

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



An annual collection from the members of the
National Network of Partnership Schools

Johns Hopkins University

2011

Edited by

Darcy J. Hutchins, Mary Maushard, Aaron Newfield, Marsha D. Greenfeld, and Brenda G. Thomas



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-

*In collaboration with the Maryland Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC).

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INTRODUCTION

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES 2011

Joyce L. Epstein, Director
National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

One Right Answer?

At a time when everyone in Education Land is making tough choices and important changes to improve student success in school, it is worth taking a moment to consider this question: **How can educators help more students do their best in school?** What's the answer? (a) Educators should work alone with students? or (b) Educators should work in partnership with families and communities to spur student success?

There really is *one* right answer. It is clear from decades of research that students do better in school when their families are involved in their education. Yet, many schools and districts still struggle in developing strong and sustainable partnership programs. They place family and community involvement on the back burner... tomorrow's agenda. Not so in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). Members of NNPS use research-based approaches to plan, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their partnership programs to engage all parents, other family members, and community partners in ways that contribute to students' learning and development. They know that better outreach to more families on goal-linked activities will result in more students who attend school regularly and meet targeted learning goals in reading, math, and other subjects. Good partnerships across the grades help more students follow the path to high school graduation with plans for college or careers.

To celebrate good work on partnerships, NNPS is pleased to provide this year's collection of *Promising Partnership Practices 2011*—contributed by members for members. By submitting their best practices, schools, districts, states, and organizations in NNPS spotlight their programs, share ideas, and learn from others.

The editors of *Promising Partnership Practices 2011* received more than 200 submissions. The collection includes 108 activities from 86 schools, 12 districts, 8 organizations, and 2 state departments of education. These members are located in economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities in 25 states in all parts of the country. The featured activities are solid or creative in their outreach to partners in students' education and/or in how they link family and community involvement to specific school goals for student success. Other excellent activities that could not be included in the book will be reported in NNPS's monthly *E-Briefs* that are sent to members throughout the school year.

FOUR TABLES OF CONTENTS

1. GOALS FOR PARTNERSHIPS. Use this list for activities that increase family and community engagement with students in reading, math, science, and other subjects, improve student behavior, health and safety, multicultural awareness, transitions to new school levels, and postsecondary plans for college and careers. Also see activities for the overarching goal to create a welcoming school climate.

THIS YEAR there are several activities to help district leaders effectively facilitate school-based Action Teams for Partnerships with their work on partnerships.

2. TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT. Use this list to strengthen parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Although each page identifies one type of involvement, each practice may activate several types of involvement by design.

THIS YEAR there are several Type 4-Learning at Home activities that will help more parents connect with their children at home on interesting things they are learning in school.

3. SCHOOL LEVEL. Use this list to find activities conducted in preschools, elementary, middle, and high schools. Many activities can be used or adapted for other school levels. Also see activities for district, state, and organization leaders.

THIS YEAR early childhood activities are grouped with the elementary grades, but are labeled to identify the preschool level.

4. CONTRIBUTOR. Use this list to see where NNPS members implemented their best practices. Activities developed in one community (urban, suburban, or rural) can be adapted for implementation in other locations.

Many Right Answers?

Promising Partnership Practices is one of the most popular NNPS publications every year. Why is that so? Good ideas, new ideas, and creative ideas are valuable and worth sharing and celebrating. Here are two more questions. **Which activities are your favorites? How might you use or adapt them to improve your program?** Unlike the opening query, these questions have *many* right answers!

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

Established by Dr. Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University in 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) guides schools, districts, organizations, and state departments of education to develop and maintain research-based programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Each Partnership School strengthens its program by forming an Action Team for Partnerships, writing goal-oriented partnership plans, and selecting partnership practices from the research-based framework of Six Types of Involvement to engage all families in their children's education in varied and meaningful ways. Districts, organizations, and states are guided to develop policies, provide leadership, and directly assist schools to strengthen their programs of family and community involvement. Members of NNPS continually learn from new research and from examples from the field to improve and sustain their partnership programs to increase student success.

For more information, visit www.partnershipschools.org.

To become a member, click on **Join NNPS**.



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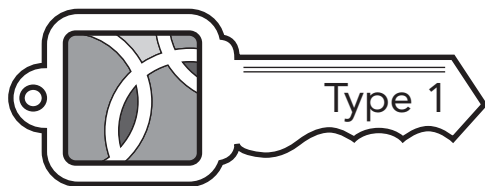
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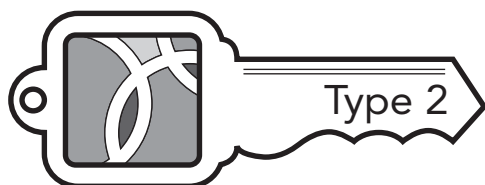
Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships



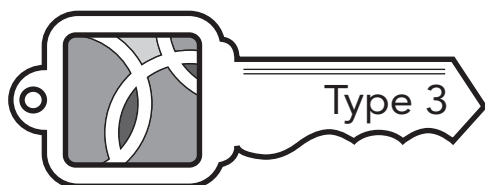
Parenting

Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.



Communicating

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.



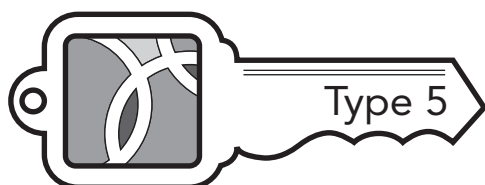
Volunteering

Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in other locations to support students and school programs.



Learning at Home

Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.



Decision Making

Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.



Collaborating with the Community

Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

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1

ACADEMIC GOALS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet academic goals in reading and literacy, math, science, and other academic subjects.

AUTHORS' CELEBRATION

LUXFORD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

An author reading his or her book in public is quite common. An event where over 500 authors read from their books is quite uncommon. Said event involving authors in kindergarten through fifth grade is all but unheard of—but that's exactly what happens at Luxford Elementary School every May. Clearly, though, these students like to stand out—their school chant is, “We are first, fast, famous, friendly, fit, and focused on reading and writing!”

Based on test data, faculty at Luxford Elementary found they needed to help students improve some literacy skills. In order to teach these skills and reward students' efforts and accomplishments, the faculty implemented an Authors' Celebration. The school advertised this event throughout the year with flyers, reminder stickers, telephone messages, and morning announcements. Several related events start at the beginning of the school year.

Teachers begin their first day classes with writing instruction, and students read and write every day. The students build their writing portfolio all year, collecting many different samples of their writing for review later. At the beginning of the year, students receive what are called “BARE” books. They know that these empty books will eventually hold their masterpieces and they spend the year working toward their final publication. Over the course of the year, students gradually come to understand that everything they read is someone else's writing. By writing themselves—by having a personal connection to their own writing—students learn to value others' work as well and seek to read more and more books.

In May, students decide which of their stories they'll publish. The stories then unfold across the pages of their “BARE” books.

The students bring the books with them to the final event, the Authors' Celebration. Here, they share their work with their parents and one another. It's a unique experience for the student authors to let others see and hear their work and to listen to the contributions of their fellow writers.

Another key piece to this celebration is the reading of the dedication pages. Each student includes a dedication page to tell the world whom they want to thank. Everyone involved enjoys hearing the students share their year-long efforts, and more than a few parents are impressed with their kids. Said a parent at this year's Authors' Celebration, “Wow, [Luxford] really made my son a very detailed and creative writer!”

The energy of the event is contagious. A newly hired teacher stated, “Seeing the students so proud and excited to share their work was awesome!” The Authors' Celebration is a popular event with a lot of momentum. After eight years, it shows no sign of stopping. Considering that reading and writing are mentioned in the school's chant, the Authors' Celebration is likely to continue. Students always will have something to say about their world and it's a joy for teachers, parents, and peers to listen and appreciate.

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CAMP OUT FOR LITERACY

**PATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DARLINGTON, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Type 3

Despite the contributions of Thoreau, camping out typically is not linked with literacy and comprehension. For Pate Elementary School, however, the great untamed wilderness teamed up with literature and learning to create a family reading night that was assuredly off the beaten path.

Along with helping students reach reading and literacy goals, Pate's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) also wanted to involve more fathers in school activities. Some students come from single-parent homes and the school wanted to make sure that the connections of child-parent-teacher were as strong as possible. Pate's faculty decided that a literacy night specifically for students and fathers or father figures would help reach these goals and organized Camp Out for Literacy.

Even though the literacy night was only for fathers and sons, the whole school got in on the excitement and publicity. All students, boys and girls alike, were encouraged to wear camouflage to promote attendance. Pate Elementary also boosted participation by sending home attractive invitations and reminders, using the school's automated phone system, and talking up the Camp Out on the school's morning show.

One Tuesday evening, fathers and sons came to school dressed in camouflage, if possible, and carrying flashlights. Guided by Forest Trail signs prepared by the Parent Coordinator, they headed for the cafeteria, where the reading teams assembled. The fourth and fifth grade teams stayed in the cafeteria, the first grade headed outside, and the second and third graders went to the gym. Each group had its own mock campfire designed by faculty. The entire school staff came together to guide each station and activity. They made sure registration, instruction, and the general event went smoothly. In addition, they also prepared some delicious camping snacks for everyone, like s'mores and toasted marshmallows.

The fifth and fourth grades traveled to

four stations and participated in various activities. Stamp Out Camping Words had children spelling high-frequency words; Ghost Stories and Written Responses involved children and their fathers listening to ghost stories and then writing their own. Flashlight Search for Letters and Words guided students to use a flashlight to search for particular letters and words in charts and books. The last station, Fishing For Words, featured a rod with a magnet at the end of the line to catch and read words that were written on fish.

The first grade met outside and had a Campfire Read-Aloud. These students and fathers also went on a Read-Around-the-School scavenger hunt, where they found clues to lead them to the next location. They also sang campfire songs together and participated in Writing Under the Stars to work on stories with their dads.

The second and third grades started off with a Read-Aloud and then went to other stations. Story Starters gave these students and their fathers the beginning of a story to finish. The Cool Bear Hunt got everyone together to pretend to hunt for a bear. They finished by singing campfire songs.

The night was great fun for all involved. One dad commented, "It was nice to be able to spend time with the boys. Sure beats video games!" Many fathers who attended recommended that the school hold more events that reach out to dads. In all, Camp Out for Literacy helped kids and dads discover the amazing blaze that reading can ignite.

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READING

GOT BOOKS? GO READ!

LINCOLN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

There are many ways to encourage students to read, but one good way to spark interest is to make reading something to explore and manipulate mentally. Lincoln Junior High School took this approach to increase reading books for pleasure as well as for new knowledge. Teachers wanted students to talk about books they were reading with their friends, with a parent, and with a teacher. And—like dominoes—the program simply fell into place.

Students at Lincoln Junior High excel in academics and participate in many activities inside and outside of school. The school wasn't worried about its students' success. Teachers and the partnership team just wanted to advance students' educational journey with more in-depth reading. They wanted to make reading "cool," so that students would pursue it with as much passion as they did other things they enjoyed. By inspiring this interest, the school hoped to engage all readers in deeper conversations about good books and great books.

To this end, the faculty worked across the curriculum to develop strategies that would motivate students to read in all subject areas. They wanted to encourage discussions about books in all classrooms throughout the year. They also discussed their goals for students with parents at the school's Open House, at book talks, and via e-mail. They quizzed students on what they enjoyed reading and what they hoped to accomplish through their reading. With this information and with support from families, the school began its program Got Books? Go Read!

To keep interest high and instigate conversation, teachers posted signs around their classrooms and offices. These signs showed what books the teachers were currently reading and recommendations of books that students might want to read. When students found out that their teachers were reading some of the same books that they, themselves, enjoyed, they

held some lively conversation with their teachers. It was, in fact, pretty cool for students and teachers to challenge each others' ideas about particular books. Teachers also introduced an on-line book club to students called Shelfari. The site shares titles of many books with visitors and encourages them to critique and discuss books online in a safe and meaningful way. Students found the site to be an excellent resource and a great addition to the program.

As part of Got Books? Go Read! some teachers who were intense readers submitted short pieces on their favorite books. These writings highlighted what the teachers liked about the books and why they thought the books were worth reading. They included talking points that would spark conversations among students who read the suggested books. As a follow up, the school also invited published authors to come to school to speak to students about the creative writing process. The idea was that if students heard about all the work, research, and invention that go into writing a book, they would want to explore these books and learn their secrets.

The program was successful. Students learned more about reading, its importance for challenging thinking and ideas, and what it takes to be an author. They made active choices to keep reading for pleasure and for learning. Got Books? Go Read also affected students' home life and interactions with parents. One parent remarked, "Car rides with my twins are so different now. We talk about what we're reading and what we enjoy about it."

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INTERACTIVE PARENT-CHILD BOOK CLUBS

HIGHLANDS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Faced with waning interest in its Parent-Child Book Club, Highlands Elementary School made a bold move to energize this year's activities. The partnership team launched Interactive Grade-Specific Parent-Child Book Clubs, highlighted in one instance by a visit by live rats, who spiced up the reading of *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*.

Highlands Elementary noticed that participation and attendance in its Parent-Child Book Club decreased over the years. The planners realized that students wanted more exciting and interactive things to read. The partnership team also wanted to attract more students and families for whom English was not their first language. The team decided to replace the previous model with the Interactive Grade-Specific Parent-Child Book Club. This club was divided into three smaller clubs for Kindergarten and grade 1, for grades 2 and 3, and for grades 4 and 5. The club meetings included a half-hour presentation by a guest, who discussed the book's topic, related the book to students' and families' real life, sparked children's interest, and helped students develop and exercise their critical-thinking skills.

The partnership team decided to give the students a voice in which books they would read and discuss. One team member was a reading specialist, which greatly expedited the book selection process. After identifying several books, the teachers turned the decisions over to the students by giving them a ballot listing the possible books. The students voted on the book club selection. When a winner emerged, the teachers publicized the book and the book club.

One of the school's business partners, a local bookstore, made the selected books available for a lower cost to students and families who wanted to buy them. Students and families had about a month to read the books. They also received a related study guide compiled and produced by teachers and parents.

On book club evening, a teacher greeted the students and their families who were seated at tables for eight. The teacher outlined the evening's events, and explained the learning objective. Then, the discussions began, with the study guides as a reference. If discussions got stuck, a parent volunteer kept the conversations going.

Then, the guest-presenter further motivated the group by helping the book come to life. For example, for the club that read *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*, the presenter was a rat breeder, who brought his pets and talked about his work and the animals. Students participated in a question-and-answer session with this expert. Almost everyone wanted to know more about the animals and everyone was in high spirits because of the unusual guests.

Not only was interest high that night, but it remained high. The smaller more active book clubs were more popular and well attended this year. "Keep having the real people related to the books," said one student. "Wow! Can't believe we had so many attending," remarked a teacher. It isn't every day that rats are invited to school. That will be a tough act to follow, but Highlands is excited about that prospect.

Type 4

READING

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MACHEN'S B.O.O.K. PROGRAM

MACHEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Learning to read well is fundamental for all other learning in school. Studying, completing homework, and taking tests all require that students know how to read. Machen Elementary School wanted to strengthen students' reading skills to increase their reading/language arts test scores. That is why the partnership team and teachers created the B.O.O.K. (Bonding Over Open Knowledge) Program, which serves another purpose—giving kids excellent and educated role models.

Machen's third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers initiated the program to boost their students' reading skills, particularly reading comprehension. Many students' struggled in understanding what they were reading. Teachers believed that educating students about things outside the classroom might help this effort. They wanted to provide time for students to obtain extra help on reading and they wanted to ensure that students would spend time with adult role models who could help students improve reading and other school-linked behaviors.

The school contacted nearby Hampton University and partnered with its chapter of the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA). The members of that organization are required to conduct a yearly community service project. Helping students read more and better sounded like a good project to NABA members. Together with KPMG, an accounting firm that sponsors Hampton's NABA, the leaders ordered books for 200 students in third, fourth, and fifth grades and went to work on helping students improve their reading skills.

The school started with a light and enjoyable book to spark students' interest and moved on to other challenging books during the year. A big B.O.O.K. event occurred one Friday morning in January. NABA members and a representative from KPMG walked through the school and into classrooms chanting Hampton Univer-

sity's school chant, *Rock the Blue and White* to get students excited about reading. The college students asked their young counterparts to join in the chant. This created a comfortable friendship among students and their reading mentors.

Three to four volunteers came to each classroom. After initial introductions, the students split up into groups. The NABA members read aloud to third graders. In the fourth and fifth grades, NABA listened to students read aloud in an exercise called "popcorn reading." Each student took turns reading to help increase their understanding of sentence structure. The volunteers also asked a few questions to make sure that students understood what they were reading. As a concluding activity, the Hampton students helped their younger counterparts make bookmarks to go with the new books that the elementary school students received.

Almost two hundred third, fourth, and fifth grade students were happy to hang out with and learn from the cool accountants from Hampton University. The most common question from students was, "When are they coming back?" Machen Elementary School could count on the fact that their partnership with Hampton University added up to changing students' attitudes about reading.

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MYSTERY READING CLUB

JOHN B. CARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

At every grade level, students love a good mystery. John B. Cary Elementary School wanted to increase students' interest in reading. They unleashed the thrill and puzzles of mysteries in the Mystery Reading Club.

Because many students lacked a variety of reading materials at home, the second-grade teachers provided good stories and activities that would encourage student reading and family involvement. With the cooperation of the Parent Involvement Facilitator, they sent home a mystery a week with a sheet of relevant questions that students would talk over at home and complete for homework. In preparation, teachers informally surveyed some students about this idea and they all responded positively and enthusiastically. Teachers, then, introduced all students to the Mystery Reading Club.

Each student received a "mystery folder" containing a description of the club, the first mystery to read, and the first set of mystery questions to discuss at home. Students had to return their work to the "mystery box" on Mondays to receive a mystery prize. Teachers showed samples of the prizes to build enthusiasm and to motivate students to read and discuss the mysteries at home.

If the students were unable to complete the work one week, they could turn it in the next week and still qualify for a prize. This way, students did not lose interest in reading if they couldn't meet every deadline.

Every Monday afternoon, the Parent Involvement Facilitator visited each class. She read the name of each student who solved the mystery and the others applauded. These students received a mystery prize—small bags of goodies, such as candy, school supplies, or cookies.

The program's real strength was that it engaged students with a parent or family partner at home. The children talked with their partner about the mystery and discussed the questions at hand. The family member—parent or other partner—could, then, get "into" the mystery with their youngster, discuss the questions, and help figure out some of the puzzles in the books. "The Mystery Reading Club has been fun and has become something my son and I look forward to doing together!" said one parent.

Of course, the other benefits of the program are important, too. Because the activity was designed to be completed at home, students learned to take responsibility for bringing the reading materials home, completing the work, and returning their ideas and answers to the mystery box on time. And, by making reading and writing more fun, the teachers guaranteed that students would take these responsibilities seriously and improve their reading skills. "This is great! Can we do it all year?" asked one student.

The Mystery Reading Club was an excellent home learning activity. The entire program cost only \$95 and was easy to implement. The school plans to initiate similar clubs in other subjects. There's no mystery to this method—the solution is clear: Keep it simple. Keep it fun.

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OH, THE THINKS YOU CAN THINK!

MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Supporting learning at home can be a daunting task for parents, especially if they speak little or no English. Mark Twain Elementary School wanted to meet this challenge and help parents to reinforce literacy skills at home through their family night titled, courtesy of Dr. Seuss, *Oh, the Thinks You Can Think!*

Mark Twain Elementary has a predominantly Hispanic population, with some classes taught in Spanish. Because the state's standardized tests are in English, there are some serious language challenges for students and teachers to solve. To add to the difficulty, many parents are not familiar with techniques to help their children at home. With the goal of improving students' reading test scores and helping parents support learning at home, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) collaborated with guest community readers to implement the family night, which assisted over 40 families.

When families arrived at the hour-long event, children and parents headed to separate activities. Students received a list of assignments that served as their "passport" from one activity to the next. At the various stations, students listened to guest readers, made bookmarks, and created new Dr. Seuss characters using art supplies and imagination. They also had opportunities to watch a clown perform hat tricks that alluded to *The Cat in the Hat* or paint their toes as they read *The Foot Book*. At another station, students made a fishbowl, ate Goldfish crackers, and read *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*.

While the kids enjoyed the romping rhymes and jangling rhythms of Dr. Seuss's stories, parents explored other topics. They gained ideas on how to help their children from the book, *7 Keys to Comprehension*, by Susan Zimmerman. Three twenty-minute sessions were conducted in Spanish as well as English in order to communicate well with all parents. Individual teachers volunteered to present ideas on specific

topics in the study book, making each one clear and helpful to parents. At the end of the sessions for parents, teachers raffled off 50 books donated by The Reading Foundation to give parents materials to use at home with their children. Because parents could only attend three study sessions, flyers were distributed that summarized all 7 *Keys to Comprehension* for parents to take with them.

Mark Twain Elementary School's ATP plans to capitalize on the success of this year's event by advertising further in advance and by offering other "mini-courses" to accommodate more parents' busy schedules. Although there were no serious implementation challenges, ATP members recommended ordering books from one online retailer rather than several different bookstores.

In good partnership programs, teachers may go above and beyond the call of duty to meet, talk, and work with families after school hours. The faculty at Mark Twain Elementary School answered that call because they recognized the importance of increasing students' love of books and parents' capacities to support their children's learning at home. Given the positive comments from parent feedback, teachers knew that going the extra mile was well worth it!

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OPEN MIC POETRY CAFÉ NIGHT

OPELOUSAS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

Tapping into students' interest in poetry gave Opelousas Junior High an opportunity to enhance its annual book fair and literacy night by showcasing students' talents. Considering that reading and writing poetry improve students' reading skills, the Open Mic Poetry Café Night also helped the school further its academic goal of increasing students' comprehension levels and overall proficiency in English Language Arts.

It was several students' great interest in writing poetry that led the Opelousas faculty to explore ways to engage students through this art. "We thought this would be an awesome outlet for them to express their feelings about their lives," said the school librarian. Through their work with a non-profit program called Festival of Words, several faculty members knew that it was possible to invite a local writer to visit schools to read and teach poetry. Writers who participated were known not only for their skills as poets but also for their talents as teachers.

Opelousas was fortunate to have Tony Daspit, a professor from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, read his poetry and teach a poetry workshop for 25 students chosen for their interest in poetry.

Building on this unique activity, the school decided to spread enthusiasm for poetry through the Open Mic Poetry Café Night. As part of an all-school effort, the art teacher and her students transformed an empty classroom into a poetry café with a stage and decorations to get everyone in the mood for some spoken word magic. "It was a perfect setting to bring out the 'word nerd' in everybody," said the librarian.

On the night of the event, families, staff, community members, and students came to enjoy an hour of student poetry and shop at a book fair. Parents expressed their excitement and pride in their children's talent for writing poetry and for their bravery in sharing their inner selves. The youngsters were, clearly, happy with the applause. They all wanted to know when the next Open Mic Night would occur.

The real strength of the event was demonstrated by the spirit and camaraderie of families, community, teachers, and students. Everyone benefited from seeing just how much talent these students exhibited.

The students took home entertaining and informative books from the book fair. Parents and teachers took home even more from the Open Mic Night—knowledge of the talents of their budding poets. The greatest benefit may have come to those young writers who learned not to fear reading in front of a crowd and to enjoy sharing their thoughts with others.

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PENNIES FOR PAGES

NISHUANE SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

Most people are willing to pay a penny for someone's thoughts. At Nishuane School, people were willing to pay a penny for a book, too, if a student reads it, that is. With its Pennies for Pages program, the school hoped to foster interest in reading and improve reading achievement, while raising money for the local library. The efforts resulted in some shining successes.

Nishuane already had a book program for its nearly 500 students in kindergarten through second grade. Students competed to see how many books they could read, with particular goals in mind. Building on this program, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) created Pennies for Pages, which not only encouraged reading but also supported the Montclair Public Library. For every book students read independently or that adults read to students, the library received a penny.

Over four months, students kept track of the books they read on a personal chart and added pennies to classroom jars when they finished books. In order to help motivate students, the art teacher created a graphic of a jar that gradually filled as the program progressed. Being able to watch a virtual jar fill gave the students another way to mark their progress. "My students just love watching our penny jar grow each week!" said a first-grade teacher. "Each student takes such pride in sharing weekly logs and adding pennies to the class collection jar."

Pennies for Pages was the centerpiece of a larger reading program that ran from January through the end of May. Other activities included a bookmark-making project during art classes, an I Love to Read poster contest, and Favorite Character Day when students, teachers and family members dressed up as their favorite storybook characters and paraded through school.

The reading initiative also engaged parents. On March 30, the ATP presented Parent Workshops for Engaging Readers—an evening of sessions designed to show parents how to use fiction to inspire young readers' imaginations and nonfiction to instill a sense of wonder with the real world. Parents also learned strategies for helping struggling readers succeed as well as techniques for encouraging reluctant readers. Each adult could select two of the four workshops that interested them. In addition, families received guidance on books and authors they might like to explore at home.

At the end of the year, the school community and the library staff celebrated Pennies for Pages at an assembly. Students presented the library director and the children's librarian with many pennies: \$601.57, including some donations from parents. The librarian then read one last book to the assembly and dropped a final penny in the jar.

The school and its community agreed that Pennies for Pages was a great success—worth doing every year. Said a parent, "Pennies for Pages was a truly unique way to challenge my 8-year-old twins to read more of the books they love and explore new ones, while emphasizing the need to contribute to the source of those good books—our very own public library!"

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REAL RIDERS READ

CAPTAIN JOHN SMITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Many a movie character who is unquestionably cool rides a motorcycle—something dangerous and, therefore, awesome. If you ask about really good readers, however, motorcyclists don't tend to pop into your head. To prove that reading is, indeed, what cool kids do, Captain John Smith Elementary recruited the help of some awesome motorcyclists.

While the school consistently supports literacy development and encourages its students to read, some students remain reluctant readers. To spice things up, representatives of Smith Elementary spoke with a local Harley Davidson dealership, local riding clubs, and the police to find riders willing to read and take kids on a ride through books.

Any interested motorcyclist could come read a short story to students in kindergarten through Grade 5. For the event, 19 bikers participated, several coming from the Hampton Police Department and the Virginia State Troopers. The bikers brought a favorite short story and took turns reading to the children assembled. Each motorcyclist also gave a short talk on how reading skills helped her or him as a biker. These were good messages for students that echoed the words from their teachers. Of course, teachers stress the importance of reading as a school skill, but students also need to know that reading helps everyone in everyday life. Real Riders Read put an interesting spin on traditional lessons.

After the bikers read to the children, groups of students moved into the activity room, where staff from the public library distributed information about free library events during the summer. The bikers also handed out free books provided by *Reading is Fundamental* (RIF) to motivate young children to read.

Everyone in school moved through these activities one grade at a time, giving all of the students time to obtain free books to take home and time to talk with the motorcyclists. The bikers were happy to talk with students about reading and to show-and-tell about their bikes.

At the end of the day, everyone—including the bike-riding guests—got together for a big group picture. “That was awesome! What a great idea to combine cycles and books! My kids loved it! Thank you!” said one teacher.

One biker's thoughts on the event were pretty straightforward: “I hope you'll spread the word and get other schools to do this!” It seems the school did a pretty good job convincing students that reading is indeed cool. All it took were a few bikers sharing their ideas that motorcycles and books aren't so different—both bring you to new places quickly and both make you pretty awesome.

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SUMMER READING VAN

GROVETON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

Summer reading can be a challenge for students in any school. To meet this challenge and keep kids reading all summer long, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Groveton Elementary School developed and implemented the Summer Reading Van.

There is no public library within walking distance for many families that send their children to Groveton, and many families do not have cars to drive to the nearest library. Additionally, many parents work multiple jobs and do not have a great deal of time to take their children to a library. Eleven years ago, Groveton's ATP solved this problem with help from a local car dealership. The educators reasoned that if families couldn't get to a library, then a library would get to them.

Each year, teachers at Groveton take the lead in organizing and outfitting the Summer Reading Van. The educators order books or collect donated books from community partners.

The next step—the hardest part of the project—is to find a van that will travel to students' neighborhoods with the books. In the past, a local car dealership loaned a van to the school for this purpose. Unfortunately, the dealership closed this year and it seemed that the Summer Reading Van would stop traveling. However, a parent volunteered the family van and the program continued as usual.

Teachers organize books into bins and contact apartment managers and other authorities to get permission for the Summer Reading Van to travel to gated or otherwise restricted communities. Then, it's time for the fun part—delivering books to children.

Each week, the Summer Reading Van starts at the elementary school and makes its scheduled neighborhood stops. Teachers read aloud to students and give tips to parents about supporting reading fluency and comprehension at home. In addition to children's books, there are books for parents

on child development, child psychology, and tips for supporting children's reading and writing.

The two teachers who run the van keep track of the books in the various bins and books that are borrowed by students or parents. They want to help students find books they want to read. Students can borrow up to three books at a time and must return books in order to borrow more. Unlike the librarians in a traditional library, the leaders of the Summer Reading Van give students Popsicles to celebrate the summer and to motivate them to come again.

The Summer Reading Van has resulted in many positive reading behaviors. Students have had easy access to good books to read during the summer. Many parents have received tips to encourage their children to read at home. Some families appreciate the Summer Reading Van so much that they incorporate its arrival into their busy schedules. One parent explained, "Our family has made the Groveton Summer Reading Van part of our summer schedule for the past three years. ...I think the reading van is a big asset for our daughters, school, and community. The reading van is fun and I am thrilled to have my daughters excited about reading."

Teachers, too, benefit from the program. They enjoy traveling into different neighborhoods to build connections and relationships with families over the summer. One teacher shared, "I can't believe how excited the students are to see their teachers in their neighborhoods! It's great to see how students are outside of school and to help them see reading isn't just something to do at school."

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Type 4

READING

TARRANT READS TOGETHER: DINNER THEATRE

CESAR TARRANT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Type 4

An old African proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” At Cesar Tarrant Elementary School, it also takes a village to support students’ reading achievement. In order to encourage parents to read aloud to their children and to have the community at-large support this effort, Tarrant’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed Tarrant Reads Together, along with a related Dinner Theatre.

