Parent Café
Making Our Schools Better
CLIP Meeting
July 21, 2011
Summary/Minutes

In an effort to increase parent input into our Comprehensive LEA Improvement Plan (CLIP), ECSS held a Parent Café at Early County Family Connections. The Parent Café address the following questions adapted from topics in the CLIP.

The Café began with a one on one conversation with randomly matched participants. The conversation was directed by these questions:

- Who are you?
- Who is your family?
- Think back to when you were in school and faced something truly challenging.
    - What happened?
    - What did you do?
    - Who helped you?
    - What did you learn about yourself?

Participants were asked to give a description of how the one on one conversations made them feel. Responses were:

- Good memories of home life
- Family is important
- Like to talk about ourselves
- Sports = or increases academics
- Similar experiences
- Different experiences
- Backgrounds -> today

After the one on one conversations were completed, participants were asked to participate in the table questions:

School Café Questions

- **What does a safe school environment look like to you?**
    - What do you feel good about in the school system regarding safety?
    - What changes would you like to see?

- **What does being an involved parent mean to you? How could partnerships between school, parents, and community be strengthened?**
    - What are some methods for gaining feedback or information from parents?
    - How do you feel parent participation could be increased?
    - Do you have any thoughts about supporting students to increase the graduation rate?

- **What qualities / characteristics should an effective teacher possess? Are there any areas in which you think teachers / administrators could benefit from additional training?**
    - In what type of learning environment does your child learn?
    - What are your thoughts about meeting different learning styles / abilities in the same classroom?

With 10 participants, 3 table hosts and 1 facilitator, the Parent Café format was used to engage each participant in conversation about each question. During those conversations, input from parents and staff was provided and documented. A summary of that input is as follows:

1. What does a safe school environment look like to you?
    a. Learning starts at home
    b. Protection
    c. Trust

d. Opportunities to learn
e. 1st impressions
f. Teacher involvement
g. Shield
h. Caring environment
i. ECMS “warm fuzzy” feeling
j. Orderly
k. Respect
l. Home away from home
m. Follows directions

2. What does being an involved parent mean to you? How could partnerships between school, parents, and community be strengthened?
    a. Positive communication from school to parents in a manageable way.
    b. (Parent) Making your presence known, especially in the school system.
    c. Involved in activities with the teacher.
    d. Teach character/morals at home.
    e. Building trust between teacher and parent is important.
    f. Essential to be involved in all aspects of child’s life.
    g. Not just observe but participate.
    h. Community should be a part of partnership.
    i. Every entity realizes their part.
    j. Community increase support in regards to financial support, e.g. increase taxes.
    k. Building a positive attitude towards providing more for education.
    l. Talk to your child about their day.
    m. Structure at home, e.g. homework time
    n. Meet with parents in the community (e. g. Baptist Branch community center)
    o. Volunteer opportunities
        i. Guest speakers bureau (from community)
        ii. Student participation increases parent attendance
        iii. Read to class
        iv. Tutor students
        v. Field day
        vi. Chaperone
        vii. Work day (e.g. improving landscape)
    p. Community
        i. Pizza Hut Book It
        ii. ECES folders
        iii. Pilot Club and Boxtops
        iv. Literacy Task Force
        v. Georgia Pacific Water Ways

3. What qualities / characteristics should an effective teacher possess? Are there any areas in which you think teachers / administrators could benefit from additional training?
    a. It is usually not a content issue (knowledge of content)
    b. How to handle disruption
    c. Parents feel heard
    d. Respect for self and others
    e. Take responsibility for actions
    f. Motivated to learn
    g. Don’t judge
    h. Come to own conclusions
    i. Willing to change
    j. “Teach them all”
    k. Child feels safe
    l. Tell parents the positive not just the negative

m. Treat kids as individuals and as a person
n. Good communicators
o. Content knowledge
p. Engaging
q. Loaders
r. Be respectful
s. Good morals and values
t. Build trust
u. Learn background of student
v. Look at kids everyday life
w. Open mind
x. Classroom management
y. Caring
z. Dedication
aa. Knowledgeable
bb. Presentation skills
cc. Patience "ongoing", "continual"
dd. Ability to listen
ee. Nurturing
ff. Good communication with parents
gg. Good directions
hh. Targeted efforts
ii. Science/crct
jj. Technology
kk. Reminder of qualities
ll. How to deliver instructions for different learning styles even re: gender
mm. Peer learning
nn. Learning how to deal with parents
oo. Ongoing b/c "things change"

After table conversations were completed, the facilitator asked for feedback from the group about what they learned from the conversations:

- Importance of ***caring** environment in schools.
- *Similar experiences and thoughts re: "making our school better".
- Helps us feel connected.
- Non-threatening experience.

The facilitator also asked for a one word description of the participants' Café experience:

- Fun
- Engaging
- Stimulating
- Brief
- Good food
- Informative
- Relaxing
- Comfortable atmosphere

In summary, some thoughts that were repetitive throughout all the feedback was that the school have a caring environment and positive communication. In the area of teacher quality, the emphasis was about relationships. Parent Involvement also had an emphasis on relationships between staff and parents and building trust with positive communication. School safety conversations focused more on a caring environment.

The information obtained from the Parent Café will be used in school and system improvement plans. Other Parent Café's will be held during the 2011-2012 school year to provide more opportunities for meaningful feedback from parents and staff.