Getting parents to work together, with each other and with the school, is the role of Holyoke School District's Parent Leadership Team (PLT). Recently, PLT has begun sponsoring two programs which are designed to effectively engage parents in the education process: A new parent center in both the elementary and JR/SR high schools, and the offering of Los Padres, Las Madres classes.

The parent centers were created to assist parents who have questions about their child's educational progress, the school district, the community and/or are seeking parenting resources. They feature computers with online access and bilingual aides, who are there to help parents find the resources they need, including how to use the school web page and create an online email account.

Both centers are open daily. At HES, the center is located inside the front entrance. Gloria Jimenez will be there for one hour every week, on alternating Mondays and Thursdays.

In February, because there was no school Monday, Feb. 16, she will be available Thursday, Feb. 19 from 1-2 p.m. She will then begin the alternating Monday/Thursday schedule. Every other Monday, beginning Feb. 23, she will be there from 3:30-4:30 p.m., and every other Thursday, beginning March 5, from 1-2 p.m.

At the JR/SR High, the center is located in the library. Cecilia Marquez will be present every Tuesday from 3:30-4:30 p.m. to help with questions.

Jimenez noted that, in order for parents to access their student's information online, they need to have an email account. She and Marquez will be able to help parents in setting up free email accounts with either Hotmail or Yahoo.

Besides the assistants, the centers offer a number of pamphlets containing step-by-step instructions in both English and Spanish on how to use the Internet and Goedustar. There is also a wide variety of literature on hand which can be used as parenting resources in general. They address student issues, such as how to help a child study for a test, as well as social and economic issues parents face.

Los Padres, Las Madres

In January, 2006, Holyoke Elementary School began holding Los Padres classes one night a week for 10 weeks. The program was designed to connect fathers, in a more meaningful way, with their families, and to engage them in the process of their children's educational and social

development.

After two years of training with fathers, the mothers began asking for similar training after seeing the significant transformations they observed in their husbands. In 2008, the first Las Madres class was taught in Holyoke.

This year, beginning in February, both Los Padres and Las Madres are being sponsored by the Parent Leadership Team. They meet every Tuesday night at 6:30 p.m. at HHS. A catered meal is served and then the group breaks up into two separate classrooms: one for the mothers and the other for the fathers. Los Padres classes are taught by Jesus Jimenez and Las Madres by Cecilia Marquez.

These classes are offered at no charge and free daycare is also available. They are to run until the end of March, and, according to HES principal Jennifer Kral, may continue longer if there is enough interest.

Curriculum and training processes for both classes were developed by the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition (CSPC). It is the result of almost 20 years of grassroots work done by CSPC.

According to research released from the U.S. Department of Education, “family involvement is a powerful influence on children’s achievement in school.”

The research further contends when families are involved in their children’s education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less involved families.

Therefore, the goal of Los Padres, Las Madres is to enhance and improve the educational and social status of children by supporting parents to become more knowledgeable in child development, communication and leadership.

Colorado schools are diverse in philosophy and pedagogy. In Mexico, a big difference exists between public and private schools. Teachers who are aware of the differences can help Mexican parents understand the education system in Colorado and enhance their ability to become more involved in the education of their children.

While the classes have been targeted more toward the parents of ESL students, any parent seeking to become more involved in the education system is welcome to attend.

Parent Leadership Team

The purpose of Holyoke School District’s Parent Leadership Team is to effectively engage parents in the education process by implementing a team specifically organized to work on parent involvement.

It is designed to help parents:

—identify their strengths and recognize individual and collective power.

—develop their leadership skills and identify ways to contribute to their children’s school.

—get to know each other and recognize they can be a powerful influence in children’s lives.

Active members of PLT include Susan Ortner, Cecilia Marquez, Andrea Kammer, Desiree Mosenteen, Kevin Asbury, Emma Cruz, Rigo Marquez and Ramon Nevarez.

The PLT’s next meeting is Monday, March 2 at 4:45 p.m. at the junior high ESL room.