Tarrant’s reading coach heard about a school that initiated a program called *One Book, One School* based on guidelines from *Read to Them*, a program that encourages adults to read aloud to kids. (See choices of read-aloud books at www.readtothem.org.) He discussed these ideas with Tarrant’s ATP, which then added a few new details to meet students’ and families’ needs. Tarrant Reads Together aims to get everyone in the school community—students, parents, teachers, administrators, and all support staff from bus drivers to custodians—reading the same book at the same time.

The ATP kicked off the two-week reading activity with a Dinner Theatre. To prepare for this, the school’s reading specialist took the first chapter of the selected book and rewrote it as a play. Children volunteered for roles and practiced their parts to be ready for the performance. On the evening of the Dinner Theatre, faculty served as wait staff and provided dinner to the attendees. The volunteer cast of students performed the play for the audience.

Following the play, staff introduced the book to parents. The reading specialist described the basics of the program, explaining details about the materials that each participant had received. To close the Dinner Theater, there was a short presentation and discussion on the benefits of reading aloud to children.

The school organized this program by giving participants a reading schedule of pages to read on Monday night through Thursday night

for two weeks. Parents were encouraged to read the selected book aloud to their children, regardless of the students’ ages. Everyone appreciated this opportunity to spend time together as a family. One parent reported, “I love the Tarrant Reads Together program. It provided an activity that our whole family could enjoy together. I never thought about reading the same book aloud to my children who are different ages.”

By keeping everyone on the same reading schedule, the school promoted conversations about the book. Each day in school during morning announcements, students and teachers followed the program by posing trivia questions on the prior evening’s passages. Students could answer these questions to enter a drawing for small prizes, which kept their excitement for the program high.

Tarrant’s ATP knew from experience that some children did not have anyone to read to them at home. To overcome this obstacle, faculty created community reading spots for students to use during their free time. The school also partnered with the local Boys and Girls Club, which provided a location where teachers, administrators, and community members could read to students to fulfill the daily read-aloud schedule.

Hundreds of people attended the Dinner Theatre and even more participated in Tarrant Reads Together. Said one teacher, “I couldn’t believe our turnout. The staff, students, and families really came together to have a fun night at our school. This two-week program provides our families with an important vision about the value of literacy.”

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READING

BEEBE PARENT MATH NIGHT

BEEBE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

There aren't many people who like big changes in well-established programs or familiar practices. Change can be confusing. Beebe Elementary School realized that changing to a new math curriculum and adding new technologies with a SMARTboard system would be a big deal—potentially confusing—for parents and students.

SMARTboards are unique and many students and parents were unsure about how they worked or how students would be engaged with the new approaches. Teachers also were on a learning curve as the new curriculum and SMARTboards changed the face of math at the school. The partnership team and teachers figured that the best thing to do was to use a family math night to discuss curricular changes with parents and show them how the new SMARTboards worked to help students reach important math learning goals. Several sessions were organized for parents and teachers to come together to get more comfortable with the school's new directions in math.

Plans for organizing a useful math night were based on feedback from parents who attended other curricular meetings and overviews. The planners organized a clear agenda and hands-on activities for parents. Beebe Parent Math Night began with a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation on the math curriculum and new tools and approaches. An identical presentation was conducted in Spanish in a separate classroom. Teachers drew from and edited a district overview to make the information relevant for their school.

Then, parents broke off into grade-level-specific groups to learn how exactly the math curriculum affected their own children. The sessions were repeated so that parents who had more than one child at the school could attend presentations for all of their students' grade levels.

In the small groups, teachers gave a short PowerPoint presentation and then showed a 20-minute SMARTboard lesson for their grade level. Parents participated in the lesson to experience what their children would be working on in school. After working with the innovative tool, one parent remarked, "Am I glad I came! I guess those SMARTboards really are worth all the fuss..."

One of the important results of the evening was the team-building of Beebe's teachers. The School-Family-Community Partnerships team shared leadership so that planning and implementing the Parent Math Night didn't over-burden any one group. The school provided dinner for the teachers and childcare for all who attended. The day before the event, the school called a catering company to order meals for the teacher volunteers. This thoughtful perk was appreciated by the teachers who stayed at the school to meet and work with parents. As one said, "Thank you so much for offering dinner and childcare. I feel so appreciated! I'm really happy I volunteered for Math Night!"

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COOKIES WITH DAD

**COX LANDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LESAGE, WEST VIRGINIA**

Type 3

Sometimes, it's tough to get dads in on the fun that accompanies goal-linked family involvement activities. Cox Landing Elementary School wanted a low-stress/high-interest way to enable fathers and father figures to help their children learn math. The partnership team cooked up a good activity that was sure to have a desirable result—cookie making.

The school administered surveys to gather ideas on how to improve family and community involvement. The surveys indicated that there was a real need to increase father involvement in student learning activities. Given requirements for Title I funds and services, the school knew it had to organize better involvement activities to help students improve reading and math skills, as well as nutrition and/or 21st century technology skills.

Several years ago, one teacher had great success implementing an activity using cookie-making as a learning opportunity for her students. The partnership team and teachers decided to improve that process. With some changes and additions, the leaders baked over 250 cookies for the event.

Cookies with Dad was open to all male role models—not just dads—including granddads, uncles, and others. Cox Landing relied on multiple sources of communication to publicize Cookies with Dad—weekly newsletters, fliers, e-mail, even the school's Facebook page. To further encourage attendance, students earned incentives (e.g., time off from class) if they came to the event with their father figures. As a result, over 60 families attended. This was a rather remarkable turnout for the 1:00 PM start time. Many dads took time off from work to attend.

MATH

Student-father teams received an activity page and 15 pretend-dollars. There were a number of ingredients children could use to decorate their cookies, but each ingredient and cookie cost money, so students and their dads used math and budgeting skills to plan what they were going to buy. The student-dad teams kept track of their budgets. They clearly were engrossed in real world skills in budgeting their supplies.

Once their planning was completed, kids and their dads went to money, cookie, and drinks stations and placed their orders with community members and parent volunteers. At the cookie stations, children received scoops of four possible ingredients (frosting, sprinkles, chocolate chips, or M&Ms). Then, they headed to tables to assemble, decorate, and eat cookies and to spend some quality (and sweet) time with their partners. Everyone was laughing, chatting, and enjoying the colorful, tasty, and well-planned cookies. Said a student, "I loved spending time with my dad."

The event concluded with a contest. While families ate, they drew pictures on their tablecloths with crayons. The family with the best table picture received a cookbook for children. The planners initially worried about having enough space for the event given the large turnout. However, it became clear as the day wore on that there was plenty of room for everyone. Cookies with Dad helped students zero in on math skills with money and budgets and ended with everyone sharing a cookie-wonderful afternoon.

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DAIRY QUEEN FAMILY MATH NIGHT

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

Sometimes it takes more than games to get kids excited about math. Math is a challenging subject that demands attention to details. However, the impressive cognition-enhancing powers of ice cream should not be ignored. Highlands Middle School organized a Dairy Queen Family Math Night to create a memorable evening of math, food, and fun.

Highlands wanted to encourage family involvement in boosting students' math skills at home. Previous Math Nights had been well-planned, but under-attended. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) figured that parents and students did not want to head back to the school for educational activities in the evening. The members of the ATP sought a more inviting and exciting environment in which to present math material. The team decided that the local Dairy Queen could be a place that students and families would be motivated to attend. They did some careful planning, sent out flyers, and raised funds to pay for a new way to combine math and ice cream.

Parents and students came to a big math party at the local Dairy Queen. Teachers wanted to familiarize students and their parents with its new online curriculum. They also played a variety of grade-appropriate challenging—but fun—math games. At the same time, students, parents, and community members were offered a school-sponsored buy one, get one free deal that applied to the whole menu at Dairy Queen.

Highland's ATP transformed the Dairy Queen into a functioning math center, complete with computer stations. Students participated in estimation challenges and board games as well as other physical math games.

Students also explored the Holt Online Curriculum resources. These resources featured video lessons, interactive practice sessions, and quick quizzes to test students proficiency and progress on specific skills.

In addition, the Holt curriculum also had a section for students to enter a raffle for more than 30 prizes. Parents were not left out of the computer activities. Computer stations helped parents learn how to check their children's progress and grades online.

The excitement of the night at Dairy Queen was also enhanced by raffle prizes and gift cards donated by local businesses. In addition, the school's mascot, a Scotty dog named Angus, showed up for math and ice cream.

The Dairy Queen location helped Highlands Middle School increase attendance at this Math Night. Over two hundred parents and students attended. The Dairy Queen also benefited, boasting its largest Tuesday revenue since its opening five years prior. As a thank-you, the store donated ten percent of the night's profit to Highlands Middle School, providing another math-related example to share with students. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, many parents saw, first hand, that teachers wanted them to be engaged in math with their middle grades students.

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FAMILY MATH NIGHT: GET YOUR GRAPH ON!

STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

It's a fact that some students love to throw paper airplanes and put Barbies in peril. At the Get Your Graph On Family Math Night at Stevens Middle School, students were able to do both to build graphing concepts and skills.

Faculty at Stevens Middle School noted that some students had trouble working with graphs. They figured a Family Math Night might help, but they wanted to go beyond earlier evenings that featured math games or puzzles. For their new version of a math night, teachers created activities that would build age-appropriate math talents. Sixth-graders would work on problem solving and reasoning; seventh-graders could explore probabilities and test their data-reporting skills; and eighth-graders would brush up on data collection and analysis. All students needed graphs to complete the activities, which were tantalizingly titled Paper Airplane Extravaganza and Barbie Bungee Jumping.

For the Paper Airplane Extravaganza, students and their parents folded paper airplanes using templates provided by the school. Then, they went to the gym to fly three airplanes at the same time, recording the flight distances on a school-provided graph. "This is so much fun. It does not matter that I do not speak English," remarked one parent in Spanish. "The hands-on activity allows me to show students how to follow directions."

A student who tossed several airplanes and graphed the distances they flew said, "I didn't know that airplane-making was such a big deal, and that if I did not follow directions I wouldn't get the best result."

In Barbie Bungee Jumping, students attempted to estimate how many rubber bands had to be attached to Barbie for her to successfully bungee jump from 16 feet. Students conducted investigations and recorded data, adding or subtracting rubber bands from Barbie's "bungee cord" until she successfully made the jump. The activity was so exciting that even parents and siblings joined the fun.

Everyone enjoyed cookies and juice and all the participants received prizes for their work. About 90 parents and 150 students attended. The students benefited from their opportunities to improve their math skills in a low-pressure, high-entertainment environment where concepts such as graphing, probability, and reporting data were grounded in concrete actions—such as Barbie hurtling toward the floor.

Most importantly, though, family math night got teachers, parents, and students together, completing activities that were fun and important. "I was able to interact with students that I normally don't get to see daily. It was fun!" commented one teacher. So, while Barbie might not have had such a good time, Stevens Middle students, their parents, and their teachers certainly did.

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FLASHCARD FRIDAY

FAIRMOUNT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ST. PETERS, MISSOURI

At Fairmount Elementary School, Flashcard Friday had a clear and simple goal—to help students who needed extra time practice and master basic math skills.

The Fairmount Parent Involvement Team wanted to find simple, but long-lasting, ways to bolster students' math achievement. One idea was for parent volunteers to use math flashcards with students who needed to practice math skills. This was not a one-time event, but a weekly activity starting in the second quarter of the school year. Volunteers would help as many students as possible master skills and meet math standards.

Every Thursday, teachers received in their school mailboxes a list of the volunteers scheduled for their classrooms the next day. When the volunteers arrived on Friday, they were greeted in the office and received a packet of information, which included their scheduled classrooms and time periods, a special Flashcard Friday name tag; a set of flashcards for their assigned grade levels; and a Thank You note for volunteering their time. The volunteers, then, go to their assigned classrooms, check in with the teacher, and begin working with pre-selected students in small groups in a quiet space.

The key to this event was parent involvement. Parent members of the Parent Involvement Team contacted their peers to volunteer for Flashcard Friday. Some members of the community heard about the effort and pitched in their time, as well. Grandparents and substitute teachers from a different school district also volunteered to help students practice their math skills.

The results of the volunteers' energy and commitment were clear. One parent stated, "I've been a parent at Fairmount for many years and I can't tell you how nice it is to see the hallway full of volunteers working with students. I've never seen anything like this at our school."

Students benefitted from Flashcard Friday, of course, but so did teachers, who did not have to spend as much time working on math fundamentals with students in need of extra practice. One teacher commented, "This program has given me instructional time back into my day. Because parents are working with these students on basic facts, I can spend more time [teaching other skills in] the curriculum." Plus, parents and other volunteers get to interact with students in simple but meaningful ways. Flashcards aren't rocket science, but they give students solid math ground to stand on so they are ready to learn more complex math skills.

The benefits of Flashcard Fridays are, indeed, far-reaching and will be continued. The school's principal had this to share: "It's been inspiring to witness the evolution of this program. From its beginnings as an idea at a parent meeting to its fruition... I couldn't be prouder." Flashcards seem almost too simple—but there isn't a house in the world that stands without a foundation.

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HAVING A BALL WITH MATH

EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Having a Ball with Math added up to a success for Emerson Elementary. With more than 400 attendees and a dozen community partners, including professional hockey players, the fall event made a good impression on students and families.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) brainstormed ideas that would bring families, especially dads and other father figures to school early in the year. The team also wanted to stress the importance of math and show students and parents that math connects to everyday life, as well as to the state standards that all students are expected to reach.

Soon other players joined the fun and every grade level was involved. Parents took on leadership roles and community members stepped up with important donations and personal involvement.

The math night included a series of athletic games and stations, each connected to specific math functions. In the gym, for instance, students and adults shot hoops and recorded the number of shots made and missed. The hallways were turned into bowling alleys and the school improvised a hockey rink where players added or multiplied the numbers on the pucks. It was during this activity that the students got to meet and work with real hockey players on a local team, who helped with math skills and hockey shots.

The computer lab was open so families could explore math sites and games they might play at home on the internet. In classrooms, families played games with math manipulatives.

The sports theme lured fathers, brothers, uncles and other male role models to the school. Often, the men in children's lives want to be more involved, but need guidance and a friendly invitation. The Emerson ATP provided some ways to start fathers' involvement.

Strong community involvement enhanced the event. Pasco First Christian, a community organization, is the school's partner in Partnerships Empowering All Kids (PEAK). Members lent a hand at the math activity. The Tri-City American Hockey Team sent players, and student athletes from Chiawana and Pasco High Schools also participated with Emerson's students. "I wish we had done fun things like this when I went to elementary school," commented one of the Pasco athletes.

Businesses donated sports-related raffle prizes, such as tickets to sporting events, board games, and autographed sports memorabilia. Other partners sent people to staff game stations and work with the children on math projects. Because of this strong involvement and support, Emerson spent only about \$100 on the event.

"I liked playing hockey and basketball because in hockey we were subtracting and we had to add in basketball," said one second-grader. "I got to come with my uncle and he helped me do the big subtracting."

That's the kind of teamwork Emerson wanted to create. Pairing math and sports resulted in a win-win activity for Emerson's students.

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Type 5

MATH

MATH GAMES AT HOME

EDISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

Math's abstract concepts and notations are challenging for many students. Math is, however, an essential skill. Like muscle, the more often math skills flex, the stronger and smoother they become. So when Edison Elementary School wanted to build students' math muscles, its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) organized opportunities for all students to practice, practice, practice at home. This year, in conjunction with its popular Family Math Game Night, the ATP built in materials that would encourage students to keep practicing and learning at home.

Even though attendance at Edison's prior math nights was relatively high—about 50% of families attended—the ATP wanted to reach *all* families. Since many parents simply can't come to evening events due to work or other commitments, the school decided to make sure that good, clear materials were sent home to everyone, whether or not they attended Family Math Game Night.

Prior to Edison's Math Games at Home, teachers and parents brainstormed a list of games that would be both educational and fun. The ATP compiled the materials that went into the bags that would eventually be distributed at Family Math Game Night.

Edison's ATP also had an innovative way to advertise its event. In order to bolster excitement and boost attendance, one week before the school's game night, the ATP traveled classroom to classroom with an estimation station. Students who completed estimation challenges successfully would receive their prizes at the evening event. As a final reminder for the math game night, every student took home a carnival bracelet and a note encouraging their parents to attend.

One Tuesday in February, students and parents came to school to receive a hands-on introduction to the math games, playing them with their families and learning the ins and outs from their teachers before receiving a whole bag

full of the games to take home. Students and families had so much fun with the games that they frequently forgot they were learning math. They simply got lost in the action and joy of play. They practiced addition, subtraction, and other major math operations while having a great time with their parents.

The real reward of the night was that the students and parents could keep playing the math games at home, a fact that surprised and pleased many children. "You mean we get to take these home?" one student asked hopefully.

The event was a success, but the education and fun didn't end there. Taking one of the most important challenges for improving partnership programs, the ATP distributed bags of the games to all students who could not attend Game Night. The team recognized that all students need the tools to improve and to enjoy math skills. The school also organized a calendar that suggested times for playing games and rewarded families for keeping to an organized schedule for family math games. The goal was to continue to strengthen students' math skills and understanding of math concepts.

Other schools in the area adopted or adapted Edison's efforts to feature math games at school and at home. They, too, want ways to help students keep flexing their math muscles!

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MATH IS NO MYSTERY AT HENRY HEIGHTS

HENRY HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Math is a mystery to some students, but not at Henry Heights Elementary School. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) titled its family math night clearly: Math Is No Mystery at Henry Heights.

The ATP and math teachers knew that they had to increase students' understanding of math concepts related to class lessons, but they wanted to do this in fun and interesting ways. They also wanted to sustain the idea of Meaningful Engaged Learning—a concept based on the research of Dr. Mike Muir in Maine. This approach to teaching outlines five goals to improve student learning: Inviting Schools, Learning by Doing, Higher Order Thinking, Student Voice and Choice, and Real World Connections. The ATP aimed to fulfill these goals at the No Mystery Math Night.

The evening event was organized as an “open house,” meaning parents and children could come and go on their own schedules. As families arrived, photographers took pictures and handed them to the kids for safe keeping. The photos would be used in a later activity.

The math events were located in all parts of the school and could be visited in any order. Students hunted for magnifying glasses that showed math problems for the night's Scavenger Hunt. Giant jars of candy sat in the multipurpose room for students to guess the correct answer. The student with the closest answer received the jar in school the next day.

Puzzles of various kinds were in the cafeteria. Math games for the whole family spread out across the art room. Students made graphs with candy, completed Sudoku puzzles, and played Bingo with math key words, operations, and symbols instead of traditional letters and numbers.

Fitting with the “mystery” theme of the night, a fingerprinting station was brought in by the local police department. Parents got the chance to fingerprint their kids in case of emergency. To raise funds for the community, a bake sale offered delicious treats, with proceeds donated to the American Cancer Society.

The final event of the evening involved the photos that students received when they arrived. With the help of a special kit, students turned their family pictures into jigsaw puzzles and took them home to play with later. This activity was a highlight of the night. One parent commented, “Making the puzzles was great! My boys didn't want to leave!”

Thanks to excellent organization and plenty of publicity (marquee, local newspaper, School Messenger phone system, and Twitter), close to five hundred people attended. The school noted that this was their highest attended event. Everyone offered high praise. One happy participant said, “We come to every math night. This math night was better than the last three we have attended.”

Indeed, with fun activities that involved the whole family, students found that math's mysteries were quite easy to solve—an open-and-shut case.

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DIGGING WITH DAD

MEADOWS PARKWAY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Little kids will always find ways to get dirty; it's a fact of life. At Meadows Parkway Early Childhood Center, though, they wanted to encourage getting dirty in order to learn. They created outdoor classroom experiences for the young students. To further motivate the students, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) recruited experts in playing outside—the children's dads.

The partnership team of teachers, parents, and the administrator planned a mix of teaching, learning, playing, and bonding experiences for students and their fathers or father figures. They created a series of learning stations to provide a variety of activities in outdoor classrooms.

Digging with Dad took place from 6-7:30 p.m. to accommodate working parents' schedules. As students and their fathers arrived, they received necklaces with one of four pendants: a bird, a flower, a bug, or a butterfly. The different pendants guided groups to their first stations to begin their explorations. Butterflies began in the Motor Area, bugs began in the Music Area, birds started with a Scavenger Hunt, and flowers started in the Digging Area. After set periods, the groups moved through all of the explorations.

The Motor Area introduced families to the school's new playground. Wooden balance beams and logs formed an interesting, textured, and adventurous climbing area. Children explored the new wooden jungle gym under their dad's supervision. They could also play with parachutes provided by a staff member at this station.

The Music Area featured a pair of instruments in the outdoor classroom—a large xylophone and a drum made from a barrel. Children also could play other instruments brought out from inside or make an instrument with materials at the Music station.

For example, some students and dads made “shakers” from paper towel tubes. A local band volunteered to play music, ranging from the *Alphabet Song* to bluegrass.

The other two areas introduced the real dirty work. For the Scavenger Hunt, the school showcased its nature trail. Students and dads traveled that scenic walkway. A local conservationist set out animal pelts along the trail for the hikers to find. With the pelts came wildlife information for the dads to share with their children.

In the well-named Digging Area, there was a big pile of dirt for students to dig into using student-sized shovels, spades, and rakes. They could plant sunflower seeds, shrubs, and trees, donated from a local nursery. Getting dirty while learning about plants was fun, and their work and play also benefited the environment and beautified the school.

Fathers seemed to enjoy the activities as much as their children did. One dad commented, “This was a great opportunity to spend time with my son. We really enjoyed everything—especially the digging!” Students and dads enjoyed their time together and learned some things about the world around them. No one had to dig very far to see the value of providing children with opportunities to learn outside of school.

Type 3

SCIENCE

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MOM & SON MAD SCIENTIST LAB EXTRAVAGANZA

COOPER MAGNET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOR TECHNOLOGY HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Type 6

Cooper Magnet Elementary School knows how to get families involved with their children at school. Earlier, a Father/Daughter Princess Ball attracted more than 175 fathers and their daughters. Mothers requested an equal opportunity for an activity with their sons. The school developed an important learning activity for mothers and sons in science—The Mom & Son Mad Scientist Lab Extravaganza.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers wanted to keep their boys thinking about the fun that comes in learning and doing science. When mothers and sons arrived at the school cafeteria, the boys received lab coats donated by a local clinic for them to keep. First, the families enjoyed a science-show.

Cooper Magnet Elementary recruited a local presenter, “The Mad Scientist of Hampton Roads,” who performed riveting science activities that kept participants moving, thinking, and interacting for about 45 minutes. Then, the boys and moms went to work as scientists.

Teachers set up Experiment Booths of simple but interesting activities with easy-to-follow procedures written clearly on index cards. Common household materials were available for the experiments—the most exotic being rock salt.

Boys and moms explored solids, freezing and melting points, and other basic concepts. For the activity Ice Cream, You Scream, boys and moms combined ingredients (e.g., vanilla, milk, sugar, etc.) and used rock salt and ice as directed to make a simplified and delicious treat that demonstrated how liquids become solids. Toppings for the ice cream were also provided.

For the activity Oobleck, the families combined corn starch, water, and food coloring to demonstrate how the solid corn starch behaves when mixed with water. This green, sticky substance is known from Dr. Seuss’s book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. In science, this fluid “goo” is an important substance. In everyday life, we see similar molton-like properties in toothpaste.

After the experiments were complete, students and parents were given copies of the recipes on note cards to make ice cream and oobleck at home. Everyone smiled on the way out, including the boys in lab coats.

As the school looks ahead to next year, the components of Mom & Son Mad Scientists Lab Extravaganza may become even more extravagant with more experiments added to the mix. The successful components will be preserved—bring children and parents together for intriguing and mysterious science activities, and everyone will enjoy learning together.

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SCIENCE

SCIENCE CARNIVAL

WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OSHKOSH, WISCONSIN

Science is simply fascinating. It is possible to explain the unexplainable by studying visible and invisible worlds. Science is a favorite subject of many students at Washington Elementary School. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided that it would be fun and beneficial to share the excitement of discovery at a Science Carnival.

Many families of children in Washington Elementary do not have the opportunity to go to a museum or planetarium. Although the school regularly hosts family nights on math and literacy, the ATP and teachers wanted students and parents to encounter in-depth science content and to strengthen their love of science. Indeed, science links strongly to reading and math, and reinforces the importance of those basic subjects.

By partnering with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's Science Outreach program, Washington Elementary got a chance to feature some fun applications of science with students and their families. Titled the Science Carnival, the events of the evening were more than games. Students and parents experienced some advanced science, with the help of the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh's volunteers.

The night began with a healthy dinner of subs, bananas, cookies, and milk to get everyone ready to work. Then, students and families went from science station to station to conduct experiments, watch demonstrations, and ask their questions. At the Oobleck station, students played with the sticky green goo that Dr. Seuss made popular in *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. They learned about different properties of fluids and related substances.

The Hovercraft station featured a real hovercraft and showed students how air pressure can lift a person. At the station called What's In Blood? volunteers used an assortment of foods to simulate the ingredients of the bloodstream and students learned the various components of blood.

Clean a Penny station showed students that the acid in vinegar, Coca-Cola, and ketchup could be used to restore the luster of old and dirty pennies. Several other stations also gave students and parents a variety of science experiences.

The stations prepared students for demonstrations of chemistry concepts that included fire and explosions. Students and parents watched volunteers make a tornado out of fire by spinning a burning sponge, demonstrate reactions of alcohol and fire, and other interesting rocketry by fire, and other phenomena. The lively demonstrations literally sparked students' thinking.

Teamwork by Washington Elementary School and the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh ensured that students experienced, learned, and enjoyed science. And their families did, too. The combination of fun and learning produced a favorable science reaction.

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SILLY PUTTY SCIENCE NIGHT

ALEXANDER MITCHELL INTEGRATED ARTS SCHOOL MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

With science, we explore the world around us. Alexander Mitchell Integrated Arts School wanted to give students and their families an opportunity to extend their understanding of science concepts and have some fun doing so.

Mitchell School holds a Family Night once a month, based on an academic theme. These evenings aim to provide positive educational experiences that families can replicate at home. For its Family Science Night, the ATP and science teachers compiled science experiments that were important, fun, and replicable.

One member of the planning group suggested that Silly Putty could be used to demonstrate the properties of polymers. Students also would learn how to follow directions for science experiments. They discussed and planned Silly Putty Science Night.

Making Silly Putty is anything but silly, and required the planners to distribute and discuss safety warnings and general tips about how to mix chemicals safely. They outlined a three major steps to produce Silly Putty.

First, students and parents went to Silly Putty University to learn what Silly Putty is and how it works. There they watched a Power-Point presentation on polymers and saw a video showing what they would do next at the Silly Putty Factory. At the end, families participated in a brief and amusing graduation from the University, complete with *Pomp and Circumstance* and diplomas.

Then, they went to the Silly Putty Factory. The Factory was set up in the cafeteria and featured a step-by-step method to make Silly Putty.

At the Factory, students and their families moved through six stations and followed directions to turn glue and starch into bona fide Silly Putty. They also went through a Quality Control Station to ensure that they had followed directions and produced Silly Putty correctly.

Finally, they went to Silly Putty Lab to experiment with Silly Putty to learn its properties and see what it could do. They tested the qualities and functions of Silly Putty and tried other experiments on their own.

The evening was fun for everyone. The production and testing of Silly Putty showed students and families that science can be an adventure in learning. Teachers saw their students and parents in a new light. Everyone left with new knowledge and self-made Silly Putty.

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SNOWY SCIENCE NIGHT

CHURCH HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHURCH HILL, MARYLAND

Every student will perform on or above grade level in Reading, Math, and Science as measured by Maryland State Assessment (MSA). This is Church Hill Elementary School’s vision statement. The straightforward, ambitious declaration is matched by the school’s strong dedication to its students. When science scores began fluctuating, the school took quick action and held Snowy Science Night to bolster students’ science attitudes and understanding.

The school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted to spur students’ interest in science and help parents support students’ science learning. When Maryland has heavy snow in the winter, students certainly like “snow days.” The ATP thought that students also would enjoy a Snowy Science Night.

The ATP did some research into snow-related science and designed a number of activities for students and parents. The team also contacted a local arboretum for some help.

For admission to the Snowy Science Night, families had to bring an empty one-gallon milk jug, which became part of a giant igloo. After turning in their jugs, children and parents entered the cafeteria and explored several science stations. They could curl up and read with hot chocolate at a station that featured an electric fireplace and carpeting borrowed from classrooms. They learned about the formation of snowflakes and got the chance to create their own using patterns that emphasized symmetry.

At another station, families learned why salt trucks are needed to clear roads in the winter. They conducted an experiment to learn whether three kinds of salt differ in melting snow and ice.

The arboretum set up two tables of activities in the center of the room, featuring a number of interesting facts, figures, and graphics. At this station, students learned how rodents live in tunnels under the snow through the winter, how to find and identify animal footprints in the snow, and other “cool” wintery facts.

On the cafeteria’s stage, the empty milk jugs (needed for admission) were put to use. Students took their jugs up to the stage and, with glue and structural supports, constructed a giant faux-igloo. Following a basic plan, students and families created the final igloo design, showing how blocks of ice might be used to make a winter shelter. The big “ice” house was a real attraction.

Church Hill Elementary reported that participation is always its biggest challenge. To attract more families and boost attendance, the school held a computer training class right before Snowy Science Night. The ATP, students, and families also had to work to get enough milk jugs for the igloo.

The event didn’t cost much. The biggest cost was a fee to the local arboretum for its services: \$50. One teacher observed, “The practice was excellent. Students were actively engaged, thinking, and finding out that learning can be fun.”

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WATCH D.O.G.S. AND HOT DOGS

DOLBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Type 3

WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students) is a national program sponsored by the National Center for Fathering at www.fathers.com. The program aims to increase the involvement of fathers and father figures in their children's schools and learning. This year, Dolby Elementary School joined the program as part of its work with NNPS to further strengthen the involvement of fathers and other important adult males in students' lives.

Forty percent of Dolby's students live out-of-zone and come to school by bus. Many families do not have other transportation to take students to school. Some students come from single parent homes; others from families where both parents work long hours; still other students have very young parents. These factors may reduce the involvement of parents, unless there is targeted outreach to welcome them to school and activities that are easy to join.

In the past, the school often approached moms first, and overlooked the involvement of students' fathers. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and teachers recognized that fathers are an untapped resource, so they focused new efforts to engage dads in various ways.

