to build upon their existing parenting program *Listening to Children and to Each Other*, also known as *Parenting 102*. They invited all Parent Café participants from the first year of funding to attend *Parenting 102*, as an intentional follow-up aimed at developing parent leadership. A ten-week long program, it consisted of a modified Parent Café structure that began each session with dyad discussions. A few of the sessions had rotating table discussions like the Parent Café, but for most sessions the dyads would be followed by a whole group meeting and discussion focused on "learning how to really listen to each other," as well as on elements of Strengthening Families' *Five Protective Factors*. There were discussion-based assignments to take home and try out on family members and friends, and then follow-up discussions on what they learned, how well it worked, and what strategies could be refined. The emphasis throughout was that this group was designed to develop parent leadership, and be a continuation of learning that began at the Parent Cafes. "It was supremely successful in that we had 30 parents continually showing up."

The Development of Parent Leaders

The structure of Parent Cafes relies upon, and also develops, parent leadership. Each café series trains and employs community members as table hosts, and connects to existing parent leaders at the locations where the cafes are held. The participants in the *Parenting 102* workshop (described above) experienced further leadership development. Approximately ten of these participants will serve as table hosts during the second year of Parent Café funding. One is also a translator, who works in a leadership role in the Parent Cafes. Several have begun to get involved in other agency programs, such as recruiting for their tutoring programs. And two or more have begun to attend the weekly meeting for agency staff, board members, and parent leaders, which is the core leadership group for agency.

Expanding the Parent Café Model to Meet Other Educational and Community Needs

Oakland Parents Together has also begun to expand the Parent Café model to respond to educational objectives at several school locations where the cafes are held. At a Parent Café held at a new location at the end of last school year, they decided to make the final session a "School Café" that included teachers and parents, as well as the traditional end-of-series potluck. □□ "This was in June 2012, and the first time we experimented with adding on to and building off of the Parent Café series, to cover other areas." For the School Café, they continued with the structure of rotations and table discussions, but developed new questions such as, "How can parents and teachers support

each other? And “How can we work together to improve the school?” The director of the agency described it as a “definite success,” and wondered if it “might be a missing link in school reform efforts -- because so much of the challenge in schools is around the cultural gap between teachers and students/parents.”

Another modification of the Parent Cafe to meet educational needs, and a definite example of systems change related to Project LAUNCH, will occur during the 2012-2013 school year, including one that just occurred in the fall of 2012. At a few school locations, there will be the traditional six sessions of the Parent Café, but then an additional two sessions will be added: an Attendance Café, focused on the issues and challenges around school attendance, and a School Café, as described above. These final two sessions will be funded not by Project LAUNCH, but by another local education agency. There is so much interest in the Parent Cafes as a parent engagement model, that at one point, the director described, two local education organizations were “competing with each other about who would fund it.”

An unplanned modification, also indicative of systems change, also occurred in the fall of 2012, where a Parent Café series was being held for the first time at a new school location. The principal of the school and several teachers attended as regular participants. “They saw the flyers and just showed up, and we were a bit surprised. At first, I didn’t even know they were teachers, but thought they were parents.”

Appendix – Additional Comments and Quotations by Participants and Staff

Additional quotations and paraphrased statements. . .

What makes people respond so positively to Parent Cafes?

“It’s not just a program where people are receiving a service. It’s structured in a way where they are also helping others. People like to be part of the solution; they want to know what they can do to help. It’s very peer-to-peer.”

“People like to express themselves. They like to talk about their own issues and their own families.”

It’s a good way for people to become more involved in the community, which they like. It’s a forum to get to know their neighbors, which doesn’t necessarily happen in a lot of places.

It’s very positively focused. It motivates people to be better parents, make better schools, have stronger communities. People find it a positive and comfortable structure – unlike traditional parenting classes.

“Parent Café is popular because it’s organic and not didactic. It doesn’t tell somebody what to do. It’s just parents supporting one another. We were surprised by how well-received and important that is.”

It gives people real tools – new skills they can use right away.

The structure is great – everybody has a voice and an equal opportunity to share. It really gets everyone involved in expressing themselves and communicating to others.

“It’s structured, it’s not just conversing. There is just enough structure to keep people focused and make it productive.” Due to the structure, everyone gets to experience at the beginning the power of the dyads, and sharing out the collective wisdom of the group.

People like the cross-cultural communication. “As they get to know each other, they get to like each other.”

Additional quotations and paraphrased statements. . .

What makes people respond so positively to Parent Cafes?

People bond over shared challenges. It crosses generations and crosses cultural differences. Being a parent is something they all have in common.

“People liked the Parent Café so much, they would not let it end. They just kept it going in [one] neighborhood.”

“It is great that the Parent Cafes came along in this worst of economic times. The parent Café provides jobs, as Table Hosts, offers \$10 gift cards for everyone who attends, and offers emotional support and community building.”

“The group dynamic that occurs is very therapeutic and touches people deeply.”

“Deep-seeded emotions come through.” “The best therapy is communicating and sharing and letting it out.”

Things like that, I wasn't doing that before. I've come to the Parent Café since the very beginning. I came to every one of them. I was excited to come and interact. We have good conversations. It's therapeutic.

Open-ended survey question #1 . . .

How have the Parent Cafes helped you?

Comments around improved communication skills

It opened up a lot of conversations between me and my child.

It has helped me with being able to talk to my kids more.

