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ParentNet fosters idea sharing

By Ann Strosnider, Sun Staff
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ParentNet, a program developed at a private school in Redmond, is coming to Bainbridge Island.

Beginning next month, four Bainbridge schools Bainbridge High School, Sakai Intermediate School, Hyla Middle School and The Island School will launch the parent support initiative.

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■ Marilyn Price-Mitchell, one of the founders of ParentNet, says it encourages discussion of everyday parenting topics, parent networking and mutual support as well as communication among parents, students, and schools. "This is a program that brings grade level parents together with a faculty liaison at meetings that are facilitated by trained parents," she said. "Parents come together for the sole purpose of exchanging ideas and strategies."

The deaths of two island teenagers in late-night automobile accidents just before school started show the need for improved communication, Price-Mitchell said.

"The tragedies that have occurred on the island recently have brought the need for parents and schools to be more involved with their children to the forefront," she said.

Rules and curfews are always a big topic among parents, she said.

"The more parents get to know one another at grade level, the easier it is to pick up the phone and say, 'My child is supposed to be at a party at your house are you chaperoning?' You might think this would be easy to do, but it doesn't always happen."

Price-Mitchell moved to Bainbridge two years ago, and as people heard about ParentNet, they encouraged her to get it started locally, she said. She no longer has school-age children but is working for the newly formed nonprofit National ParentNet Association.

ParentNet was initially developed and launched in 1996 in grades 5-12 at The Overlake School, a private independent school in Redmond. It has since been duplicated at about 20 other schools in Washington, Florida, Oregon, Kansas and California, and 400 parents have been trained to be facilitators.

Brent Peterson, principal of Bainbridge High School, said he is

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excited to be working with the PTSO to bring ParentNet to the school.

"This parent communication and networking strategy has great potential to provide a specific structure to support effective and timely parent-to-parent communication opportunities. Now more than ever, parents need support and encouragement in their efforts to connect with one another."

BHS will begin ParentNet this year with its ninth grade parents.

U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Bainbridge Island, recently joined the advisory board of the national association.

"I applaud the efforts of the National ParentNet Association for encouraging parental involvement," he said. "By actively engaging parents in the learning process, student achievement, self-esteem, attendance and positive behavior are significantly improved."

Parent-teacher organizations typically pay the cost of training and materials, Price-Mitchell said. Most of the Bainbridge programs have funding, but Sakai is still seeking financial help. Anyone who would like to contribute is asked to call Susan Wing from the link on the ParentNet Web site.

Learn more:

What: Training for ParentNet volunteer facilitators

When and where: Oct. 16 at Sakai Intermediate School or Nov. 6 at Bainbridge High School, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day

Information and registration: www.parentnetassociation.org

Reach reporter Ann Strosnider at (360) 792-9219 or by e-mail at astrosnider@kitsapsun.com.

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