After viewing a sample program from San Antonio, Texas, the school joined the WATCH D.O.G.S. program. They received a box of materials to get started and useful information about the program. The school hosted a foundational meeting—A Welcome Night—to recruit dads as Watch D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students). All fathers and father figures were given information and one was elected Sponsor. The group of dads decided to conduct an event focused on science. They wanted to redesign Earth Day to make it relevant for students.

The school's annual Earth Day Celebration took on a new name WATCH D.O.G.S. and Hot Dogs, and built on the Earth Day tradition. Dolby Elementary provided landscaping materials, tools, and food for the event. Dads and students worked together to plant trees and beautify the campus using gardening tools, mulch, and various flowers and bushes that were donated by the students. Dads taught students how to plant and, then, care for the new plantings. They were instructed in weeding, mulching, and landscaping, and other skills.

Some dads and students worked together to build Solar Ovens—neat little devices that used the power of sunlight to heat up food. They worked with the children to construct and explain the solar-powered ovens and showed how the sunlight reflected off the oven's foil to cook hot dogs. These simple ovens are easy to build, and resulted in some welcome food for the D.O.G.S. and their pups.

As more great students hound their dads to become WATCH D.O.G.S., the program will grow. The Dolby Dads have interesting plans for next year. One father summarized the heart of the program perfectly, "I love being here helping the school, working with the kids. I feel like I made a difference today."

SCIENCE

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ACTIVE CONTRIBUTORS AS TUTORS AND MENTORS

UPPER MERION AREA MIDDLE SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Students learn from teachers. The statement is true, but students also learn from just about everything they experience and from many different people. When Upper Merion Area Middle School wanted to increase students' skills and abilities, it developed a strong tutoring and mentoring program so that students would meet with many teachers for good and useful interactions.

The school's Action Team for Partnership and other teachers and administrators had specific objectives for this initiative. They wanted to assist students in achieving important academic, social, and behavioral goals. They also wanted to increase productive parent and community involvement. School leaders knew that research showed that well-implemented tutoring/mentoring programs and goal-linked family involvement contributed to student success in school. They elected to combine these components in Active Contributors as Tutors and Mentors.

The program is school-wide and provides tutors or mentors to students in grades five through eight on school topics and life's lessons. To increase productive partnerships with families and the community, the school sought mentors who live or work in the area. The volunteers have diverse backgrounds and vary in age, ethnicity, and in their knowledge, skills, and talents. All have experiences and skills to teach to students and a willingness to establish this relationship. Even high school students may be tutors and mentors as part of their Service Learning courses.

Volunteers go through a screening process that includes interviews and background checks. They are prepared with an orientation session on the school's character education program. Then, they are assigned to a teacher who becomes their primary contact for the interactions they will have with students.

The teachers provide volunteers with necessary materials, information, and directions

for their tutoring sessions. Volunteers may work with individual students, small groups, or whole classes on particular topics or students' needs.

The students enjoy working with people they see around town and having interesting adults teach various skills. One student stated, "I hated math until [one volunteer] started showing me different ways to do problems. Now, I get good grades and think math is fun."

The middle schoolers also see good citizenship and service in action because the friendly and knowledgeable mentors do their work as volunteers, on their own time, and for no financial reward. Presently, about 40 volunteers work with the program and assist about 200 students before, during, and after school.

Teachers observed that students' report card grades have steadily improved since this program was implemented. Participants held between 1000 and 1500 tutoring, mentoring, or teaching sessions during the year. A teacher noted, "I am thrilled to see the progress that our students are making by working with their tutors and mentors."

This well-run program hasn't escaped the notice of those outside the school building. The school earned a 2010 National School of Character Award. The program has no monetary costs—teachers' time in organizing volunteers and volunteers' time in tutoring and mentoring are spent with an eye on student success.

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Type 3

OTHER SUBJECTS

BECKY-DAVID'S PARENT UNIVERSITY

BECKY-DAVID ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Although formal education is listed as K-12 or K-20 for studies through college, adults never stop learning. Becky-David Elementary School wanted to help parents continue to increase their knowledge and skills that would, in turn, contribute to students' success via its Parent University.

Becky-David is a large school with over 1,000 students. Still, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators wanted to make sure that every family understood "the basics" of what their children were learning at school and how to best support learning at home. The school also has goals to increase family involvement and keep lines of communication open between home and school in order to create a safe, caring, and respectful learning community for students, parents, and teachers. These aims guided the design and content of the school's Parent University.

Parent University, with activities for students and for parents, was conducted one Saturday morning in January from 8 am to noon. The ATP offered dozens of sessions that parents selected to increase their awareness of and comfort with school-linked topics, including reading and writing, mathematics, general health and wellness, safety on the street and on-line, and social issues.

The 25-minute mini-courses gave parents useful information and tools to enable them to support students' schoolwork, homework, and physical and emotional well-being. For example, the school's literacy specialist and a first grade teacher shared ideas with parents on Making Reading Fun with Your Family. The school librarian showed and discussed Websites for your Child at Home. The district's director of family involvement shared ideas on Proactive Discipline. Volunteers repeated their mini-courses two or three times during the morning to accommodate as many parents as possible.

While parents attended adult-only mini-courses, their children participated in student-friendly sessions on related content. For example, one session for parents was called Supermarket Smarts, and the children had a session called Kids Can Cook. Similarly, when Becky-David's school nurse met with parents to discuss how to help children with stress, students were in the gym learning how to Have Fun and Be Fit.

Some parents wanted to attend the mini-courses with their children. Some courses were, indeed, for adults and children. A representative from the American Red Cross taught families How to Make a Disaster Kit. At a Vacation Station, parents and students made healthy snacks together, complete with take away ideas for home.

In between classes and throughout the morning, families could view students' art work on display, visit the Career Wax Museum in the cafeteria, or obtain a library card application. Exit surveys indicated that Becky-David's Parent University was a clear success. One student stated, "It was so fun. I liked cooking with my mom." A parent added, "I learned many ideas for working at home."

Becky-David's leaders reviewed the Parent University from start to finish and concluded "It was definitely worth the time and effort. Participants left with information to guide children, and presenters were even more dedicated to the event after presenting." If it is conducted next year, Becky-David is considering partnering with one or two other elementary buildings to increase parent participation and expand the number of sessions and presenters.

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

BLUE RIBBON HOMEWORK CENTER

AMISTAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

When the principal comes knocking, it could mean trouble. For students at Amistad Elementary, however, when the principal knocked on their doors, it was to deliver a blue ribbon! Students and families who participated in a new program, Blue Ribbon Homework Center, received awards for completing the program's requirements, starting with having parents and children create a homework space at home for students to do their work.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers at the school noted that some students did not complete their assignments because they lacked a dedicated space and basic supplies (e.g., tape, crayons) to do their work at home. The faculty agreed that all students—successful or struggling—would benefit by improving the homework process.

To start this project, the principal sent letters asking parents if they would help their children create a study space at home. Children whose parents responded to the letter received a backpack with pencils, notebooks, erasers, rulers, and other supplies that students need for homework. Community members donated the backpacks and supplies, and volunteers filled them, too. Participating families received another surprise—a visit from the principal.

Amistad Elementary's principal visited every family that agreed to create a homework center. After seeing the space, the principal presented the student with a blue ribbon and congratulated her or him for creating a place dedicated to doing homework. The principal also took pictures of the students and their families. He said that the home visits were his favorite part of the program. He felt it was important to make a connection on an individual, comfortable basis with each family to emphasize the importance of students' work on homework at every grade level.

The principal's excitement was shared by students and parents. One mother said,

"My son is so excited about his space. He doesn't let anybody mess it up. He tells his brothers, 'This is my homework center.'"

It never is easy to make home visits. The principal had to adjust his schedule to meet with all of the families in the program. A teacher and member of the ATP accompanied him.

Benefits were quickly apparent. More students were encouraged by teachers and parents to do their homework, more completed their assignments, fewer reported "lost" homework, and students' grades improved. "I've definitely seen an increase on homework returned from those who have participated in the Blue Ribbon Homework Center," said one teacher.

Amistad will continue this initiative. The staff plans to keep better track of those who are involved and monitor their progress. They will encourage more students to join in. It was clear that a small, organized, and dedicated space for homework is one easy way to start to improve the homework process.

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Type 4

OTHER SUBJECTS

FAMILY GAME NIGHT

STEEPLE RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Type 4

In a world of increasing dependence on electronic media, Steeple Run Elementary continues to observe Turn Off the TV Week, sharing with students and families the importance of other kinds of activities and entertainment. This year, the school introduced Family Game Night to the week's agenda, hoping to spotlight the benefits of playing board games.

Previous Turn Off the TV Week events had been quite successful, so the school's partnership team kept the same format as it had for a well-attended Reading Night. A team of teachers and parents planned the week well ahead of its February schedule. Team members wrote articles in the school newsletter to spark interest in Family Game Night, teachers encouraged students to attend with their parents, and parents on the partnership team recruited other parents.

For one evening, the school became a gaming palace. In each of six classrooms, there was a different, grade-specific activity. There was also a welcome room and a chess room. As families entered the welcome room, they received a map of the game rooms and a brochure that detailed the educational benefits of game-playing. They also received a list of games to take home, including some that could not fit into the schedule for Game Night.

In the various classrooms, three 20-minute gaming sessions took place. Between sessions, organizers made announcements and shared trivia that they hoped would spark conversations. Area college students helped out in the game rooms as administrators visited with families throughout the school.

Games for different grade levels included *Chutes and Ladders*, *Guess Who*, *Stars and Circles*, and *Blokus*. A local group, the Chess Wizards, hosted chess games in the Learning Center. In addition, The Marbles Store set up shop in the gym to display other educational games. Here, families could try out some games and purchase

them if they wished. In addition, the store gave away discount coupons to all who stopped by.

The organizers at Steeple Run wanted the event not only to be fun for the whole family, but also to strengthen students' skills in math, critical thinking and social behaviors. The brochure explained the relationship of games and these key life skills:

- * By learning to play by the rules and take care of game pieces, students learn responsibility.
- * By playing a game to the end and keeping calm, students learn perseverance.
- * By being fair and admitting mistakes that may occur, students practice honesty.
- * By being able to deal with wins and losses gracefully, kids learn sportsmanship.

Games also enable students to practice other skills, such as observation, eye-hand coordination, counting, selecting and applying strategies, and tactical thinking.

About 50 parents, 70 students, and many siblings who were not Steeple Run students participated. They enjoyed gaming, skill-building, and meeting other families. The evening was fun and "too short"—indicating that Family Game Night was, indeed, a good reason to turn off the TV.

OTHER SUBJECTS

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FAMILY NIGHTS

BAYSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Middle school can be a challenge for students who must accept increasing responsibilities, greater academic demands, new friends, and, often, peer pressure. Often overlooked, are the challenges parents face when their children enter middle school. Parents must continue to guide their children, who are growing and changing before their eyes. Bayside Middle School aims to help students succeed in the middle grades and help parents succeed with their early adolescents.

Teachers noted that some students weren't meeting with academic success because they weren't studying as much as they should at home. Upon further investigation, they discovered that this problem might be solved if parents felt confident about guiding their teens on homework and studying. Some parents felt frustrated about helping on subjects they had not studied in decades. Others felt they were missing new study technologies and techniques. Still others were trying to keep straight all of the subjects their students were studying with different teachers.

With these challenges, it was easy for some parents to hope their children would simply handle all middle school issues on their own. When some students did poorly, failed their tests, or did not meet potential, it was clear that parents could not step back, but needed to guide their students to do their best in middle school. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers at Bayside wanted to give all parents greater confidence about their involvement in the middle grades.

Family Nights at Bayside were one way to start. The school invited parents and students to come to the building, eat dinner, and work on school skills. It was so much fun that, sometimes, whole families came to catch up with one another and learn more scholastic strategies. The school had a movie and activi-

ties for younger siblings so that parents could give their attention to their middle schoolers.

As part of the first Family Night, teachers demonstrated some games that helped students practice math skills. Students and parents found that these math games were interesting and fun.

At the next Family Night, teachers added a reading focus on the birthday of Theodor "Dr. Seuss" Geisel with attention to his more advanced, middle school-level stories. Local Italian restaurants generously donated baked ziti and spaghetti and meatballs for dinner. Costco donated a \$30 gift certificate to cover other food needs. Another local business, Haygood Farm Fresh, donated a striped Dr. Seuss birthday cake. After the excellent birthday dinner, parents and students split up into groups to learn reading techniques to improve students' comprehension. Younger siblings also read Dr. Seuss books and played games with volunteers.

Bayside's advice to other middle schools struggling to involve families to support students math, reading, and other learning goals is "Just do it!" The school's partnership team and planning committee found that everyone—parents, students, teachers, and community partners—appreciated and benefitted from Family Nights. Bayside Middle also proved that some popular activities in elementary schools (e.g., math games and Dr. Seuss celebrations) can be successfully redesigned for the middle grades.

A future Family Night will focus on educational technology—a topic of interest to students and to parents. With almost three hundred attending the last event, Bayside's leaders for family and community involvement are building a path to partnerships for student success.

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Type 4

OTHER SUBJECTS

MINI-COURSES

NAPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Sometimes students need to move beyond the Three Rs to stay motivated and engaged in school. Naper Elementary's School-Family-Community-Partnership (SFCP) team wanted to give students a chance to learn new things outside of typical classroom subjects. To enable students to explore many topics and develop their curiosity and creativity, the school implemented Mini-Courses.

Naper Elementary School has a strong curriculum, but the teachers know that there is more to the world than English, Math, Science, and History. With Mini-Courses, the school can expand students' exposure to and interests in unfamiliar subjects.

Mini-Courses are 90-minute classes on topics as diverse as Irish Dancing and Physics Party Tricks. The courses are conducted in the spring so that the weather is nice and some classes can be held outdoors.

The school gathers volunteer experts, including parents, school staff, and community members, who will teach their specialties to a class of eager students. Or, the school recruits specialists to teach selected courses. The idea works in two excellent ways—children get a chance to learn about various topics they'd never be able to access in school, and the experts in the community get to share knowledge and form connections with students to foster further learning.

The SFCP team discusses budget, content, timing, and other details in order to make sure the volunteer instructors understand the requirements and goals of the program. When the course topics are set, the school gives a list to all students to review and to select their top four choices.

Students have time to discuss their choices at home. They make their selections one week before Mini-Courses begin. Students should be interested in all four of their top choices, as they may not receive their first choice.

A random drawing determines which class a student will take. Once the instructor has the class list and location for the class, he or she submits a lesson plan for approval. The school buys the supplies for each class using funds provided by Naper's Home and School budget.

With administrative tasks completed, students are able to enjoy their Mini-Course. They may explore forms of karate, make candy, or play life-size chess. Students may learn fire fighting techniques, make plaster sculptures, create backpacks from duct tape, or learn the hard science behind magic tricks.

The variety of classes is huge, but the opportunities for growth are even greater. Students' reactions to these experiences are predictable. Said one excited student, "I wish we could do Mini-Courses every day!"

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ROCK THE TEST!

EAST MIDVALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MIDVALE, UTAH

Rocking out is not just entertainment. At East Midvale Elementary School, it is a strategy and it is becoming a tradition. This year marks the school's second annual Rock the Test, an incentive program for students taking required exams.

The elementary school has set a school improvement goal to increase students' proficiency in language arts and mathematics. Teachers use home-grown Rock the Test! activities to help students feel positive (or excited) about the tests they must take.

To begin, a puppet cheerleader named Molly Pompomovitch teaches good test-taking strategies during school-wide broadcasts leading up to the testing period. The students also are invited to attend pre-test tutoring, where volunteers, teachers, and parents give students extra help on skills they need to practice.

To boost morale, about 100 teachers wear their Rock the Test! T-shirts. The school is decorated with Rock the Test! signs. And, a Rock the Test Assembly is held before the test period. The assembly features a rock concert with a local D. J. and his band performing for the students. Teachers line the halls and cheer as the students enter the assembly.

"Rock the Test is exciting! The assembly really pumps you up and makes you feel good about the test," said one fifth-grader. "I get nervous before the test. The things we do to rock the test make me feel like I can do it. When I see the teachers wearing their T-shirts, it makes me feel that they are all rooting for me to do well."

The encouragement continues during the testing period. Signs that read "Do Not Disturb—We Are Rocking The Test!" hang from classroom doors. The school provides nutritious snacks and teachers distribute raffle tickets to students to reward proper test-taking behavior. For example, students receive tickets for using scratch paper, showing their work, highlight-

ing or underlining key words and phrases, filling in test-bubbles correctly, and more.

After the test period, students receive postcards saying "We rocked the test!" At another assembly, students submit their raffle tickets for prizes. More than 100 prizes are awarded to lucky students, but every one receives a small prize for effort.

Rock the Test! produces results. It has increased student attendance, encouraged parents to keep their children involved in school activities, and provided more ways for teachers to give students extra help on needed skills. Although only in its second year, the incentive program is producing results. After the first Rock the Test in 2009-10, East Midvale made AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) with significant gains in many test categories. The school is awaiting this year's results. In the meantime, Rock The Test! gets an "A" for building enthusiasm, school spirit and community support.

Type 3

OTHER SUBJECTS

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TABLE TALK

WINDSOR OAKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Students are curious, talkative, and imaginative creatures. To keep them thinking and talking at home, as they do at school, Windsor Oaks Elementary School developed Table Talk, which serves up interesting topics for discussion that add “meat” to dinner conversations.

Each month, the school sends home a Table Talk calendar, one for grades K-2 and one for grades 3-5. Each one is filled with conversation topics. A letter to parents explains how to use the ideas to spark children’s thinking and imaginations each day of the month.

Parents check off topics they discuss at dinner (or breakfast, or any time). When students return the completed calendar the next month, it is used as a raffle ticket. Prizes include books, snacks, and art supplies. The goal is that the calendars will promote creative thinking, meaningful discussions, and enjoyable conversations at home.

Each month, the calendar presents a theme. For example, in April 2011, the K-2 calendar followed a springtime theme. Topics for imaginative conversations concerned plants in a world that was different from our own. “What if plants had feelings like ours?” “What if a dog buried a bone and a bone tree grew from it?” “What if sunflowers gave off sunlight?” “What if plants could grow without sunshine?” These “what if?” questions challenge students to think creatively. They can exchange ideas—just for fun—with a parent, sibling, or another member of the family.

The April calendar for students in grades 3-5 had thought-provoking questions with real world applications for modes of transportation. One night the questions for discussion was, “What if airplanes had not been invented? How would this have changed history in the twentieth century.” Another night, students and parents discussed, “What if all roads were one way? Describe your route to and from school.”

These odd questions give children a chance to think outside the box. By exchanging ideas with others in the family, children feel listened to and appreciated. One student shared, “It is really funny to see what ideas my mom has on some of the questions.”

Ultimately, Table Talk gets students and parents thinking, laughing, and talking together. Said one parent, “[Before Table Talk] our conversations usually turned to who had to do what or go where. Once we started incorporating the Table Talk questions into our conversations we found ourselves enjoying the conversations, laughing, and getting into some really interesting discussions.” It is clear that students and parents at Windsor Oaks are talking together in some curious and creative ways.

Type 4

OTHER SUBJECTS

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TECH TALK NIGHT

T. H. WATKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Some joke that parents get confused by new technologies. The fact is that youngsters, too, need to learn the ins and outs of a computer before they are comfortable and confident in this electronic age. T. H. Watkins Elementary School held Tech Talk Night to boost everyone's confidence about computers.

T. H. Watkins surveyed its students to learn about the technology resources they had at home, questions they had about computer use at home, and how teachers could help their families use these resources. The survey results revealed that most students had a computer at home, but that some were not allowed to use them. Parents also asked the school for help on ensuring Internet safety if their children used computers at home. Tech Talk Night aimed to increase parents' awareness of the computer as a tool for children's education and how to ensure safe use of the Internet at home.

At Tech Talk, presentations and activities covered three major topics. Three groups of students and parents rotated through these 20-minute sessions.

Parents and students learned how Blackboard, e-mail, and Twitter can be used as school communication tools. They were guided to use Accelerated Reading and Home Connect, two programs that students and parents can use to improve skills and to increase parental involvement. A pair of websites, Study Island and Brain-Pop, were explained and explored, giving parents and students a great deal of essential information.

At Tech Talk, parents received a folder with information on Internet safety, helpful educational websites, online testing resources, and individual passwords to access services that relate to their children. During the presentations, students got a chance to show their parents how their school Promethean tools worked and other computer-related skills that they had mastered.

Parents completed exit evaluations to assess the quality of Tech Talk presentations. One parent commented, "I had no idea that the school had this much technology. I'm very impressed. Now I can help my child at home and feel confident." Teachers stayed in their classrooms to answer parents' questions. Everyone enjoyed some light refreshments.

Over 300 students and about 100 parents attended Tech Talk. The evening not only provided information and hands-on experiences, but also fostered communications between teachers and parents. Parents, children, and teachers were focused on a critical tool that students must use in school and may use for homework. Everyone was talking technology.

Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

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WHITE OAKS THREE RING CIRCUS

WHITE OAKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Everyone loves a circus. At White Oak Elementary School, the three rings of its circus-themed family night spotlighted math, technology, and reading comprehension.

To advertise the White Oaks Three Ring Circus, a member of the school faculty dressed as a clown and made three appearances on the school's morning announcements. Flyers asking parents to RSVP went home with students, and so many parents responded that the school had to create a fourth ring to house refreshments for everyone.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers organized the event by assigning families to one of four groups, each starting at a specific circus ring. When families arrived, "circus workers" presented them with a colored circle and directions to their first ring. The activities, different in each location, lasted about 20 minutes. Then, families were escorted to the next event by faculty and staff dressed as different circus animals.

In the Library Ring, families were divided into grade-specific groups and listened to a story. A reading comprehension activity followed. Foam dice printed with "question words" guided students and parents to discuss the story. This easy and effective activity showed parents a technique they could use at home to talk with their children about books they read.

Math games took place in the Gym Ring. Children and parents played card games featuring grade-appropriate math skills to give students some practice while having some fun with their parents.

The Computer Lab Ring featured technology-related activities for students and parents. This included a display and information on websites that parents could access for educational games and ways to reinforce their children's reading and math skills at home.

The Cafeteria Ring offered snacks, including circus staples such as hot dogs, popcorn, and cookies. The Three Ring Circus was fun for all involved. "I've heard nothing but good things about tonight," said one administrator. More than 200 people attended.

The leader of a local Girl Scout Troop, whose members helped out in the four rings, expressed her appreciation. "My troop loved participating in the circus. Thanks for inviting us," she said.

Two weeks after Circus Night, every family—including those who could not attend—received a packet that contained a copy of every circus game and instructions to make sure that everyone had a chance to use the materials. The packets included the foam dice for the reading game and the deck of cards used in the Math Ring. The organizers hoped that by making these materials available for home use, families would continue to enjoy the games and strengthen students' skills.

White Oaks administrators wanted this event to increase family involvement at school and in their children's education. The Three Ring Circus Family Night showed that "ladies and gentlemen, and children of all ages. . ." could, indeed, enjoy thinking and learning together.

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2

NON-ACADEMIC GOALS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet non-academic goals for positive behavior, post-secondary education and career planning, health and safety, multicultural awareness, and successful transitions.

FAMILY TEAM BUILDING NIGHT

CRESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPRINGFIELD, VIRGINIA

Research shows that when parents and educators work with students to set goals, students develop more positive perceptions of their academic abilities and gain greater skills in coping with difficulties in school. When Crestwood Elementary School wanted to boost its students' confidence and improve skills and scores, they brought parents and students together to set goals, strengthen study habits, and reinforce good school behaviors. Family Team Building Night aimed to demonstrate how important teamwork was for helping students reach their goals and succeed in school.

So many attendees responded to the advertisements, which appeared in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, that the Action Team for Partnerships and teachers at the school conducted the activities in two locations—the school library and cafeteria. Crestwood also asked local high school students to assist in serving food and implementing activities to accommodate the large numbers of parents and students.

At the light dinner of pizza and lemonade, participants watched a PowerPoint presentation on the evening's agenda and the basics of goal setting. Topics included the results of good goal setting, examples of age-appropriate goals, and Crestwood's interest in children's achievement. The school also provided headsets for families who needed the information in Spanish or Vietnamese.

After the presentation, families split into two large groups for two targeted, hands-on activities. The families switched topics after 30 minutes to consider all important issues. The first activity was Team Building Games that included Blindfolded Partner Obstacle Course and Wooden Egg Spoon Relay. These activities focused on trust, cooperation, respect, and team building, and demonstrated the importance of working together toward any goal.

The other activity brought students and parents to a Goal Setting Seminar. Teachers led

sessions in separate classrooms for groups of 10 to 20 people. Organizers made sure that families who spoke the same language went to the same places so that translations were clear and useful. Using PowerPoint, teachers guided students and parents on strategies for good goal setting and ways to track progress in attaining set goals. Weekly goal-tracking records in various languages were shared and teachers demonstrated how to use them at home. Several teachers referred to these charts in their classrooms to reinforce their use and to remind students to keep thinking about their goals as they tracked their achievements.

Family Team Building Night had positive outcomes at home and at school. A parent of a 2nd grade student commented, "This will be very helpful for us to help [my son] set goals and take responsibility around the house."

Teachers observed benefits in their classrooms. One teacher noted, "After this event, I began using the goal chart weekly with my students. As a result, I have seen growth in their abilities to create, reflect upon, and revise realistic, specific goals."

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Type 1

BEHAVIOR

FOCUSING ON STUDENT SUCCESS

KEARNS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Type 6

Each afternoon, after the final school bell rings, many young adolescents are left alone. During unsupervised time, some middle graders are tempted to participate in risky behaviors that can have serious consequences. Given this reality, Kearns Junior High School created a place and a program for students to come after school. The staff developed FOCUSING on Student Success, a program designed to provide students with a safe and educational environment after school hours.

The Kearns Junior High population faces a number of challenges. About 70% of students receive free or reduced-price meals and many are English Language Learners (ELL). Most of Kearns' parents work during the day, which means that many students go home to wait for parents to return, whether they are with or without siblings or other supervision. Some students were simply "hanging out" after school, which can lead to problematic behavior. To address these challenges, Kearns partnered with the Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services to establish an after school program for its students.

Prior to implementing the program, Salt Lake County Division of Youth Services hired an After School Program Coordinator to run an after-school session every day for about three hours. The Division of Youth Services also provided four part-time staff members to help conduct interesting and appealing activities and to ensure that the program ran smoothly. For its part, Kearns provided rooms at the school, including the cafeteria, library, and assorted classrooms.

The program is conducted Monday through Thursday from 3-6 p.m. and Friday from 12:30-4 p.m. to follow the scheduled school day. For the first hour, students work on homework in a study hall style setup. The coordinator and staff assist students or answer questions to help students with their academic subjects. Following homework time, students may select two

activities, each for one hour, from a long list of options to meet their interests and enrich their experiences. For example, students may play sports, such as soccer or basketball. They may select archery, dance, or academic games to build new skills and talents. Some students try their hand at cooking or, when conditions permit, choose to learn and practice snowboarding. Said one parent who was grateful for the opportunities offered after school, "My child learns new skills and builds new interests."

Twice a week, the Utah Food Bank comes by with a dinner for students, called Kids Café. Students also have opportunities to offer their services to the community. For example, every other week, students may go to a local senior center to conduct activities with the retirees. At the end of the year, they hosted a Senior Prom—a fun dance that included the election of a Prom King and Queen.

In all, over 350 students, over 750 parents and community members, and more than 20 teachers participated in or benefited from the after-school program. Coordinating these large numbers and finding the space to meet was challenging, at first. The planning committee solved this and other issues with good communications and problem solving. The leaders had daily "check-ins" to address immediate problems and monthly meetings to plan and evaluate activities.

One student summarized FOCUSING on Student Success by saying, "I like the program because the staff are very nice and friendly and care about us. I also like it because it's fun and keeps us out of trouble." The school's focus has broadened and improved the lives of its students.

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BEHAVIOR

FUN FREAKY FRIDAY

COVINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COVINGTON, LOUISIANA

You might think Covington Elementary is just a school of students, but it's also a school of fish. That is, its students take part in a special program that follows the "Fish Philosophy." This philosophy has four components:

- Be There.
- Choose Your Attitude.
- Make Someone Else's Day.
- Have Fun Learning.

To "Be There," students are encouraged to pay attention to teachers and friends and to what is going on in class. "Choose Your Attitude" asks students to take charge of and control their own actions. Will they be nice or mean? To "Make Someone Else's Day," students are asked to be aware of ways to make things better for another person every day. And, "Have Fun Learning" sounds self-explanatory, but emphasizes for students that learning can and should be enjoyable. If a lesson or subject seems uninteresting at first, perhaps there's another way to approach it.

These good behavioral goals are clear and attainable, but may seem difficult to some students. Covington Elementary has a hook—the school places fishbowls in classrooms and various common areas. When a student exhibits a behavior that reflects the Fish Philosophy, a teacher writes the students' name on a ticket and puts it in a fishbowl. At the end of a class, the teacher draws a ticket and the winning student receives a small prize, such as a Popsicle. Certain fishbowls have special rewards. There also is a fishbowl outside to encourage good behavior when students are waiting for their after school pickup.

Students also receive half of the ticket recognizing their good school behavior, good will toward others, and attitudes about learning. They take these recognitions home and parents (who were informed about the program)

set up a similar fishbowl for encouraging good will and good attitudes at home. Parents are asked to discuss the philosophy with their children to reinforce good behavior at school.

Because the prize drawings are random, some students may not receive a prize, but they do receive the original recognition. The school organized another aspect of the program to reinforce its importance and help everyone have some fun—Fun Freaky Fridays. Two students from each grade are selected who demonstrated good attitudes and behaviors all week. They may dress up in wigs, fake glasses, funny hats, and other silly things and dance down the halls shaking noisemakers.

The principal invites these students into her office, where she shows them the "Good Book," filled with pictures of previous Fun Freaky Friday celebrities. She takes a picture with them and gives out goodie bags. With all students enjoying the little show, the principal reinforces the importance of good behavior, kindness, and commitment at school and encourages all students to become a Fun Freaky Friday celebrity.

