

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



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

Johns Hopkins University

2012

Edited by

Brenda G. Thomas, Marsha D. Greenfeld, Courtney Sender, and Darcy J. Hutchins



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-

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for the photographs of school, family, and community partnership activities in *Promising Partnership Practices 2012*.

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INTRODUCTION

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES 2012

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.,

Director

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

What's in a Name?

“That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Did you know that Shakespeare gave good advice for developing effective programs of family and community involvement?

Districts and schools in NNPS know that a school-based Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) is an essential structure for an effective program of family and community engagement. By writing a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships that includes activities for the six types of involvement, an ATP ensures that all families can be involved in their children's education in different ways and in different locations—at home, at school, and in the community. By evaluating the quality and progress of its work, an ATP ensures that its partnership program can improve from year to year, engage more families, and improve results for students' success in school. Yes, the ATP is the essential structure for moving partnership programs forward in all NNPS schools.

In *Promising Partnership Practices 2012*, you will see that some districts and schools in NNPS give their ATPs a local name. Districts and schools have School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) teams; Family Engagement Action Teams (FEAT); School Action Teams for Partnerships (SATP and SATp); and other variations on the theme. The best names follow the “rule” in the NNPS Handbook for Action that a team for family and community involvement must “speak” partnerships, and not focus only on parents.

In the end, team names are a matter of choice, but in NNPS the action team—however called—must include teachers, parents, administrators, and other partners in children's education. A good partnership team will focus its plans and activities for partnerships on goals to improve the school climate and to increase students' success. A dedicated team will work, over time, to engage all parents, not just a few. A strong team—by any name—will conduct work that is as “sweet” as that of any other strong Action Team for Partnerships (ATP).

What's in this Book?

The activities in this book come from Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs)—whatever their local names—for others in NNPS to help them strengthen their partnership programs. The editors of *Promising Partnership Practices 2012* selected 88 activities from 70 schools (or school groups), 13 districts, 4 organizations, and 1 state department of education. The contributors are from economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities in 16 states in all parts of the country. There are basic, advanced, creative, and surprising goal-linked activities in every section of this book.

Readers will find good ideas to adopt or adapt by using the book's four Tables of Contents:

FOUR TABLES OF CONTENTS (TOC)

1. **GOALS FOR PARTNERSHIPS.** This TOC will help you find family and community engagement activities to increase students' skills and attitudes in reading, math, science, and other school subjects; improve student behavior, health and safety, multicultural awareness, transitions to new school levels, and postsecondary plans for college and careers; and improve the school climate. This TOC also includes activities to help district, state, and organization leaders strengthen their leadership on partnerships and improve their assistance to school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs).

2. **SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT.** This TOC will help you find ways to strengthen parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each page notes one type of involvement, but each practice may activate several types of involvement by design.

3. **SCHOOL AND POLICY LEVELS.** This TOC will help you find activities that were conducted in preschools, elementary, middle, and high schools. Remember, many activities implemented at one school level may be used or adapted at other school levels. Also, see activities for district, state, and organization leaders.

4. **CONTRIBUTORS.** This TOC shows you where the contributors to this book are located. Of course, many activities developed in one community (urban, suburban, or rural) may be adapted to meet conditions and interests in other locations.

ON THE WEB. *Promising Partnership Practices 2012* will be on posted on the NNPS website— www.partnershipschools.org—in the section Success Stories. See the Order Form for additional print copies.

NNPS SAMPLERS. NNPS *SAMPLERS* provide a shortcut for reviewing ten good activities from prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices* that may help your school meet specific partnership goals in reading, math, science, attendance, behavior, career awareness/postsecondary planning, and improve partnership programs in preschools, middle schools, and high schools. Each *Sampler* also includes a one-page summary of results of research on the featured topic. Follow the links to *Samplers* from the NNPS homepage. Also, see an Order Form for printed copies of *Samplers* for easy distribution.

NEW. MEMBERS ONLY! Starting January 2013, NNPS will initiate its MEMBERS ONLY section of the website to give members access to over 1000 activities in all prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices*, from 1998 to 2011. Members only also will have access to all *Samplers* in the current series and new topics that will be published next year. The access code for the Members Only section for the 2012-13 school year is NNPSmem13.

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) provides professional development and on-going technical assistance to enable 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 activating 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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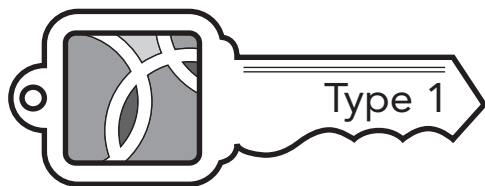
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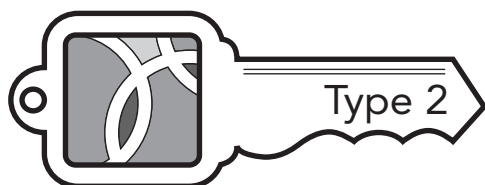
Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships



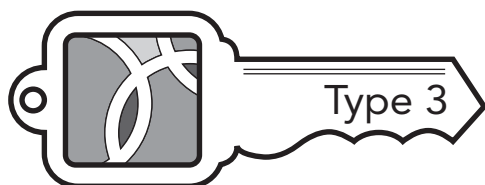
Parenting

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.



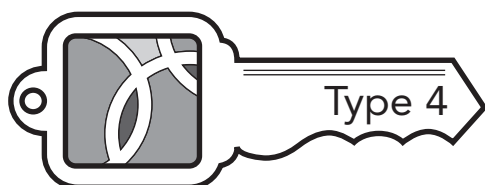
Communicating

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



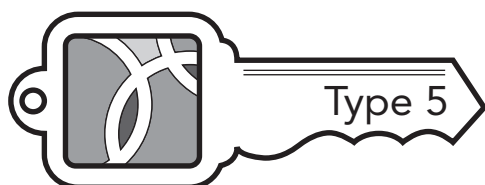
Volunteering

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.

BOOK SWAP

BELL CITY SCHOOL BELL CITY, LA

Free books. The price was right at the Bell City Book Swap. This was not a dream—but a real two-day event at which students, their families, and community members were able to obtain books to read and refresh their home libraries.

The Book Swap required two steps—collecting donated books and, then, making them available to others. Donations were made in response to flyers and automated phone calls one week prior to the Swap. Families and the community donated gently used books for elementary, middle, and high school students. Donations also included adult books that were appropriate for display, such as novels, cookbooks, and how-to books. The curriculum coordinator, Student Council members, and parents worked together to sort about 2000 donated books by age level, and displayed them by level in the multipurpose room.

The next week, every class in the school visited the Book Swap and selected books according to a two-day schedule. Older students helped younger students choose their books, and Student Council helpers were assigned to each time slot. Parents and community members who signed in at the front office also were able to participate over the two-days.

Accessibility, generosity, and community spirit were the guiding principles for the Bruin Book Swap. You did not have to donate books in order to participate and everyone was free to take books that interested them. After 500 students in grades preK-12 selected their books, only 40 books remained. Student Council members donated the extra books to a local women’s shelter.

The Book Swap took some planning, but the first year of the event was a real success. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) found that sorting books by age and reading levels helped them keep the event on schedule. They also were careful to plan the free Swap after the library’s Scholastic Book Fair fundraiser so that the activities did not interfere with each other.

Everyone in Bell City seemed to agree with the teachers, who called the Book Swap “better than shopping,” and “a great opportunity for the students to share and get new reading material.” With a price tag of \$0 for the school and for the swappers, a chance to donate books to a local women’s shelter, and an opportunity for collaboration by teachers, students, families, and community members, the Book Swap promoted reading for just about everyone.

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Type 4

READING

BREAKFAST AND A BOOK WITH MOM

MACHEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VA

Type 3

One Friday morning in March started off with “The Seuss, the whole Seuss, and nothing but the Seuss”—the theme for Breakfast and a Book with Mom. The Machen Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned a morning breakfast for moms and students to coincide with Read Across America and Dr. Seuss’s birthday. The school wanted to encourage more students to become enthusiastic readers.

Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, big sisters, and female neighbors were invited to Machen Elementary School to share a healthy breakfast and a story or two with their children. Teachers, parents, and students dressed as favorite Dr. Seuss characters in honor of the event. The PE teacher became the Cat in the Hat, and two students took the roles of Thing One and Thing Two.

Families enjoyed a continental breakfast of muffins, bagels, fruit, juice, and coffee. Then, families began to read books they brought from home, or Dr. Seuss books that the school librarian had provided. Before long, the mothers and mother-figures were not only reading to their own children, but also to other students in the cafeteria whose moms could not make it that day.

After reading each book, students completed a Book Information Sheet to record the title of the book they read and a summary of the plot. Mothers were asked to write an encouraging message to their children or to their children’s teachers and classmates. The teachers later read these inspirational words aloud to the students.

Machen’s ATP, Parent Involvement Facilitator (PIF), school Reading Coach, and others worked to get many community groups involved in Breakfast and a Book with Mom. Volunteer

readers from nearby Langley Airforce Base read a Dr. Seuss book to students in each classroom. Later in the afternoon, Salty, the mascot from the Norfolk Admirals hockey team, visited the students to encourage reading.

Title I funds covered the \$250 cost of food for the event. The biggest challenge was ensuring that mothers would be able to attend an activity at 7 a.m. To solve this challenge, the ATP sent home RSVP flyers three weeks in advance, advertised on the school marquee, and placed reminder phone calls to families. They also held the event on a Friday, rather than in the middle of the week. At the end of breakfast, the PIF collected parent evaluation forms to measure parents’ reactions to the event.

When students read books aloud, their mothers had the opportunity to hear their children’s reading skills and gauge their reading fluency. Enjoying reading and making progress on reading skills is a necessary step for improving reading test scores.

One parent said that she and her son “love to read together! ...Cuddling and reading a book is a great way to spend time together.” Parents, community members, and students at Breakfast and a Book with Mom got to share time, breakfast, and a good story.

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READING

LITERACY BREAKFASTS

INTEGRATED ARTS ACADEMY BURLINGTON, VT

Breakfast and a book to read is a good combination for starting the day with food for strength and food for thought. Integrated Arts Academy (IAA) used this concept to welcome all parents to the classroom and to reinforce the importance of reading. At Literacy Breakfasts, students started the day right by reading to their parents.

Teachers opened Literary Breakfasts by greeting parents, other family members, and students who arrived at their regular classrooms at 8:10 a.m. As parents helped themselves to coffee and a buffet-style breakfast that teachers and other parents had prepared, students retrieved their book boxes—plastic containers that hold approximately eight grade-level books for each student. Carrying enough food for the whole family, parents joined their children at their desks or writing tables. Students, then, chose a book from their book box to read a good story to their parents, while enjoying breakfast together.

The planning committee wanted to give teachers options to orchestrate the details of their own Literacy Breakfasts, so each classroom proceeded according to the individual teacher's design. Some teachers directed students in singing songs for their parents, while others asked students to share their personal writing with their parents. At 8:45, some teachers gave a brief overview of the reading program in their classrooms. One teacher reported that, "I loved seeing the expression on the kids' faces when moms and dads entered the rooms."

Literacy Breakfasts ended at 9 a.m., as teachers thanked parents for attending. Teachers also noted that parents were always welcome to call or e-mail if they wanted to follow up on their child's literacy learning.

To ensure that every student could participate in Literacy Breakfasts, children whose parent or guardian could not attend were invited to bring a sibling from another grade. Also, all other adults who were free in the building were invited to join students who did not have siblings or parents at the school.

The IAA planning team decided to hold two Literacy Breakfasts in the fall semester and two in the spring, divided by grade level: preK-2nd grade, including the Students Toward English Proficiency class; and 3rd-5th grade. For others interested in conducting this activity, the team recommends at least three methods of outreach for inviting families. IAA used flyers, the school newsletter, a voice message from the principal, and individual phone calls. Home-School Liaisons, serving as interpreters, called families of English Language Learners to encourage them to attend the events. Interpreters also were available to translate conversations between parents and teachers during the Literacy Breakfasts.

At Literacy Breakfasts, 250 students and 180 parents and families got to enjoy an hour of reading or other literacy-linked activities. The morning was, according to one parent, "[A] spectacular event! Loved being in the classroom with my child." The event was the type of success story that a student could write about and read aloud at the next Literacy Breakfast.

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ONE BOOK, ONE SCHOOL BOOK CLUB AND SENIOR CENTER

UPPER MERION AREA HIGH SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

At Upper Merion Area High School (UMAHS), books are uniting students, families, teachers, and communities in the One Book, One School initiative. UMAHS paired its reading program with a local senior center’s book club, so readers of all ages could come together to discuss literature.

To promote a common culture of reading among students and staff, UMAHS developed the One Book, One School project. During the month of February, everyone in the UMAHS community—administrators, teachers, students, custodians, cafeteria staff, and more—read the same book: Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. Throughout the month, all school activities stopped for fifteen minutes while everyone read. Students examined issues and ideas raised in the book in many of their classes, and the English department encouraged parents and families to read the book, as well.

In the spirit of literary partnership, the school contacted the local senior center’s book club. Twenty senior citizens in the club agreed to read *The Hunger Games* during the month of February, in preparation for a joint discussion during their monthly meeting. At the end of the month, nine UMAHS students, one English teacher, and one school administrator joined the Senior Center Book Club to discuss the book’s themes of social standing, power, poverty, and war.

The book club meeting forged strong intergenerational connections. Students were impressed at how well the seniors received the book, and seniors appreciated the level of maturity and intellect that the students demonstrated. The best element of the event, wrote the senior center’s executive director, “was the joining of the two age groups and seeing what the different perspectives were...Your students were so open with the seniors and our seniors fell in love with your students.”

Because the One Book, One School project required everyone to have a copy of the book, UMAHS built several partnerships to help make it available. A local bookstore agreed to sell the book at a reduced cost (\$5.32), holding a Book Fair at the library that was open to students and parents during and after the school day. Staff members and other parents donated new and used books, so students on the free and reduced-price lunch program received the book for free. The donated books also went to the senior center book club, so the seniors did not incur any cost.