To know how to communicate better with my child (2 comments like this)

Speak to my children everyday

It helped me sit down more and talk with others.

I now know how to help other people to have good communication with their children and partners.

I learned to be more outspoken and listen more to others

I listen to my kids and stop myself from interrupting them when they are talking to me

It taught me how to listen to my children without yelling so much. I just take turns with my daughter.

It helped me be a better dad to my son to sit and talk to him and listen to him.

To listen more and respect other views

Taught me the importance of listening.

To listen to my children and other people

The café made me learn to listen to my children more and to ask questions

To listen and be heard

Listen to people.

It helped me listen attentively and understand and communicate with my babies and other people.

I learned that listening to your parents and child is important. Parents should always listen and ask questions about what's going on

Learning how to listen to my child and them listening to me.

Open-ended survey question #1 . . .

How have the Parent Cafes helped you?

Comments around improved parenting

It taught me to be patient with my family. (2 comments like this).
It helped me be closer with my child. (2 comments like this)
Helped me and my partner deal with our kids
It has helped me understand my children better.
Learning to have an open mind on relating to my children
It gave a good perspective on how to accomplish what my goals are as a parent
That children are just that children growing individuals, in need of structure, support, love, care and so much more.
To be more patient with my children (2 comments like this)
It gave me a different outlook when it comes to my children
It has help me become a better parent (4 comments like this)
I enjoyed it with my husband and we learned how to be better parents.
It has helped me to look at other parenting models
It has shown me that most of my child's experience is shared with their peers. They are growing and need expressions of love and room for growth, values and goals and parents who have their best interest at heart by letting them grow in to who they are meant to be.
I have learned that the love and respect I received as a child really help me all through my life
Every week I am trying new things to help my child achieve and be their best. Parent Café really help us parents to do just that. THANK GOD FOR PARENT CAFÉ!
Paying attention to them
To pay attention to our children's everyday feelings

Comments about improved relationships with family members

It has helped me with relationships with my children, boyfriend and people.
To enjoy being with my family
To understand my family better
I have learned a lot about my own parents.

Comments around the therapeutic benefits/stress reduction

By venting my stress of the week
Expressing thoughts and concerns to community members with similar issues – release
I am more vulnerable and transparent.
Helped me to heal my hurts and talk about my life.
I learned to speak my mind and not be afraid.
I feel more tranquil with my self
I learned to coexist and share.
I learned I can share my feelings
I'm less withdrawn and more approachable.

Comments around building connections and community

Getting to know people's values
Meeting new people. (2 comments like this).
Interacting with community members, and sharing car problems.
Having a lot of good conversations
Talking, sharing with others. (3 comments like this).
Listening to other parents and being able to help them
Facing our difficulties together and working thru them
Knowing that there are people who are interested other people

Comments about cross-cultural connections

Opening lines of cross cultural relations through communication
I learned from people with different cultures. We meet new people with good heart
Interact with other parents of diverse cultures

Open-ended survey question #1 . . .

How have the Parent Cafes helped you?

Comments about becoming a better person

To be a better person (2)
To be more honest
Understand better ways
Care about people
Help me with my responsibility as a man.
Helped me to make good decisions.
It helped me have more patience with myself and my children.

General comments

Really helped my daughter and her children
Everything
I learned a lot of new things (6 comments like this)
Lots, YES, thanks!
Gave me a lot of ideas and advice (3 comments like this)
Made me think of ways to deal with problems.
This is my first time coming but this is a great class
It has been a very refreshing joyful milestone in my life.
This program was very insightful and positive they should have many more
This program helped me so much and I'm very grateful
Help me understand better.
It's a lot of help; it truly helps a lot

Open-ended survey question #2 . . .

What issues affect you and your family the most?

Comments about challenges with family members

Behavior issues with my children
Finding time together uninterrupted. Also taking time out to build our family unit.
Family time
How to show love and respect to our children
How do you make sure each of your children feels special
All family issues
Dealing with anger issues and respect
Dealing with kid's anger and inappropriate behavior.
Giving each child enough attention and time.
When my kids don't listen
Coming together as a family
Trying to discipline my child and make sure they know I love them
Sibling rivalry
Tantrums
Behavioral issues in one of my kids
My children not communicating with me or family members
Getting along without fighting

Comments about general challenges of life

The world and what it has in store for us.
Stress and money
Time and energy
Problem solving
Respecting others
Daily living

Open-ended survey question #2 . . .

What issues affect you and your family the most?

Trust
Economic
Anger, poverty, lacking time
Not enough income
Single parent home
Not having enough time for myself.

Comments about challenges dealing with past experiences

A lot, when it comes to talking about how I grow up with my family

Comments about communication challenges

Lack of communication (5 comments)
Learning how to communicate with my grand children
Talking and being open
How to talk to one another
Being a team

Open-ended survey question #3 . . .

What are the best services or supports you've heard about or used that have helped you and your child get ready for school and do well?

Durham transportation
Child development support
Having a good community support group like this
Schools
Kinship program for children
Childcare with a positive environment and atmosphere
211
OPT Share Network

Open-ended survey question #4 . . .

What suggestions to you have for future Parent Cafes?

Invite teenage mothers and fathers to future meetings
Extended ages to allow parents of older children to attend.
Have children's parent cafés
Handouts
Entertainment
Connecting with the urban church to host parenting cafes.
Organize new outlets
Speak to groups to tell them about the Parent Café