Fish Philosophy and Fun Freaky Friday are unusual approaches to character education. The activities are just strange enough to capture the attention and imagination of many students and setting a positive tone in the school. Even the teachers have a way to go fishing. Colleagues put others' names in a teachers' fishbowl, and from time to time a lucky winner gets a free coffee. The philosophy may sound fishy, but lots of people at Covington are hooked on good attitudes, good schoolwork, and good behavior.

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Type 2

BEHAVIOR

RED TIE CLUB

TIMROD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Building character and leadership skills in students who are currently disruptive in school is an important goal, but is not easy to attain. Timrod Elementary established the Red Tie Club to help fifth and sixth grade boys shape up and be the school leaders they were meant to be.

The school noticed that some boys, in particular, were being sent often to the office for disciplinary problems. The number of office referrals worried the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). The teachers, parents, and administrators knew that good behavior in class is essential for a productive and effective learning environment for everyone. One team member suggested that by targeting the fifth and sixth grades—the leaders of the school—the program's effects would trickle down into the other grades by example.

The school chose red ties because they're a symbol of leadership and strong decision-making skills. Think of business or political leaders in important meetings or interviews—red ties are common attire. Students in the Red Tie Club receive these ties and must attend leadership-school meetings every other Thursday from 2:30-3:30 p.m. The meetings cover such topics as manners, honesty, consideration, responsibility, determination, and other qualities of upstanding leaders.

Students discuss leadership skills and are guided to look people in the eye and shake hands firmly. The Red Tie Club members keep a Log Book to record their good behaviors in school and at home. At each meeting, students review their Log Books and share their experiences with other Club members. At each meeting, those with examples of Red Tie Club behaviors have their names put into a raffle basket. At a culminating Club Family Dinner, ten names are drawn for a Wal-Mart gift card.

Along with faculty lessons and Log Books, the Club hosts conversations with members of the community. The Chief of Police, Mayor, and others have been guests at Red Tie Club meetings. They offered advice and told of their experiences that would help the young men become good leaders.

Students also work to improve their community. They participated in the school beautification day, planted flowers, performed general maintenance and saw clearly how much work goes into making the school an attractive place.

The ATP and faculty know that their fifth and sixth grade boys will soon go to middle school, where many challenges of growing up will be waiting. The Red Tie Club aims to help the students become strong and just leaders in Timrod and in future years. The boys are aware of this lofty goal. A 6th grader said, "[A local attorney] taught us that being honest can be hard at times, but it's always the right thing to do. He showed us that the decisions we make now...will help us figure out what kind of people we want to be."

Similarly, a 5th grade Club member shared, "[The youth minister] told us that character is what you do when no one is looking. [It is a good thing] to open a door for someone just because, or let someone in your family watch what they want on TV."

Teachers, parents, and community members have reported measurable differences in the 19 members of the Red Tie Club and in the school, generally. As Dr. Brooks, the district superintendent, noted, "This program is truly wonderful. Seeing this kind of transformation in these students is just simply amazing."

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STUDENTS LEARN BY LEADING

NELLIE STONE JOHNSON SCHOOL MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Some say that, “Those who can’t do, teach.” Students at Nellie Stone Johnson (NSJ) School are proving that this saying is wrong. They teach by doing. By participating in the Lead Peace program, students in the middle grades engage in service learning activities to teach other students in the kindergarten through eighth grade the importance of positive behavior and citizenship.

Startling statistics have been reported by NSJ. In 2008, 48% of Minneapolis homicides occurred in neighborhoods around the school. Up to 42% of families with children under age 18 live in poverty and 95% of students received free or reduced-price lunches. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators knew that they needed to put a program in place to mitigate these challenges that affect many students on a daily basis.

Implemented in 2001 in response to feedback from administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community partners, Lead Peace is a county-school-university-community partnership for service learning. Stakeholders wanted to improve middle grade students’ school connectedness and success, foster positive community involvement, and reduce risks for violence. Lead Peace engages students in creative, experiential ways by providing opportunities to practice and develop interpersonal skills, cooperative peer behavior, and a host of other leadership skills.

Middle schoolers first learn about and discuss these important characteristics in the classroom. Trained facilitators including teachers, student support staff, social workers, and youth workers conduct 55-minute lessons once a week during the school day. Organized for small-groups (e.g., seven or eight students), the lessons cover leadership skills such as communicating, decision-making, resolving conflicts, and solving problems.

After these discussions, students put their skills to the test. They identify issues and concerns in the school and community that they want to help improve and develop service-learning projects to address these challenges. For example, one group of seventh graders taught first grade students math and reading games. Another group made stress balls out of balloons and rice to teach fifth graders how to control stress and anger. Other students focused their project on reducing bullying. They created a video about this problematic behavior and had teachers speak about their own experiences when they were young students who were bullied at school.

Lead Peace at NSJ is improved and strengthened every year. Building on a 10-year history, school leaders emphasize the importance of teamwork and collaboration. The University of Minnesota helps NSJ evaluate the program. Hennepin County Social Services provides training for Lead Peace facilitators. Teachers and administrators schedule time in the day to help students build these leadership skills. Parents continue to help students at home by supporting the program and the students’ service learning projects.

Survey data indicates that students in Lead Peace are more able than other students to manage stressful situations, and they display lower levels of bullying and fighting. It is expected that they are learning leadership skills that will continue to be valuable in their lives.

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Type 6

BEHAVIOR

DRESS FOR SUCCESS FASHION SHOW

LEE HALL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

Type 5

The Dress for Success Fashion Show at Lee Hall Elementary School had style and substance. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) met with parents who were interested in supporting students in a fashion show that would reinforce students' good behavior, good attitudes, good ideas, and future planning.

The purpose of the fashion show was to spotlight the fact that all schools have dress codes for students and staff. The organizers, including educators and parents wanted to send another message: "We dress for success at work, school, and play. How we dress can demand respect, affect our potential for employment, determine our approachability and help us feel confident and competent."

The school's parent involvement specialist integrated lessons for students into the event, focused on character education and success in school. These included the importance of good school attendance, good citizenship, and career-readiness skills. Students who wanted to participate in the fashion show had to demonstrate these skills, along with passing grades in all of their subjects.

Parents, too, were offered some guidelines for the six types of involvement and the importance of partnerships across the grades. They were asked to make a commitment to on-going involvement, even as they volunteered time to help students with the fashion show. The parent volunteers took responsibility for creating flyers and programs, teaching runway skills, selecting music, recruiting volunteers, and serving as stage managers and mistresses of ceremonies.

Students rehearsed weekly outside of class. Older students guided the younger models.

The ATP moved the program to a nearby middle school when the committee determined that there was high interest and the need for more and better space. The popular show had themed segments: animal prints, bright and bold, April showers, soft pastels, casual wear, athletic gear, career and formal wear.

The show's printed program included a brief biography of each model, featuring students' future goals in education and training, and what they might want to do when they grew up. This emphasized the career-planning goal. Students also identified a citizenship trait that was particularly important to them—respect, honesty, tolerance and trustworthiness scored high. These, too, were discussed in their program bios.

The show won rave reviews. The principal of the middle school that hosted the show remarked "...those children were adorable...and I appreciate the opportunity to meet the families and the chance to welcome them to the middle school journey."

The ATP found other teachable moments during the fashion show. Community leaders spoke during intermission about the transition to middle school and test-taking strategies. Families received information on college and career planning, parenting tips, and recreational and community resources.

Although it was a large undertaking, the fashion show turned out to be well worth the investment—a lot more than a few pretty faces.

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CONVERSATION AND NETWORKING

ARDEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

Arden Elementary School is working to close the achievement gap between black males and other school groups. Data show that, on average, black males have lower achievement and higher drop out rates than other student subgroups. After receiving reports on the distressing data, a team of Arden’s teachers talked with parents and community members about this issue. They agreed that there still was time to help all students succeed and be college-and-career ready by the time they graduated from high school.

School leaders decided to organize a conference for parents, teachers, and other adults not only to share the data, but also to seek solutions for Arden’s students. They also wanted to identify examples of successful African-American men in their own community to come to meet and talk with Arden’s students to motivate them to do their best in school.

To address these challenges and goals, the school sponsored an evening conference and dinner called Empowerment Through Conversation and Networking. The question for discussion and for action was: How can we help our African-American males achieve and succeed?

The conference began with a greeting from the Boys II Men organization, a program the school sponsors to help male students learn from and with adults in their community. Following the greeting, six Arden students presented statistics about African-American men nationwide. Then, as a counterpoint, they presented positive attributes about themselves. To continue, the district’s executive director of accountability, assessment, research, and evaluation talked with parents about the school’s test data and ways they might help their young men at home.

In the next part of the program, six African-American men from different walks of life discussed the current state of black males in school and society, and offered suggestions and

solutions about how to turn negative statistics into positive growth and progress. This panel also answered the audience’s questions and invited comments.

The district’s Superintendent delivered a moving speech that called everyone to action. The superintendent asked all stakeholders—teachers, parents, and members of the community—to work together to help all African-American males succeed in school. Afterward, several community organizations spoke with parents about programs that are available for their children.

The evening concluded with dinner and opportunities for teachers, parents, and organizations to network and plan actions that each could take in the short term and the long term to support student learning. “This was a powerful night,” said one attendee. “I hope we can continue this effort.”

The conference resulted in a larger network of partners to support the students at Arden. These partners shared information that would enable more students to attend summer camp, obtain counseling, meet with mentors, and have other enriching extracurricular activities. The conference also introduced students and their families to black males in their community who have achieved and succeeded in their careers. The message was clear. With cooperation and on-going action, Arden can close its achievement gaps, too.

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PARENT ACADEMY

W. H. RUFFNER ACADEMY NORFOLK, VIRGINIA

Often, the best way to support students is to support their parents. W. H. Ruffner Academy—a school in an urban area surrounded by several low-income apartment complexes—focused on creating a welcoming climate of partnerships and increasing families’ employment skills through its Parent Academy.

The impetus for this initiative came from questions about student uniforms. Ruffner Academy requires its students to wear uniforms, but the uniforms can be costly. Many parents did not have the means to buy uniforms that cost upwards of \$50, especially when their children were, typically, out-growing them every year (and sometimes between years). The school tried to help families by setting up a swap shop for students to exchange outgrown for larger uniforms, as they were needed. It also solicited the help of local businesses to provide donate uniforms.

The solution was helpful, but did not address the underlying issue. Parents wanted to increase their earning potential by improving their employment. The school decided to help by providing parents with employment skills training.

The Parent Academy training was a 12-hour structured learning experience, conducted over a four-week period. Classes were held in two 90-minute sessions every week. Taught by Virginia Cooperative Extension employees, teachers, and adjunct community college faculty, the classes for parents covered important issues using a variety of learning strategies—role play, group discussions, oral presentations, guest speakers, and other methods to help parents understand useful information and apply it to their own needs and interests.

Every class taught parents a different skill that would enhance their options for employment. Getting to Know Yourself, the introductory class, taught how to develop a personal inventory to help people understand their strengths,

weaknesses, and interests. This information could expedite the process of finding and keeping work.

Other classes built on this foundation by providing parents with a solid knowledge base. The classes included: The Right Job-Just for You, Marketing Yourself, Preparing Your Resumé, Writing a Cover Letter, Planning the Interview, Job Seeking Strategies, and Staying on the Job Once You Are Hired.

When participants completed these classes, they received a certificate confirming that they completed the Parent Academy. Area employers were alerted to recognize these certificates as a indicator of competence and diligence, giving the holders an advantage in their job seeking activities.

Ruffner Academy used multiple methods to encourage parent attendance. Beyond the standard flyers and e-mails, team members conducted “door-to-door marketing,” parent-to-parent word-of-mouth, and, perhaps most importantly, student encouragement. Students received extra-credit classroom participation points if their parents attended the Parent Academy.

This year, 30 family members completed Parent Academy. They reported feeling more equipped to apply for new employment. Said one parent, “Thank you for giving me my self-respect back. I now feel good about applying for jobs. . . I always wanted to work in an office.”

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BROCK ON THE MOVE

BROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SLIDELL, LOUISIANA

The health, exercise, and nutrition campaign at Brock Elementary got a jump start last fall when First Lady Michelle Obama visited the school to kick off her *Let's Move* Campaign. To actively support the nationwide initiative, the school launched Brock on the Move. The program promotes the health of its students by focusing on nutrition and exercise.

Using the community connections of its business partner, Brock held an event at the Camellia City Farmers Market, just down the block from the school. There, the school's cafeteria manager conducted a presentation on healthy snacks, complete with tastings. The Nutritional Advisory Council (NAC) students helped with the snacks, which were provided by the school food service.

The school nurse and two others who volunteered their time checked attendees' blood pressures and heart rates; a local hospital provided literature on health and nutrition, and the market vendors offered samples of their fresh, locally grown foods.

These activities led up to the big event—a one-mile walkathon through surrounding neighborhood. Brock students, teachers, and families walked through the area on sidewalks rather than in the street to avoid the need for a march permit or police escorts. A toddler in a stroller and someone's dog joined the walkers as passers-by honked their support. Businesses along the way provided water to the walkathoners. At the end, each participant received a medal and a certificate, as well good feelings of building school spirit and doing something good for themselves. The local newspaper published a story about Brock on the Move with many photographs.

"It was really a family and community event," said the principal, pleased with the planning and the results. "It was great to see the students and parents participating together, and how the community embraced us."

A student was quick to share his favorite part: "I liked the snacks!"

With this event, Brock met several important goals. The school increased parental involvement, sponsored a community outreach project on healthy habits, and demonstrated the importance of exercise and good nutrition for students, staff, and families. The school also learned the power of partnerships, according to one organizer. One business owner who is on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) explained that planning and conducting Brock on the Move "opened up opportunities for relationships with many other [partners]." She added that the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) had helped the ATP understand the importance of meaningful and effective relationships.

The school aims to keep its students, staff, and larger community moving by sponsoring other activities, as well as a similar healthy-walkathon next year. The ATP assessed the event and decided to start planning earlier in the year for the spring activity and have a Plan B in case of inclement weather. This year, Plan A for the Brock on the Move activity worked just fine.

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FAMILY FITNESS NIGHT AND FOOD FAIR

CUNNINGHAM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BELOIT, WISCONSIN

Food and fitness are interlocking links on the chain of good health. They depend on each other for support, strength, and continuity. Knowing that both are important for growing children, Cunningham Elementary School wanted to help families become familiar with fundamental concepts of fitness and nutrition.

Cunningham’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) noticed that students at the school were becoming more sedentary. Some were bringing rather unhealthy lunches to school. The ATP and teachers were concerned that these factors—physical and nutritional—were contributing to more students having trouble concentrating in class and feeling lethargic in school. They believed it was time to redirect students toward better eating habits and more exercise to improve their lives physically and mentally.

Cunningham already held a fitness night for students and families, but the ATP wanted to improve its content and coverage. This year, they added information on local produce for healthy eating in the form of a “Food Fair.” The planners began by encouraging teachers to support the concept and donations from local businesses. These were good goals, as most teachers already favored good nutrition and healthy eating. They volunteered to design and/or conduct fitness games with their students. The school used Title I funds to support these activities, as needed.

On the culinary side, a pair of enterprising teachers took the lead in procuring donations from local businesses and organizations for health food and for raffle prizes. Because childhood obesity is a common topic and concern, teachers were successful. In addition, the local YMCA, Parks and Recreation Department, and local organic grocery stores were eager to their part to improve students’ health.

At the Fitness Night and Food Fair, families received a card with a list of activities in each classroom. They selected the games, activities, and demonstrations that appealed to them. At each location, they received stamps on their cards when they completed the activity. A walking track around the school displayed posters about healthy eating and exercise, as well. Some participants’ favorite activities included a dance video, a hula-hoop contest, and partner juggling.

Families visited the Food Fair, which featured a quiz game about Wisconsin fruits and vegetables. Bushel and Peck, a local organic grocery store, provided samples of healthy foods. Additionally, a local college student studying the culinary arts came dressed in chef whites and hat to distribute snacks and discuss healthy eating. This volunteer was so impressed with Cunningham’s event that she may soon be helping other Wisconsin schools follow suit. She remarked, “It was great to see all these parents interested in how to cook healthy food for their families. More schools should do things like this!”

Over 100 people came to Fitness Night and Food Fair. Its results are already apparent in more active students and more good-food lunches. Students (as well as parents) have more knowledge about how to help themselves live happier and healthier. The Fair produced food for thought!

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Type 1

HEALTH AND SAFETY

H₂O FOR LIFE

LARKSPUR MIDDLE SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Much of the world faces a shortage of potable water, but there are people who want to change that—including the students and faculty at Larkspur Middle School.

Larkspur Middle adopted H₂O for Life as its community service project for the 2010-11 school year. H₂O for Life pairs schools in North America with schools in developing countries to bring WASH—that is, WAter, Sanitation, and Hygiene education—to the students.

With more than 1,500 students, Larkspur is one of Virginia’s largest middle schools. Wanting to build a sense of community, the school’s ATP and parent coordinator explained, “we think serving others and becoming aware of global issues people are struggling with will allow our students to achieve a common goal and work as a team with their community.”

To tie this service project to the school’s plan for continuous improvement, Larkspur sought to involve staff, students, parents, and community members in H₂O for Life. The Student Council took a leading role. It advertised the program and related service-oriented fundraisers, and led a school-wide assembly on the plan to connect with and raise money for a partner school in Haiti that lacked access to clean water.

In mid-October, the school kicked off the project by celebrating Global Hand Washing Day. In that week’s announcements, the school advertised the essential hygiene of hand-washing, provided facts on how germs spread, and detailed the difficulties for those in developing countries who have no access to standard sanitation. Students also watched a slide show about water usage and attended a student council assembly.

The first fundraiser was a Halloween dance. The initiative continued in February with a pair of fundraisers—a variety show and the 1st Annual 5K Family Fun Run/Walk. The February variety show featured a series of student acts and a slide show displaying powerful images and

important facts about water usage around the world. Almost 300 people attended. Revenue from ticket sales went directly to H₂O for Life.

Next came the 1st Annual 5K Family Fun Run/Walk. This event, held on school property, attracted 176 participants. About 25% were students, 25% were faculty, and 50% were families, friends, or community members. The friendly race raised nearly \$900 for H₂O for Life.

Along with fundraising, the school made a big splash with its community partnerships. A local business, Volunteers in Education, donated food, beverages, and other services to the scheduled events. Other community partners designed and built a sign advertising the event, set up booths informing students about foot health and proper footwear sizing, and donated coupons and gift cards for goodie bags distributed at the 5K race.

Teamwork between the school and its community was, indeed, impressive. Said the school’s principal, “This project epitomizes the strength of effective community-wide partnerships. All facets of the Larkspur community were involved in H₂O for Life—students, teachers, parents, neighbors, and businesses. When these groups come together to support a cause and/or learning experience, our educational system is greatly enhanced!”

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MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION: STUDENT STRESSORS

NAPERVILLE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

High school students face many pressures as a normal part of growing up. Students at Naperville North High School felt the typical stressors related to report card grades, graduation requirements, and other aspects of teen angst. The school's partnership team (SFCP) decided to tackle this issue to provide more support to students and help them feel more able to face the stresses in high school.

Based on the results of a survey of its students in the 09-10 school year, the Naperville North partnership team learned that students wanted to reduce school-related anxieties, increase peers' honesty on tests, and feel confident about solving problems they might face in the future. One goal was to help students learn strategies for dealing effectively with school stress and teen pressures.

The partnership team of parents, teachers, and administrators began by discussing incidents, movies, or books that might link to student stress to provide educators, students, and parents with opportunities for rich conversations and teaching moments for their students. The team also considered ways to create effective discussion groups with students.

The decision was to create the Academic Integrity Committee. This group of parents, teachers, administrators, and students held two successful, well-attended forums to discuss students' stress and its effects. The long-term goal is to help participants understand the scope of stress in high school and gain strategies to deal with stress and make good decisions when facing stressful situations.

At one forum, the groups showed a movie about students' cheating, followed by a panel discussion, moderated by the principal. About 400 people from the school and district attended this provoking and lively discussion. At another forum for the high school community only, students discussed related issues and potential

solutions. All of the topics that emerged will be followed again in the next school year, as the school wants to continue to explore and strengthen all students' abilities to minimize stress in high school.

Homework was one topic that was important in the forums and discussions. Students wanted to share their views that the purposes and quantity of homework needed to be clear, or the work becomes a persistent stressor for students. Teachers listened well and aim to review their homework policies and practices. Said one teacher, "I will try to be more purposeful in the homework I assign." This illustrates one of the good results of the forums and discussions. Students were able to bring up topics that troubled them, make them public, and, with adults, call for actions to address issues that might make high school less stressful to students.

A parent commented, "After seeing *The Race to Nowhere* [at one of the forums], I began to evaluate my contribution to my son's high stress level. I will talk with him differently regarding his school work." It's this awareness and willingness to act that leads to change, not just a few useful tips.

The Academic Integrity Committee evaluated a survey of students conducted later in the school year to determine reactions to the forums and to plan new and follow-up discussions for the coming school year. The assessments are helping Naperville North students meet the demands for good decisions and honorable behavior more confidently.

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PASCO POUNDS

PASCO HIGH SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Being a “loser” pays off big at Pasco High School. The school staff put a positive spin on losing weight and on helping students gain strategies for more healthy living in the school’s version of the show, *The Biggest Loser*, called Pasco Pounds.

Improving health and health care is on the national agenda, as is reducing childhood obesity. Pasco High School wanted to ensure that its students were taking good care of themselves by eating healthy and exercising. The school wanted to highlight the importance of preventing diseases that are associated with obesity, such as diabetes and arthritis. Pasco High’s Action Team for Partnership (ATP) hoped that if students learned more about healthy living in high school, they would continue good health habits as young adults.

Spurred by community members who attended school meetings, the ATP outlined the Pasco Pounds project. They envisioned a contest over about eight weeks. Members of the community agreed to volunteer their time for major project activities such as weigh-ins and an awards ceremony. With tasks delegated and the structure set the project took shape.

Pasco Pounds was open to all in the school who wished to compete—students, faculty, and other members of the school staff were welcome to join in on the healthy fun. Pasco Pounds featured a weigh-in every Friday for contestants to keep track of their weight loss or healthy weight stability. There was a point system so that participants could see where they ranked among their peers. Contestants earned points both by losing weight or by participating in health-related events organized by student leaders and by a local fitness club.

Four teams were formed of 20 members each for the first go-round of Pasco Pounds. Each participant received a themed T-shirt from student leaders. If they wore the shirts during Friday weigh-ins, their team earned additional points. Student leaders also provided contestants with contest rules and a calendar that gave the dates of group events and health education classes which contestants could attend for more points.

Each week, community partners weighed contestants, calculated weight loss percentages, and tallied up points. Contestants then received updates on the top five point earners and team standings. In an effort to keep excitement high, the top two leaders won tickets to a local hockey game halfway through the contest. After eight weeks of work and play, the winning team received \$500 for their class fund. The winning team’s staff (or guides) won a two-month membership to a local fitness club, and the individual staff winner won a new exercise bike.

The school’s ATP plans to implement and improve this healthy contest in the future, given the success of this year’s effort. One teacher contestant had this to share: “The Pasco Pounds contest was a breath of fresh air for a weight loss program. It was so fun to be able to exercise with colleagues and know that my improved health was benefiting my students.” Improved health benefits everyone. Pasco High School is trimming off pounds and encouraging good health for everyone’s well-being.

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Type 6

HEALTH AND SAFETY

THE DANCING CLASSROOMS PROGRAM

A. A. NELSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Dance is an athletic and artistic endeavor that can entertain, educate, and excite its participants and its audience. For A. A. Nelson Elementary School, dance also is an annual activity that helps fifth graders learn many life lessons in the Dancing Classrooms program.

The goals of Dancing Classrooms is to increase fifth graders' self-respect, self-confidence, and respect for others through a series of 20 ballroom dance lessons. After Whistle Stop, a local non-profit organization, offered the program, the school became excited about the possibilities. The program gives children a chance to learn dance regardless of income or location. The school's Action Team for Partnerships, teachers, and administrators wanted students to have the opportunity to build social skills and improve physical health.

Dancing Classrooms runs the course of ten weeks, with two 45-minute lessons a week, starting in August. The instructors are called Teaching Artists and received dance training from Pierre Dulaine, founder of American Ballroom Theater and Dancing Classrooms.

The course starts with the basics: leading and following by dance partners, building dance repertoire, understanding and sharpening balance, and executing respectful positions moving to and from the dance floor. Then, students go into more depth learning moves and combinations of specific dances and the cultural heritage of each dance form, including dances from all over the world.

Dances include Merengue, Foxtrot, Waltz, Rumba, Tango, Swing, Heel-Toe-Polka, and selected line dances. As they learn the dances, students also have opportunities to improvise their routines. By creating dance movements within a dance form, they may really understand the artistic process of dancing. Students also increase trusting relationships with their partners, as they must work together to execute and master

standard and improvised moves. Thinking about dance and teamwork, one fifth-grade student commented, "I never thought I'd like to dance or even dance with a girl. After going through Dancing Classrooms, I realize now I really like it!"

At the end of the course, students perform dances for a large audience. This year, A. A. Nelson Elementary held a *Dancing with the Stars* event at a local auditorium. Students, dressed in their best clothes, showed off their fancy moves for parents, teachers, and others in attendance. Everyone was amazed by the abilities the fifth graders demonstrated. It was clear that the student partners worked well together and respected each other. Following the show, A. A. Nelson was invited to participate in the *Colors of the Rainbow Team Match* dance competition—and they took first place!

The founders of Dancing Classrooms, Pierre Dulaine and Yvonne Marceau, had this to say, "With Dancing Classrooms, we are able to reach children in existing classroom settings and address fundamental issues of mutual respect and self-esteem—issues that social dance puts into practice. We hope to inspire children through dance to do well, to respect one another, to be proud. This program is about more than dance, it is about teaching children to take a bow."

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EPIC PRC: EQUIPPING PARENTS IN THE COMMUNITY

LIBERTY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA

Teachers at Liberty Elementary School know that rigorous readiness and basic skills taught in early childhood lead to students' educational success in the later grades. Kindergarten and first grade are very important school years for helping students learn to read, do math, increase positive attitudes about school and learning. Because it is true that parents are children's first teachers, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Liberty Elementary's teachers wanted to help all parents support children's learning at home in the early grades.

To make it easy for parents to participate, the ATP aimed to establish a "one-stop shop" with a welcoming spirit and resources that parents could use to reinforce reading and math skills with their young children at home. The added challenge was the school has a growing population of English Language Learners (ELL), making it important to include all parents—in this effort. The schools' Equipping Parents in the Community (EPIC) program works to familiarize parents with the school's Parent Resource Center (PRC) so that all parents feel welcome and able to ask for and obtain help in supporting children's learning.

EPIC PRC is held in the school library four mornings a week from 8:30-10:30 a.m. Parents can come in to ask the bilingual (English and Spanish) community liaison for help. He knows the resources that are available and works to refer parents to the resources they need or want to work with students at home in ways that reinforce what teachers are doing in class. The PRC has many resources in reading/language arts and math including books on tape, reading games, activities for phonemic awareness, games to improve basic math skills, math flashcards, math manipulative activities, and many more. Without the PRC guide to help, it is easy for parents who speak Spanish or English to get confused by the materials available for different grade levels and for students at different ability

levels. The point is to help all parents find exactly what they need to support their students' skills in positive—fun—ways.

The EPIC-PRC community liaison helps parents zero in on the resources and activities that are most likely to help their children. In addition to the liaison, other parents—including bilingual parents—volunteer to work in the PRC to help the parents who come in, answer questions, talk about materials and teaching strategies that other parents may use at home, or just talk parent-to-parent. The community liaison also helps parents use the computer lab attached to the library to learn that technology and look for additional materials that may interest them. PRC mornings are always busy, as a steady stream of parents look for a helping hand and leave with useful materials and ideas.

Liberty Elementary has been successful with EPIC PRC. In the future, one goal is to develop stronger connections with teachers so that they know the materials in the PRC. Then, more teachers will be able to recommend which activities parents might use to boost students' success on particular skills. The community liaison plans to conduct workshops in multi-languages at EPIC PRC to broaden the scope of the program.

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FAIRY TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

MAYA ANGELOU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Type 3

All kids love the imaginative drama and joy in fairy tales. Stories of scary monsters, courageous heroes, and magical characters create another world for children. When Maya Angelou Elementary School wanted to spark students' imaginations, increase reading for pleasure, and raise reading scores on state tests, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers looked to fairy tales for some magic and some answers.

The ATP and teachers noticed that, in the past, their Family Literacy Nights attracted mostly younger students and parents. They wanted to increase participation across all grades. In 2011, The ATP's Reading Committee paired fairy tales with a multicultural theme, drawing on the school's large population of students and families from other countries.

The new design required good organization and many leaders and helpers. Teachers and community volunteers developed intriguing materials for fairy tales from various countries. Teachers and community volunteers staffed the reading, learning, and fantasy stations. Parents solicited donations from local businesses to support the evening's activities.

When they arrived, families began a world tour of fairy tales by picking up a "passport" at the library. Students filled in their names, grade levels, and drew their own portraits as a "passport photo." Then, the students and their families visited any country to learn, read, and do activities on its fairy tale. At each station, students took a copy of a fairy tale from that nation and completed a related activity. They received a passport stamp when they finished each activity.

The night's events included three second-grade classes performing a musical rendition of an African fairy tale, a fifth-grade readers' theatre on a tale about China, and a puppet show on a folktale from Mexico. There also was a snack room where students and parents shared snacks and fables, and

a station where children folded origami animals to go with a Japanese folktale. Along with the fairy tale learning stations, there was a book walk, a photo corner where children and their families could have their pictures taken in costumes from the various countries, and several opportunities for the kids to make books to take home.

Teachers and administrators were told by many parents: "Thanks for a wonderful evening," and, "Looking forward to next year!" Since the event, teachers report an increase in library circulation of fairy tales, as well as other books. Of course, all reading leads to more reading. Students also expressed interest in readers' theater productions.

Adults, too, benefited from Fairy Tales from Around the World. Parents learned some techniques for reading fairy tales with their child at home and doing related activities, and the importance of encouraging their child's reading. The Mid-Columbia Reading Foundation provided brochures with helpful tips on the importance of reading and how parents can make reading fun and important for their children. With the increased awareness of and interest in different countries and cultures, teachers found they could expand their curriculum in many subjects.