The UMAHS Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) recommends meeting with community book clubs early, so they can get the book on their list during the same time that students are reading the book. In the future, UMAHS hopes to have at least one student volunteer for every senior in the book club.

The One Book, One School partnership with a local senior center allowed students and seniors to engage in good discussions with neighbors they might not, otherwise, have met. It is ironic that *The Hunger Games*—the first book read by One Book, One School Book Club and Senior Center—describes a future in which children fight each other to the death, but was used at UMAHS to bring different generations together. Indeed, the senior center director asked UMAHS to “Please keep us in mind for any future partnerships.”

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Type 6

READING

READ ACROSS AMERICA

EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MADISON, WI

Emerson Elementary School’s teachers know that motivating students to read is a critical factors in increasing students’ reading skills and love of reading. The ATP and teachers used the occasion of Dr. Seuss’s birthday to get many community organizations involved in promoting literacy. In connection with the Read Across America celebration, Emerson combined fun reading activities with family and community involvement for a successful literary experience.

After a healthy dinner of subs, fresh fruit, lemonade, and dessert, families followed a map-card and schedule of activities for different literacy stations located around the school. Activities included Mad Libs, Dr. Seuss read-aloud, Madison Public Library’s Stories in the Dark, pick your own book, and create a bookmark. Families spent 30 minutes at each station and were directed over the PA when to move on to the next station. Families received a sticker on their activity maps as they completed each activity. When families had filled their map cards with stickers, they were entered into a drawing for a new Dr. Seuss book.

What made Emerson’s Read Across America unique were the many opportunities for community engagement that the event supported. Community organizations such as the Madison Public Library shared its summer reading program with Emerson families. Local restaurants and supermarkets donated food, and a bookstore donated 120 books. Emerson Elementary is a host school for student teachers from Edgewood College, and the Edgewood College Student Wisconsin Education Association (WEA) provided volunteers for the literacy event. The WEA also wrote a grant to fund Read Across America, and with Emerson’s AmeriCorps VISTA members, designed some activities, and obtained donations for dinner.

With 250 students and parents in attendance, traffic flow and organization were very important. When students and families arrived at the school, they received a map-card at the registration table, listing the activities, locations, and a schedule to follow. The cards were color coded and divided into 7 groups of 25-30 people. Each group started at a different activity station, and moved in the order listed on their cards. Clear instructions helped the event progress smoothly.

One teacher said, “It’s a great event that emphasizes the importance of reading and bringing families together.” The ATP and reading teachers assessed the evening and decided that, if a similar literacy night is conducted in the future, they could strengthen the practice by including more reading activities for older students.

Students and families at Emerson’s Read Across America had opportunities to experience the fun of reading in literacy-themed games, read-alouds, character meet and greets, and selecting books to take home. The event brought the wider Madison community together with the school for a successful reading extravaganza. Dr. Seuss would have enjoyed this evening.

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Type 4

READING

READ FOR THE RECORD KICK OFF

MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

“**L**lama llama red pajama hollers loudly for his mama!” If this sounds to you like a line from a loopy, exuberant children’s-book-turned-live-skit, then you’re on the same page as Mark Twain Elementary. The school celebrated Anna Dewdney’s *Llama Llama Red Pajama*, the 2011 Read for the Record campaign book, with a zany kick-off event that encouraged quiet reading through live theater.

For the past three years, the school has participated in the national Read for the Record activity every October. When they discovered that the 2011 book was an infectious rhyming read-aloud, they decided to amp up the excitement for reading at home with a school assembly. Students roared with laughter as the school Vice Principal joined the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) co-chairs to perform the book as a live skit.

The school used the kick-off to share health messages, as well. Mark Twain’s Partners in Educating All Kids! (PEAK!) collaborator—Advanced Pediatric Dentistry—sent its Tooth Fairy to remind students that bedtime reading and tooth-brushing go hand in hand.

The opportunity for partnerships did not end there. Mark Twain’s Read for the Record collaborates with the district’s Bikes for Books program. This program encourages students to read 20 minutes each night at home and to record their time reading for pleasure on an official Bikes for Books calendar. Parents initial the calendars and students turn them in each month. Twice-yearly, Bikes for Books hold assemblies to celebrate all of the students who turned in their reading calendars and randomly awards two girls’ and boys’ bikes and helmets donated by the Pasco Masons.

To meet the challenge of sorting through monthly reading calendars, Mark Twain organized a Senior Project with the local high school. One senior student was assigned to the elementary school to graph the reading records

of participating students. The growing graph of reading minutes was displayed on a prominent hallway bulletin board.

The kick-off event was conducted twice during the day, splitting the 780 students into two groups, so that all could see the *Llama Llama* skit up close and personally. The ATP used flyers and the school’s outside reader boards to notify parents of the event, alerted the staff at meetings and by e-mail. Mark Twain’s PEAK! Partner fund covered the \$50 cost of the kick-off.

According to Mark Twain’s Principal, the Read for the Record Kick-Off was “a fun and highly engaging assembly integrating...the joy and love of reading.” That’s good news, because twenty minutes of reading at home each night translates to many extra days of school-linked reading time each year. The time students spend reading for pleasure and reading with a parent may lead to lifelong love of reading inside and outside of school.

The immediate impact? “The kids are still checking the *Llama Llama Red Pajama* book out,” says the Mark Twain librarian. “We can’t keep that book in the library!”

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READING THROUGH THE YEARS: FAMILY LITERACY EXPO

PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

The more children read, the better readers they become. To encourage reading at home and to gain an understanding of the history of children’s literature, the School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) team and Home and School Association at Prairie Elementary School conducted Reading Through the Years—Family Literacy Expo. They invited all members of the school community to join students on a journey through children’s literature over time.

At a district meeting, the Prairie SFCP co-chair heard from a representative of HURRAH—Happy, Upbeat Retirees (& Other) Residents Actively Helping. The Prairie leader knew that these senior citizens could be extraordinary resources if they were linked to students’ reading for pleasure.

Prairie invited the Naper Settlement to do a presentation at the school’s Literacy Night on children’s books in the 19th Century. A member of this group came dressed in costume as a school teacher. She took students, families, and teachers back to school in 1863. Eight Prairie students were pre-selected to participate in the dramatization of her classroom.

In addition, five members of HURRAH came and shared their memories and favorite books from childhood. Each volunteer read aloud a few paragraphs from a favorite book and told how the story inspired them when they were young children. The speakers shared their reading memories and encouraged students to love reading as much as they did. A PowerPoint Presentation looped on display throughout Literacy Night with images of the covers of classic children’s books spanning the years.

To unify the student body, the art teacher created T-shirts with a green Prairie Dog logo on the front sitting on a stack of books and the phrase “Nurtured Readers are Leaders.” The shirts were printed by a local company that offers job training and employment to adults with autism

and other developmental challenges. Everyone in the school community received a free shirt for Reading Through the Years—Family Literacy Expo.

One more activity at the Expo was a Recommended Reading Garden. Students filled out paper flowers, butterflies, book worms, or caterpillars with the names of their favorite books and “planted” them in flower pots. The flower pots served as centerpieces for a Volunteer Lunch at the end of the year. The garden showed parents all of the books that children were enjoying and helped them devise summer reading lists for their children to consider.

Because there were many parts to this project, the SFCP team conducted the Literacy Expo activities over two days. With the participation of the community’s public librarian, a 3-D horizontal Time Line of Children’s Literature was developed showing students how stories reflected events in history. Elementary school textbooks from the 1900s to the present were on display. Families also donated items for the Time Line. In addition to books, stuffed animals, board and card games, puzzles, toys, and other artifacts brought the historic children’s stories to life.

The Literacy Time Line afforded students and families an opportunity to explore reading together in a creative way. The activities helped increase students interests and self-confidence about reading many kinds of books outside of school. Families were engaged with their students as they set reading goals. All of the activities at the Family Literacy Expo demonstrated the power and pleasure of reading, and increased students’ awareness of how literature has inspired children across the decades.

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ROUTE 66 READING ROAD TRIP

KINGSLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

With the goal of increasing students' excitement about reading and family engagement in reading, Kingsley Elementary School developed two creative activities to increase students' reading with dads in the fall and reading with moms in the spring. Both journeys into reading supported Kingsley's literacy goals by surrounding students and families with words and stories.

In the fall, a two-tone 1955 Chevy Belair parked at the entrance to the school. This put students' interest in high gear. It was the start of the Route 66 Reading Road Trip with dads and father figures. Students escorted dads, uncles, grandfathers, and male neighbors on the Route 66 Reading Road Trip. The students and their guests passed the Chevy Belair and picked up a travel guide to "drive" to 12 locations from Chicago and Los Angeles. Pit stops included quirky landmarks, diners, rodeos, museums, gas stations, trading posts, and more.

At each location, the pairs read a brief description of the road-side attraction and recorded answers to factual questions in the guide book. Teacher "tour guides" led other activities. They read about Route 66 on the school's new iPads, built roadside landmarks from recycled detergent bottles, drew pictures, and read a favorite book by a campfire. This was, indeed, a real reading trip!

In the spring, the partnership team set up an intriguing museum with apple seeds, acorns, pebbles, and trolls. This was the start of Tales, Tales, and More Tales—a fairy tale event with moms. Students and their moms or other female relatives stepped over the infamous bridge of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* and into a Storyland that was filled with tales from around the world.

Students and their guests dressed as princesses, cowboys, and other characters. They journeyed to 12 activities related to selected tales. At each station, they read short summaries and answered reading-based questions. Using iPads,

student "detectives" discovered errors in 36 tales. Did Cinderella ride a motorcycle to the ball? Did Snow White bite a poisoned grapefruit? Students weren't fooled, and they created their own variations to traditional tales. They also visited the Tale Museum, where they and their guests matched apple seeds, pebbles, acorns, trolls, and mattresses to particular tales.

The fall and spring imaginative events required good planning and teamwork. Community members donated items for raffles. A local high school's drama department donated props to transform Kingsley into Storyland. This helped offset the \$300 total cost, paid from Kingsley's Home and School budget. Volunteers were essential. Parents on the School Family Community Partnerships (SFCP) committee helped organize, plan, and oversee activities and materials, and designed routes through school for good traffic flow. Teachers and administrators greeted families and helped run activities, and students designed graphics for all flyers and created a mural for the fall event.

The two family engagement activities were fun, but "reading is always the focus," said a parent volunteer. Related reading materials were in all classrooms and students were paired with a cross-grade reading buddy to encourage each other's reading. Parents kept at-home reading logs with their children, and read with children at the event. By promoting partnerships in reading, Kingsley wanted students to get their kicks on Route 66 and read happily ever after.

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SOL FAMILY READING NIGHT

LAKE TYLER MIDDLE SCHOOL NORFOLK, VA

At Lake Tyler Middle School, SOL Family Reading Night turned preparing for state tests into reading fun. Parents and students read together, received books donated by a publishing company, and engaged in exciting literary games, in preparation for Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.

On this Family Reading Night, families and students entered a world of engaging reading activities that were linked to state standards. They rotated to different reading experiences every fifteen minutes. For example, one reading teacher ran a Making Inferences station. Another shared the features of Kindles and e-readers with parents and students who read from the devices. Still another teacher oversaw a board game station at which students read short selections and answered questions by applying reading strategies such as drawing conclusions and summarizing. At the laptop station, families participated in computer-based reading activities that students used in the classroom.

To encourage reading after this evening, the Reading Instructional Coach contacted a publishing company for high-interest novels that would appeal to Lake Tyler students. The company donated over 70 books, including multiple copies of the same books. Teachers encouraged parents and children to take home pairs of books, so they could read the same book and discuss characters, plot, and themes with each other. Teachers also modeled strategies for parents and students to have meaningful conversations about these and other books.

Students and parents received a ticket at each reading station they completed. At the end of the night, all of these tickets were collected to be drawn for prizes. Teachers also recognized students with outstanding achievement in reading.

The planning committee noted that the number and timing of SOL events made a big

difference in attendance. When Lake Tyler held several SOL nights for different content areas, they found that fewer parents and family members attended each one. They selected one but not another. The partnership team also changed the event time from 6-8 p.m. to 3-5 p.m. in an effort to encourage students to attend directly after school. This was easier than returning later with a parent. These changes will be reviewed to try to increase the number of students and parents who can attend the useful test prep activities.

One good result of the focus on reading was that teachers from other departments and content areas came out to support the activity. The reading teachers returned the favor by supporting other departments throughout the year, creating a more cohesive learning community for students. A School Improvement Grant (SIG) covered the cost of materials, food, and prizes for the reading event.

The school reading coach explained that, at the SOL Family Reading Night, teachers brought “. . . fun and engaging activities they had used in their classrooms to share with families, so that parents could see how their children were learning.” Parents, then, were more knowledgeable about the state tests, and students were better prepared to take them.

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THE LION AND THE MOUSE: TRI-LINGUAL FAMILY STORYTELLING

L'ETOILE DU NORD FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MN

Type 4

Families at L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School speak 28 languages at home. This means that some of the elementary school's 640 students are working to become bilingual in English and French, and some are working to become tri-lingual. English Language Learners are working to retain and improve their home language, English, and French. To help Spanish-speaking families share their languages with their children, the school implemented a family storytelling project that used three languages to engage families with children as authors.

Latino families, including parents, siblings, and extended family members, worked together at home to interpret Jerry Pinkney's award-winning wordless picture book, *The Lion and the Mouse*. The students and family members worked together to write their own versions of the folktale in Spanish, and the students brought their stories to school. The English Language Learner and classroom French teachers helped students translate their family stories into English and French. Next, students created handmade triptych books with three pockets, each pocket holding an illustrated pamphlet of their original *Lion and the Mouse* story in English, Spanish, or French.

The school and Saint Paul community embraced the budding tri-lingual authors by celebrating their efforts. Students read their stories aloud to their classrooms in celebration of L'Etoile du Nord's first Cinco de Mayo Celebration. Later that month, the district presented the books for public display at its annual End-of-Year Latino Celebration.