More than 350 students and 200 adults attended Fairy Tales from Around the World. The moral of this tale is clear: Good stories were, are, and always will be good stories!

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

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FIESTA TIME: AN EVENING OF FASHION, FOOD, AND FUN!

PULASKI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

At Pulaski Elementary School, differing cultures don't create barriers—they create festivals. To strengthen partnerships with the many Latino families in its community, Pulaski Elementary School started Fiesta Time, a multicultural festival that celebrates the contributions of the Hispanic/Latino community. As they planned this celebration of culture, Pulaski Elementary's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), school staff, and parents included a fashion show, dance clinic, dance ensemble performance, potluck supper, and a live Mariachi band.

No language barriers detracted from this festival and the connections of parents and students across cultures. Parents eagerly helped their children showcase their culture and its fashions. For the fashion show, students wore clothing native to their homeland, resulting in a colorful and beautiful experience for a very large audience.

A local Zumba dance instructor offered a clinic to parents and children to teach them the movements of this new dance-aerobics combo-craze. Then, La Aspira, a live dance ensemble from a nearby high school, performed authentic Latin/Hispanic dance routines, delighting the younger children and their families.

The Fiesta continued with a potluck dinner in the school's cafeteria. Parents prepared the food, which was, then, totally authentic cuisine from their home countries. Finally, a Mariachi band entertained during dinner—enriching everyone's experiences.

Fiesta Time with its combination of fashion, fun, and food grew from the school's understanding of the importance of promoting strong partnerships with Hispanic/Latino families and communities. After good team planning, the organizers distributed flyers and newsletters to call Fiesta Time to everyone's attention—all students, families, and commu-

nity groups and organizations. Teachers shared their excitement by including relevant information in their classroom lessons for students.

Fiesta Time had strong support with almost 1,000 people attending. By combining a student fashion showcase, an active dance class, a polished dance recital, a wonderful dinner, and a live, local band, the planners made sure that the activities were important and enjoyable for everyone. Children were excited and proud of their cultures. Parents were moved by the joy that was generated: "Thank you so much for caring about us [Latinos.] We feel appreciated and respected," said one parent. Others in the audience simply enjoyed the activities and learned about the Hispanic/Latino culture that is right around them.

Because of community support and teacher and parent volunteers, the activities cost the school only around \$500. The Zumba instructor and La Aspira volunteered their talents and parents supplied food. Pulaski Elementary School demonstrated that to knock down barriers, all you have to do is ask for some help. Then, you can throw a fiesta.

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FILIPINO CULTURE AND LANGUAGE CLASS

SALEM MIDDLE SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Type 2

Salem Middle School celebrated its small but significant Filipino population—about 12 percent of its enrollment—with a popular course on traditional Filipino customs and Tagalog, the native tongue of the Philippines. Not only does the annual course steep the school’s second-generation Filipino-Americans in their ancestral culture, it also shares that culture with others in the community.

One of Salem Middle School’s goals is for students to have an understanding of and increased appreciation for the Philippine society and culture. To meet this goal, the school continued to develop and improve its Filipino Culture and Language Class for all interested students. Working with its Partner in Education—the Filipino-American Community Action Group—Salem Middle offers a 16-week after-school course on the Filipino culture and language. The class meets once a week, but it is as serious as any class that meets during the school day. When the enrollment reaches 15, the teachers create two groups to keep the class size small and to ensure an in-depth experience for all students.

The class begins with the basics: the alphabet and pronunciation of the Tagalog language. After learning the number system, students work through the parts of the body as well as everyday phrases, including greetings, directions, and question words. Because the goal is for students to speak the language conversationally, teachers make sure students have built a wide vocabulary. When the essentials of knowing how to ask for things and greet others are mastered, students learn adjectives and work on their accent and cadence while speaking. Throughout the course, students learn several songs in Filipino, write and present skits, and soak up the culture inherent in every activity.

Toward the end of the course, students begin working on their final presentations to summarize what they have learned. They may present songs, dances, drama, or games for their families, teachers, and other members of the community. After the performances, teachers present their students with certificates to recognize and congratulate them for the commitment that was needed to complete the challenging course. At this celebration of accomplishments, everyone enjoys some tasty Filipino food.

Volunteer teachers run the program for 16 weeks. It is a strong and important commitment to the community. “It is an excellent program and opportunity for children to learn and appreciate our cultural heritage,” said one grateful parent. This year 23 students attended. Over its 10-year history, more than 300 students and 100 teachers, administrators, and school staff have been involved in the program.

Students, families, and the school benefit as students become more familiar with the history of the Philippines, the Tagalog language, and exposure to and experiences with the Filipino culture. The point is made: No group should feel like an overlooked island in our world.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

INTERNATIONAL NIGHT

EDWARD D. SADLER, JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

The motto of the Edward D. Sadler Elementary School is: “Educate globally competitive students who graduate as responsible citizens and lifelong learners who are prepared for success in higher education or in a career of choice.” The school addressed this mission at its first International Night and added two practical goals—to increase students’ awareness of different cultures and to encourage tolerance and appreciation of all who bring something new to the table.

The school’s parent involvement specialist considered the likely results of an International Night. She enlisted other schools and community businesses, teachers, families and students to support and participate in the festival.

Each grade, Pre-K to 5th, focused on a different country, including Madagascar, Greece, Mexico, India, China, Japan and Australia. The teachers geared their classes to include information about these countries and built in time for students to create crafts for the festival. The students decorated the halls with their crafts to build enthusiasm for International Night. Several local restaurants provided Chinese, Mexican, and Greek food, making the event even more special.

Families were welcomed to the gym, where they began their seven-country tour. There was a booth for each featured country with information, food samples, and crafts that students, parents, and other members of the family could examine and enjoy. In the booth on China, a community volunteer demonstrated Chinese calligraphy and explained the differences between the English and Chinese alphabets. Another community partner displayed and discussed a family quilt with pictures of her forefathers. At each booth, something interesting and intriguing was shared with the tourists.

After families traveled the globe, they assembled in the auditorium for a fashion show and dance performances. Students modeled traditional costumes from the different cultures. Students from a nearby private school performed ethnic dances and invited members of the audience to learn traditional dance steps.

After the festival, older students received the activity book *Every Culture Counts*. Students who were unable to attend received the book at school later in the week.

Along with the impressive work by students, many parents and members of the community were involved in International Night. The nearby college, Belmont Abbey, brought several students from the United Kingdom and the Caribbean, who contributed food, pictures, and small cultural items. One parent who had adopted her child from China brought a delicate traditional Chinese tea set. A kindergarten teacher made the Greek dessert, baklava, for everyone.

Many partners added something special to this celebration and study of different countries. About 60 parents and 40 students attended. Teachers and administrators, even those who could not attend because of graduate school courses, pitched in to make it a great event.

Sadler will continue to conduct and improve its International Night, focusing on the cultures and contributions of various countries. The activities clearly contribute to the school’s mission to promote globally competitive and culturally competent students.

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MULTICULTURAL OUTREACH

NORTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

LAYTON, UTAH

Moving to a new place is always a challenge—even more so if you also must learn a new language. To make sure that newcomers knew they were welcome, Northridge High School implemented Multicultural Outreach—designed to improve communications between home and school and increase parents’ involvement with their high school students and their school community.

Northridge High School has a diverse and dynamic population. It is close to a military installation and serves students from many places around the world. There also is a growing population of Spanish-speaking students and families. The school identified a need to make sure that all parents and students understood school processes and programs. To increase and improve communications with more parents, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators began Multicultural Outreach. The leaders hoped that parents—particularly those new to the school and speaking various languages—would become more comfortable about communicating with the school staff, regardless of their backgrounds, cultures, or languages.

The outreach project had several parts. At the beginning of the school year, new students and families were invited to an orientation session called Newbie Knights the week before school started. Participants came to the school cafeteria around mid-day for a pizza lunch and to tour the school. They were welcomed and guided by personable leaders from the Student Government. Bilingual students and school counselors conducted an informative question and answer session for students and their parents. A Spanish-speaking school counselor was on hand to translate information and answer questions.

The Newbie Knights activity was followed, after the school year started, by Spanish-speaking parent-teacher conferences. Parents made appointments for their conferences and teachers

invited them to a group orientation on how to help high school students with academic issues.

In Spanish, parents received information about the school’s advisory and tutorial programs, the counseling website, and tips on supporting students’ study skills. Parents gained a better understanding of the schools’ resources in their own language at the orientation session and in their parent-teacher conferences.

Finally, the Multicultural Outreach program organized a series of discussions about college planning and college visits for Spanish-speaking students and parents. Colleges and universities in the area collaborated by inviting students to visit and by conducting a number of multicultural events. These included Lunch Time College Visits, where students experienced life on the various campuses and gathered information to help them determine what they were looking for in a college. Also, academic advisors from colleges talked with students interested in furthering their education. To support students’ goals for postsecondary educational plans, Northridge’s website identifies scholarships and multicultural opportunities available to students.

Students and families agreed that the activities sponsored by Multicultural Outreach helped them learn about the school and the community. The ATP aims to improve this program by addressing questions and needs raised by students and families. This good activity gives the school a strong foundation for even broader outreach.

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NEVER GIVE UP

WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

It still is true: Hard work and determination count if students want to succeed in school and in life. Upward mobility is difficult—but possible in the United States of America. For Hispanic Heritage Month, Whittier Elementary wanted its students (94% Hispanic) to know that they can succeed academically and individually if they draw from their heritage and their family’s strengths and work for success in school.

With the help of the school’s PEAK! (Partners in Educating All Kids) partner—Con Agra Foods—the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers sponsored a poster contest and assembly entitled Never Give Up. The school’s goals for this project were to recognize the heritage of its Hispanic students, educate all students about Hispanic culture, and honor the achievements of its students.

To meet these goals, the school began by decorating its cafeteria with red, green, and white banners, along with flags of the U.S. and of Spanish-speaking countries around the world. Around the cafeteria, the planning team posted pictures of Hispanic women and men who had excelled in the arts, science, politics, business, and other fields. Then, Whittier Elementary held its poster contest.

The purpose of the poster contest was to showcase the success stories of Whittier’s own students. The school encouraged students to submit a poster that summed up his or her interpretation of the phrase “Never Give Up.” The contest’s judges were a team of Con Agra employees, who reviewed the students’ work. They marveled at the students’ artistic abilities and were encouraged by their hopes and dreams revealed in the posters.

One poster displayed the American flag with the caption, “Freedom is everywhere you look.” Others depicted students who were graduating from college or working in their future careers. Their dreams were as diverse as dentistry and the presidency of the United

States. Over 100 students submitted posters.

The winning posters were shown in a whole-school assembly. Winners received a gift bag from Con Agra Foods. At the assembly, a pair of Con Agra employees shared their own stories about their early struggles as young Hispanic students. The presentations gave Whittier’s students many examples of the importance of education and reinforced the posters’ theme—Never Give Up, even when facing difficult situations in school or elsewhere.

At the assembly, to celebrate the hopes and dreams of all of Whittier’s students, Baile Folklorico in full costume performed and a teacher-led Mariachi student group played lively traditional music.

The assembly and student poster contest stirred students to action. As the students planned and created their posters, they heard many stories, previously unknown, from families and community members. Perhaps most importantly, the activities helped students and those around them take a moment to recognize that everyone faces challenges in school and in life. The winning poster, “Your Parents Suffer for You,” was a two panel design showing a student in school on one side and a father driving a tractor on the other. The student wanted to show that many families in the community are working hard in agricultural jobs to enable their children to do better by succeeding in school.

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FAMILY FUN NIGHT

HOLLENBECK MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Being the new kid in the first year in middle school is tough—something like walking a tight rope from the old school to the new one. At Hollenbeck Middle School, students from four elementary schools transition to their new school every year. To help all students and families feel safe and welcome, Hollenbeck holds a Family Fun Night.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) has three goals for the event: Get everyone acquainted with each other and the school, help everybody feel comfortable, and foster a sense of community. By gathering parents, students, and teachers and engaging them in a plethora of activities, the school found a way for everyone to meet one another without school pressures or constraints. The ATP and other volunteers create a happy scene with bright balloons and signs that direct families to different activities.

Incoming students and their parents assemble in the gym for a short presentation by faculty that describes what to expect in a typical sixth grade day. Information focuses on students' lockers, lunch, dressing for PE, classroom curricula, and the school's expectations for students' behavior and character. After the introductory session, the principal and assistant principals greet everyone and enter them into a grand raffle for school wear and useful items donated from community businesses. Winners are announced periodically during the evening activities.

Students and families may go on a scavenger hunt that takes them to key areas in all parts of the building including the main office, library, nurse's office, and so on. Outside, parents, students, and teachers enjoy a barbecue dinner for one dollar. The PTO works closely with local businesses who provide the dinner fare at a discount to keep the price down for parents. For dessert, students and parents are free to make ice cream sundaes at a sweet buffet in the cafeteria.

In the commons, a karaoke machine waits for talented (or brave) students and parents to take the stage and sing a song or two or lead others in a song. In other parts of the gym, families and faculty may compete in basketball and volleyball games.

The auditorium hosts a family-friendly and educational movie, with popcorn and juice at a concession stand. The chess team set up a table for anyone to join a game and, perhaps, join the school's chess team. Similarly, the school band and jazz band play to entertain and to attract prospective band members from among the new students.

The PTO has a booth for parents to join on the spot and opportunities for parents to sign up to serve as volunteers for various projects according to their interests and availability.

Nearly one thousand students and parents came to the last Family Fun Night and praised all that was going on. Said a parent, "This evening was really enjoyable... What's more, we spent time with our daughter's teachers and now feel that we have built a strong support system around our daughter to be successful at school."

At Family Fun Night, students and families learn the geography of the middle school, which is important. They also experience the spirit of the school, which is really powerful. Every tightrope is easier to walk with a safety net.

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PARENT-TO-PARENT NIGHT

JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Transitions are always challenging. When they move from the elementary to middle grades, students must leave the familiar for the unknown. They enter a middle or junior high school wondering about their work, their friends, their teachers—everything about their new young lives. Parents, too, move with their children from their old school to the new one. They must feel prepared for the transition.

Jefferson Junior High School thinks parents are key to students' success in the middle grades. To support students' and parents' transitions, the school conducts Parent-to-Parent Night. This meeting provides an informal venue for parents to learn what is in store for their early adolescents.

For Parent-to-Parent Night, six parents of junior high students are selected for a panel of experts. Their children must have come to Jefferson Junior High from one of the three elementary "feeder" schools. Their children also must have been active at Jefferson in many activities so that the panelists know about the programs and services at the school. Finally, the panelists must be articulate and helpful people who are willing to speak to a large group.

The panel meets with the in-coming students' parents to clarify how the new school works for and with students and families. They aim to ease parents' concerns by presenting good information in a caring environment.

At Parent-to-Parent Night, the elementary school students' parents receive information about the school and a short "bio" of each panelist. This includes their experiences at Jefferson Junior High as parents and their students' activities. After short presentations, parents may ask the panelists questions directly or write questions on cards for the panelists to answer. No topic is taboo.

The goal is to have a lively, honest, informative conversation that will, indeed, help in-coming students' parents feel part of and comfortable with Jefferson. Should the panel hear a question that they cannot answer, a teacher or administrator may address the issue, adding to the richness of the discussion.

The program obviously benefits parents by helping them learn the ropes from the "seasoned pro" panelists. The in-coming parents also begin to build their social network of other parents who attended and presented at Parent-to-Parent night. The exchange also helps teachers and administrators at the start of the school year connect with parents who know how the school works.

Students benefit, too, when their parents have some knowledge about the school. They may feel more secure—emotionally—if their parents are comfortable with the school, its teachers, and administrators. Students may feel more confident—academically—if their parents are aware of the schools' goals for students, teachers' homework policies, required classes, and other topics discussed at Parent-to-Parent Night.

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PIT CREW: ON THE ROAD

FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Type 5

For Francis Howell Middle School, the problem with parental involvement isn't the desire—it's the distance. The school has an active and creative Parent Involvement Team called the PIT Crew, but its students come from nine zip codes. It is difficult for parents who live far from the school to come to PIT Crew meetings and other school-based activities. Despite this challenge, Francis Howell Middle wanted to make sure that every parent was involved in school decisions and in their children's education. The PIT Crew decided to take some meetings On The Road.

Francis Howell Middle has one neighborhood that is farther away from the school than the rest. Understandably, these families attended fewer meetings and activities at the school building than did other families. But, the PIT Crew knew, all parents should have good information from the school and everyone's opinions should be heard concerning school decisions that affect students and families. The PIT Crew wanted to take some steps to connect with families from the distant neighborhood and enable them to be more engaged in middle school activities.

In addition, the partnership team recognized that one of its feeder elementary schools was in the distant zip code area. Francis Howell wanted to welcome these families and ease their transition to middle school life. On the Road was a multi-purpose plan to increase the involvement of current and in-coming families from this attendance zone.

First, the PIT Crew circulated a flyer to parents in the targeted area to tell everyone about the meeting On the Road. They also worked with the feeder elementary school to host the meeting to make it convenient for parents to attend.

Parents of students who were currently enrolled at Francis Howell and parents of the rising sixth graders came to the arranged PIT Crew meeting. The school's principal greeted the group and discussed the purpose of the PIT Crew and its effects on the school. She highlighted many noteworthy accomplishments and encouraged the parents to join the team, attend activities, and support their children's education through the middle grades.

Taking PIT Crew meetings On The Road had multiple benefits. The partnership team recruited new members. Families from the targeted neighborhood felt stronger support from the school. Parents recognized that they could be involved, even from a distance.

The traveling meeting also showcased the outstanding parental involvement programs and practices that are conducted at Francis Howell Middle School. By reaching out to rising sixth graders' parents, the PIT Crew alerted these parents to the importance of their continued involvement in their children's education. One parent who attended the meeting commented, "It was great to know that parents can still be involved at the middle school level."

Similarly, a member of the PIT Crew remarked, "It was exciting to see the fifth grade parents enthusiastic about wanting to be involved at the middle school level. ... They wanted to know more about how they can help." In sum, On the Road was a no frills, no cost activity that helped close the distance between the school and its families.

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TRANSITIONS

READY TO GO

ROGER WOLCOTT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT

The jump from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten is an important transition in children's and parents' school lives. The Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center knew that this switch required attention. Parents, too, were concerned. The Family Center Leader met with several parents who wondered how the new school would treat their children, what the children's days would be like, and how parents would be welcomed and involved.

The Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center also houses the town's public kindergarten. Thus, orienting students and parents to kindergarten was, in large part, the Center's responsibility. The partnership team and staff wrote and produced an informational DVD—Ready to Go—to make sure that the preschool, kindergarten, parents, and children were ready for a good transition.

Every incoming kindergarten student received one of these DVDs, along with other useful information. The DVD, which included the faculty as actors, showed parents an average school day and typical activities for new kindergartners. Teachers also staged some learning activities that students would experience in kindergarten.

The DVD also provided a virtual tour of the school for parents and children. They visited important places in the building, met the new teachers, and saw their rooms. The DVD also included a collection of fun photographs of various kindergarten activities, classes, and events.

With the DVD, parents received a number of useful resources, including a calendar of fun readiness activities for parents to

prepare young students for kindergarten. The information packet also included information on health services, insurance, community resources, and registration materials.

The Center staff also included a book that was inspired by the video. It featured tips to help parents prepare their child for his or her first day in kindergarten. The book is short and clear so that parents can read it with their children to ease their concerns about their move to kindergarten. The book was so popular that it was distributed to other early childhood centers in the area, and was translated into Spanish.

The Ready to Go DVD—well named, simple, and powerful—prompted one parent to express her thanks: “I liked knowing what my child would be doing every day in school.” The DVD was distributed to over 200 students and their parents. It reduced many a fear about an early and important transition in students' school careers.

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SIP 'N' SOB

DELMAE HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Dropping kids off on their first day of kindergarten can be an emotional time for many parents. They see their little ones move into a formal schoolroom and, sometimes, it is just too much. Delmae Heights Elementary knows that parents care about their children and want the best for them. With its Sip 'N' Sob program, the school hopes to ease the transition for parents and their youngsters.

Delmae's teachers and administrators wanted to build positive connections with parents from the child's first day in kindergarten. Sip 'N' Sob gives parents a unique way to connect with the school and with their children. They also demonstrate the power of writing.

Parents are welcomed to the school cafeteria after they drop their children off for the first day of kindergarten. They are served a snack with juice, milk, coffee, and, for some, tissues. They are guided to write personal messages to their children on fun, themed stationery provided by the school.

These notes are genuine and very moving. They show clearly that parents love and care for their child and have hopes and dreams for their child's success in school. Some notes congratulated the child on the big step of entering kindergarten. Some encouraged their children to learn a lot in school. Others declared their love and their hopes for happy school days.

Some stationery was sent home to parents who could not come to the Sip 'N' Sob gathering. In this way, no child missed getting an important letter.

Teachers read the letters to the children, took their photos, and displayed the photo and letter on a bulletin board in the hallway. One teacher explained, "My students look forward to having their letters from their parents read aloud to them." The letters are displayed for all to read and to see the goals that all parents have when their children enter school.

The notes serve several purposes. Children love getting the messages from their parents. They also see that writing is a powerful tool for expressing their ideas and emotions. At the end of the year, the letters are sent home with the students. Parents may talk with students about the year in kindergarten, or letters may be saved in scrapbooks or posted on refrigerators.

Sip 'N' Sob has helped to reduce students' and parents' anxieties about entering kindergarten. The practice is well-known in the area and was featured in a newspaper article this year. For very little cost, Sip 'N' Sob makes the first day of kindergarten less painful for parents and very memorable for students.

Type 1

TRANSITIONS

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WILDCAT WELCOME

WASHINGTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Parents make transitions with their children from preschool to elementary to middle to high school. At Washington Junior High School, the partnership team (School, Family, Community Partnerships-SFCP) knows that if parents know about a new school, their children will be more comfortable about the changes that await them.

Wildcat Welcome is a simple way to welcome parents and their children who move into the community. Parents and other volunteers on the partnership team contact these parents to acquaint them with the school. When parents move to Naperville and enroll their children at Washington, they fill out a form with their contact information and give permission for a parent volunteer to call them to talk about the school, their child, and prospects for a successful transition.

The volunteers make the calls to welcome the parents to the school community and to answer any questions they may have about the neighborhood or the school. This helps relieve the parents' anxiety about being in a new place. In turn, the Wildcat Welcome also eases the way for new students. If parents know how things work and are confident about the school, students will be more confident about their new placements. The volunteers call these parents at several key points in the school year—on the child's first day of school, before the first parent-teacher conference, and before important school events.

Parent volunteers must be willing to make calls to talk with other parents. They are prepared with in-depth knowledge on all of the

school's policies, programs, and services for students and families. Wildcat Welcome enables parents to volunteer who might be employed during the school day, as their calls can be made on their own schedules.

Washington Junior High School administrators, teachers, and partnership team report many benefits from the Wildcat Welcome program. Every parent is welcome at school, even if they just moved to Naperville. The new parents begin to build social ties with experienced Washington Junior High parents. From the first day at school, students know that their families are part of the school community. New students adjust more quickly and have better work habits in class.

"I changed schools several times when I was young and know how it feels," said one volunteer. "Having someone you can go to other than the school [staff] eases the transition and makes you feel more welcome." Because the program is inexpensive and easy to run with significant benefits, the school has succinct advice for others: Just do it!

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3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIP GOALS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help create a welcoming, family-friendly school. These practices aim to reach out to involve all families and the community.

BBES SUPPORTS OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

BOLLMAN BRIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JESSUP, MARYLAND

Veteran's Day marks the nation's appreciation of all veterans (living or deceased) for their service to this country. The holiday (previously Armistice Day) has been celebrated for almost one hundred years. Sometimes, though, more than a holiday is needed for veterans and the active military to know that people at home care deeply about their safety and return. The leaders at Bollman Bridge Elementary School thought it was time to support the troops, particularly the soldiers and their families who are based in the neighborhood and who send their children to Bollman Bridge.

First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden developed *Joining Forces*—an initiative asking the nation to support the troops and their families. To heed that call, Bollman Bridge, which is close to the Fort Meade Military Base, wanted to acknowledge the struggles and the contributions of soldiers and their families, and support them in some way.

The school was aware of the activities at the base and the impact of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Teachers and administrators knew that although many students and their families at the school needed some support or assistance, many did not know that the school would lend them a hand or were shy to ask. To make their intentions clear, the school planned BBES Supports Our Military Families. The program was conducted in April from 6:30-7:30 p.m. to meet families in this neighborhood and to recognize the importance of the military and their families.

All families with veterans or members of the military on active duty were welcomed to school for the program. First, the school leaders introduced key partners and shared statements of purpose to help everyone get to know one another and to understand the goals for the evening.

One segment provided time for reflection and for sharing information. A father on active duty shared his story. He told how his family spent many sleepless nights hoping and praying for his safe return. His story moved many in the audience to tears. He revealed that he served the country for over 20 years and this school event marked the first time he had been thanked and supported by his community.

In another segment of the program, military families spoke to the audience about their experiences and circumstances. Several voiced their appreciation for the support shown by the school. Still others expressed how happy they were to make new contacts with military and other families in the area who shared common struggles.

The staff at Bollman Bridge described many school and district resources that were designed to assist military families and their children. These included Links to Resources for Military Families and a Facebook page designed specifically for Bollman Bridge Elementary.

The evening ended with refreshments and with the creation of service banners, which now hang proudly on a Wall of Honor outside the school's front office. The school gave gifts of appreciation to soldiers and their families.

BBES Supports Our Military Families was reported in the local newspaper. This resulted in a great deal of positive feedback from the community and beyond. Bollman Bridge will continue a program of appreciation so that all of its military families know that the school is there to help all parents and children.

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Type 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

BRADDOCK'S BOUTIQUE

BRADDOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ANNANDALE, VIRGINIA

It's tough to focus in school if you are cold or wet, or have no jacket or gloves on a rainy day. That is why Braddock Elementary School decided to expand its help-yourself-closet to an actual used clothing store, Braddock's Boutique.

Until recently, the school had a closet of clothes that families could borrow or use if they spoke with a school counselor or staff member. To accommodate families' needs in a more accessible way, the school expanded the closet to a Boutique. Helping families with clothing needs is not a new idea for schools in the district. Braddock's Boutique took on an added goal—to attract and serve families of English Language Learners (ELLs) who sometimes are reluctant to come to the school building. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and school staff knew that getting parents to come to and trust the school was important for reducing their fears about interacting with educators.

The Boutique is located in a large storage room off the cafeteria. The partnership team prepared the space, secured donations, found clothing racks, and opened its doors. It operates much like a real store, with a regular schedule (Fridays, 9-10:30 a. m.) and rules and regulations for keeping things organized and running smoothly.

The Boutique has a parent management volunteer team, many of whom have little or no English language skills themselves. Families can buy a year-long membership for \$5, which entitles them to two visits per month. Or, they can pay \$2 to visit the store on any occasion. Either way, customers may take as many articles of clothing as fit into a shopping bag on each visit.

The staff restocks the Boutique weekly. All items in the store are donated. Proceeds go

toward buying additional storage bins or racks. Any other profits goes to the school's fund for helping families in financial need. In short, the Boutique relies on volunteers and donations. Maintenance is pretty simple—the Boutique must be swept, organized, and restocked with clothing.

The clothing makes an immediate difference in the lives of children and families, but the Boutique has also been successful in getting parents to feel comfortable about coming to the school building. During the Boutique's first year, 25 families bought membership cards. This year that number tripled.

Every Friday, 20 to 30 families shop at Braddock's Boutique, along with some school employees. "It's a great way to get to know other moms, exchange ideas, and make new friends," said one regular shopper. "For me it's a fun day when I go to the Boutique."

Parent involvement is essential to children's learning. The Boutique helps parents clothe their children, a critical parenting skill, and shows many families that the school is a caring place. The ATP and parent volunteers hope that parents who learn more about the school will return for parent-teacher conferences and to support students' programs. Through its Boutique, Braddock is strengthening the sense of community in the school.

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CALLING ALL JAGUARS

MABLETON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MABLETON, GEORGIA

Most students need to know that someone cares about them and the work they do. After all, day after day, students are assigned work in all subjects, projects, essays, examples, and experiments. They are asked to think and write, build and present their ideas and creations. At Mableton Elementary School, Calling All Jaguars ensures that every student is known, supported, assisted, and recognized for good work.

Designed by Mableton’s Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and the faculty, adults keep a close eye on students so that they know when and why to praise or reward them for improving skills and for completing work. Calling All Jaguars is the vehicle for publicly recognizing students’s work and for alerting parents to students’ progress.

The strength of this program is in its simplicity. When students complete their class and homework assignments, teachers not only record their accomplishments but also post high-quality work outside of the classroom for all to see. The principal, assistant principal, and other faculty review the posted work and, if they believe it is particularly noteworthy, will stamp it to note their enjoyment of good work.

For selected projects, the principal and other “readers” select two outstanding pieces of student work for special recognition. The students are called to the principal’s office—clearly not for being in trouble. The student and the principal then talk about the students’ good work, exploring the students’ ideas.

Following their discussion, the principal calls the student’s parents—with the student present—to praise the child’s high-quality work. The conversation makes clear that the principal knows the assignment and has discussed it with the student. The point is to clarify the importance of the assignment, the student’s ideas, and the final product.

A list of all students who earned this kind of praise for good and interesting work is then posted in the hallway where it may be seen and discussed by others for at least two months. Students receive their own copy of the list to save with their work and share with their family.

This is an important program that is not very common. Teachers often recognize good work by students, but really interesting ideas and students’ efforts are rarely something to celebrate. Sports achievements usually get more attention. At Mableton Elementary, however, the ATP, principal, and faculty want students to understand that their time on assignments in writing, reading, math, science, and other areas is important and worth others’ time to read, discuss, and reward.

Said a teacher, “Calling All Jaguars has motivated my students to achieve more so as to receive the one-on-one time with an administrator. It’s a great program.” The practice spurs students to think carefully about the work they do. A student remarked, “I loved that they would call my parents. They thought I was in trouble, but I had done something well. It made me laugh.”

Word spreads quickly if teachers and principals call parents about good work and good deeds. It makes everyone take students’ work more seriously, including the students themselves.

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CLARKE STREET CONNECTION SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

CLARKE STREET SCHOOL MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Type 2

The school newspaper is a standard communication tool that keeps families aware of school dates, events, and important decisions. It takes some work to keep it in circulation. When the Clarke Street School's paper stopped printing due, in part, to lack of funds, people missed it. Parents asked for it in surveys conducted at the beginning of the school year. School staff expressed similar sentiments.

How could the work of compiling, printing, and distributing a newspaper be done, and by whom? The workload was real. The company that printed the paper was no longer available. Yet, everyone wanted the paper back. A committee of three teachers, one parent, the director of the SPARK (Early Literacy) program, and an AmeriCorps Vista volunteer agreed on a few points.

First, no one person would have to produce the school newspaper alone. The committee listed tasks and distributed leadership roles, sharing responsibilities with others at the school. Second, a method for submitting information for the paper was simplified. Everyone at school could have a voice in the paper, and to share important information with students and families.

Teachers and students could contribute easily in one of three ways. They could write a summary of a class activity; submit students' high-quality work (e.g., stories, poems, essays, reports, or other views); or interview a student about something he or she was learning. The committee also agreed to find a company to print the paper for as low a cost as possible. A local print shop agreed to do this work for a reasonable fee.

To encourage submissions and to sustain enthusiasm for the paper, the committee sent reminders to teachers in their weekly communications and to students in daily announcements. When items came in for the paper, the AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer compiled and organized columns and articles.

Ready to go, the paper needed a name. A school-wide contest was held to name the paper. The winning name—Clarke Street Connection—seemed just right.

After the first issue came out, more students and teachers asked how they could be involved. Interest remains high. Work has been shared. Students enjoy seeing their work in the newspaper. Parents always like to read what students wrote.

As a new project, there are some kinks to work out. Nevertheless, whether low-tech or high-tech, printed or e-mailed, monthly or quarterly, school newspapers remain a good way to connect school and home.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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FUNDRAISING FOR FAMILY EDUCATION

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

The American Society for Deaf Children Conference is a five-day meeting for families with excellent workshops that help parents raise and educate their deaf children. While parents are in sessions, the children enjoy an environment similar to summer camp. This year, the conference and camp traveled to Frederick, Maryland. For the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, this was a rare opportunity for parents and their children. The school decided that it would do its best to send every family to the conference who wanted to attend. This required a year of purposeful fund raising.

Many parents of children at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf are unable to come to the school for classes during the school year because they live an hour or more away from the building. And, most parents of children at the school do not have the funds to attend the summer conference and camp, which costs over \$1,000 for a family of four. The school knew that the conference offered valuable information and experiences for families and for students.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other school leaders started planning events to raise money to support 28 families who wanted to attend the conference and camp. Some scholarship money was already in hand, which provided each family with about \$250 to start. More was needed to reach the group's goal.

The 2010-11 school year began with a flea market to sell items donated by the school staff and local community. In addition, the school ran food concessions and rented tables to vendors and individual families who wanted to sell items to raise conference funds. The flea market contributed about \$500 toward the school's goal.

Creative and profitable events followed throughout the school year. Among other activities, the school held a pizza sale, bake sales, acquired Avon products for families to sell to others, and held a BINGO night. Families sold

candy bars and held an auction featuring crafts that families made to contribute to the conference fund.

Some families did other fund raising. One parent ordered silicon bracelets à la *Livestrong*, but with *Deaf Awareness* printed on them. Another made a Valentine's Day gift basket and raffled it off. The parents' creativity and sense of community were outstanding.

By the end of the school year, the 28 families all were able to plan their trip to the conference and camp this summer. Their basic expenses were covered, thanks to the teamwork and hard work conducted all year by educators, families, and community members. A single dad was pleased that he had funds to attend the conference. "I can't wait to go," he said. "This is going to be a great trip for me and my son." Others echoed his sentiments. The conference and camp may not be in the Pennsylvania area for a while. Thus, this could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for these families and students.

Sometimes fund raising is criticized as an old way of involving parents. In this case (and in many others) fund raising was a useful strategy—part of a comprehensive partnership program. Here, fund raising supported parents' attendance at a particularly important conference for their children's success in school and in life.

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H. A. R. T.: HELP AND RESPECT TOGETHERNESS

KITZMILLER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

KITZMILLER, MARYLAND

Type 6

Senior citizens in the community can support a school in many ways and a school can support its senior citizens. Kitzmiller Elementary is aware of the value of its seniors and their needs. In its activity, Help and Respect Togetherness (H. A. R. T.), the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others at the school plan a day each year to honor its senior citizens with visits from students and their families.

Nearly 110 members of the close-knit Kitzmiller community share in the school's good will toward seniors and in some good cooking. The program has become an anticipated annual event by everyone involved.

The activity developed as part of the school's character education program to give students an opportunity to broaden their understanding of "community" and to meet new people in their area. Although it started as a Valentine's Day celebration one year, it expanded to a more comprehensive springtime event.

Guided by the ATP, parents, school staff and volunteers work with local churches and community organizations to identify seniors who would enjoy and benefit from the school's outreach activities. With the list of names and addresses in hand, the participants prepare food and activities for H. A. R. T. Food includes Mason jars filled with dry ingredients for making soup and easy-to-read recipes. This fulfills safety requirements set by the health department and provides seniors with healthy ready-to-make meals.

A few days before the selected delivery date, the school group creates a soup assembly line. Each class moves through this line, assembling as many jars of soup as needed. In other jars, they prepare fixings and directions for a delicious dessert.

Students have another role in making cards with personalized messages for the seniors. In clever, creative, and sincere messages, the

cards tell the seniors that they are honored and respected by the school and the community.

The project is supported by several community groups including the Lions Club, Empowerment Group, and the school's business partners. They donate funds and time to cover costs, which total about \$50 for 100 deliveries.

The H. A. R. T. team of teachers, staff and students make the in-town deliveries. Parent volunteers drive students to make deliveries on the outskirts of town. Afterward, all of the participants return to school for lunch and for photos for the local newspaper. The students know they are part of a meaningful and fun experience. "I think it's really cool and good to give to the older people," said one student.

All of the seniors enjoy meeting the students who deliver their nutritious gifts. "I cannot begin to explain the looks on each and every face as they receive their packaged goodies from our students," said the principal. "It truly is a heartwarming experience."

The project reinforces the schools' lessons for children on positive behavior and the joys of giving to others. More importantly, H. A. R. T. brings the community together and spotlights a school with heart.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

HANNAH'S HEART STUFFED ANIMAL DRIVE

WESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WESTLAKE, LOUISIANA

The winter holiday season is a busy and happy time. At Westwood Elementary School, the students focus on the spirit of giving to others, which, indeed, is at the heart of the holidays.

A group of fifth graders had been brainstorming to find a way to combine service and charity. They knew that they needed a project that could include everyone, regardless of religious affiliation or financial status. One member of the group suggested that the school collect stuffed animals to donate to charity. They decided to name the drive to honor a classmate who had died in a tragic accident.

The Hannah's Heart Stuffed Animal Drive aimed to do two things: provide toys to needy children and help local police officers when they were working to help frightened children. They planned to send toys to children in need. They also wanted to give some stuffed animals to the police department to enable officers to use or distribute them when they were working with children and their families in difficult situations. In both cases, the animals would provide some joy to the children.

The group's good ideas were supported by the school's partnership team, teachers, administrators, and parents. To reach their goal, fifth graders distributed flyers and sent messages about the program on the electronic bulletin board at the front of the school. Quickly enough, donations of new and lovingly-used stuffed animals came in, including a large Beanie Baby collection.

To honor their classmate, Hannah, the fifth graders tied pink tags to the stuffed animals with the project's name. It helped the students to remember their classmate in this way. They realized that everyone's contributions and their hard work would, in fact, help many little children.

Hannah's Heart Stuffed Animal Drive is now an annual, school-wide effort. Stuffed animals have been sent as far away as Mexico, and thanks and praise were returned to the school. The plan to help the police succeeded, too. A police sergeant reported, "A lot of time when we get calls and children are involved, they're frightened of us because of our uniforms and the situation. Having a stuffed animal in the trunk of the car to offer them helps show them we're there to help."

The project is also continuing to honor the memory of Hannah. Said one volunteer from a children's shelter, "Many of the kids have asked about pink tags on their stuffed animal. After we explain to them where they came from and why the tags are there, they cuddle or cling tightly to their stuffed animal. It's like they know someone out there cares about them."

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Type 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY: SERVICE-BASED LEARNING

FRANK W. COX HIGH SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Type 6

There are many serious problems in our communities that need to be solved. Poverty and its related issues head that list and pose real challenges to improve the circumstances of the poorest among us. Frank W. Cox High School wanted its students to understand the nature and extent of social problems in their area and to try to solve some through the school's program of Service-Based Learning.

The community service project's goal was to help students become globally aware, independent and responsible learners, and productive citizens. To start, teachers embedded the project in tenth grade Honors English classes. Students were asked to select a service learning activity that they could accomplish, and, by so doing, improve the lives of others. The students decided that they could make a real difference if they worked together to solve targeted issues of hunger.

Students began by conducting research. More than 100 tenth grade Honors English students toured the Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia. The on-site staff gave them an overview of the situation. They reported how many people the Food Bank served and how much food is needed to feed the hungry. The staff also explained the Food Bank's mission and strategic plan. They provided the organization's annual report. After the tour, students asked questions to learn what they could do to help solve the problem of hunger in the area.

Next, the tenth graders and other students wanted to find out what it felt like to feel hungry. Researchers estimate that 60% of the world's population eats a small bowl of rice each day and 25% eat just a little better. By contrast, 15% do not want for food.

For a simulation, 220 students entered the cafeteria for lunch and received a ticket selected at random. The ticket's color determined whether the student received a bowl of rice, a bowl of rice and some fruit, or a full meal. The students reflected on this experience.

Finally, students participated in the Food Bank's Extreme Food Drive. Students created posters, spoke in their classes about the project, and went door to door in their neighborhoods collecting food for the Food Bank. Eventually, all students in the school participated.

The students organized and boxed the donations. With support and music from a local radio station, the students loaded the food into a Food Bank truck. In all, students, families, and others in the community donated over 7,000 pounds of food to the Food Bank.

Importantly, students took the lead to organize the project. They learned a lot and produced impressive results. Teachers helped them along the way and families and others contributed to the project. With service-based learning, students and the school made a difference in the community.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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PARENT “SHARE THE LOVE” DAY

EASTMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL HIGHLAND, UTAH

Eastmont Middle School staff wanted to improve the way the community perceived the school and its students. They also wanted to increase family and community involvement to improve the school climate and to increase students’ success in school. Good things were happening at school, but the new curricula, teaching approaches, and students’ accomplishments were not known to many parents and other community members. To highlight the school’s good work, Eastmont developed Parent “Share the Love” Day.

The school recognized that students’ parents were busy and that many were dealing with economic and other family challenges. It was hard to involve parents at the school and in students’ educational activities.

At the same time, teachers were striving to excite students about learning, improve test scores, and celebrate progress. They knew that they could do more to improve the school climate and students’ successes if more parents were aware of the school’s agenda and if they became enthusiastic partners in their children’s education. To communicate these ideas and to encourage parents’ support for upcoming school events, Eastmont decided to open its doors, shine light on its accomplishments, and invite parents to come take a look.

Parent “Share the Love” Day was designed for students to bring-a-parent-to-school to learn more about the school’s program and goals for student success. Prior to the parents’ and students’ arrival, Eastmont’s Parent Teacher Association decorated the school. Balloons filled the hallways and posters provided directions to classrooms and other areas of the school. Parents signed in, received visitors badges, and were welcomed to Share the Love.

Parents followed their middle schoolers from class to class. Teachers prepared interesting lessons to give parents a sense of what a typical day was like, and how their children were challenged to learn. Parents saw new and improved school curricula and students in action.

If parents elected to take a break from attending class with their children, they could go to the school library for discussions for and with other parents. Topics included “Don’t Be the Last to Know” on preventing drug use and gang involvement, and “Parents, Speak Up” on ways to talk with early adolescents on challenging topics such as healthy sexual development, and more.

Parents joined their student for lunch in the cafeteria. Those who stayed the whole day for more classes received a thank you gift..

At first students were not sure about having parents at the middle school. However, within an hour, the office was helping students call their parents to come. Because of good publicity and outstanding organization, almost 300 parents shared their love with Eastmont Middle School. Parents were very positive about the challenging work their students were doing. One parent commented, “I can’t believe how good these teachers are!” With a sigh of relief, another admitted, “I’m glad I’m out of school. I could never do this work!” At Eastmont Middle, a little love went a long way to increase positive family and school connections.

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PARENT/STUDENT “REWARD CARD”

PATERSON SCHOOL #7 PATERSON, NEW JERSEY

Everyone knows that parents’ participation in school activities is extremely rewarding. Parents benefit, students benefit, and the school benefits from parents’ support. Yet, there are challenges to engage busy parents in productive ways.

At Paterson #7, some students’ parents work more than one job. Some do not speak or read English. Others have transportation difficulties. These factors often result in low attendance at school-sponsored events. Paterson’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) created The Reward Card for parents and students in grades 5-8. The idea was to urge students to encourage their parents to support and attend school activities.

When parents attend school events with their children, points are added to their Reward Cards. The points can be redeemed for a number of prizes for students. Students know that they will receive tangible “extra credit” points if their parents come to school for meetings, workshops, and other events. Said one student, “All I have to do is get my parents to go to a meeting, and I get a reward.”

The school planned a series of events for the school year so that parents and students could schedule their participation. These included parent-teacher-student conferences about report cards, workshops for parents, meetings, and other whole-school or grade-specific events. Parents found this helpful, as one noted, “I love having the dates for all events in advance so I can save the date.”

The school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) organized some activities at each grade level so that all students and parents had equal opportunities to become involved and reap rewards. At events, the ATP and teachers tracked attendance and used a special punch to record points on the Reward Cards.

Students were reminded about the activities and the related rewards. In its first year, the Reward Card boosted attendance for the school’s Math Night and Literacy Night. The school’s Organic Luncheon had a healthy turnout. The school’s garden project in the spring attracted many who volunteered to continue the garden over the summer.

Total points on the Reward Cards will be calculated at the end of the year. Various prizes include a movie in the auditorium, a trip to the park, and others.

Parents gain many educational and personal rewards when they are engaged with the school and when they support students’ activities. However, by recognizing and thanking parents for their time, the school captured students’ and parents’ attention about the importance of involvement. More and different parents have become involved at Paterson #7—very rewarding all around.

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PARENTS: PARTNERS IN DECISION MAKING

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

It's much easier to initiate school improvement when staff, students, and parents work together. Park Middle School has set ambitious goals for increasing students' success in school. School leaders wanted more parents to participate in recognizing students' good work and progress on report card grades, citizenship, good work habits, school spirit, manners, and reading skills.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and faculty implemented Parents: Partners in Decision Making to increase parental participation in school assemblies that recognize students' successes. They also planned to use these occasions to gather parents' views about setting and attaining school improvement goals.

The school holds an Honor Roll Assembly three times a year to recognize students' academic and other achievements. Faculty noticed that parents who came to the assemblies were eager to share their ideas with teachers and members of the ATP and, often, offered to help the school. The ATP reasoned that if more parents came to the Honor Roll Assemblies, more students would feel strong support and pride in their accomplishments and the school could use time with parents to hear their views on school programs and decisions.

In the past, the school sent notes home to parents about the Honor Roll Assembly. To encourage more parents to attend, members of the faculty and ATP made phone calls in English or in Spanish to each students' home. To assist in making these phone calls, the ATP expanded its pool of bilingual volunteers to call parents in the most friendly way—in their home language. This personal touch and emphasis on the meaning of the honor roll awards boosted parent attendance up to 150 parents per grade level, from its previous level of 5-15 attendees per grade level.

This simple practice not only increased attendance, but also improved school climate. One student mentioned, "My mom had never been invited to school when I was not in trouble. [At first] she was a little nervous."

The ATP built on parents' enthusiasm and listened to their ideas for improving the assembly and for motivating students to achieve at high levels. Parents suggested that the school lengthen the assembly so that each student's accomplishments could be appreciated. This change was made, and parents saw that they had a voice in the decision. The ATP also made parents part of the awards ceremony by asking each one to present their child with a flower to congratulate them for their good work. The students gave their flowers to a teacher to thank them for their help in becoming honor roll awardees.

Honor Roll Assemblies showcase students for their academic advances and for behavioral excellence, regardless of their ability levels. Parents see that good behavior and good citizenship are valued, even if students are not the top academic achievers in their class. Students see that their parents support their efforts to reach school goals. With Parents: Partners in Decision Making, students see that the school values their parents' participation.

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POPSICLE PARTY

ANN REID EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Type 3

Before its grand opening, Ann Reid Early Childhood Center wanted to welcome its incoming students and their families, and acquaint them with the new facility, the staff, and administrators. The teachers and staff wanted their young friends to explore and play in all of the exciting, new areas of the center. They invited teachers, parents, students, and neighbors to come to a party—a Popsicle Party. Three-year-olds love popsicles!

Teachers speaking English and Spanish led parents and children on a tour of the facilities. Volunteers distributed popsicles and greeted families. Administrators chatted with parents and children. Everyone was learning what the new Center had to offer.

As parents continued the tour and discussions, children explored the inside and outside play areas. Each student received a deep blue Ann Reid T-shirt. The shirts had a trio of school-ready ducklings walking across the midsection. Each shirt had a child's name on it, too, along with the slogan, "Make Way for Ann Reid Ducklings." Teachers also wore their signature shirts.

The children met new friends as they played with their soon-to-be classmates. Photos showed many smiles, excited children, and lots of activity. More than 750 children and adults attended the open house and welcome party.

The center is an impressive place. It is a 48,000-square-foot school for 3- to 5-year-olds with vegetated roofs, rain gardens, and other environmentally-friendly construction features that make it a certified "green" building. Hallways have floor-to-ceiling tackable wall surfaces and rotating letter/number blocks designed for spontaneous teaching moments. The hallways twist and curve in ways that catch a young eye and spark imagination.

The Popsicle Party not only showed off the school but also demonstrated how family-school-community cooperation would be a hallmark of the new center. Parents donated decorations and T-shirts, and even pitched in to clean up. One teacher designed the school logo. Others created tour routes and volunteered as tour guides.

Because the Center did not have a Home and School Association yet, with a budget for partnership activities, teams from other schools gave Ann Reid funds for the event. The district's food service donated the popsicles and many people lent coolers to keep the popsicles frozen on an August afternoon.

Everyone agreed it was a great, family-friendly kick off. The Popsicle Party showed that, even before the first day of school, Ann Reid Early Childhood Center had all its ducks in a row.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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POWERFUL PRESENTATIONS

BRADFORD SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

Ideally every parent would attend every meeting and event at school. Of course, perfect attendance never occurs. Still, a number of promising practices are known to boost parents' attendance: providing child care, serving dinner, involving the students, and actively advertising—to name a few. One of the best ways to ensure high attendance at a workshop is to discuss topics that parents are interested in. Bradford School followed this plan to present information that parents wanted to know.

Bradford's faculty was particularly interested in increasing the participation of parents from all of the school's populations. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) noted that some parents did not attend because they felt left out, or were just not motivated to invest time in some topics.

Among the Powerful Presentations, the planning group made sure to include something for everyone. The topics selected aimed to educate, entertain, and familiarize parents with the school and with their children's programs. All presentations shared information with parents and took questions and suggestions from parents.

The first meeting focused on academic programs and services at the school. The academic intervention team was introduced and the advanced academics program described. One of the teachers on the academic intervention team and the principal presented details on the two topics so that parents really understood how they contributed to students' success.

The next meeting featured Philosophy for Parents. Teachers spoke to parents about the school's program called Philosophy for Children. This initiative, headed by professors from a local university, gathers students together for discussions about ethics and moral issues. At this Powerful Presentation, however, the parents were the ones to sit in a circle and discuss their ideas to see how the philoso-

phy program for children worked at the school.

The third presentation was the Principal's Powerful Presentation. The principal spoke to parents about current and prospective learning activities available to Bradford students. For example, parents learned about the up and coming University Experience, which gives students an opportunity to try "cool" electives taught by the school's faculty.

The fourth meeting of this series helped prepare students and their parents for the next school year. The school wanted to talk with parents about the middle school experience. The planners invited former Bradford students, now in middle school, to speak to current fifth graders and parents about the transition.

Parents and teachers convened for the fifth meeting to discuss the topic Fostering Compassion and Preventing Bullying. This included what parents can do to help prevent bullying in school. The last meeting, titled Celebrations of Learning, brought everyone together to show parents just how much their children had accomplished during the year. It was a wonderful opportunity for parents to hear how far their children had come and what impressive things they had done.

The Powerful Presentations covered many topics. The presentations also helped many parents see that the school wanted to engage them in school life and in positive interactions with their children at every grade level. Parent feedback was overwhelmingly positive and school leaders estimated that about 480 students benefited directly because their parents attended one or more Powerful Presentations—powerful, indeed.

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R.E.A.L. MEN

MAIN STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Type 3

It's true—barbecue is delicious! A little barbecue and a good book are even better together than alone. Throw in a little extra excitement—say a crime scene investigation—and you have a memorable occasion. Main Street Elementary School combined these elements and more to create the R.E.A.L. (Raising Expectations, Achievement, and Leadership) Men program.

One of the school's improvement goals is to increase parental involvement in ways that contribute to student learning and success in school. Teachers want to close the achievement gap between students in different racial groups by increasing the skills and scores of African American males in the school. R.E.A.L. Men focused on these goals. As one parent said, "The only thing better than having a great time is having a great time with those you love and hold dear. The R.E.A.L. Men program provided me and my son with wonderful educational growth experiences."

With the help of male volunteers, the school planned four activities to show its male students what it takes to be a "real man." Boys got the chance to work with their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, or other male guardians on a quartet of projects that appealed to both their manliness and their curiosity.

First, in R.E.A.L. Men Cook, boys and their male role models practiced math and analytical thinking by creating their own kind of barbecue sauce. They chose among three kinds of ingredients: spicy, tangy, and sweet. Students and their fathers or father figures made sauce by combining the ingredients in various fractional parts. They measured and kept track of the amounts they used as they went along. At the end of the event, the boys took home some of their newly made sauce, each of which had a unique name thought up by the boys themselves.

Next, the activity R.E.A.L. Men Read brought special guests to the school. These guests were the R.E.A.L. Men who selected books from the school's front office and traveled to various classrooms to read their favorite stories to students in grades K to 5. They showed, clearly, that strong, manly men do, in fact, read. Not only that, they are willing to read aloud with others, share stories, and discuss ideas.

Third, R.E.A.L. Men Explore brought the boys and men together to solve a mystery. They worked together to fill their investigation notebooks with information from a fictitious crime scene, Interrogation Room, and Footprint Analysis Room. Gradually, the boys and men developed a picture of a culprit for the local authorities, who arrested the perpetrator. This fun activity gave students a chance to think and analyze information with the help of their male role models. They all enjoyed playing detective for a day.

The final event of the year was R.E.A.L. Men Dream. Students set personal learning goals in their Parent-Student-Teacher conferences. Their fathers or male role models helped the students dream big. They discussed students' goals and how to reach them, and stressed the importance of learning and achieving in school and out. Whether completing tasks or dreaming about the future, the boys at Main Street Elementary learned that they could count on R.E.A.L. Men to help them go in the right direction.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

JAMES MCGEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

James McGee Elementary has an impressive chant known as the Peace Pledge. It has four parts:

- * I will be responsible for my actions.
- * I will respect others and myself.
- * I will treat others the way I wish to be treated.
- * I will think of others before I think of myself.

These are big, serious statements, but they are even more powerful when you know that students actually try to measure up.

To help students fulfill parts of the pledge, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all of the James McGee faculty conduct and keep improving the project, Random Acts of Kindness. The goal is to guide students to be contributing, conscientious members of society.

Teachers want to instill these positive characteristics in students from the earliest grades on. McGee’s principal commented, “One of the goals that I have for children is to see how they can serve the community and make it a better place. They don’t have to wait until they are grown up to do this.”

The students’ random acts still require some planning and teaching. Some initiatives are school-wide. For example, students participate in coin drives that support numerous causes such as disaster relief, cancer patients, and community members in need. The school also takes part in an annual collection of supplies for CARE packages sent to soldiers.

Some acts of kindness are classroom specific. This year, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, third and fourth graders were asked to identify a need—outside of their family—and fulfill it. Although the student is responsible for their behaviors, parents can help. Parents are asked to talk with the student about the project and support their efforts.

At the end of the assignment’s timeline, students had to create a tri-fold board using pictures or other media to show what they had done. They described their act of kindness in from one to five paragraphs. They used their board, writing, and public speaking skills—calm and professional—to present their act of kindness to the whole school, including parents.

The project aims to improve students’ academic skills in writing, speaking, and problem solving, and build important personal qualities. For their Random Acts of Kindness, students have raked leaves, cleared dinner tables, caroled for the elderly, baked cookies for neighbors, shoveled snow, held the door open for everyone who came by, and other thoughtful behaviors. By encouraging students to think about others, the program is helping students become caring people who contribute to their community.

Student’s acts of kindness do not go unnoticed. One parent commented, “I think that it is cool to see the students involved in a service project. The variety of acts that students select to perform is amazing.”

Random Acts of Kindness is a simple idea that may have lasting results. Students learn the importance of a kind word and a helping hand. These character traits can last a lifetime.

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ROCK THE NIGHT AWAY: FAMILY FUN NIGHT

INDIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL OF MILWAUKEE FRANKLIN, WISCONSIN

Type 3

The 1950s were 60 years ago, but they can influence the present. For the Indian Community School of Milwaukee, the 1950s provided the theme for an event that helped send Native American children and their families to the Family Resource Center Family Camp and raised funds for Southeastern Oneida Tribal Services.

Teachers and administrators at the Indian Community School wanted to help send constituent families to a summer camp, but the school needed funds to do this. A partnership committee of four came up with an idea that would be fun, affordable, and include students and their families. They chose a '50s theme—The Sock Hop—and combined it with a spaghetti dinner. The dance was free and dinner was kept at low cost, so everyone could attend The Sock Hop, even if they ate dinner at home.

After working with the Southeastern Oneida Tribal Services on logistics and responsibilities, the committee recruited others to help as event leaders. Some called local businesses and individuals to ask for donations of food, sound equipment, and photography services. Art students from a local college and from the school created many of the decorations, including large cardboard props, such as a jukebox, turntable, and '57 Chevy Corvette.

Students from more than a dozen classrooms volunteered to create smaller versions of these props to hang from the gym ceiling. Faculty members pitched in, too. They made table centerpieces by shaping vinyl LPs into bowls that they filled with flowers.

The gym was transformed and the fun began. About 60 parents, 50 students and more than four dozen community members came to Rock the Night Away.

A local pizza place, one of the school's community partners, sold spaghetti dinners at a discount: \$6 for adults and \$4 for seniors and children age 4 to 12. Children 3 and under ate for free.

After dinner, the school's parent educator and early childhood director organized the music and led families in some oldie-but-goodie '50s dances. There also were raffles and a bake sale, with all items donated.

"The Sock Hop was a community event," said the principal. "Several people who attended were asking if we would do it again next year. I would like to do it again. Great teamwork."

The school raised almost \$1,000 to send children and families to camp. Those who wanted this support had to volunteer for 4 hours at The Sock Hop. In addition, many other families enjoyed dinner, dancing, spending time together, meeting other families, and getting to know school staff. The entertaining evening gave all families a glimpse of the past and helped families in need look to the future.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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ROWENA CHESS COMMUNITY OUTREACH

ROWENA CHESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Successful programs of school, family, and community partnerships build trusting relationships between parents and teachers. Rowena Chess Elementary School aimed to strengthen its program of family and community involvement with a new activity, Community Outreach.

Over one hundred of Rowena Chess Elementary's students live in trailers and below the poverty line in one section of town. The school wanted to reach out to these families so that parents could feel supported and welcome at the school and in their children's education. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others knew that they had to begin to build positive connections with the families, just as they work with all families at the school. The ATP thought that the targeted families might feel most comfortable on their own turf. So, the ATP planned to bring family involvement to the community.

The ATP met with initial resistance from the management of the trailer park. So, they started with small activities in the community. First, the students' teachers drove through the trailer park, distributing pencils to children who were playing outside. Then, teachers asked permission to meet with students outside on a Saturday afternoon. The management agreed.

For the Saturday event, the faculty brought in hundreds of pumpkins donated by a local supermarket. Students were invited to come by the pumpkin stand, introduce their parents to their teachers, and pick up a pumpkin to take home with them. This was a simple, but friendly school-community outreach activity.

Parents appreciated the extra efforts of teachers who came to their community. Teachers were able to talk with parents they had not met before. And, students enjoyed seeing their teachers on the weekend in their own neighborhood. At school during writing time on the following Monday, many students wrote about their

pumpkins. They had carved, decorated, or eaten them. Every story was interesting and personal.

Next, activities were scheduled for the winter holiday. These were welcomed by the management of the trailer park. The ATP and teachers set up a lending library of children's books in the manager's office, and distributed candy canes and books during Christmas vacation.

Other visits and activities followed including Bingo at Flamingo, an Easter Celebration complete with twenty dozen eggs for students to dye, an Easter Egg Hunt, and more. Students and parents in the area were excited about all of the activities in their neighborhood. It was clear that trust relationships were growing between teachers and parents and between the school and its new community partner—the park management.

This kind of outreach to involve families and the community away from school is more difficult than holding a meeting at school, but the ATP's and teachers' perseverance paid off. Friendships and social networks have been built where there were none before. A veteran teacher added, "It's fun to see the students in their community and to see positive benefits transferring to my classroom."

True to its name, Rowena Chess Elementary started by moving small Chess pieces to increase the involvement of families who had been out of reach. In the end, the new families were in the game—ready to work as partners with the school to support their children as students.

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SAVE OUR SCHOOL!

FOUR SEASONS A+ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Type 5

The goal of this Four Seasons' project was perfectly clear: Save the school. In early January, the superintendent announced that Four Seasons, the only arts-infused school in the Twin Cities, would be closed. The staff, students, parents, and community were devastated. It was well known that the culturally diverse school offered an important path to success for many students, 70 percent of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

Within days of the announcement, a few dedicated parents formed Friends and Families of Four Seasons: Save Our School. The group scheduled a brainstorming session on how to address the School Board at an upcoming meeting to state its case for keeping the school open. Group members made invitations to the meeting and created a Facebook link. The Parent Teacher Organization bought dinner for families who wanted to attend the Board meeting.