The L'Etoile du Nord team was able to share the results of this Family Storytelling program with many groups. They presented the project at the first Latino Parent Network of the

year in September, then to the PTO, the Site Council, and the Latino Parent Advisory Committee at the St. Paul Public School district. They wrote an article in the school newsletter, presented the project at the Humphrey College of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, and had two proposals accepted to present at various language acquisition conferences at the district and University.

For a successful Tri-Lingual Family Storytelling project, the planning team advises starting small and providing follow-up communications and support for every family. L'Etoile du Nord piloted the program with fifteen families. Costs were \$225 for five copies of *The Lion and the Mouse* and \$100 for paper and book board, which the participating teachers paid for voluntarily. Teachers in this school agree that it is important for students to feel positive about their home language and confident about their progress in English and in French.

The Tri-Lingual Family Storytelling Project aimed to improve students' language skills and oral fluency, while encouraging parental involvement. One Latino parent opined, "It is important for children to practice talking in French and Spanish, too." Another said, "We need these opportunities so we can participate more [at home and at school]."

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READING

DIY DAY: DADS INVOLVED IN YOUTH

HENRY TIMROD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

“DIY” usually stands for Do It Yourself craft-making—but at Henry Timrod Elementary, when dads and other male relatives came to school with their children on a Saturday morning, it meant Dads Involved in Youth (DIY). Pre-K through sixth-grade students and their dads, uncles, grandfathers, and male community volunteers all worked together to construct their own birdfeeders and learn new math concepts along the way

One Saturday morning, 56 students and 48 male family members arrived at Henry Timrod and received a math skills sheet, clipboard, and pencil. The families ate a full breakfast, which was sponsored by a local church and restaurant.

After breakfast, everyone proceeded to the construction side of the cafeteria to obtain a birdhouse kit, tape measure, and screwdriver set, which was theirs to keep thanks to a grant from the Francis Marion University (FMU) Center of Excellence. Student-family teams received basic directions for building a birdfeeder and were shown a model. Then, working at long cafeteria tables, they started their projects. Eighteen volunteers—including male community leaders, FMU students, teachers’ spouses, a local male artist, and a carpenter—walked around, assisting as needed.

Once students and their male relatives built their birdhouses, they worked together to complete related math activities. Teachers were on hand to help students recall concepts and skills in measurement, prediction, shape identification, and comparing angles.

Student-father groups took their wooden birdhouses to paint stations in the school breezeway. At the final measurement station, they measured birdseed donated by Lowe’s and completed their math skills sheet. Students handed in a checklist of steps taken to make their birdhouses and their math skills sheet, showing over 80% mastery of math skills.

Each student-father team proudly carried home their birdhouse, birdseed, tape measure and screwdriver set, and a smile. For 29 fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, DIY Day was the first time they had attended a school event all year. One teacher commented, “Five of my students participated today. ...I’d only met the moms before. It was great to see and talk to their dads.”

Community volunteers helped make DIY Day a success. One student, who did not have a male relative, partnered with a male volunteer mentor. The FMU grant covered costs and Lowe’s suggested a more affordable project for next year, as well as other materials it could donate. The volunteer carpenter said, “Please make sure you invite me to this event again next year. I will have four more guys lined up ready to come help...I can’t think of a better way to spend a Saturday morning.”

Choosing a Saturday allowed male relatives to participate outside of the workweek, but transportation to school was difficult. FMU reported that the college may be able to help with transportation in the future. With more than 87% of Henry Timrod students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, receiving breakfast on a Saturday was also viewed as a benefit.

At DIY Day, students learned math, constructed crafts, and built family-school partnerships. Most importantly, said one teacher, “Students were so proud to have their dads with them—that’s a feeling in the atmosphere that’s not even describable.” Do it yourself craft-making has never been so full of do-it-togetherness.

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Type 4

MATH

MATH CARNIVAL

MOORE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

What do you get when 250 students, 250 parents, 40 faculty and staff members, and 25 community members come together for a fun-filled carnival of math games and activities? At Moore Intermediate School, over 500 happy people enjoyed Math Carnival together. They strengthened math skills and family and school bonds.

At October's Math Carnival, teachers in bright and bold costumes greeted students and family members. Clowns, witches, mice, ancient Egyptians, and others helped students and families move among carnival tables throughout the building. Each table was set up with a math activity and game. After completing each activity, students received one item from the table and the teacher stamped or initialed the students' carnival tickets. When students filled their cards, they earned a homework pass that they could use any time during the month of October.

The fifteen activities set up throughout the building were mind-bending math tasks and word puzzles related to shapes, patterns, logic, and critical problem-solving. Each station presented participants with an activity sheet that posed a problem to solve.

The problems varied widely. Students divided plots of land into congruent shapes, used puzzle pieces to create new shapes, removed toothpicks from a set of squares to create a specified number of new squares, found patterns in money-earning, worked out the number of beans in a salad, played a slide-and-jump game with rules for different colored pieces, and more. Students tackled real-world examples and learned math concepts that would help them in their math classes.

The Moore Association of Parents and Teachers (APT) planned the Math Carnival in conjunction with the school's Supplemental Educational Services Fair. That way, parents could come to the cafeteria to learn about after-school

tutorial and enrichment programs for their children *and* participate with their children at the Math Carnival. The event followed a building and grounds clean-up sponsored by business partner General Electric, so the school was welcoming, friendly, and attractive for parents.

The greatest challenge for the Math Carnival was making sure that all families knew they were invited and that the event was free. The school used its monthly newsletter, electronic signboard, and parent-link phone system to publicize the event. Popcorn and drinks were available to everyone in the cafeteria. APT and school-level funds covered the \$200 cost of the event. In the future, the APT hopes to find other community agencies that might support and participate in the Math Carnival.

At Math Carnival, students improved their math skills and their relationships with their enthusiastically-costumed teachers, which, in turn, improved student behavior. Families and teachers met each other and exchanged information and resources, and families also found supplemental educational services for their children.

"This is easily my favorite activity," said Moore's Principal. "It is great to see the staff come together with all of our shareholders." The Math Carnival added math skills and math concepts to equal fun for the whole Moore community.

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Type 4

MATH

MATH NUMBER SENSE

ALTIZER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HUNTINGTON, WV

Memorization, calculators, fingers, an abacus, charts, trees: all of these are tools that teachers may have used to teach children math. The changes in math instruction created challenges for parents at Altizer Elementary. They often could help their children in math, but not always in the same way that the teacher taught in class. A workshop, Math Number Sense, was designed to introduce parents to the types of math instruction that their children were learning at school.

At the Math Number Sense workshop, parents and their children received a packet with sample math problems and how students are taught to solve them. Teachers explained the importance of number sense and demonstrated their math teaching methods. These included TEN frames, two-colored counters, 100 boards, unifix blocks, place value workmats, and more. At the workshop's end, students worked with their parents on a Hundred Board, while enjoying drinks and snacks.

At first, parents thought that they would not understand the new math concepts. Ultimately, they agreed that the activity was "fun," because "now I know I am not the only parent who didn't understand." The parents also discussed ways to incorporate math into their everyday activities with their children. In future workshops, the team at Altizer plans to include an example of an everyday math activity, such as the use of fractions in a recipe.

The partnership team at Altizer envisioned Math Number Sense after several parents requested more information about how to help their children in math. Title I math teachers worked with kindergarten through second-grade classroom teachers to decide which math methods were the most difficult to grasp. Then, the Title I math teachers developed the workshop agenda and provided the materials for parents.

Because every room at Altizer is in use during the day, the workshop took place in the gym/cafeteria. To encourage parent participation, students were invited to join their parents in attending the workshop instead of attending class. This enabled parents and students to work together on the math activities in a positive and supportive school environment. Altizer also sent home a note one week in advance with a registration form, a three-day notice reminder, and e-mail reminders to parents in the e-mail program.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships and the math teachers at Altizer hope that the Math Number Sense workshop will help to increase the number of parents who are comfortable about reinforcing students' math learning at home, show students that they are interested in their math skills, and, thereby, improve students' math scores.

Here is a math situation to consider: The total cost of the workshop was \$15 for snacks and drinks. This helped more than a dozen parents and their children gain confidence about working together on math homework. Altizer figured that the cost-benefit ratio was positive for the participants. The Action Team and math teachers also gained many good ideas about how to communicate with parents about math instruction so that they could help their children at home.

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MONSTER MATH NIGHT

MAYA ANGELOU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Maya Angelou Elementary used the excitement about Halloween to get students and families just as excited about building math skills. At Monster Math Night, Halloween themes guided math-learning activities and provided a fun, engaging, friendly event where students participated in math games with their families and community partners.

Families arriving at Monster Math Night received maps that helped them travel from classroom to classroom to participate in various math games targeted at a variety of grade level standards. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) encouraged families to come dressed in Halloween costumes, so witches, goblins, and students played math games together. The games addressed skills of number recognition, number matching, number patterns, estimation, fractions, probability, and basic arithmetic.

One of Maya Angelou's Partners in Educating All Kids (PEAK)—Kadlec Clinic—set up a Trunk-or-Treating station outside the school that encouraged family engagement and event attendance. The Regional Service Corps had several volunteers in attendance, running a S'more station that included a fun way to use fractions to get a treat.

With over 500 students and 700 parents and family members in attendance, Monster Math Night required good planning and many volunteers. About 80% of the Maya Angelou teaching staff participated in organizing, running, and cleaning up the activity stations on the night of the event. Teachers also attended and participated in the games and activities along with the students and families.

Many students enrolled in an afterschool program conducted by the Boys and Girls Club created signs, which were posted around the school to advertise the event. They also designed and painted door signs to tell which math game was in which classroom.

Administrators allocated ATP and Title I funds to cover the \$450 budget for various activities and for materials such as math-themed board games that were given away as prizes the day after the event.

Monster Math Night gave students a chance to interact with parents and teachers in a relaxed, supportive environment centered around building math skills. Parents learned how easily they could reinforce math skills at home by using simple games or activities that promoted targeted skills. Each year, the ATP evaluates the games and activities at the school's math night, and modifies or replaces them to attract more families and to better teach the desired skills. Maya Angelou's principal noted, "The parents love the games and have begun to see math [with] a different perspective."

Students went home with S'mores, candy, and prizes. Parents had strategies to help their children improve and enjoy math skills. Monster Math Night may be conducted around Halloween, but there's nothing scary about learning math skills and concepts.

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ONE MILLION MCA MATH MINUTES

ANOKA MIDDLE SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS

ANOKA, MN

Here's an equation: The cost of paper + x = higher Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) Math proficiency. The answer to the equation is: x = Anoka Middle School's One Million MCA Math Minutes program. In an effort to increase students' math proficiency by at least 5% across all subgroups, Anoka students and their families kept track of their math study minutes as part of a school-wide studying initiative.

This thrifty approach called attention to the importance of "the basics" for strengthening math skills—namely studying. The question was: If more students studied math for more minutes, more of them—at least 5%—will increase their math skills and scores.

Six weeks prior to the online MCA Math tests, Anoka math teachers handed out six Math Minutes record-keeping slips to each student—one for each week of the program. Students recorded the time they spent each week studying math or completing math homework activities at school or home. Parents and teachers signed the slips—thanks to reminders from the school e-newsletter and the principal's weekly phone calls to parents and students. Students submitted their slips at the end of each week.

Math teachers put these records in envelopes that were labeled with their names for the Volunteer Services Coordinator (VSC). Then, the VSC sent the envelopes home with students whose parents volunteered to count and record the minutes. Parents e-mailed the total minutes of math study per class to the VSC. The VSC entered this information into a spreadsheet that tracked each class's total math minutes for the week, along with the weekly total for the whole school per week.

To incentivize the program, the Arts Curriculum Integrator designed a huge poster of a math-minutes thermometer to hang in the school. The VSC updated the thermometer using red construction paper to show the increasing number of math study minutes over time. This presented a public record of students' progress.

One Million MCA Math Minutes was an inexpensive, easily replicable activity that encouraged over 1900 students, 3500 parents and caregivers, and 50 teachers to strive to increase math test scores. The practice turned math homework into a team-building activity, augmenting parental involvement without adding extra work for anyone. The simple record keeping focused students' attention on the importance of completing homework and studying for tests. The activity encouraged parents to talk with their children about their math work and time studying.

MCA test results will be available at the start of the next school year. The teachers believe that the school's Math Minutes program will be a real problem solver.

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SINGAPORE MATH NIGHT

T. H. WATKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 4

When T. H. Watkins Elementary implemented the Singapore math method in their classrooms, many parents had questions about the new strategies, which followed the curriculum and instructional approaches used in Singapore. To give parents knowledge, tools, and resources about how to support their students' math learning at home, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) held a three-activity Singapore Math Night at school.

The ATP used three rooms to address a different math theme and activity in each location. As parents, students, and families arrived for the evening, they received a rotation schedule and were assigned a particular beginning location.

In each room, a math strategy was featured along with an easy-to-use math manipulative that reinforced the strategy. In the Math Strategies room, students and families created a foldable flipbook that provided an at-home summary of five Singapore math strategies used in classrooms.

Participants at the next station made Number Bond bracelets using pipe cleaners and beads. Finally, the Model Drawing room explained and demonstrated how students used model drawing techniques to solve math problems. At the conclusion of the workshop, families enjoyed refreshments and left with three math teaching tools that they could use at home.

Throughout the evening, students assisted in showing their parents how they used the various strategies in their math classes. An exit evaluation collected qualitative and quantitative responses to Singapore Math Night. The results of these surveys showed that families "enjoyed seeing their students explaining the math." The experience helped families understand why math teachers at T. H. Watkins emphasized teaching students *how* to solve problems and *how* to find an answer.

Singapore Math Night responded directly to parents' requests raised in previous ATP meetings to know more about the school's new math approaches. The planning committee created a rotation schedule that reflected the needs of all families, many of whom have students in more than one grade. The resources that students and parents took home applied to all grade levels.