The school's family involvement liaison set up an online survey asking parents for realistic ideas and reasons for keeping the school open. She presented these at the School Board meeting, which more than 70 parents, students, and staff members attended. "The school board was amazed at the quick and realistic solutions presented," she reported.

Other speakers presented student success stories. Community members followed the meeting with a barrage of letters to Board members, the Superintendent, and state legislators. Students talked about how the school was making their lives better. Alumni also weighed in, saying that this elementary school helped shape their future.

"Four Seasons is a year-round arts school and we have the best faculty and staff anywhere. We have professional musicians on staff, professional dancers on staff . . . not to mention delightful and inspiring classroom teachers," wrote one parent.

"I like Four Seasons A+. My school helps you get smarter and we have fun at what we do," a second grader added.

Members of the community center told how the school and the center programs were connected, and how closing the school would adversely affect the center's program, as well.

Within a week of the School Board meeting, the Superintendent came to the school. Originally, she planned to answer questions about the closing, but instead she announced that the school would stay open. The school had to move to a new location, but that was a solution that the community accepted. The Superintendent reported that parent and community involvement was a big factor in this decision. She commended the school for their family and community involvement program, and noted it served as an example for other schools in the district. The strong support from families and the community made a real difference in the school's future.

The committee of Friends of Four Seasons remains active, along with the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), and the family involvement liaison. They and others will help ensure a smooth move to the school's new home.

The difficult situation at Four Seasons taught its supporters some important lessons about the power of partnerships that may help any school. Said one, "Don't just fund raise. Don't just focus on teaching to tests. Build a community. Your school will grow in ways you never thought possible."

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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SENIOR HONOR NIGHT

NEW HORIZONS HIGH SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

High school graduation is a major milestone in the lives of teenagers and parents alike. Many changes await students who enter college or technical training, find a job, join the military, or take another new path toward adulthood. They may leave home for the first time, and parents will have to let them go. New Horizons High School wanted to ease this change process. The school initiated Senior Honor Night for students to have a chance to thank others for their help along the way.

A week before graduation, parents, students, and teachers came together one Friday evening for dinner and an assembly. At this assembly, students reflected on their achievements and those who helped them achieve. They recognized and celebrated the many kinds of assistance they received from teachers, parents, and others. It was clear that students understood both the joys parents share and the sacrifices they made to enable their children to succeed in school since kindergarten.

For the assembly, students brought along two or three people whom they wanted to honor and acknowledge. The Floriculture class decorated the cafeteria, with help from community donations. Everyone enjoyed a simple spaghetti or pizza dinner.

Faculty members, chosen by students to speak on their behalf, talked about the growth, development, and talents of each student. Then, the seniors gave short speeches thanking their parents, teachers, and other important people in their lives.

The students also recognized their classmates for their friendships, support, and other contributions. Each graduating senior took a turn in sharing their tributes.

After the dinner and presentations, students traveled by bus to a local bowling alley for a pair of games. During this diversion, the Action Team for Partnership (ATP), staff, and other volunteers prepared the gym for a dance, which in its way, honored the students and their guests. Non-senior students also were invited, but paid admission to the dance. A friendly set of raffles awarded the graduating seniors simple household items or electronics to help them at college or at work.

The transition from high school to college is intimidating in many ways. Senior Honor Night put students' growth and change in perspective, along with their gratitude for many others. It was a simple, elegant, and meaningful way for students to prepare themselves and their families for the future.

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TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

LAKE CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Type 2

In any school, some students fall through the cracks. Some may not measure up to their full potential. Some may lack strong support at home for their work at school. Lake City Elementary wanted to help all students succeed at high levels and increase the involvement of parents in ways that would prevent any students from failing in school.

The teachers and administrators knew that they needed some new approaches to reach families who, previously, were “hard to reach.” They decided to take their communications with parents in a different direction by Takin’ It To The Streets.

The plan was for teachers and administrators to visit three neighborhoods one Saturday. They would bring with them their interest in the children’s success, information on school and community resources, a picnic, and a chance for students and their families to win prizes. By Takin’ It To The Streets, the educators hoped to create new connections with parents and start some important conversations.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers began by making bilingual flyers about neighborhood visits in English and Spanish. They sent these home with students and distributed them to area businesses and community agencies. The team also ran radio announcements for two weeks before the selected Saturday activities. They made poster-size copies of the flyer for the areas selected for visits.

Two teams of teachers and administrators traveled to two neighborhoods in the mid-morning. They set up a sign-in table for parents. Parents and students visited booths for information on school-linked topics such as state tests, school attendance, kindergarten registration, and adult education. There was a final booth for good food and free clothing. Finally, the ATP and educators held a drawing for prize baskets of good things

for students and parents. After photos were taken, the teachers and administrators packed up and headed to one more neighborhood.

At this stop, the fire department also set up a table with fire safety information and displayed their great fire trucks. Even the mayor showed up, as did police officers. Parents and students enjoyed meeting their children’s teachers and talking about the important roles that parents and other family members play in helping their children succeed in school. Everyone enjoyed hot dogs for lunch.

The connections that were made were real and important. Teachers were able to meet parents, talk with them about their children’s school performance, and learn something about children’s lives outside of school. Parents received useful information. Students talked with teachers informally. Across all stops, teachers interacted with over 150 parents and 450 students.

Takin’ it to the Streets cost the school about \$300, thanks to significant support from community partners. PepsiCo donated drinks, Lake City Housing Authority and the local Title I Office provided the hot dogs, and Wal-Mart gave the school a gift card to help pay for supplies and prizes.

One administrator commented, “Takin’ It To The Streets was our most successful event this year.” It was successful because of strong teamwork, good planning, and the enthusiasm of parents and students on the streets where they live. It is expected that, as a result, many more parents will be more actively engaged with the school and with their children.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

TECHNOLOGY 4 PARENTS

PARKWAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Parkway Elementary School knows that one key to student success is goal-linked parental involvement. To keep improving students' reading and math skills and related achievement test scores, the school went to parents to offer its Technology 4 Parents program. This is a series of classes to help computer-challenged parents use technology to help increase their children's academic success.

Parkway Elementary offers technology education to all students and knew that the children were gaining important computer skills. They also recognized that many students' families did not have comparable computer skills. Some did not own a computer. Some left the use of the computer to their youngsters.

The school conducted a survey to measure parents' interest in improving their technological savvy. After receiving a resounding "yes" from the parents, the school's computer specialist designed a curriculum that would help parents increase their computer know-how.

Flyers about the free classes were sent home that outlined the topics and skills that would be covered. The district's Media and Communication Department funded the program.

Each class was conducted twice—once in the morning, and once in the evening—to accommodate parents' busy schedules. In addition, the school offered babysitting services to encourage parents to attend.

The first classes covered basic topics. Participants learned the names and functions of parts of the computer, word processing skills, and techniques for surfing the Internet. One grandparent commented, "I've really learned a great deal about the basics to get started on the computer...[I'm] hopeful to attend more classes."

The second session covered more advanced topics. This included information on Google, how to set up G-mail accounts, and how to use e-mail and Google Docs features. The next class included useful topics on Internet safety and how to protect their children (and themselves) on the Internet.

The final session presented a series of useful educational websites, including the school's Parent Portal, with information on how to access and use the resources on these sites. The number of parents attending Technology 4 Parents increased as the workshop series continued. Parents praised the usefulness of the classes. As one regular attendee stated, "My experience with the [first] three sessions was a great adventure. All classes were well-taught and well-explained."

Parkway's planning committee attributed the success of the classes, in part, to a new name—Technology 4 Parents. This replaced an earlier, more mundane title, Adult Beginning Computer Classes. The leaders also improved the schedule, with classes held over three weeks instead of two months. The concentrated timeline increased participants learning and remembering skills from class to class. The leaders for partnerships expect that more parents will become tech-savvy through Technology 4 Parents. This will help them access the sites that the school and district use to communicate information about student learning.

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Type 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

THE GOOD OF THE ORDER

MONTCLAIR HIGH SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

Type 2

It takes teamwork, planning, and strong program implementation to create and sustain good connections of home and school. Without an orderly, organized approach, many parents feel uninformed about what is happening at school. Even at the high school level, parents want to know how their students are doing and what they can do to support their teens as students. Montclair High School recognized the importance of family involvement and wanted to improve communications between educators and parents in ways that would help students through the 12th grade.

Montclair High School has over two thousand students with diverse ethnic backgrounds. It is not always easy to reach every family. Parents have requested more information from the school, and some were concerned that they missed important communications.

To improve communications with more parents, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other school leaders decided to examine how they were communicating with parents from school-to-home and from home-to-school.

First, they wanted to improve information that parents received about upcoming events at the school and deadlines for various student or family activities. Students heard announcements on these matters every day on the school's loudspeaker. To make sure that parents were alerted, too, the school began sending transcripts of the announcements in E-blasts to families. That was a quick, easy, and effective fix to one communication problem.

A second step improved the school's Guidance Bulletins to include parents. The Guidance Department wanted its news and announcements added as a section of the E-blast. The school counselors knew that family engagement and support were important in guiding students to select courses and plan for their

futures.

Third, the ATP wanted to improve information on the schedule and content of its meetings. It, too, used the E-blasts to alert parents to monthly meetings and to summarize information for parents who could not attend. The ATP meetings built a good reputation for being on time, well organized, with clear agendas, and on important topics.

Each ATP meeting concludes with a segment called the Good of the Order. Attendees may pose issues, questions, or concerns that were not on the agenda. These issues are discussed at an ATP meeting or with teachers and administrators. Parents have raised questions on diverse topics such as the school's dress code and the school's landscaping. With the ATP, there is, now, an orderly system for communicating with educators that should increase more and different parents' involvement.

The new communications at the high school have come to the attention of the Montclair Board of Education. Said one board member, "The MHS School Action Team has proven how positive changes can take place when parents, teachers, and administrators talk to one another and, more importantly, listen to one another."

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

VETERANS' DAY

GILLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Gillis Elementary School believes it is important to foster a love of country in young students. To strengthen students' patriotic spirit, the school conducted a Veterans' Day service with stories and song.

The Gillis community includes many veterans of all ages. The school wanted these heroes to know that their service was appreciated, and that they were valuable and valued members of society. The school also wanted students to learn some history about the United States and the military. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, students, and other volunteers designed an assembly to meet these goals.

To open the assembly, the Cub Scouts presented the American flag, everyone said the *Pledge of Allegiance*, and the Gillis Elementary School chorus sang several songs. School leaders shared a PowerPoint presentation on each branch of the military. A theme song for each branch of service played when its work was explained to the audience—*Anchors Aweigh*, *The Army Goes Rolling Along*, *From the Halls of Montezuma*, *Off We Go Into the Wild Blue Yonder*, and *Always Ready* played for the Navy, Army, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard, respectively. Veterans from each branch stood as their theme played.

Winners of a fifth grade contest on patriotism read their excellent essays. Then, a Patriotic Blanket made up of students and teachers wearing red, white, and blue was formed. Each veteran in attendance was introduced and received hand-made cards from students thanking them for their service and wishing them well.

The veterans, in full dress uniform, talked about their service. They shared some points of history with students and their personal experiences as members of the military.

A number of the veterans also were teachers at the school. They commented that it was a unique experience for them to talk with students about their service and for the students to view their teachers in this new light.

The assembly ended with the members of the Gillis chorus waving American flags and leading everyone in singing *I'm Proud to Be an American*. One teacher, moved by the experience, said, "Seeing the children sing those patriotic songs brought tears to my eyes!" Many veterans expressed their gratitude—their hearts filled by the children's spirit, tributes, stories, and talents.

Gillis' Veterans' Day honored heroic community members and taught students valuable lessons. Youngsters learned to be respectful and to honor people who have given much for the good of the country. They also learned first-hand accounts of interesting moments in history, as veterans explained the military experiences. With eight hundred fifty students in attendance, it is safe to say that many—young and old—were happy to share their good will and love of country that day.

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4

DISTRICT, ORGANIZATION, & STATE LEADERSHIP



Practices in this section help facilitators in districts, organizations, and states to strengthen leadership and assist schools in developing effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

COFFEE TALK: BONDING, SHARING, AND LEARNING!

ST. LANDRY PARISH SCHOOL BOARD OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

Educators are always on the alert for teachable moments. If they do not occur by chance, educators will develop opportunities to instruct and support others. St. Landry Parish School Board organized a series of get-togethers called Coffee Talk: Bonding, Sharing, and Learning, to share ideas with parents on how they may support their children's learning at home.

St. Landry Parish wanted to increase the number of parents who came to workshops. The district leaders knew that some parents were not comfortable about coming to formal school settings. They set Coffee Talks in the Family Resource Center—a location within walking distance for many families in the district. They also organized the agenda to be nonthreatening and interactive. Parents were invited to bring their favorite coffee mugs to the meeting to add a personal twist to the activities.

Flyers on the workshops were placed in community stores. The local newspaper and radio station publicized the Coffee Talks as a public service. District leaders and school officials walked through some neighborhoods knocking on doors to invite parents to attend. Parents were invited to come together, meet educators, meet each other, and learn some good ideas for reinforcing students' learning at home.

The excellent advertising resulted in a very large number of interested parents at the first Coffee Talk. The personal mugs were the topic of conversation. Some brought cups that their parents had owned; others brought unique or utilitarian mugs. There were stories to share as people met one another.

At this Coffee Talk, parents were assigned to small groups to write stories about their mugs, include interesting details, and illustrate their stories. The parents were surprised at all that could be discussed about "just a mug."

Workshop leaders used the activity to suggest that parents could create similar kinds of learning opportunities to spark their child's thinking at home. For example, they could lead conversations to spark children's imaginations about their favorite breakfast foods. Parents suggested that they could ask their children to list vocabulary words that described their favorite breakfasts, measure the weight and describe textures of breakfast foods and drinks, create recipes and write directions using breakfast foods, and describe why they liked certain breakfasts and not others. The ideas kept coming.

Coffee Talks are, now, regular events in the St. Landry Parish School Board. They have covered topics for parents to support learning at home including fun science experiments and discussions about social studies. They branched out to Book Talks to encourage students' reading and parent-child conversations about books and stories. This friendly focus is of interest in and beyond St. Landry Parish. District leaders presented information on Coffee Talks at National and State School Board Association Conferences and other state meetings.

By bringing parents together for low-pressure, high-output learning, St. Landry Parish workshop leaders are modeling ways that any (or every) parent can support their children's learning at home at any grade level.

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COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION

ALTOONA SCHOOL DISTRICT

ALTOONA, WISCONSIN

Altoona's educators, families, and the community were concerned about state policies that threatened to dramatically reduce school funding. Slated to lose up to two million dollars, leaders in Altoona saw a real need for targeted action. And, they knew that an essential element for enacting change is having open lines of communication between and among stakeholders. To strengthen communications with everyone in the community on this important issue, leaders in the Altoona School District teamed up with the University of Wisconsin-Stout in a collaborative effort.

District leaders wanted community support for a referendum to reverse the reduction in funding and restore its original budget for the schools. Every year without full funding meant cuts to people and programs in the district.

The problem was that many members in the Altoona community were not aware of the funding cuts to the district or consequences for the schools. Many adults did not have school-age children. One referendum had failed due to a lack of support from the community.

The district staff and teachers were sure that they could pass the next referendum if they could provide clear information and explain the effects of the policy for teachers and for students.

Ideas for increasing community support were discussed. One of the district's AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers had heard from a colleague in another city that a professor at UW-Stout was looking for projects for her students that involved surveys and focus groups. The VISTA realized that the professor's students could do a project that combined their interests with Altoona's need for information on how to increase community support to restore school funding.

The UW-Stout professor and district leaders worked out a set of survey questions that would address the important issues, and two graduate students came to Altoona to help

conduct this project.

The students and the VISTA volunteer identified three large groups that they wanted to survey: Parents and school staff; community members without children in school; and businesses. They started by surveying parents and school staff because they could contact them via the Internet and the technology in the schools. They collected and analyzed the data. From the responses, the study group developed a detailed set of strategies and methods to improve the district's chances of passing a future referendum for restoring state funds to the schools.

A member of the school board, impressed with the quality and usefulness of the surveys, remarked, "We've been trying to get this kind of information for years." With the list of strategies generated by Altoona's educators and parents, the district will plan its next steps to convey information needed to increase community support for the next referendum. They also will continue to work with their contacts at UW-Stout on future surveys of groups in the community on funding and other policy issues.

This district took a deliberate approach to plan their next steps for passing a referendum to restore school funding. Rather than doing the same things that had previously failed, district leaders used a research-based approach to gather more and different ideas for improving communications with the community.

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EMPOWERING & DEVELOPING ATP LEADERS

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT PASCO, WASHINGTON

Pasco School District leaders for partnerships continue to work together to design ways to help school-based Action Team for Partnerships (ATPs) work effectively and energetically. The district leaders keep in close contact with the co-chairs of their schools ATPs.

For example, the district co-facilitators conduct quarterly cluster meetings to discuss methods for creating cohesive teams and sustainable partnership programs in every school. They recognize that the co-chairs of ATPs have assumed important responsibilities, which sometimes can feel overwhelming. They wanted to help schools' co-chairs develop leadership skills of communicating clearly and delegating tasks to share leadership for ATP activities.

District leaders for partnerships selected their theme for the 2010-11 school year to address these issues: Empowering and Developing Leaders. They knew that this focus would help ATP co-chairs build leadership skills and strengthen the structure of all ATPs.

At one cluster meeting early in the school year, district leaders for partnerships guided ATP co-chairs through several leadership-building exercises. After a short presentation on leadership characteristics and values, they asked the ATP co-chairs to identify which leadership characteristics they already possessed. The group discussed the values behind these characteristics. This serious, but pertinent, discussion generated thoughtful reflections and conversations about leadership styles, values, and actions.

At the last cluster meeting of the year, the ATP co-chairs received a chart of leadership skills, such as nurturing collaboration, managing conflict, and building trust. Each leader selected one attribute that he or she wanted to improve. They had five minutes to create a "personal leadership development strategy" and an outline of proactive steps to develop the selected skill over time. Each one presented

their leadership goal and strategies. The group, then, discussed ways to refine and improve the strategies to increase chances of success in strengthening the selected leadership attribute.

In addition to these activities, the district facilitators for partnerships provided other opportunities for ATP co-chairs to strengthen their leadership at their respective schools. For example, ATP co-chairs kept track of parents who attended ATP meetings. This previously was monitored by the district leaders. The ATP co-chairs also became the main authors of Pasco's *Bright Ideas*, the district's collection of promising partnership practices from each school. In years past, the ATPs completed a short questionnaire on one best practice, and the district leaders wrote the articles. This year, each ATP wrote its own 325-375 word summary, under the leadership of the co-chairs and with the principal's approval.

At the conclusion of the year's focus on leadership, each ATP co-chair received a copy of John Maxwell's *21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*. One chair remarked, "This book was the perfect gift! We needed inspiration, and [this book] has inspired me." The year revealed that being a leader is not always easy, but strong teamwork eases leadership on partnerships.

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FAMILY CONNECTIONS FACILITATION

WORCESTER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWARK, MARYLAND

Many children living in poverty struggle to keep up in school. The Worcester County Public School District knew that many of its students were living in families who were economically-stressed, with incomes below the poverty line.

District leaders wanted to support these students' physical, emotional, and academic growth. They also wanted to increase connections of home and school to engage parents in feasible, but productive ways. To accomplish these goals, the district collaborated with the NAACP and the Worcester County Minority Achievement Task Force to support a Family Connections Facilitator.

The district's school-linked statistics demanded attention. Educators wanted to improve student behavior, reduce disciplinary actions, increase the number of students who graduated from high school, and reduce the drop out rate. The district took some important first steps toward these goals.

Each school has a Student Services Worker (SSW), whose job is to assist the school with its most pressing problems. To assist the SSWs, the district hired a Family Connections Facilitator to work with families in particularly difficult circumstances.

The district's Family Connections Facilitator began by researching the conditions and needs of families in the district, particularly those who were hesitant to work with teachers and whose children were struggling in school. She knew that some parents are reluctant to become involved at their child's school because of their own negative school experiences. She also knew that good connections with these parents could help improve their children's academic and social development.

The Family Connections Facilitator made many home visits with these families, often spending hours discussing opportunities to improve their situations and leaving lists of available resources. She and the parents also discussed the importance of their involvement with their children's schools and teachers. She also left her own contact information, and an offer to provide assistance if they needed transportation or other services to come to school meetings or activities.

The Family Connections Facilitator conducted monthly parent education workshops, provided a full dinner, presented guest speakers, and connected with the families to help them feel welcome and cared for. She also kept track of the children of these families, checking in with them at school, in class, and at home to ensure they were on the right track to succeed in school. One student remarked, "She's like another mom to me."

To help the school-based SSWs, the Family Connections Facilitator has provided this kind of in-depth assistance and care to over 75 families in the district. She also helped a few parents get their GEDs and go on to college programs. A grandparent evaluated the Family Connections Facilitator, saying, "She's been a life-saver for me and my grandchildren. She helped me feel like we were going to make it, when I thought all hope was lost."

In schools, an Action Team for Partnerships plans a goal-linked program to involve all families in their children's education. In addition, district leadership, demonstrated in Worcester, may be needed to engage the parents of students who struggle to succeed.

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INTERCAMBIO LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT MADISON, WISCONSIN

Current estimates are that about 7000 languages and dialects are spoken around the world. Most people speak only one, but, today schools serve families who speak many languages other than English at home. It is the district's and each school's responsibility to communicate clearly with every student's family. And, that is a challenge.

Madison Metropolitan School District includes students and families from highly diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. Among the languages most commonly spoken in the area are English, Spanish, Hmong, Nepali, and Arabic. There is no doubt that Madison's schools are challenged to reach out to every student's family. The district has begun to address this challenge with Spanish and English speakers with the Intercambio Language and Cultural Exchange Program, designed to support students and parents who are English Language Learners.

Madison's goals for this program are three-fold: To improve communications among parents and teachers; to increase students' literacy achievement; and to learn about families' cultures to use culturally-responsive teaching practices that would be meaningful for student learning.

The program consists of two 10-week sessions in the fall and spring semesters. Intercambio (a Spanish word meaning exchange or trade) aims to teach English and/or Spanish as a second language to give people the tools to communicate with each other. In Madison's program, three teachers from the Literacy Network, a community-based organization, provide certified instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) and in Spanish. Typically, there are two ESL classrooms at the beginner and intermediate levels, and one Spanish classroom for parents who want to learn that language.

Over the course of the two 10-week sessions, participants learn the basics of each language, including grammar, sentence structure, and spelling rules to become familiar with the way the language works. They begin to build vocabulary with numbers, body parts, health, and school topics. They also learn other useful phrases and how to ask questions. These basics help parents and teachers communicate with each other as neighbors and talk about school-related issues.

The program has strong support from the Madison community. One parent shared, "I think [Intercambio] is very important for us as Hispanics. We come to these programs to learn and the classes are free. It's good for us to be able to engage with our kids' teachers."

In school, many children learn English in ESL classes and in language arts; many learn Spanish as a second language. It motivates students to see their parents learning similar lessons and practicing their new languages. The Intercambio Language and Cultural Exchange Program is helping Madison's teachers, parents, and students meet these language challenges together.

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JUEVES GIGANTE: A GIGANTIC FAMILY EVENT

KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

Nationwide, there is an important press for students to complete high school, graduate on time, and plan postsecondary education for college or careers. In addition to traditional ways to encourage students to stay in school and plan their futures, Kennewick School District conducts ¡Jueves Gigante!—a unique strategy to increase Latino students' graduation rates and postsecondary education. The district wanted to help more Spanish-speaking parents understand the school system and their roles in making sure their secondary school students attended school regularly, loved learning, and planned for the future.

The district wanted to provide information to its many Spanish-speaking families in a culturally respectful way. ¡Jueves Gigante! or (Gigantic Thursday) started small, but now is well known in the district.

ELL and migrant high school students from the district's three high schools have responsibility for ¡Jueves Gigante! They plan and conduct the evening. Their planning meetings are conducted primarily in Spanish and English, and in Arabic, Somali, or other languages, as needed. This ensures that all students who want to be involved can be and that everyone participates in the plans that are discussed and in the decisions that are made.

About a month before the event, a student-designed and student-developed "commercial" runs on the local Univision channel to promote ¡Jueves Gigante! The students also distribute invitations at Spanish-language church services. To make sure that parents know about ¡Jueves Gigante!, students make phone calls to remind all 1600 families in the district with children in secondary education to attend.

¡Jueves Gigante! is a program in three parts: Dinner, resource fair, and a live show based on a TV show, *Sábado Gigante*, (*Gigan-*

tic Saturday). This year, ¡Jueves Gigante! began with two speakers. One gave students a highly motivating message about the importance of completing school and planning their futures. The second spoke to parents about their influence in their children's lives. Then, students put on a skit on the loss of school credit that occurs if families make sudden trips out of the country in the middle of the school year.

To celebrate their heritage, students performed Traditional Mexican dances. The students also made and presented a video to increase everyone's awareness of the dangers of bullying, with particular attention to bullying behaviors in the middle grades.

All students who participated in planning, advertising, decorating, entertaining, and working behind the scenes were trained for their roles, so the results were highly professional. The students who participated wore ¡Jueves Gigante! T-shirts so that those attending could identify these capable young people and ask for their help, if needed.

Over 800 people attended this year's event. The local NBC-TV reported on ¡Jueves Gigante! and MSNBC picked it up later that week for national coverage. About 40 community booths, including community services and local colleges and universities distributed information to students and to parents about the importance of staying school and planning for the future.

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PARENT ENGAGEMENT OUTREACH CENTER

FORT WORTH INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT FORT WORTH, TEXAS

In Fort Worth, the school district operated a Roving Resource Center that served parent liaisons and counselors with a lending library of books and media for use in workshops with parents. To improve the Center, the district gave it a permanent home. No longer “roving,” this resource was renamed the Parent Engagement Outreach Center.

The newly named Center was centrally located in a middle school so that more people, including parents, could use its resources. More services were added to the new space. For example, besides its traditional book and media library, the Parent Engagement Resource Center has “make and take” stations for parents to gain ideas on how to help their children with learning activities at home; computer and audio stations; and workshops for parents on nutrition, parenting, college planning, and other important topics. “This Center offers us a wonderful opportunity for parental outreach,” commented a district leader.

In addition, the Center offers information on district and school programs for students and for families, and on state and national issues that affect education. It showcases the district’s applications of the framework of Six Types of Parent Involvement so that parents see how the district has invested in improving connections with families in different ways. All materials at the Center are available in English and Spanish.

Because this Center aims to help parents and guardians help their children succeed in school and in life, its resources, workshops, and other materials focus on *the students*. Some materials help parents address student development, challenges in parenting at different grade levels, and decisions about schooling. Parents can find useful information on children’s emotional development, family decision-making, nutrition and health, preventing substance abuse and other risky behaviors, and other topics that parents value.

Other materials focus on helping students in particular school subjects and other educational goals. Parents can find strategies and activities for helping students with math and literacy learning at home, materials on requirements for high school graduation, information on how to prepare for college and careers, educational posters and books, and other materials to encourage students to stay in school.

“Resource materials from the outreach Center promote awareness. . . on a variety of topics and programs,” said one parent. “[Through its workshops and materials,] parents have the opportunity to learn about the different strategies to help children academically and emotionally.”

Leaders for partnerships in Fort Worth Independent School District have noted the Center’s contributions. About 300 parents and other caregivers have used the Center in its new location, as have at least 75 teachers and school staff members. The Center is an important district-level leadership activity to increase family involvement in Fort Worth.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT REPORT CARDS

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Report cards are typically used to monitor students' academic and behavioral progress. They tell students and parents how students are doing in school, highlighting areas of excellence and things that need attention and improvement. The Milwaukee Public School District wanted to track the progress of schools' programs of parental involvement. They developed a reporting system to chart the steps that schools should take to organize and systematize their partnership programs.

The district's leaders for partnerships discussed which forms and documents each school should submit to show they were developing a viable structure for a school-based partnership program. The ultimate goal is for each school to have goal-linked plans and practices that engage all parents in their children's education.

At a monthly principals' meeting, the Superintendent spoke of the importance of involving parents to increase students' achievement, improve attendance, and increase other indicators of students' success in school. Most principals' meetings focused on improving the curriculum, instructional methods, and accountability. The fact that this meeting was dedicated to the importance of parental involvement, demonstrated the district's commitment to helping each school improve its outreach and results of partnerships.

At the meeting, the Superintendent distributed new reporting forms to the principals. These "report cards" outlined six expectations for schools' partnership programs and due dates for key forms, documents, and data. The principals were asked to submit a school policy on partnerships; complete a list of members on the school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP); report data on attendance at parent-teacher conferences; identify a representative from the school for a district advisory committee, and submit other

key forms to the district leaders for partnerships.

Clearly, having a list of ATP members is a prerequisite for having a well-functioning team that will plan and conduct a school-based partnership program. Similarly, naming a representative to a district-level advisory group is a prerequisite for ensuring that the school is contributing to district discussions and decisions about parental involvement.

Schools that completed all six expectations (i.e., submitted all six forms or documents) received an "A" on the district's report card for partnership program development. Those that completed five expectations received a "B," and so on.

"The Parent Involvement Report Cards provided an opportunity for schools to 'make the grade' in parent involvement," said one District Parent Involvement Coordinator. The report forms and letter grades created an instant buzz and attention to parental involvement in the schools. Principals and schools' ATPs learned which key structures for establishing and improving parental involvement they had in place, and which structures and activities needed attention.

All schools in Milwaukee can meet the district's expectations for basic components of an A-rated school-based partnership program. Even more importantly, with the basic structures in place, all schools could implement programs and practices that engage parents and the community in ways that support student success in school.

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SCHOOL TEAM SPECIFIC TRAINING

NAPERVILLE COMMUNITY DISTRICT 203 NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Large group training on partnership program development is efficient and effective for preparing many schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to begin their work on goal-linked programs of family and community involvement. After schools get started, however, their teams move at different rates. Then, small group workshops are needed to address questions or to meet challenges in particular schools.

The district leaders for partnerships in Naperville Community District 203 sought to assist their schools, which have been members of NNPS for up to 15 years, by providing small-group workshops on specific questions for improving school, family, and community partnerships.

Experienced teams in the district did not want to repeat "basic training" on partnerships. They were ready for advanced workshops to solve specific challenges in reaching all families in their schools. Further, the district added a new Early Childhood Center, whose partnership team needed initial and age-appropriate training to establish its program of family and community involvement at the preschool level.

The district's Core Team of advisors on partnership programs assigned a subcommittee to gather information on topics and formats for small-group workshops. This committee assembled materials to help them with the task. These included a summary of the district's history of its SFCP (School, Family, and Community Partnership) program; forms designed to enable schools to plan and evaluate their work; information on the Epstein model of Six Types of Involvement; and a collection of best practices from schools in the district, organized by grade level. These materials sparked conversations and discussions about prior large-group workshops and options for small-group training sessions.

Each member of the district's Core Team selected a school to visit from a list of SFCP teams that requested assistance on a special topic or challenge. These facilitators drew from the resources they had collected from prior training workshops, but tailored the material to conduct shorter, individualized sessions with the SFCP team at each school. They also tailored the presentations and discussions to the school level—elementary, middle, high, and early childhood center. The district's leaders for partnerships also developed an administrator's guide on partnerships, particularly for those new to the district.

A full team of district facilitators worked with the Ann Reid Early Childhood Center to ensure that the school's new SFCP team would start with a well-organized, goal-linked program for family involvement for preschool students. A faculty member at Ann Reid reported, "The training was wonderful. . . . I feel like I have a level of knowledge to start and chair the SFCP team at Ann Reid." (See the Ann Reid Early Childhood Center's initial activity in this publication.)

Naperville's leaders for partnerships have found that small-group workshops are valuable for advancing a particular school's partnership program by addressing that school's questions or challenges. As one teacher noted, "Providing the specific examples for our school was invaluable." This kind of targeted training in districts helps all schools continually improve their partnership programs.

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SILENT ART AUCTION AND CONCERT

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Though fundraising requires determination and persistence, its most vital requirement is creativity. Even for a good cause, leaders must create interest and understanding to make a case for support. Sometimes, it helps to identify a need and provide a unique service to meet that need—one that people will pay for.

The Milwaukee Public School District wanted to offer summer internships to students to help plant community gardens. To motivate students to participate, leaders needed to pay small stipends for their work. Two innovative AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers considered how to raise funds for this program. They knew that the experiences would not only benefit students, but also beautify neighborhoods.

The VISTAs took leadership to publicize the program for students and the district's need for funds. They contacted many people in the community for support. In their outreach to the community, the VISTAs found that there was a lot of art—visual art and music—in the area. They decided to showcase the art and music to raise funds for the students' internships. With district leaders, they planned a silent auction for people to see and purchase local art. To further support the program, a small admission fee was charged to see the exhibit.

A local business provided a building for the exhibit and auction. The volunteers collected as much local art as possible for the event, and invited local musicians to perform. The musicians were happy to volunteer their talent in order to become better known in the area.

A large crowd attended. People were interested in the artists, musicians, and in the district's cause—supporting students in a beautification program. People put in their bids for

the art work. The artists and musicians gained community attention for their talents.

By the end of the night, nearly every work of art had a number of bids. The district raised the \$1,300 it needed to pay students for their time.

The targeted fund raising activity was a win-win-win-win experience. The district gained community good will; students gained a unique community experience; artists and musicians became better known in their area; and the community became a more beautiful place. The generosity of the artists, musicians, business partners, and donors contributed to the success of this fundraiser.

In tight economic times districts and schools may need to raise funds for important, educational projects. The Milwaukee example suggests that a benefit event is most successful when it benefits an important cause in a most beneficial way.

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WORLD SNOWMAN DAY CELEBRATION

WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT WAUSAU, WISCONSIN

People of all ages and backgrounds love making snowmen. It is a simple joy of winter to see a snowman with a carrot nose grinning at passersby. That is why Cornelius Graetz, the German owner of the world's largest snowman collection (over 3,000 snowman-related items), created World Snowman Day in 2008.

Wausau School District's leaders for partnerships found World Snowman Day while researching holidays that it could incorporate in the Family University Network (F.U.N.). The holiday seemed to match the district's interests and climate. On Wausau's World Snowman Day Celebration, families visited the Wausau School Forest and celebrated winter with fun and educational activities.

The celebration started with the Wacky Winter Science Show, a presentation by Mad Science, a science enrichment provider from Milwaukee. The show entertained and educated, demonstrating science experiments involving static electricity and a mysterious rock from the North Pole. Families participated in experiments and watched Mad Science demonstrate cool science-based tricks.

After the demonstrations, families traveled to other stations that guided learning activities in specific subjects, including reading, art, science, and more. At one station, children and families went on a museum-of-wildlife scavenger hunt. At another station, families looked through a microscope at snowflakes, examined their unique shapes, and created their own paper snowflake designs.

Parents read winter stories with their children. The books, in English and Spanish, were from the public library.

To keep everyone warm in the bitter cold of Wisconsin's winter, a lodge at the park offered hot cider and snacks. Families could drop by anytime during the morning to warm up and get a bite to eat. As they left the event, each family received a book to take home, and set of activities, and a free coupon for a Blizzard from Dairy Queen.

Feedback on surveys and by enthusiastic participants was positive. One parent remarked, "I'm so glad you offer experiences like these to families. It was a wonderful day." The winter activity was a good start for the on-going Family University Network (F.U.N). The very cold day was warm and wonder-full inside. The snowmen were left out in the cold.

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YOU'RE AN ESSENTIAL PIECE: HOME & SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

HAMPTON CITY SCHOOLS: TITLE I PROGRAM HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

It's an undeniable fact that parents play a critical role in their children's success in school. Yet, all too often, parents' influence is overlooked because of the many challenges that all educational stakeholders encounter—limited time and lack of resources. Knowing the importance of positive partnerships, Hampton City Schools set aside time on a Saturday to meet with and assist parents and to showcase many community resources that are available for parents and their children.

Hampton's Title I Program sponsored the Home & School Connection Conference, with help from various district departments, including 21st Century, math, social studies, and social work. Community partners—Hampton Public Library, Hampton Parks and Recreation—also assisted. The conference designed for parents of elementary-age students, included speakers, workshops, and many ideas to increase parental involvement at school and parents' support of children's learning at home.

The free conference was held at the local convention center. The district provided breakfast and on-site childcare to encourage parent participation. In the opening session, volunteers from diverse backgrounds and walks of life spoke to parents with compelling short stories about how parent involvement had influenced their own lives. Their stories prompted similar conversations among the attendees.

The conference offered informative workshops for parents and fun activities for the children. Parents registered in advance for two of seven workshops on topics that interested them. The sessions included:

Priceless Parenting; Parents as Educators; Improving Connections of School, Home, and Community; Making Your Voice Count; Homework: A Parent's Survival Guide; Building Strong Relationships with Teachers; and Raising Winners! The workshops took place in small classes with in-depth discussions. Several local businesses supported the sessions by donating items and information, which attendees received in their conference bags at registration.

While parents learned and discovered, children in the Kids Zone ate continental breakfast, healthy snacks, and enjoyed a performance by Uncle Ty-Rone, a ventriloquist known for his children's shows. They also participated in entertaining educational activities that kept them busy and learning, just as their parents were.

Said a pair of presenters, "We would like to thank you for allowing us to present at the conference. It was an amazing experience . . ." Parents, too, were impressed with the day. They wanted more time and more parents to attend. One parent suggested, "Conference attendance should be mandatory." The district will hold future conferences to continue to support parents and to honor them for the hard work they do to care for their children and support their work in school.

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ACHIEVE THE PLAN GAME

MINNESOTA PARENT CENTER MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

One way to keep educators thinking about how to improve their programs of parental involvement is to have them keep talking about it and sharing ideas. As the Minnesota Parent Center (Minnesota's PIRC) worked to facilitate schools' partnership programs, they developed a friendly, focused approach for encouraging educators and Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) keep improving their efforts—Achieve the Plan Game.

The Center found that some schools resisted suggestions for improving their plans and programs. It is hard to review and reflect on written plans and hear others' suggestions. The Center wanted to take a positive approach to advance the quality of school-based plans and activities for family and community involvement.

The Center knew that games helped people learn by interacting with others. They developed a game with the correct name for the goal they had in mind—Achieve the Plan! The point was to help educators and partnership teams discuss challenges they face in planning and implementing activities for effective family and community involvement. The game, Achieve the Plan, might encourage players to share good ideas to help schools solve challenges and engage more families.

Small groups of two to four players use the game board, pieces, and list of rules. The most “rookie” teacher or parent goes first, and play moves clockwise. From the “Start” space, each player rolls the dice, draws a card, and moves a game piece before acting on the card's instructions.

For example, if a player lands on an “action circle,” she or he must complete the specified action. These include “Take the Bridge” or “Take the Path,” which give players a shortcut to the game's goal. They may be asked to discuss a topic, or get “Stuck in the Blame Bog,” where they must wait a while. They also may lose momen-

tum if they land on a space that says, “Must Draw a Dot Card to Move.” These cards hold discussion questions on such topics as how to engage families who do not speak English or how to enable parents to participate in two-way communications.

Achieve the Plan gives the Center staff a fun and productive way to talk with teachers or ATPs about the nitty-gritty of improving their programs of parental involvement. Leaders use the game at regional workshops and other trainings, and highlight the game in monthly e-Newsletters and on Center's website. The Minnesota Department of Education has publicized the game for use by other schools' partnership teams. One teacher who played the game at a workshop commented, “I thought [my school was] doing OK, but then saw how much more we could be doing for parents and students. This gave me great ideas!”

The game's clear focus is a welcome way for team members to have productive, low-pressure discussions about improving their plans and programs. A staff member remarked, “I was doubtful when you said we were to play a game, but this was really good!” The Minnesota Parent Center may be playing games with its partners, but is clear that the Center means business about improving programs of family and community involvement.

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DEVELOPING A PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY/PLAN

RHODE ISLAND PARENT INFORMATION NETWORK CRANSTON, RHODE ISLAND

Every school wants parents to be involved in their children's education, but it helps if the school has a clear plan to work with all parents in ways that benefit students. The Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) wanted to help educators take steps to review, improve, or write a Parent Involvement Policy that would comply with requirements for Title I funding and provide each school with a blueprint for a strong partnership program.

RIPIN conducted a 3-hour workshop to help educators share, discuss, and improve their present policies so that they were in compliance with Title I requirements. They also hoped that the discussion would help parent involvement leaders from across the state become more familiar with the law and its required components for parental involvement. This year, 19 educators participated in this session, including Title I directors, principals, and assistant superintendents.

In the workshop, RIPIN facilitators stressed that Title I's words about "policy" were actually referring to schools' "detailed plans" for parental involvement. That is, the "policy" is not just a general statement of intent to involve parents. Rather, the law states that it is a detailed schedule of activities for engaging parents in ways that support student achievement and success in school. This discussion made everyone feel more focused on the work they needed to do to improve their own school's program by developing a viable policy/plan.

The RIPIN staff reviewed all sections of the Title I Parent Involvement requirements at the district and school levels and discussed questions to ensure that everyone understood the important sections of the law. Each school is expected to conduct productive parental involvement that supports students' academic development.

The RIPIN staff worked to make this information clear and understandable, rather than using the language of the law, which sounded very demanding. They rephrased requirements as questions. For example, they asked: "How can the school involve parents in planning, reviewing, and improving the Title I program?" instead of making this sound as if there were only one way to fulfill this requirement.

Policies work better when they're developed by teams of people, not dictated by one person. The RIPIN facilitators distributed an Organizing a Team activity to help attendees see that they could develop a strong and committed team to lead work on family and community involvement in any school. The activity focused on team roles, meeting times, long term goals, and other details. Attendees also received a Planning Your Meeting activity that included sample agendas for effective team meetings.

The workshop added other helpful guidelines for writing a school policy/plan. This included information on the National PTA Standards, Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement, a Title I requirements checklist and template, and more. The six types of involvement that guides NNPS's approaches was popular among participants, who saw ways to combine the framework with the Title I checklist.

The workshop seemed to reduce attendees' stress levels about the word "policy" in Title I legislation. Participants reported that they better understood Title I requirements for parental involvement and saw that a detailed plan for engaging all parents would accomplish the intent of the law.

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HEALTHY BODIES/HEALTHY MINDS

CUYAHOGA COUNTY UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLEVELAND, OHIO

Childhood obesity has spiked in recent years. Leaders in many communities are looking for solutions to this growing health problem. The most appealing approaches are very common-sensical—children need good nutrition and active play every day! And, they need parents to model healthy behavior. Cuyahoga County’s Universal Pre-Kindergarten program wanted to help its young students feel happy and healthy by increasing family involvement and active play in Healthy Bodies/Healthy Minds.

One part of this program featured positive messages for parents, students, and teachers on the benefits of a healthy life style and the fun of exercise. The Cuyahoga Universal Pre-K staff wanted to share this information in simple but compelling ways in a number of actions and events.

First, they changed the dinners that were served at Family Nights for parents and children held at the Children’s Museum of Cleveland. The dinner menu featured more diversity in good food options, and water was served instead of sugary drinks. The Museum collaborated with a large exhibit called “Healthier Than Ever.” It included athletic and nutritious stations with activities at the Stretching Station and the Portions Patio.

To support the Universal Pre-K program, experts from the museum traveled to several preschools to talk about healthy food and daily exercise, and to answer children’s questions. Several of the early childhood centers in the community began their own programs for fitness and health—notably Kiddie City Child Care Community, Inc.

Kiddie City began with a series of family fitness nights. Parents, children, and staff sweated together to an exercise video, broke a few boards, and learned how to kick at Karate Night. On Stress Relief Night they got together to discuss stress in their lives and how to

reduce or remove it. Kiddie City also conducted a Biggest Loser activity for adults in which staff and parents engaged in a twelve-week weight-loss program. This also emphasized exercise and active movement for children and adults. Finally, at Food is Knowledge, students and parents enjoyed healthy food and learned about good nutrition.

Kiddie City has many ideas for its leadership for Healthy Bodies/Healthy Minds. They are scheduling a Swim and Gym Night, a Walk in the Woods at a local park, and another round of Biggest Loser for adults. The young children’s parents are excited about all of these activities. As one father said, “Wow, this was fun. When is the next event?” Another parent asked, “When does the next Biggest Loser start?”

Cuyahoga Universal Pre-K’s Healthy Bodies/Healthy Minds program is varied and vital for promoting children’s and parents’ health and wellness. Its local partners, including Kiddie City and the Children’s Museum, are showing that more children and families will participate in this important agenda when groups work together.

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NJPIRC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BEST PRACTICES AWARDS LUNCH

NEW JERSEY STATE PARENT INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTER NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

One way to keep districts and schools working to continually improve their partnership programs is to recognize outstanding work. It also helps to share good ideas and to thank people who work hard and well together. New Jersey State Parent Information and Resource Center (NJ-PIRC) wanted schools and districts in the NJ project to know that they were appreciated. The organization held a Family Engagement Best Practices Awards Luncheon.

The PIRC staff and advisory board planned to acknowledge the work that district leaders and school teams accomplished to date. They also wanted to encourage these sites to continue their work toward excellent and sustainable partnership programs.

The Awards Lunch included an area where districts, schools, the New Jersey Department of Education and other partners displayed resources and best practices of family and community involvement. Outstanding schools set up a poster area to show and discuss their work with others. The displays enabled district leaders and school teams to meet and talk with each other.

The executive director of Prevent Child Abuse-NJ, the home of the NJ-PIRC, introduced the keynote speaker—the director of Family and Community Relations at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington D.C. He delivered an engaging speech on the importance of family and community involvement. He also discussed ways to promote successful parent-teacher organizations. He closed with a few statements on the critical contributions of good communications between school and home.

After lunch, there was a discussion of the challenges and successes that districts and schools experienced as they planned and implemented their programs and practices of partnerships. Many good ideas were shared that others could adopt or adapt as they continued their programs.

Then, the NJ-PIRC conducted its award ceremony. It recognized all districts and schools with framed certificates. A group photo was later featured in an article on the PIRC's website. Special recognitions were made with a Best Practice Award for an innovative and excellent activity; a Partnership Award for exceptional outreach to families and community; and a Rising Star Award, for increasing commitment to family engagement.

The luncheon included a raffle with educational and professional development prizes and gift cards to cover travel costs. A parent on one school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) commented, "It feels great to be appreciated. . ." In return, the districts and schools voiced their appreciation for the NJ-PIRC.

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OUTREACH PROJECT

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Leaders at Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence (COE) developed its Outreach Project to encourage more districts and schools in South Carolina to develop programs of family and community involvement that contribute to student achievement and success in school.

For several years, COE has awarded funds to faculty members in local schools who worked with Francis Marion University on research and development projects that addressed one of six standards for understanding and educating children in poverty: Living in Poverty; Language and Literacy; Family and Community Partnerships; the Classroom Community; Curriculum Design Instruction/Assessment; and Teachers as Leaders/Learners/Advocates.

COE leaders noticed that up to now, few of these projects involved parents directly and intensively, and only one used the Epstein model for developing a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships. COE uses that model and NNPS tools and approaches in other schools, which have increased outreach to diverse families, including those living below the poverty line. These schools not only engaged more families, but also had impressive and creative results on student achievement.

After reviewing available data, COE decided to provide additional funds in the Outreach Project to support more schools' work on partnership program development. COE leaders conducted a National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) Training Workshop for schools that were interested in this agenda and in applying for funds. There were three goals for the workshop: Showcase three involvement activities that were featured in the 2010 edition of the NNPS publication, *Promising Partnership Practices*; motivate schools to engage more "hard to reach" families, including fathers and other significant male figures in students' lives; and announce the funds available for projects on

school, family, and community partnerships and on the education of children living in poverty.

Terms and guidelines for funding were provided at the workshop. Schools were asked to select one activity from an NNPS book of *Promising Partnership Practices* that matched a goal in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships. They could adopt or adapt an activity to improve student learning in an academic subject, improve behavior, or improve school climate. The schools had to submit their proposals for funding by December. They also had to agree to present their work at COE's End-of-Year Celebration and to submit their activity for consideration in NNPS's 2011 edition of the *Promising Partnership Practices*.

A COE Review Committee rated the schools' proposals. Three schools received funds for their projects: R. E. A. L. Men at Main Street Elementary to increase the involvement of fathers and father figures; Red Tie Club at Timrod Elementary to improve student behavior; and Families Reading Every Day (FRED), which planned to distribute over one hundred quality multi-cultural books to kindergarten students to improve early reading skills. The winners work was featured in the COE Spring Newsletter, which is sent to all educators in South Carolina. (See the Timrod and Main Street Elementary School projects in this publication.)

The Outreach Project's funds are incentives for more districts and schools to learn about and develop goal-linked programs of family and community involvement. COE's project is an important leadership activity for scaling up partnership programs in South Carolina.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROJECT

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAM SPECIALISTS TRENTON, MICHIGAN

The Michigan Association of State and Federal Program Specialists (MASFPS) has taken on a difficult challenge—to help districts and schools in Michigan meet federal standards for high-quality partnership programs, as required for Title I funding. The Association’s executive board authorized the development of a comprehensive professional development initiative to improve leadership and school-based programs of family and community involvement across the state. Two program managers chose the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) as its model.

The Parent Involvement Project is a three-year effort (started in fall 2009) that aims to reach and teach hundreds of educators and parents in schools and districts in Michigan. The MASFPS leadership team for the project began by attending the October 2009 NNPS Leadership Development Conference in Baltimore, where they earned certificates to conduct their own training workshops for school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs).

Well prepared, they conducted nine One-Day Team Training Workshops in different parts of the state. Participants came as teams of teachers, parents, administrators, and other partners. They learned about the organization of effective partnership programs and, by the end of the day, drafted One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships linked to their own School Improvement Plans and Title I plans. The MASFPS trainers also held half-day sessions in May and June in Lansing in the middle of the state and in Marquette on the Upper Peninsula.

Schools and districts were able to apply for on-site technical assistance. During the 2010-11 school year, schools in eight districts each received a minimum of five days of technical assistance and advanced training from MASFPS to implement their Action Plans for Partnerships. There were elementary, middle and high schools

in this group, as well as one alternative school and two K-12 schools. In the spring, these schools participated in a regional workshop where they shared their successes and challenges, and showed how their teams were building their capacities to engage students’ parents in effective ways.

“The sessions provided to date have resulted in an increased awareness of the tenets of a strong parent involvement and community partnership program,” said one of the program managers. “As a result, many schools and districts are forming Action Teams for Partnerships and developing action plans . . . for implementation in the fall of 2011.”

The 2011-12 school year will be the project’s third year. The Association will continue to build a state-wide “network of partnership schools” that can learn from and support each other. MASFPS will sponsor a summer workshop on interactive homework that will help schools engage parents in deeper ways in their children’s academics. The Association also will continue to develop effective ways to disseminate best practices.

“For the first time, I feel I am a true partner in my child’s school,” said one parent on a school’s ATP. MASFPS will continue its work by encouraging district leaders and school teams to join the Michigan network when they are ready to develop goal-linked family and community involvement. Such programs will meet and exceed Title I requirements for engaging families in ways that contribute to student success.

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ROUND TABLE MINI-CONFERENCE

ARIZONA STATE PIRC GILBERT, ARIZONA

A Round-Table Mini-Conference sounded like a good way to enable educators, parents, and other partners in education to share their work and learn new things to improve their partnership programs. The Arizona State Parent Information and Resource Center (AZ-PIRC) created a meaningful, interactive agenda for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) and others to increase their understanding of effective family and community involvement.

AZ-PIRC started with a survey to learn about schools' needs, interests, and questions for improving their partnership programs. Using this information, the PIRC leaders developed a PowerPoint presentation addressing the topics that were important to its constituents. This was used in a short presentation to explain the goals, guidelines, and agenda at the mini-conference.

Among nine topics featured at the Round Table Mini Conference were: the effectiveness of parent-teacher academic teams; family engagement in rural locations; fathers' involvement in schools and students' lives; family engagement at the secondary school level; and parent leadership training.

Facilitators from state-wide organizations including Arizona PTA, Stand For Children, Communities in Schools, and the Arizona Department of Education conducted round table discussions. Leaders from three LEAs presented the sessions on promising practices related to community partnerships, urban engagement, and the utilization of data to evaluate family involvement programs. The AZ-PIRC facilitated a discussion on PASS (Parent Academy for Student Success, a parent leadership program.

All topics were discussed three times during day. Attendees could listen, learn, and contribute to any three topics that interested them.

The sessions were kept small, with up to ten participants at each round table discussion. The flow of information and ideas went from presenters to participants and back again. The small groups also meant that participants could ask questions and share their own information on the various topics. The round table format provided time for examples and exchanges, successful strategies and challenges that are difficult to solve, and networking for other connections.

The Mini-Conference was an excellent opportunity that succeeded by keeping things casual and highly interactive. The information offered was on topics that were requested and important to the attendees. Said a coordinator, "The PASS Training and Academic Parent Teacher Teams Round Tables were excellent and I'm looking forward to implementing the materials at my school to increase our family engagement!"

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STEM SCHOOL SCIENCE NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

HAMILTON COUNTY FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST COUNCIL CINCINNATI, OHIO

A community-based leadership organization, Hamilton County Family and Children First Council, supports a Resource Coordinator in each collaborating school to guide and help the school improve its partnership program. The Resource Coordinator, teachers, parents, and students at William H. Taft Elementary School created an interesting partnership with science teachers, students in second through eighth grade, and an economics professor from University of Cincinnati (UC). Together, they developed a STEM Science Night at the Museum.

Science Night at the Museum is a school-wide activity that includes activities for students at different grade level. For example, eighth graders at Taft work throughout the year to learn different specialties in science. This year, they also learned about economic development to make some interdisciplinary connections.

The Resource Coordinator for parental involvement and the UC Professor of Economics worked with volunteers to help teams of eighth grade students create products that relate to both science and economics to show and to sell at Science Night at the Museum. In one project, students worked with technicians from the imaging department of a local hospital to create Skull Necklace Kits made from actual x-rays. Among other projects, some eighth graders worked with respiratory therapists and made Tongue Depressor Harmonica Kits that demonstrated their knowledge of vibration and harmonics. Still other students focused on different science concepts, resulting in DNA Bracelet Kits and Syringe Ink Pen Kits. At the museum, the students displayed, demonstrated, and sold their products.

In the weeks prior to Museum Night, second through seventh graders also learned basic economic principles. They earned points for good behavior and for academic achievement. They could apply the points to “debit cards” and

use these on Science Museum Night to buy the eighth graders’ science kits that interested them.

On Science Museum Night, students and their families met at the school for an early pizza dinner, and then headed to the Museum of Science and History. The second through seventh graders received their debit cards on a color-coded lanyards in red, yellow, or blue. The colors guided students where to start their tour of the museum in one of three sections.

Students with red lanyards began in the section of medical displays and a medical career fair set up by a local hospital. Students could examine state-of-the-art hospital technology. Some student-scientists might be interested in this specialty for a future STEM-related career.

Students with blue lanyards begin by touring the actual museum, which was closed to the general public for this school activity.

Those with yellow lanyards started at the booths of the students’ specialty science kits. The eighth graders assisted customers in assembling the kits and using the products. The kit makers called upon their training in economics to attract customers to their booths. The best-selling kit earned a cash prize (\$25) for the winning science student. The eighth graders had to keep track of their inventory of science kits, and their profit/loss margin.

This STEM-Economics-and-Museum event brought students, parents, teachers, and community partners together for an informative evening and a unique, interdisciplinary, real-world experience.

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BEYOND RANDOM ACTS OF PARTNERSHIP

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION MADISON, WISCONSIN

It is time to move family and community involvement from accidental activities to well-planned partnership programs. This means that family and community involvement activities will be linked to school improvement goals for a positive climate and for student success. Such purposeful programs make family and community involvement central to school improvement, rather than “extra” or “outside” the interests of educators. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) knows this well. DPI has been a state leader in helping districts and schools organize purposeful partnership programs. The state’s partnership team wanted to help more Wisconsin districts and schools consider these new directions at its Beyond Random Acts of Partnership Conference.

This approach, supported by many research studies, was featured in a report prepared for the U. S. Department of Education (*Beyond Random Acts: Family, School, and Community Engagement as an Integral Part of Education Reform*). As NNPS guidelines assert, partnership programs require teamwork, a written plan of activities linked to goals for student learning and development, and annual evaluations to improve outreach to parents and results for students every year.

DPI wanted educators and parents to know that family and community involvement requires more than unrelated or only fun activities. Rather, good programs that focus on student success are worth everyone’s time—educators, parents, and students. The Conference aimed to redirect efforts from simple activities to more comprehensive partnership programs.

The conference began with a “Fishbowl Session,” where attendees from schools, districts, homes, and communities across Wisconsin listened to a panel discussing parent involvement and school environments. As if looking into a fishbowl, the audience observed and considered

what it heard. Then, the audience members participated in important question and answer periods.

The 200-plus members of the audience broke into small groups to examine and discuss critical questions. Teams addressed questions such as: “How do you define a welcoming school environment?” and “How do schools integrate, sustain, and systematize environments that welcome all children and families?” Each team recorded some breakthrough ideas and some remaining questions.

As keynote speaker, the Superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools presented his views on the power of family and community involvement. His inspirational presentation recognized challenges that districts and schools must solve to organize and sustain effective partnership programs. He made clear, too, that words were not enough; action was imperative.

After lunch, a new panel focused on ways for schools, families, and communities to co-create involvement activities focused on student learning. This discussion highlighted the importance of teamwork. Small groups discussed the roles they might play in strengthening teamwork on partnerships. They addressed such questions as: “What is your role in helping students learn?” or “What strategies for achieving success and overcoming challenges have you encountered?”

The final activity asked participants to fill out a “commitment card” telling how they—individually and with others—would help develop better partnership programs in their schools. The organizers planned to mail the cards to the attendees at the start of the school year to remind them of their commitments to action.

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ENGAGING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN EDUCATION

MARYLAND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FAMILY INVOLVEMENT NETWORK ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

Many if not most schools across the country serve some families that speak languages other than English at home. As schools improve their programs of family and community involvement, they face some challenges in communicating with and engaging diverse families. To resolve these challenges, Maryland schools are emphasizing a key component of partnership program development—teamwork. To help schools press ahead, state leaders formed the Maryland English Language Learning Family Involvement Network—MELLFIN, which aims to provide guidelines and resources to schools and teachers working to engage linguistically diverse families in their schools and in their children’s education.

Students in Maryland come from about 200 countries and speak over 150 languages and dialects. This rich cultural diversity adds many positive qualities and learning opportunities to Maryland schools, but also poses communication challenges. MELLFIN brings educators, parents, and community members together for an annual conference to brainstorm, share ideas, and learn strategies for involving diverse families in school-based partnership programs.

The theme of this year’s conference was Closing the ELL Achievement Gap through Family and Community Engagement. The well-planned conference included breakfast, time to network, time to visit information booths, and several important sessions.

In the morning, the Superintendent of Anne Arundel County Schools and Assistant State Superintendent welcomed attendees. The keynote speaker, Director of Community Outreach for the U.S. Department of Education, delivered an engaging talk and important information on alternative strategies for involving diverse families in their children’s education. He called on schools to take action to attain their combined goals of more family

involvement and higher student achievement.

At its awards ceremony, the organization presented a MELLFIN ELL Family Engagement Award to Bollman Bridge Elementary School and Coastal Sunbelt Produce to recognize their effective outreach to diverse families and excellent practices. (See a Bollman Bridge activity in this publication.)

Attendees selected two break-out sessions that interested them from a long list of workshops conducted by state, district, school, and organizational leaders. The topics were current and relevant for increasing the involvement of English-learning families. One attendee reported, “The sessions ... were very practical, useful, and resourceful. The conference continued my motivation to increase parent involvement.” Discussions and networking continued at a lunch of Asian fusion cuisine, which reflected the conference theme.

One participant summarized the success of the conference: “This was my first time. It was amazing in all ways. Well-organized, great facility, delicious meal, prepared presenters, good information, powerful speaker, and lovely helpers.” Maryland is considering creating a regional conference by working with leaders in Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. The region’s schools share similar challenges and goals to engage diverse families in ways that increase their ELL children’s success in school. An annual motivating and informative conference could help to advance this important agenda.

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