In response, one parent of two student in different grades said, "I am better equipped to help my students with homework. I understand how to use the strategies." A parent of three children echoed those sentiments, adding, "I am thankful to have the items to bring home to help with math."

Singapore Math Night helped families gain some strategies to support their children with math learning at home in ways that matched teachers' approaches in class. In turn, students had more positive conversations about math with their parents at home.

MATH

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DISCOVERY WITH DAD

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER—HACKMANN ROAD SAINT CHARLES, MO

Rooms filled with launching zones, air velocity measurement instruments, and black lights may seem more like something at NASA than at a preschool. Discovery with Dad was a two-day activity that brought fathers and other male role models to the Early Childhood Family Education Center—Hackmann Road in the Francis Howell School District for scientific exploration and discovery.

About 150 fathers, grandparents, uncles, and special guests came to school with their favorite preschoolers on Discovery with Dad days. They traveled as classes to eight exploratory stations, each with several activities on each scientific theme. Some activities included black lights to explore positional concepts; Gak-making for chemistry fun; eight ways to explore sink/float and measuring concepts; soda pop geysers at the launching zone; paper airplanes to demonstrate air velocity; play dough color mixing for color investigations; levers, pulleys, and wedges to learn about simple machines; and popcorn-popping for experiencing the five senses and to enjoy a snack.

Throughout Discovery with Dad, one classroom teacher or assistant stayed in the classroom to facilitate a particular science station. The other teacher traveled with the class and dads to supervise the activities and to support students who did not have dad-guests. Each station lasted about 18 minutes, with two minutes to travel from one activity to the next.

Because the Early Childhood Family Education Center is a preschool with half-day programming, the 2 hour and 40 minute event was conducted over two days, with activities for students in the morning and afternoon sessions.

The visiting dads and father figures received a flyer that explained the science theme and activities in each room and suggestions for follow-up activities to conduct at home to help students continue learning. These ranged from

instructions for home-made lava lamps, finger paints, parachutes, and marshmallow poppers, to activities gathered from *www.brainpopjr.com*. One parent said, “I read over the ...ideas for home and was...impressed! We will be trying many of them soon.”

The Hackmann Road Action Team activity fund, raised through the Action Team’s fundraising efforts, supported the \$300 cost for supplies that were not readily available. The Action Team recommends planning at least six months in advance to involve local businesses or community groups in activities like Discover with Dad. The Planning Committee also noted that holding the event after school for all students, rather than on two school days for morning and afternoon sessions might be a good variation on this theme.

Discovery with Dad introduced preschoolers to hands-on science activities with their teachers guidance and with the participation of their special male role models. When her husband and children came home from the event, one parent noted, “As a mom of girls, I love that they have the chance at such a young age to dig into science. It is so important to start their love and interest in a fun field!” One dad described the day as “awesome!” Another impressed (and wiped-out) dad said, “You guys work harder in two hours than I do in an entire day.” Clearly, the teachers were able to bring science learning and science fun to young and old.

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EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK FAMILY SCIENCE NIGHT

CASTLIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MO

Type 4

Everything But the Kitchen Sink Family Science Night may not have included the kitchen sink—but it did have tubs, plastic bags, marshmallows, spaghetti, and many other standard kitchen items. With eleven stations for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) experiments and discoveries, parents and children learned a lot about science and how to conduct science activities at home using common household tools.

The eleven stations set up around the gym and cafeteria minimized wait time for activities, such as ice cream-making at the Vacation Station. The wide variety of activities included passing a pencil through a “leak-proof” plastic bag filled with water to learn how polymers form a seal around a pencil. At the Use Your Noodle station, students practiced engineering skills by building a structure of raw spaghetti and marshmallows to support a ping-pong ball. The Castlio music staff got involved too, running a station that used glasses and water to learn about sound.

A subcommittee of the Castlio Parent Involvement Team (PIT) provided take-home information for each experiment, including instructions for conducting each activity, the science concepts behind the activity, questions for exploration, online resources, and related activities to do at home. Students also had a chance to show parents how they use technology in school, by watching an educational movie and answering questions about the science topics they learned.

The evening was prompted by a parent survey that showed a desire for a fun, STEM-based learning activity. In response to these data, the Castlio PIT decided to create a night filled with creative, highly engaging science and problem-solving activities, aligned with STEM and Grade Level Expectations in the content areas.

The cost of materials was only \$2 per student because the experiments used commonly available household items. The PIT sent home a request for families to donate some materials to determine how many materials they needed to purchase. Parent Involvement District-Level funds covered the costs of materials for 180 students and 85 parents in attendance.

The PIT’s Science Night planning subcommittee consisted of one administrator, two teachers, and one parent, who met twice and communicated extensively through e-mail. In reviewing procedures, Castlio recommends having a core planning committee develop the theme and a loose framework for each station; recruiting volunteer station leaders, and soliciting input on activities from across curricular areas. Music teachers, for example, conducted a station that enriched and extended the theme.

At Everything But the Kitchen Sink Family Science Night, students participated in cooperative learning experiences by helping each other solve experiments, make predictions, share, and wait patiently for materials. As one teacher put it, “The most important learning experience was [that] children can learn alongside their parents, with other adults from school, and [with members of] the community...” With so much energy and interest in science at Castlio Elementary School, who needs the kitchen sink?

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SCIENCE

MINUTE TO WIN IT SCIENCE NIGHT

JOHN McLOUGHLIN MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WA

How do you make science as exciting as participating in a game show? McLoughlin Middle School enabled students to investigate science concepts while beating the clock in fun games with their friends and families. The Minute to Win It Science Night let students and parents have a rousing good time doing science.

McLoughlin Middle has held an annual Family Science Night for over a decade, but an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) member and a teacher decided to base the 2011 activities on the popular *Minute to Win It* game show. The show is popular with students' families, and the ATP science chair identified activities from the show that taught state science standards and that could be replicated at home.

About 300 students and 200 parents spent two hours playing games that applied science concepts such as water surface tension, gravitational pull, and inquiry thinking. Fifteen adult facilitators, including teachers and parent volunteers, explained the concepts and the rules for the game in each classroom. Students and families chose their activities based on the concepts posted on each classroom door. At the end of the night, completed game cards qualified students for raffle prizes.

The games covered a wide range of science concepts. Many activities are posted on the *Minute to Win It* website, which describes the activities and the simple materials needed to conduct them. "A Bit Dicey," for example, illustrated the concept of the basic stability of tall and short structures. "The Unknown Box" asked students to make inferences about one unlabeled side of a box and support their claims with evidence.

Community members were integral in offsetting costs and adding fun to the game night. The school's PEAK! (Partners in Educating All Kids!) business partner assisted with student and

parent sign-ins and donated \$50 for raffle prizes such as science kits, mini-microscopes, and books on science topics. A local dentist provided game materials such as plastic cups, dice, and Popsicle sticks. An extra \$100 in gift cards and prizes came from the local Dairy Queen, in exchange for local business promotion.

The McLoughlin ATP recommends that others conducting a Minute to Win It Science Night make sure that they have enough space for the activities that require a lot of room. The school was very pleased by the high interest and high attendance, and will work to have more space, sponsors, and volunteers if they conduct the same or similar event.

Minute to Win It Science Night allowed families to explore science concepts with their children and experience the warm and welcoming school environment. Parent comment cards were enthusiastic about the number of options available for family participation, calling the event "fun!" and remarking, "We can do this at home! Thanks for the great ideas." Teachers followed up with activities that related to science units and state standards.

Minute to Win It Science Night put a game-face on academic learning. The event was so popular that students asked to run a smaller version of the games at the next school social! When middle-schoolers ask for more science in their free time, you can be sure that the experimental science night was a success.

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SCIENCE SCI-FARI ADVENTURE

VIRGIE ROBINSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

The air was charged with electricity and curiosity at Virgie Robinson Elementary School's Science Sci-Fari Adventure. Fourth and fifth grade students and their parents joined area scientists to learn more about science all around them.

Students worked on science projects before the Sci-Fari, which began with a science question to explore. The students followed the steps of the scientific method to answer their questions. They used an inquiry approach and, as appropriate, experimental methods. Students documented the steps they took and displayed the results of their inquiries in the school library. Some students graphed their results or took pictures of what they learned. Others put all steps of their projects in their displays.

In the past, only adult scientists from the community presented information and activities at the school's science night. This year's Sci-Fari was enhanced by the addition of student-scientists who shared their questions and project results. School funds were used to purchase boards for the students' presentations.

Stations were created around the school for the community's scientists to bring experiments to life. Banners were hung advertising each scientist and topic so families knew where to go for each experiment. The scientists organized hands-on activities on topics such as creating human-sized bubbles and studying insects. Staff from the local Public Utility District demonstrated how electricity works. Staff from LIGO (Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatories) shared unique information on their large physics experiments using lasers, light, and gravity to detect gravitational waves that may originate in space millions of light years away from earth.

Washington State University's MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) group aims to encourage underrepresented students to enjoy and achieve in these subjects. MESA representatives presented math, science, and engineering activities for students and families to enjoy.

Members of the Astronomy Club were stationed outside the school to share the wonders of the night sky with participants. Presenters also included the 4-H Club who brought live goats for students to observe and tend.

Students who presented information on their science projects received a certificate and a science medal. All of the community scientists received a certificate of appreciation and many personal thanks from students and parents.

Over 125 parents, 175 students, 12 staff members, and 20 community partners enjoyed the Sci-Fari at Robinson Elementary School. Evaluations indicated that the participants enjoyed the students' displays and the scientists' stations. Students learned first-hand how to investigate a scientific question and present their findings to others. Meeting scientists from the community helped students and their families recognize that the facts and mysteries of science are, truly, all around us.

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Type 2

SCIENCE

STARRY SCIENCE NIGHT

CHURCH HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHURCH HILL, MD

The sky was the limit when students, parents, teachers, and community members planned Church Hill Elementary's Starry Science Night. The goal was to increase students' interest in science and, ultimately, raise science test scores. Students and families were invited to participate in thirteen activities that focused on the stars and planets.

This year, the school selected astronomy as the theme for its science night. A partnership team of parents, teachers, and community members met to search for astronomy-related activities that would interest students at all grade levels. They also identified responsibilities for activity leaders.

The first set of stations involved creative and visual arts. One parent built a Giant Space Ship made from recyclable materials, which students decorated while learning about space shuttles. At the stations for Glitter Galaxy Crafts, Origami Mini Stars, Clay Model of the Solar System, and Hot Chocolate and Marshmallow Constellations, students made their own versions of stars and planets—including a constellation that floated in their hot chocolate!

Dads got involved with the Constellation in a Can activity, where students marked an empty can with the stars of their chosen constellations. Two fathers hammered nail-holes through each point and, then, shined a flashlight through the can to simulate each constellation.

Starry Science Night incorporated math concepts, too. At Impact Cratering, students dropped three different impactors on a bed of sand that had a layer of cocoa powder on top. Then, students measured the distance of the displaced powder from the point of impact. At the Bode's Law station, students examined relationships among the planets using addition, subtraction, estimation, geometry, and measurement skills.

Another set of stations focused on science facts. Families wrote their answers to Interactive Planet Riddles that were taped to classroom walls. Examples of Space Truth or Fiction were scattered throughout the classroom. A Coloring and Reading station offered various books about space and connect-the-stars sheets to draw constellations. Pairs of students hunted for facts about the solar system at the Solar System Scavenger Hunt, and won glow-in-the-dark stars or planets for their efforts.

Real stars were part of the experience. The Star Wheels station leader took students outside to search the night sky for the constellations that they had drawn inside on their Star Wheels.

The evening's planners wanted to ensure high attendance by Hispanic parents and others who were, typically, uninvolved. To increase attendance, teachers conducted a Homework Help Night before Starry Science Night. Families were invited to stay for pizza dinner and attend the science activities, too. The coordinators plan to provide translators at future activities to support Hispanic parents' participation.

Starry Science Night required substantial planning by educators, parents, and community members. They advertised the event in the school newsletter and on the website, in morning announcements, and sent invitations home. The principal's fund and community donations covered the \$300 cost.

One of Church Hill's School Improvement Goals for students to attain 95% proficiency on the fifth-grade Maryland School Assessment (MSA) Science test. Attaining that goal would make students science stars!

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TAKING SCIENCE TO THE HOME

EDISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

Every school is working to increase students' interests in STEM subjects—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Often Engineering is overlooked, as schools focus on science and math. Edison Elementary School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) received a fun-filled engineering kit that included suggested activities, a supply list, and a video. The ATP decided to put the kit to use to focus on Engineering as an important field for applying math and science to improve our lives.

Taking Science to the Home was designed for 4th and 5th grade students and families. The planners wanted to include learning activities that could be enjoyed in school *and* taken home to strengthen and extend student learning.

One evening in February, over 120 students and their families came to the school gym and hallways to participate in challenging, educational, and—yes—fun engineering activities. Six stations, all from the Zoom Engineering Kit, were set up, and students were given related take-home activities and supplies.

Stations included Polishing Pennies, an experiment to see which household liquids could best shine up a dull penny. The take-home kit for this activity gave students different liquids to test. At Hoop Glider, students manipulated a straw, tape, and two strips of paper to create hoop gliders that flew down the hallway. Then, they measured the distance flown. Students and families raced their Puff Mobiles—vehicles powered by a simple puff of air—which they made from straws, Lifesaver candies, paperclips, paper, and tape.

Students used gumdrops and toothpicks to create their own Gumdrop Dome structures. The Paper Tower task challenged students and families to construct the tallest structure possible using only two pieces of newspaper. Finally, students filled bottles of water with packing peanuts and paper clips, finding the right balance

to suspend the peanuts in the middle of the water—making not a floater, not a sinker, but a “Flinker.” A volunteer engineer from the community circulated among the students and families to talk about the field of engineering.

Each station provided a take-home activity to reinforce the engineering concept at home. To make sure that all students had access to the same great activities, the ATP provided take-home bags to all students, including those who were unable to attend. Each kit included a plastic bag, instructions, and materials for the specific activity. Some kits provided the same supplies used at school, and other kits had slightly different activities—e.g., marshmallows instead of gumdrops—so that students and families would find something new in the experiments at home.

In preparation for Taking Science to the Home, the ATP scheduled a kit-making party and gathered volunteers to put together enough kits for every 4th and 5th grade student. The local UPS store donated packing peanuts for the Flinker station. Each classroom volunteered to collect one kind of supply needed for the event. The ATP committee chairs collected the donated supplies and made any necessary additional purchases.

The ATP promoted their practice in two unique ways. One week before the event, the ATP went to each 4th and 5th grade classroom with a traveling cart of all the activities to pique the students' interest. The day of the event, every student went home wearing a bracelet with a reminder about the time and place.

After completing the activities, one parent said, “This was so fun! I can't wait to do these at home with all of our kids!” That was exactly the point of Taking Science to the Home!

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ART IN THE HIGHLANDS

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

At Highlands Middle School, art appreciation is not limited to museum-goers and art collectors. With the help of dedicated parents, teachers, administrators, and local artists, Art in the Highlands turned middle schoolers and their family partners into art students by day, muralists by night.

Art in the Highlands took a two-pronged approach to arts education: learning and doing, during the school day and in an evening community event. To creatively implement the *learning* component, Highlands Middle School received district approval to invite 11 local artists to share their skills with sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. The artists taught students many exciting skills, including pottery, water color, photography, interior design, fiber art, graphic design, mixed media, and others.

Learning about art during school hours was only the first step. The *doing* component continued. First, students worked with their families to paint tiles for a new, permanent mural to decorate the school's entrance. Second, one evening, community members were invited to the school from 5 to 8 p.m. to purchase five-dollar tiles. Then, small groups of community members decorated tiles to add to the mural, which also included the school's mission statement.

In the spirit of true artistic partnership, everyone worked together to offset the \$300 cost of this activity. Donations from a local contractor and artist, as well as discounts at a craft warehouse and commercial crafts store, helped cover the cost of materials. For students and families who could not afford to buy a tile, one generous parent donated \$100.

The ATP, PTO, and afterschool program coordinators worked together throughout the Art in the Highlands planning process, determining its theme, soliciting artists, planning activities, making name tags, and writing thank-you notes. Parents attended weekly planning meetings for

two months, and volunteered their time to sell student- and family-created mural tiles during lunch for the week prior to the event.

Students in an after-school program also contributed to the planning process. They designed the logo for the project, which became the advertising symbol on the school website, in the local newspaper, on the school reader board, and on Facebook.

Art in the Highlands coordinators noted that other art-related activities will be conducted in the future. They plan to develop activities around the calendars of the local artists and the local artistic community, so that conflicts in schedules are avoided.

As the principal of Highlands Middle School explained, "In our classes, we are so focused on reading and math all the time that we want to make sure we had an opportunity to see that art is all around us, and it's in our lives every day." By bringing artists into the classroom, Art in the Highlands allowed teachers and artists to connect the visual arts with classroom-based math, science, reading, and entrepreneurial studies.

Art in the Highlands was a rich academic experience for students and an opportunity to create a beautiful project and lasting tribute to school, family, and community partnerships.

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BREAKFAST FOR CHAMPIONS

WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

Type 3

For students at Westgate Elementary, cultural diversity is part of the culture: 22 different languages are spoken as first languages in students' homes. This ensures many opportunities to learn about others, but many families that are new to the country are unfamiliar with U.S. schools. They seek assistance in many areas, one of which is how to help their children prepare for standardized tests. At Breakfast for Champions, over 100 students and parents came together to share food for breakfast and food for thought.

When Breakfast for Champions opened at 7:30 a.m., students, parents, and some other family members signed in with teachers' assistance, helped themselves to donuts donated by local grocery stores, and looked at students' posters hanging around the gym. Students had worked with the school counselor to create recipes for "Smart Cookies" on the posters. The math specialist created posters with released math test items that showed students' work.

At 7:45 a.m., the principal welcomed everyone. He shared a PowerPoint presentation explaining what tests the children would be taking, test dates, how the school used test results, and how parents could encourage children to perform at their best. From 8:00-8:15 a.m., parents talked with their child's teacher, visited with other families, and picked up a card with information on getting their children to school on time and well-prepared on test days.

Parents filled out cards of encouragement for their children. The cards were donated by a local drugstore, labeled with every student's name in grades 3-5, alphabetized by classroom, and placed on grade-level tables. Clipboards were available for parents to complete their cards and return them to the baskets. One parent said, "The cards of encouragement were a great idea. Now [my children] know that I'm thinking about them during the test."

For students whose families were unable to attend, a staff member or Homework Center volunteer filled out an encouragement card, ensuring that every student received a positive message on the first day of testing.

Breakfast for Champions modified Muffins for Moms/Donuts for Dads by featuring useful information for parents. This year, the school invited moms and dads of students in grades 3-5 and provided information on math skills and state tests. Parents also were offered strategies to support their children's test taking.

To overcome the language barrier, headsets were available for Spanish translations. Para-educators contacted many Somali families and the ATP worked with community members who had ties to other cultural groups. Interpreters also were available at the Breakfast. The ATP encouraged teachers to call at least five families and personally invite them to Breakfast for Champions.

One teacher reported that, "It was wonderful to see so many cultures represented at this event." In the future, even more is planned to welcome all families. The ATP hopes to print invitations in English and Spanish and to have translation headsets for Spanish, Somali, and Burmese families.

With more and better information about state tests, it is hoped that more parents will support their children's learning and more students will demonstrate that they are test-taking champions.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

EXPLORE TEST INFORMATION PARENT NIGHT

WASHINGTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Parents need information to understand the whys, hows, and whats of the 8th grade standardized tests. The School, Family, Community Partnership Teams at Jefferson, Kennedy, and Washington Junior High Schools took on this challenge. Each school designed and implemented an Explore Test Information Parent Night to orient parents to the *EXPLORE* test, which was in its second year of use in the Naperville School District. The evening's agenda aimed to explain the test, share information on how test results were used by the school and district, and enable parents to interpret their own child's test scores. At the conclusion of each meeting, parents were given a copy of their child's test results.

At Kennedy and Jefferson Junior High Schools the evening was called A Night to *EXPLORE*. A district staff member provided an overview of the test, described what each section measured, gave examples of how the students' scores were interpreted, and addressed parents' questions. After the introductory session, parents were divided into small groups, based on the high school their children would attend. They received information on how *EXPLORE* scores and other criteria affected students' placements in some high school programs, subjects, and classes. School leaders demonstrated the Turning Point Technology that students use in their assessments. Parents learned-by-doing. They used the technology to participate in a survey at the end of the program.

At Washington Junior High School, the principal welcomed parents and discussed the evening's agenda. Presenters who were experts on the *EXPLORE* test shared information with the group. The first speaker was an administrator from one of the high schools that the 8th grade students would attend. He discussed how the test results would be used by the high school staff to help students develop paths of study.

He also discussed how students would be helped to prepare for the ACT college entrance exam. The second speaker was a district administrator who explained more about the purpose of the *EXPLORE* test and how parents could interpret their own child's scores.

Valuable lessons were learned by the SFCP teams as well as by parents at the *EXPLORE* Test Information Parent Night. Jefferson had a larger turnout than expected, with over 150 parents attending. The team leaders plan to arrange more space next year and have multiple stations for parents to sign in. They also will sort students' tests alphabetically and at letter-grouped tables around the room to streamline the distribution of individual student's scores to parents.

All three SFCP teams were pleased with the results of their meetings on the *EXPLORE* tests. They believe that eighth grade students benefit when their parents have good information about the tests they take and the courses they select in high school. Knowledgeable parents can discuss these topics with their teens, guide their decisions in high school, and support their students' academic success. As the principal of Kennedy Junior High noted, "The evening provides a good opportunity for parents to receive a big picture view of how students' data can inform their decisions going from middle school to high school." As parents explored the *EXPLORE* test, they gained important information and ideas to help their teens make a successful transition to high school.

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

FAMILY FUN ZONE

JAMES MCGEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Afifth grade student at James McGee Elementary School won an essay contest sponsored by the Pasco School District for ideas from students for improving school, family, and community partnerships. The district also provided funds for the school to implement the winning concept.

At James McGee, the student envisioned an evening for parents and students to participate actively together in art, music, and physical education (PE). Her vision matched the school's interest in orienting families to the Arts Education program at the school. The principal, winning contest student, and her parent met with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other parent PTO officers to plan logistics. Technology—the other special subject that students have, along with art, music, and PE—was added to the evening as a topic of interest to parents.

Each specialist teacher selected something interesting and interactive to present to parents and students at all grade levels (K-5). Teachers selected activities that highlighted the state standards for their special field of study. They listed the materials that they needed and purchases were made using funds from the award.

The Family Fun Zone came alive with the arts and technology activities throughout the school. The music teacher demonstrated a percussion ensemble. She taught students and parents a fun-zone-lesson on rhythm using chants, drums, and marimbas. Participants learned different beats, and students and parents tried out various instruments. Her session culminated in a drum circle directed by the students.

The art teacher taught participants to make masks. Students and parents explored color, patterns, and textures with many materials (e.g., feathers, beads, geometric shapes, colored glue). Students and parents worked together to create their masks and wearable art.

The PE teacher conducted a relay game set to music. The game involved shooting baskets, calisthenics, and running. Parents and students were on teams together. Laughter rang through the gym as families cheered each other on.

In the computer lab, the technology teacher created a website scavenger hunt for parents and students to complete together. The hunt took participants through sections of the school's website and related websites to find information and play educational games. They looked, for example, for school announcements, scheduled events, the monthly newsletter, math and language arts activities and games on the Education City and Sumdog sites.

As families arrived at the Family Fun Zone, they were given a program that identified activities and locations. The sessions were scheduled for 20-minutes to allow participants to attend all of the activities. The families self-selected the activities. Parents and students traveled together. At the end of the evening, everyone gathered in the cafeteria to enjoy refreshments and a chance to win raffle prizes.

The district's award to the school to implement the students' winning essay idea paid for the expenses of the evening. Family Fun Zone was attended and enjoyed by over 100 students, 150 parents, and 20 teachers. The activity helped build positive connections of parents, teachers, and students, and showcased the importance of the arts in children's education. Parents met the special-subject teachers who work with their children to bring the arts and technology into their lives. Family Fun Zone was, indeed, a fun and learning experience.

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Type 5

OTHER SUBJECTS

GOAL BUBBLES

RUTH LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

“Great event!” Parents, students, teachers, and community members often say how much they enjoy a school activity. That is good, but not good enough for the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the faculty at Ruth Livingston Elementary School. They wanted all partners to know the educational purpose of every involvement activity that they conducted to increase students’ success in school.

The ATP and school leaders created Goal Bubbles to make the goal of each activity explicit. A “bubble” is a short, clear description or explanation of why a partnership activity is in the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. ATP members or teachers wrote one or two sentences explaining how each activity was designed to support a specific goal in the School Improvement Plan to benefit students, such as learning about characters in a book, becoming aware of many careers, and using a microscope for science discoveries.

ATP co-chairs transcribed the sentences onto colorful, eye-catching Goal Bubbles, which students posted before family involvement events. When an activity is held at the school, students post about 20 copies of a Goal Bubble on doors, counters, walls, tables, and poles, so that parents see them and easily learn the purpose of their participation. The Goal Bubbles helps parents see that their time is being used for a clear purpose that should contribute to student learning, development, and well-being.

The Goal Bubbles provided parents and teachers with a common vocabulary about an activity. They also generated conversations between parents and children about things the children were learning in class. For example, when the ATP wanted parents and children to discuss careers after the Motion Commotion Truck Night (when all kinds of trucks park at the school to illustrate businesses and jobs in the area that use trucks), the students posted Goal Bubbles that

read: “Increasing career awareness, one truck at a time.”

To ensure that Me and My Guys Sports Night would build relationships, not just sports knowledge, the ATP’s Goal Bubble read: “Our goal: To create a fun environment where students can spend quality time with the important guys in their lives.”

In addition to helping families understand why partnership activities are conducted, Goal Bubbles helped the ATP and teachers plan and evaluate the events. For example, astronomy displays were excluded if they did not meet the Goal Bubble for the Science Extravaganza. More relevant activities and displays were added.

Goal Bubbles improved the school’s evaluation of activities beyond the number of parents or community members attending an event. Now, ATP members can reflect on the degree to which each event supported the intentions of its Goal Bubble. One teacher commented, “It’s nice to know the events have substance and not just fluff.”

The Ruth Livingston ATP encourages others to create and display specific goals for their partnership activities. The ATP budget covered the \$30 cost of removable glue dots. The laminated Goal Bubbles are reusable year after year for activities that are repeated.

Goal Bubbles helped the ATP, staff, and parents clarify the reasons for conducting every productive partnership practice. The only mind-bending question that remains is: How do you make a Goal Bubble for the Goal Bubbles?

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

MARDI GRAS MATH AND READING

CALEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

Type 4

Caley Elementary School in Pennsylvania may be far from New Orleans, but the school enjoyed a Mardi Gras Math and Reading celebration, nevertheless. Parents, students, and teachers gathered for breakfast to celebrate Mardi Gras and the district's new reading and math curricula. At the pancake breakfast, parents, students, and teachers were given Mardi Gras beads and masks. They conducted math and reading activities set up around the gym related to the Mardi Gras theme.

Math and reading teachers, along with ESL and Reading specialists, set up activities with grade-specific content. Families explored activities such as sight-word bingo, coin toss word blends, sight-word duck ponds, math puzzles, and math problem solving. Each activity lasted between five and ten minutes. The activities either centered on a Mardi Gras theme or offered theme-based prizes such as coins or masks.

To address important academic and behavioral goals, the ATP and teachers created shared leadership by educators and parents. The teachers and staff were responsible for the math and reading activities at their tables, and parents were responsible for their children's behavior. As a result of this clear division of labor, one parent remarked that he "enjoyed the event and felt the children were very well behaved."

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted as many families as possible to learn about Caley's new math and reading programs. They knew that stand-alone lecture-workshops had been poorly attended in the past. The ATP also discussed the issue of student behavior during evening and weekend school social events. Students often were overly exuberant when they joined their friends and parents for games and activities after school.

The ATP decided to address both issues at once as they prepared for high attendance by parents. This included more structured academic math and reading activities conducted by teachers and explicit shared responsibility with parents for students' behavior. They also planned the event to coincide with the school's annual pancake breakfast. This ensured that the teachers would be able to tell many parents and children about the new curricula in reading and math.

The school reached its goal, as over 220 parents or family members and children attended the Saturday-morning Mardi Gras Math and Reading Breakfast. The admission price was \$2.75 per person or a \$10 maximum per family, which helped to cover the cost of food and materials.

At Mardi Gras Math and Reading, students and families enjoyed a pancake breakfast, a cultural celebration, and hands-on activities that demonstrated new directions in the district's newly adopted math and reading curricula. The winning combination of good plans, good information, and good breakfast made this a Mardi Gras to remember.

OTHER SUBJECTS

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PRE-K/KINDERGARTEN LUNCH BREAK MAKE AND TAKE

SUNSET ACRES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SHREVEPORT, LA

Sunset Acres Elementary, a school where 98% of students receive free or reduced-price lunch, wanted to get more parents involved in their children’s education starting in the youngest grades, but they faced a serious challenge. Many students’ parents worked more than one job, or worked at night, or on other schedules that conflicted with early-morning, after school, and evening programs and meetings. The solution was the Lunch Break Make and Take—a chance for parents who could not come to other school meetings to be welcomed at the school, meet teachers, and gain strategies and materials during lunch.

The Lunch Break Make and Take was conducted at the school library from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Parents could arrive during their lunch breaks or between their first and second jobs. Over sandwich trays, chips, and drinks, the principal and pre-K and kindergarten teachers welcomed parents.

Each teacher brought one hands-on reading or math activity that they used in class and that could be easily reproduced during lunch. These included alphabet arcs, math file folder games, and environmental print books. After the teachers demonstrated the activities and explained their educational purposes, parents were able to make the activities using materials arranged around the library.

As they helped parents make the activities, teachers were available for questions and answers about their expectations for young learners. Parents received gallon plastic bags to take home the learning activities that they created.

Sunset Acres Elementary School addressed several challenges in planning and conducting the successful Lunch Break. Teachers met in advance to discuss which activities they would feature and what materials they would

need to provide. They prepared activity bags with some pre-made materials and made CDs of letters and sounds for all attendees to take home.

To ensure that they could present their activities to the parents without losing instructional minutes with their students, teachers scheduled their presentations during their planning periods and rearranged their lunch schedules. When teachers needed to return to class, administrators took over for them at the Lunch Break.

A second challenge was confirming parent attendance. The planning committee created fun flyers to go home with students, sent information home in weekly folders, and advertised on calendars, newsletters, and the outside marquee. Because parents who wanted to attend had very different schedules, teachers contacted each parent to personally invite them to attend the Lunch Break.

The Teacher/Parent Involvement Liaison advises others, “Don’t be afraid to give this a try!...Most teachers already have activities that can easily be duplicated for home, so it is easy [to implement].” The \$140 cost of lunch and supplies went a long way, as community volunteers used the activity bags when they tutored students at school. Sunset Acres hopes to hold this event twice yearly in the future.

Parents who attended Lunch Break Make and Take gained information, strategies, and materials to support their children’s early education. They also established fellowship with other parents and partnerships with their children’s teachers. In these ways, they were able to make and take away new and useful family and school connections.

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Type 4

OTHER SUBJECTS

**OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 2

At Ochoa Middle School, home and school connections took on varied and creative forms this year. First, tour buses brought teachers and staff to students' communities and, later on, transported families to parent-teacher conferences at school. Second, a parent survey revealed that parents wanted a new Information Night topic, "Helping Your Student Be Successful in School." These two initiatives suggested a common theme: Seeing is Believing to Support Achievement.

Using Genie Tour Buses. Before the school year began in August, Genie Tours—an Ochoa community partner—donated their buses to a teacher and administrator to tour the neighborhoods surrounding the school. Of the 94% of Ochoa students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, many live in the Lakeview Mobile Home Park. On the tour of neighborhoods, teachers walked and stopped to talk to families and students throughout the Park. "Wow," one Lakeview seventh-grader told his teacher. "You took the time to come to *my* neighborhood." At the end of the tour, teachers commented on how valuable it was to see the neighborhoods and homes of their students.

Later in the year, Genie Tours donated buses to bring Lakeview parents to parent-teacher conferences. The content of the conferences was shaped by a parent survey, sent to parents in Spanish and English, to learn their views of how the school and home could support students' academic achievement. In this school, with 95% Hispanic families, the survey revealed that parents wanted to know more about how to help their children be more successful in school.

Better Information for Parents. At the first quarterly Information Night, teachers presented strategies for parents to help their children succeed in middle school, with targeted attention

to guide parents of struggling students. All information was delivered in both English and Spanish.

Previously, parents of failing students were notified of their student's lack of academic progress. Now, with the school's attention to all students' success in school, these parents also receive information about how to help their children make positive progress in learning.

Advertising about the Information Night was attached to each progress report. The information specifically targeted parents of students with Ds or Fs on their reports. "The more information we arm parents with," one teacher said, "the more they can support their students to be successful. It's a win-win for everyone, but especially the student."

The ATP, teachers, and school leaders—with support from their community partner, Genie Tours—plan to improve the teachers' bus tours by adding more stops in students' neighborhoods. They also want to improve the use of buses to bring parents to parent-teacher conferences by giving more advanced notice to parents about this unique and important service. At their Information Nights, teachers aim to add information and strategies for parents to help students who are struggling in specific subjects for different reasons.

Ochoa Middle School brought teachers from the school to students' neighborhoods and brought more families to the school. One teacher commented, "Seeing is believing, and beliefs translate into action." Ochoa is showing that families and teachers who see one another as partners can believe in their students' success.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

ST. JOHN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Parent-teacher conferences are standard at most elementary schools, but they often leave out one important partner in education—the students. At St. John Elementary, Student-Led Conferences are giving students responsibility for conducting periodic conferences with their parents. In this way, students are directly involved in the learning process.

Student-Led Conferences begin with teachers and administrators, school board members, Partners in Education, and preservice teachers from McNeese State University greeting parents. The school leaders provide an overview of school-wide achievement data and information on the School Improvement Plan. Members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) guide parents to their children’s classrooms, where students are waiting with their presentations.

Having worked with their teachers to prepare for the conference, the students discuss their academic goals, progress, learning, and academic or behavioral needs with their parents. They also share data binders with their parents, which include their own achievement data from specific tests. Teachers facilitate meaningful parent-child dialogue about academics and attendance.

In small or large groups, students and parents participate in instructional activities that reflect students’ classwork, such as tutorials for computer-based applications and learning center activities. At the end of the 30-45 minute conference, parents complete a feedback survey about the conference.

With St. John’s enrollment increasing every year, Student-Led Conferences take place over three nights divided into three grade clusters (preK-K, 1-3, 3-5). They are held twice per school year to give parents an opportunity to see and support their child’s academic growth as the year progresses. Last year, over 900 students and over 1500 parents participated at Student-

Led Conferences.

The ATP recommends strong support for teachers, administrators, and staff on the three evenings, twice a year. The only cost for Student-Led Conferences is the effort and time of the participants.

All of that effort pays off at Student-Led Conferences. Because students are responsible for their presentations, their preparations are opportunities for individualized guidance from their teachers and self-reflection on their academic progress and school behavior. Students improve their communication skills by discussing their progress, next steps, and needs with their parents.

As for parents, they are consistently impressed by the ownership their children take for their own learning. One parent called the conference a “Wake up call for parents! [The conference] created an awareness of student achievement.” A first grader’s parent appreciated the “rich discussion. Loved the one-on-one time. Liked the independence of students.”

Teachers, too, report that the conference is a source of pride. One faculty member from the collaborating McNeese State University commented, “Students are obviously engaged in the conferences and are excited to share their progress with their parents. This is a powerful tool.” With Student-Led Conferences, the tools of communication, preparedness, and responsibility are placed firmly in the students’ hands.

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

WKCE NIGHT

EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL JANESVILLE, WI

Type 2

Standardized tests are familiar to all students, but their parents do not always know what the tests are about or how test scores are used. At WKCE Night at Edison Middle School, parents learned about the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Evaluation (WKCE) and how to help their children do their best on the test—while having some fun.

WKCE Night was conducted about a week before the test was administered. Parents were guided to the school cafeteria. A buffet lined the perimeter of the room with nutritious food, including dried fruit, trail mix, and turkey hot dogs, along with information on nutrition.

Educational stations were set up where students and parents could eat, learn, and work on test-related activities. Members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) presented a WKCE PowerPoint on the test originally shown to students, but tailored for parents in English and Spanish. Stations included: a table for parents to write encouraging notes that their children would receive on test day; a Literacy Connection table; a “Stump the Student” station with puzzles for students; sample test materials; and tips on how to help students the night before the test. Prizes were raffled off at the end of the night

Thanks to community support, Edison Middle School only had to provide the materials on testing and the communications to advertise WKCE Night. Four local businesses donated nutritious food, information on nutrition, and raffle prizes. The school Builder’s Club provided childcare for very young children. Edison’s students helped set up and clean up the room. Some helped care for their younger siblings.

At WKCE Night, students explained the state test to their parents and discussed the challenges they face in preparing for and taking the test. Take-home test packets enabled parents to practice test-related items with their children at home. One parent expressed her satisfaction,

saying, “WKCE Night was beautifully done. It really helped me understand the test and curriculum my child is learning.”

WKCE Night required good planning by the ATP, teachers, and administrators, and strengthened partnerships between educators, parents, and students. The administration approved the schedule and use of the building about a month in advance. An ATP representative attended team teacher meetings to garner support, get ideas from teachers, and secure teacher volunteers to talk with parents and students at the event. Two weeks prior to WKCE Night, the ATP contacted custodians about the cafeteria setup. A few days before the event, final computer and projector arrangements were made.

According to Edison’s principal, “get[ting] the word out to many people” about an event like WKCE Night is extremely important. Parents received flyers in their children’s report cards, read postings on the school website, saw community flyers, and received Alert-Now messages. Event planners called the parents of Saturday school students, individually, to invite them to attend. If WKCE Night is conducted again, Edison leaders want to involve students and parents in event planning and increase attendance by advertising at the public library and in other venues.

WKCE Night helped parents and students focus together on “the” test so that the students would do their best.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

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.

COMMUNICATION NOTE PADS

AMISTAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

In these days of high-tech communications, there still are good things to do with note pads. At Amistad Elementary School, the resourceful Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers decided to use note pads to simply and elegantly meet the challenge of increasing two-way communications between home and school.

The Communication Note Pad system guided parents to use pink note pads to send notes to their children's teachers. Teachers used salmon (orange-y) colored pads to send notes home. At a staff meeting at the beginning of the year, the principal explained to all teachers how to use the salmon notes for school-to-home communication. He showed an example of a filled-out note from teacher to parent that would be positive and productive. He also distributed the pads for both school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

At the school's Open House Night, parent-teacher conferences, and ATP meetings, teachers distributed the pink note pads to parents and explained the color-coded system. Thus, parents were on the lookout for salmon-colored notes from the teacher, and teachers were expecting pink-colored notes from parents. Students were active participants—aware that their teachers and parents were in touch and working together—as they delivered the notes back and forth.

Communication Note Pads addressed the concern that teachers had difficulty communicating with many students' families. About 97% of Amistad students received free- or reduced-price lunch. Many families' phone numbers changed during the school year; most families did not have access to e-mail or the Internet; and some parents did not speak or read English. To meet these challenges, the school counselor and secretary often translated and wrote notes in English and/or Spanish to help teachers and parents

address each other in their native languages.

The Communication Note Pads Campaign encouraged teachers to send positive notes about students to parents. That positive reinforcement reduced disciplinary actions, because parents were informed about students' classroom behavior. Students were more than carrier pigeons. They also wrote notes home on the salmon-colored note pads to share information with parents about their classwork and their experiences at school.

The cost of the program for one year was about \$300, funded through Title I. A mid-year Communication Survey for parents helped the ATP evaluate the success of the program, as did counting the notes that teachers received from parents. By year's end, over 580 students, 270 parents or caregivers, and 32 teachers and staff members had communicated with each other about the students' work and school activities.

Amistad's ATP emphasized the importance of starting this kind of activity at the beginning of the school year by clearly explaining the purposes of two way communications and by motivating teachers and parents to use the note pads. The school leaders presented the pads as a helpful tool, not a burden, by offering translation services. Teachers also could use their computers to generate and print (on salmon) mass notes that went to all families.

At Amistad, Communication Note Pads encouraged parents, teachers, and students to communicate easily and actively about students' academic and behavioral successes and challenges. These were clearly colorful communications.

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Type 2

BEHAVIOR

DONUTS FOR DADS AND DADS ON PATROL

COMBRE-FONDEL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 3

At Combre-Fondel Elementary, mothers, grandmothers, and aunts were used to coming to school—but other family partners in students’ education were missing. Enter Dads on Patrol, which brought fathers and father figures into the school building. The school wanted to send a message to students, families, and the community that dads are important for students’ success in school.

Combre-Fondel started to reach out to fathers with the Donuts for Dads event at school. Fathers and other important males in students’ lives met with volunteer city, parish, and church leaders to discuss improvements to the community that occur when parents take active roles in their children’s education. Teachers and school administrators explained the importance of male role models for increasing student achievement. The discussions were aided by coffee and donuts.

During roundtable discussions at Donuts for Dads, parents and school staff envisioned Dads on Patrol as a means of bringing father figures into the school and making their presence a force for good. Each father in attendance agreed to walk the halls of Combre-Fondel for two hours each week, stopping by classrooms to talk with any students they observed were having difficulties in class or who seemed in need of a conversation or pat on the back.

Dads on Patrol immediately made a positive impact on student behavior and academic outcomes. With the dads in the building, students behaved better, stayed on task in class, and turned in their homework. They knew that their teachers and parents—moms and/or dads—were communicating with each other. Parents, teachers, and community members also benefitted. One noted that it is “so beautiful to see that many men at school caring about their children’s education.”

BEHAVIOR

The greatest challenge in organizing Donuts for Dads was finding an event date and time for the target audience. The Action Team for Partnerships, teachers, and school leaders sent home a survey asking parents about convenient dates and times. The idea is to find the best date for the most people. The school leaders created flyers, recorded phone messages to parents, and made daily announcements to encourage maximum participation. They were pleased with the participation of 65 parents at the event.

Although many schools have conducted Donuts for Dads in various forms, Combre-Fondel linked the invitation and breakfast to a serious discussion by school and community leaders with students’ dads and father figures. The discussion resulted in a new way for dads to volunteer to assist the school.

Combre-Fondel used Title I Parental Involvement Funds to cover the \$50 cost. The leaders emphasized that “this was a really easy and inexpensive activity that yields very positive rewards for us.” In the future, they hope to offer additional resources to dads, including job listings and GED information.

Donuts for Dads and Dads on Patrol have shown that when fathers and father figures lead with actions that support education, student success follows.

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FANCY FRIDAY

CHURCH HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHURCH HILL, MD

Many in the working world look forward to their weekly Casual Fridays, but at Church Hill Elementary, the students were excited about Fancy Friday. On that day, students were expected to dress, act, and behave “fancy,” and they rose to the occasion.

On Fancy Friday, the entire school came together to practice proper etiquette by wearing formal attire and rehearsing mannerly behavior throughout the school. The staff served as waiters for the students at lunch, as the students dined on tablecloth-covered tables with centerpieces. Several families in fancy attire also attended. Everyone wore fancy clothes, gowns, or costumes on Fancy Friday.

The day’s culminating activity was *Dancing with the Stars*. Students performed ballroom dances that they learned in gym class and guest dancers competed for first place. Community members judged, along with Molly Manners, the character who had been making appearances on the daily morning announcements to teach manners lessons. After all the dancing, a community member brought her ice cream truck to school and gave snow cones to everyone.

Fancy Friday served as the end-of-the-year reward celebration for Church Hill’s Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS). One PBIS incentive encouraged students to collect “cub paw” stickers or paper copies that contributed to an overall count for the marking period. Staff and bus drivers distributed cub paws to students who demonstrated the three principles of PBIS: being safe, respectful, and responsible. The PBIS committee sets a cub paw goal that all students are expected to meet in each marking period, along with a reward for meeting the goal.

In the weeks leading up to Fancy Friday, Molly Manners appeared on the daily announcements. The PBIS Committee developed Molly Manners’ lessons to include everything from

shaking hands, to removing hats inside a building, to not burping in public!

Preparation for the dancing portion of the evening began in gym class, where the gym teacher taught basic ballroom dances. The team planning Fancy Friday recruited guest dancers, including the superintendent and principal, the school mascot, teachers, custodians, community members, parents, and a pair of ex-cruise ship dancers who now teach dancing in the area. Guest dancers practiced on their own time, while each class at school learned a dance.

Students received an invitation to Fancy Friday that instructed them to wear their finest. To make sure that all students were included, the school received donations of neckties for boys and strings of beads for girls who wanted help with fancy dress. Church Hill advertised Fancy Friday in its newsletter, website, morning announcement, teacher and parent communications, and flyers. Over 375 students, 500 parents, 60 teachers, and 15 community members participated or benefitted from the activity. The principal’s fund and community donations covered the \$120 cost of tablecloths, mints, ice, and other necessities.

Fancy Friday was a successful, positive-reinforcement activity linked to the school’s PBIS program. Parents and teachers encourage students’ good behavior at home, in class, and in all parts of the school. This activity resonated well with students. One parent reported, “I’ve been trying to get my son to take his hat off when entering a building, with no luck. Now, he does it automatically.” It seems the students are simply having a well-mannered good time.

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FILL YOUR BUS DRIVER'S BUCKET

FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MO

Type 3

Many students depend on school bus drivers to get to and from school every day, but how often do riders show the drivers their appreciation? Francis Howell Middle School decided to build positive relationships between students and their bus drivers by tying in the school theme of “How Full Is Your Bucket”—a metaphor for filling everyone’s lives with positive thoughts and actions. Students filled out index cards with positive comments about their bus drivers. Parents placed the cards into real buckets of treats to present to the drivers to show them how much they were appreciated.

In Character Connection (CC) classes at the start of students’ school days, teachers explained that the Parent Involvement Team (PIT) planned to provide treats to fill buckets for bus drivers. Teachers asked students to write kind notes to their bus drivers to help “fill their buckets.” Students wrote their cards and specified their bus slot number so teachers could separate the cards into the correct buckets. Though names were optional, some students signed their names, and others colored or decorated the cards. About 95% of students submitted cards for their drivers by an established deadline.

Over the two-week period for students to complete their cards, the PIT asked parents to send in donations for the buckets. These included packaged sweet and salty treats, bottled water, school bus die cuts, a note explaining the theme, and a sticker for each bus that read, “This is a Bucketfilling Bus.”

The school had a supply of white plastic buckets that were used for this activity. On bucket-filling day, PIT parents met at school and set up an assembly line. They placed a piece of styrofoam at the bottom of each bucket, slid a small wooden dowel into the styrofoam, and attached a white cardstock sign with the die-cut bus and slot number. They filed the buckets with treats and with the students’ cards. At the end

of the day, student volunteers handed buckets to their drivers as buses pulled into their assigned parking slots.

Thanks to the donations of time and materials, Fill Your Bus Driver’s Bucket was an effective and thrifty way to support the school theme. The practice supported the School Improvement Plan’s goals for good student behavior and for a positive school climate. It also activated one of the six types of involvement—Type 3: Volunteering. CC teachers reminded students that they could fill their bus driver’s bucket daily, by enforcing character expectations on the bus. Expectations included being Respectful, Responsible, Compassionate, and Honest to both fellow riders and the drivers.

The PIT recommends that others using this idea set a short timeline for the project in order to sustain students’ interest. Francis Howell implemented the practice in 15 days. The goals were specific (i.e., present filled buckets to the drivers), while also addressing the broader challenge of improving students’ behavior on the bus and increasing students’ respect and gratitude for their drivers. The long term goal may get a boost on the day of the activity, and, then, take root gradually over the course of the year.

The positive response from bus drivers was obvious. The PIT Co-Chair related that after receiving the cards and treats, “One student noticed her bus driver started to say good morning when she got on the bus.” Recognizing that bus drivers bring students to and from school safely every day, one parent expressed everyone’s sentiments, saying: “If we brightened one day of [the bus drivers’] lives to show how much we appreciate them...then I am glad we filled their buckets.”

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BEHAVIOR

G.R.E.A.T. FAMILIES

EASTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

The staff at Eastgate Elementary School were active combatants against gang violence in their community. They set a goal that 90% of students will report feeling safe at school and in the community. One of their first strategies to help students reach this goal was to encourage family involvement in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program.

GREAT Families is a family-based crime prevention program consisting of six weekly sessions, two hours each, facilitated by police officers who were trained in the program. In three different six-week sessions, police officers taught Eastgate parents and 4th and 5th graders—as well as older siblings—about what gangs are, how they operate, and how to resist the pressure to join a gang.

The sessions included techniques for parents on setting family rules and boundaries for students; being a positive role model; and limiting negative influences of media, including some video games, music, and the Internet. The sessions included time for families to set their own goals for and with students. Also, community agencies including the library, parks and rec, and the Department of Social and Health Services shared information about how to access their resources.

Each session began with a family-style meal where all participants, police facilitators, and school coordinators ate together. An Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) chairperson coordinated the menus. A group of local high school students, enrolled in an education class, provided childcare for younger siblings.

In the Eastgate community, many families did not view police officers in a positive light. Seeing a teacher from the school who works on the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) program and a police officer conduct the GREAT sessions helped build trust between families and the police. To implement the GREAT program, a

local police captain wrote the grant for funding from Goodwill Industries.

The Eastgate ATP, teachers, school principal, and school counselor selected families with multiple risk factors (e.g., domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, gang affiliation) to call, personally, to invite them to join the GREAT program. After the first week, some of these families began making phone calls to share information from the program with other families.

Eastgate invited all 4th and 5th grade families to the final, culminating session, including families with strong protective factors such as positive discipline methods and close child supervision. The diverse population of families provided an environment in which the school's families met and learned from one another. The ATP found that the entire school staff needed to work with the planning team to implement the GREAT Families program.

The results of GREAT, to date, were noteworthy. One student with a serious truancy problem attended school regularly after his parents attended GREAT. Students' behavior improved and rates of homework completion increased. One parent movingly attested, "When you come over here and hear all these things about gangs, and kids, and how you can help them, it changes your life. My life is changed."

In the end, the GREAT Families is protecting kids, families, and the community. The DARE officer in charge of GREAT said it best: "[Gangs] need a child who feels left out, alone, dejected, and not understood. There are ways to fix that... and the things we teach here makes that child a much more difficult target for the gang to take."

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Type 1

BEHAVIOR

LEADER IN ME PARENT NIGHT

DOLBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 1

Dolby Elementary School staff and its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) knew that *shared leadership* for student success meant recognizing that families took important leadership roles in helping students learn and grow. Further, with good guidance, students became the main “leaders” in their own learning and behavior in school. It was clear that educators, families, the community, and students shared leadership for helping students attain academic and behavioral goals for success in school. To reinforce that belief, the school conducted The Leader in Me Parent Night, which focused on the school’s Seven Habits for Highly Effective Families.

When the Junior League of Lake Charles learned that Dolby wanted to become a *Leader in Me School*, the organization offered to sponsor a night to help parents guide their children in proactive, positive ways to become leaders, themselves. With help from Dolby administrators and the Southwest Chamber Alliance, the Leader in Me Parent Night was planned. The goal was to introduce parents to Steven Covey’s *Seven Habits Leader in Me* schools program. *Leader in Me* students take responsibility for their learning and behavior, and for making good decisions that help them succeed in school.

A guest speaker introduced the *Seven Habits*—which include being positive and proactive in settling arguments, thinking “win-win,” and synergizing. She discussed ways that parents could take actions at home to support these school behavioral guidelines. Parents asked questions and received a handout with examples of positive actions to support the *Seven Habits*. Copies of the book were raffled as door prizes.

To make sure that parents could focus on and enjoy the discussion, two paraprofessionals on the school staff provided child care for young children. Teachers sent home a save-the-date flyer several months in advance, with an RSVP for

parents to note if they would attend and if they needed childcare at the meeting. The planners also promoted the evening using local television news, newspapers, classroom calendars, school newsletters, the marquee in front of the school, a reminder letter home, and flyers in teachers’ boxes and the faculty lounge.

The Junior League, Southwest Chamber Alliance, and Title I contributed to support the guest speaker, door prizes, advertisements, and refreshments, which cost a total of \$2000. About 200 students and almost that many parents, teachers, and community members attended the discussion, making the event cost effective.

According to Dolby’s assistant principal, Leader in Me “was one of the most powerful parental involvement nights that I have had an opportunity to help plan and attend.” A parent shared that her children are no longer fighting at home, thanks to the proactive personal accountability habits she learned at the Parent Night. A grandparent reported fewer miscommunications at home thanks to the “seek first to understand, then to be understood” habit. A student visited the principal’s office to explain how he “thinks win-win” in all situations.

Dolby Elementary’s Leader in Me Parent Night strengthened connections between school and home, and provided parents, teachers, and students with a common language to discuss and take actions to promote student learning and positive behavior. This event just might become the school’s unofficial eighth habit.

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BEHAVIOR

PAWS FOR PARENTS

LANGLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VA

At the homes of Langley Elementary School students, baffled parents heard their children ask for “paws” in exchange for roaring. Their confusion was cleared up, thanks to the Paws for Parents program at Langley. The program helped parents create positive disciplinary strategies at home that replicated and reinforced the school’s ROAR behavior structure—an acronym for being Respectful, Organized, Appropriate, and Responsible.

Langley’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) noticed that children understood the school-wide good discipline program at school, but didn’t know how to apply these principles at home. The ATP invited parents of K-5th grade students to attend a Paws for Parents to learn more about the school’s good behavior program, and to develop supportive practices they could use at home.

In a comfortable environment with light snacks, interpreters, and childcare in a separate area, parents viewed a PowerPoint presentation explaining the ROAR acronym. Throughout the slideshow, parents saw pictures and posters that hang in the school building and exemplify children’s ROARing behaviors in the cafeteria, the playground, the hallways, and more.

Parents also saw how adults at school reinforce positive ROARing behaviors by awarding students with paws—small sheets of paper with a paw print. Classes receive special privileges or fun rewards based on the number of paws the class collects every nine weeks. It seems that Positive Actions are Worth Something (PAWS)!

Once parents were comfortable with how the program worked at school, they identified specific areas at home that could benefit by reinforcing the desired ROAR behaviors. They determined what it would be like to apply ROAR principles to routines like going to bed, riding in the car, doing chores, and more. Then, parents created posters like those used at school to show

the expected behaviors and to reflect the unique needs or circumstances of their own families. It was clear that students would have more ownership of the behavioral goals at home and at school if they were engaged in the poster-making.

In addition to taking home their posters, parents gained ideas for other positive reinforcement systems that they might use at home, such as marbles in a jar or stickers on a refrigerator chart. Parents received stickers, sticker charts, and additional poster boards and markers to work with their children to create posters that extended ROAR behaviors to situations at home.

Langley serves as the English as a Second Language Center for elementary children in the city. Thus, many Langley parents do not speak English at home. The ATP carefully selected only the most important information and used many visual aids at the workshop to help all families gather useful ideas. Interpreters worked with families, as needed. To advertise Paws for Parents, teachers and the ATP posted flyers in eight languages, discussed the event with students on the daily announcements, and sent a Connect-Ed phone reminder.

One parent said, of discipline at home, “I thought I had tried everything! But now that I think about it, everything I have tried is so negative. I am going to start being positive and recognize what is right so I can fix what is wrong.” When parents and school staff use the same principles and share a common language in how they guide and reinforce students’ behavior, they can better support each other’s efforts. Students benefit, too, from consistent messages at home and at school.

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Type 2

BEHAVIOR

SURVIVOR WEEK: NATIONAL TV TURNOFF WEEK

SCOTT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

TYPE 3

For many students today, the thought of lasting a week without television or other electronic screens seems inconceivable. At Scott Elementary School, 350 students and their parents made it through Survivor Week during National TV Turnoff Week. School spirit, parental involvement, and community support characterized a week of reading, sports, and other activities. Friends and peers at school cheered the participants on to complete the challenge.

When the School, Family, and Community Partnership (SFCP) committee decided to participate in National TV Turnoff Week, they knew they would have to brainstorm ideas for making limited screen time exciting and motivating for students. At Scott, it was called Survivor Week and had a distinctive logo.

Parents received an information packet detailing the requirements for participation; a list of alternative activities; and a daily log for students to list their activities, which parents signed. When Survivor Week began, students and parents shut off the TV and started playing games, doing puzzles, interacting with neighbors, and reading.

Each day of Survivor Week, school announcements included encouragement to keep the TV turned off, ideas for activities, and the growing number of participants. Each morning, teachers asked participating students to write their names on a label. SFCP members counted the labels and put students' names on a daily poster that was displayed at school.

To increase school spirit, students who participated at least one day received laminated bag tags with the Survivor Week logo, which the SFCP had designed in conjunction with a local print shop. Volunteers wrote students' names on the back of the tags and put them in teachers' mailboxes for distribution.

Students who survived the full week without TV turned in their parent-signed logs

of activities and were entered in a culminating raffle. One week-long survivor from each classroom won a \$5 gift certificate to the school book fair, which was held later that month, to reinforce literacy and encourage participation in the book fair. At week's end, the SFCP made a poster in the lobby with the names of all students who survived the entire week.

In the future, the SFCP would like to send a pre-Survivor Week letter to parents to learn how much screen time was typical for students. They also would like to develop some school and community involvement opportunities in the afternoon and evening to further assist students and parents to spend quality time on various challenging and stimulating activities.

Staff members—all of whom participated—were positive about the experience. Teachers reported that participants completed more homework assignments. It is expected that, as a result of Survivor Week, students improved interpersonal and creative thinking skills by working with others on activities, rather than passively watching TV.

Results were noticed at home, too. One parent said, "Fabulous practice. It forced my kids to think outside the box. We spent more time outdoors, and I felt much better about my kids' day." Another parent noted, "I loved the way it put the focus on reading and family interaction. It put a stop to the conflict over 'Can't you just wait until the show is over?'" At Scott School, unlike the TV show with a similar name, everyone was a winner during Survivor Week.

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BEHAVIOR

YOU CAN TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS

CALEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

You could be barking up the wrong tree if you try to get dads involved in the same way as moms. Caley Elementary School wanted to increase the number of fathers and father figures who were engaged in ways that would increase student achievement and decrease problem behavior in school. Along with the national WATCH D.O.G.S. (Dads of Great Students), Caley developed *You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks* to bring male role models into students' classrooms. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) knew that this would require creative outreach to invite dads in.

The school invited dads, grandfathers, uncles, and other father figures to sign up—one at a time—to spend a well-structured day in the classroom, lunchroom, playground, hallways, and to help dismissal. The day's assigned Dad arrived at school to park in a designated WATCH D.O.G.S. parking space. He reported to the main office, where he was greeted by a representative—the building secretary, principal, or school counselor.

The day's Dad received the WATCH D.O.G.S. Handbook, reviewed tasks with the representative, and helped with arrival traffic. When Dad was announced on the P. A. system, his child or children came to the main office to have their picture taken with Dad. Photos were displayed on a prominent bulletin board in the front lobby.

Starting at 9 a.m., each Dad followed a well-planned schedule. The school counselor, in conjunction with teachers, carefully coordinated activities to meet student and teacher needs. Dad's activities included reading in class, playing math games, tutoring specific students on sight vocabulary and fluency, talking about his work/career, supervising lunch and recess, helping the Parent-Teacher Co-op, working with special subjects (i.e., physical education, music, art), and overseeing dismissal. Each Dad had lunch and recess with his own child.

Caley implemented WATCH D.O.G.S. and *You Can Teach an Old Dog New Tricks* after school-wide data showed that male students had a higher incidence of disciplinary referrals and lower math and reading scores than did female students. In response, the Counselor/Principal/Parent Book Club read *Raising Cain* to learn more about the social and emotional development of boys. With this information, Caley implemented a Boys Night Out event, where boys and male role models participated in collaborative games and activities. The new program met the observed need to increase paternal involvement at school during the school day.

Over 130 fathers or father figures volunteered for WATCH D.O.G.S. this year. To organize their schedules and activities, Caley created a handbook for staff and fathers specifying roles and responsibilities. The school also posts a volunteer calendar, handbook, and daily orientation form on its website. The program leaders use an electronic form to determine daily slots for dads to tutor targeted students. Each day's volunteer Dad calls the next day's scheduled Dad to keep the program running smoothly.

The program has shown noteworthy results. Literacy assessment scores increased for students tutored by Dads. Lunch and recess behavior referrals decreased. Children of volunteer Dads increased their homework completion. The best responses came from the Dads: "It makes me feel like I am part of the school getting to know the kids and teachers," said one. Another noted, "...in the supermarket some kid [will] say, 'Hey Mom, there's the watchdog dad.' Then, I get to meet the parents and...really connect with people." That kind of school and family connection is a new trick that volunteer dads can learn.

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Type 3

BEHAVIOR

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS CONFERENCE

NORTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL LAYTON, UT

When Northridge High School wanted to show 1,680 students the value and relevance of education to a career path, the school turned to its community. That's how 60 guest speakers in a wide variety of careers ended up speaking at the College and Career Readiness Conference. There, students heard evidence of the impact of education in the real-world.

Every student in the school participated in the College and Career Readiness Conference. Most dressed in professional business attire. Students welcomed presenters at the door and escorted them to their presentation location. There, student leaders acted as room monitors and introduced their guests. Students listened to the guest speakers' brief presentations about their career paths, and then asked questions. Each student attended three 25-minute sessions, with five minutes to rotate between rooms.

The Community Council, Northridge's NNPS-linked partnership team, asked each teacher to identify at least one presenter who would share his/her expertise at school. The final 60 presenters were parents and community members with various careers, including a graphic artist, computer game designer, registered nurse, lawyer, cartoonist, mortician, radiology technician, meteorologist from the local news station, and a local newspaper columnist. Post-secondary advisors, the principal, school counselors, and ten Northridge alums—including an NFL player—also spoke about the importance of students' education at Northridge.

At the end of the two-hour Conference period, students returned to their advisory classroom for a short debriefing. Teachers took notes on student comments and submitted them to the school team leader for review. The presenters proceeded to the media center conference room, where the culinary arts students had prepared a continental breakfast to show the school's appre-

ciation for their participation. The presenters also filled out a survey with their comments and suggestions.

To help with logistics, ROTC students assisted in facilities management and administrators adjusted the bell schedule for the first two hours of the school day. In an advisory period prior to the Conference, students selected the three 25-minute sessions they wanted to attend. Each student also chose two alternate sessions, in case their top three picks were full. Students were prepared about three weeks before the Conference with guidelines and discussions on appropriate conference behavior and attire, types of questions to ask the presenters, and how to phrase their questions.

To meet the \$150 cost of advertising and food for the Conference, Northridge used funds raised at a school dance. Career/Technical Education funds covered the cost of thank you gifts for the presenters.

Months of planning made the College and Career Readiness Conference a success. One student said, "This conference was a really good idea. I learned so much. I want to do it again next year." A presenter reported, "The students were great! I would love to come back again next year." The Northbridge team would say that this activity empowered many students with knowledge about options for post-high school careers and pathways.

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JA BIZTOWN

GILLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Fourth-grade students may be too young to drive or vote, but that did not stop students at Gillis Elementary School from operating a bank, managing a restaurant, writing checks, and voting for Mayor of JA Biztown. The fourth-grade teachers at Gillis brought free enterprise, civics, banking, employment, responsibility, social studies, and good citizenship to their students in the form of Junior Achievement (JA) Biztown.

JA Biztown is a non-profit organization that promotes 4th-7th grade education on entrepreneurship, financial literacy, employment readiness, and citizenship. It is a simulated town where students take charge. More than 150 students, teachers, and volunteers from Gillis traveled to Houston, Texas this spring to be a part of it.

For Gillis students, the real education took place before they arrived at the simulated town. For six weeks prior to the trip, teachers offered lessons on basic finance, including depositing paychecks, paying bills, and balancing checkbooks. Students also learned about free enterprise, philanthropy, and the responsibilities of good citizenship. In addition to learning about real-world social studies concepts and operations, students prepared for the trip by filling out job applications, attending job interviews, and practicing teamwork and conflict resolution.

At JA Biztown, they played their parts as town mayor and other representatives, judges, radio DJs, bank managers, athletic trainers, real estate agents, and police officers. JA Biztown included fourteen simulated businesses, each with a CEO and CFO, including Papa John's Pizza, Kroger, Best Buy, and others. Students reported that, "I felt like an adult," and a parent volunteer said, "The children really felt like they had jobs in the town."

Before supervising students on the responsibilities and requirements at JA Biztown, teachers, parents, and community members were required to complete a mandatory training. Two sponsoring fourth-grade teachers attended a Biztown leadership training program in order to prepare the other fourth-grade teachers and 28 parents and community members for the trip.

Title I funds covered the cost of the trip to Biztown for Gillis students. The school leaders pointed out that the simulated town, businesses, and citizenship principles could be replicated, locally, on a smaller scale.

The lessons in citizenship, math, reading, social studies, behavior, and life skills were so rewarding that all of those involved "are still talking about this wonderful experience," according to the assistant principal at Gillis. One parent enthused, "My daughter was able to see the entire picture from job application to interview, all the way to bringing her paycheck to the bank."

JA Biztown gave fourth-graders at Gillis Elementary a chance to see the grown-up world of employment, finance, and citizenship. The best part? After all their hard work in the simulated town, the students went back to school in their real town, where, after all, they still needed time to just be kids.

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LIFE HAPPENS

NORWICH TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL NORWICH, CT

Important connections occur at unexpected times. In life, the trick is to see the potential and take advantage of the unexpected opportunity. That is what happened at a high school softball game in Norwich, Connecticut.

A Student Service staff member from Norwich Technical High School met a Community Educator nurse from Backus Hospital. Both were watching their daughters' softball game. They began a conversation, learned about each others' work, and decided that they could form a partnership to improve the health of high school students. The result was an educational program called Life Happens—a series of teen-centric health seminars conducted throughout the school year for students, families, and the public.

The Life Happens series began in October with one seminar every month through April. Doctors, nurses, and Ph.D.s presented important information on a wide variety of health issues pertinent to teens, including: Seeing Stars: A Concussion Discussion; Be Aware, on trauma programming; Ask the Dietitian; Everyone's Different—Be Who You Want to Be, a frank discussion about self-esteem and sexuality; Delicious and Nutritious, a discussion on healthy eating, snacking, and sports nutrition; Anxiety Society, with attention to reducing stress in tough times; and Being Mean Won't Go Unseen, a straight talk about bullying.

With each health topic presented, Norwich Tech offered a student program during the day, and Backus Hospital offered a corresponding parent program at night. The daytime programming reached over 300 students. The evening seminars were open to the public. One presenting doctor said, "This is a great collaboration that I am proud to be a part of. It is what being a community hospital is all about."

In order to determine which health topics to teach, a Backus Community Educator designed a needs assessment for teenage students. Norwich Tech disseminated the assessment to students and sent 450 surveys back to the Backus community education office. Based on these data, the school and hospital worked together to create the sessions of the Life Happens series.

Norwich's graphics department conducted a Life Happens poster contest, which captured students' interest and participation. Students took the lead in welcoming the monthly presenters to their school. Parents could attend the day or evening presentations.

The year-long series cost only \$125. State funds for the high school covered the small Norwich Technical High School gifts for the presenters. "We are amazed," said the school social worker, "by the number of opportunities that can be accessed if there is a willingness on the school's part to begin the dialogue." At Norwich Technical High School, a chance conversation created a powerful education alliance that aims to improve the health and safety of students and families.

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Type 6

HEALTH AND SAFETY

NO FAMILY LEFT BEHIND: HEALTHERSIZE NIGHT

DELMAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

“If they won’t come to us, we will come to them.” So goes the Delmae Elementary School’s new motto. When a data-based study showed that school functions were not reaching families living in poverty to the same extent as other families, Delmae took action with No Family Left Behind: Healthersize Night. Community health providers met teachers, parents, and students closest to the homes of families who did not usually attend school functions.

During Healthersize Night, over 800 students and 400 parents and families were able to speak with local health agencies, including dentists, doctors, mental health providers, safe kids programs, health and fitness centers, and more. Families took home resources about these organizations. They also learned how to prepare inexpensive healthy snacks. Students also took things home, including books about healthy lifestyles, jump ropes and other games for physical activities, and ideas for healthy snacks using ingredients commonly found at home.

The most important element of No Family Left Behind: Healthersize Night was choosing a building within walking distance of the target families. The Curriculum Coordinator, school Wellness Team, and the Association of Parents and Teachers (APT—the school’s partnership team) did just that. They also contacted local health organizations during the planning phase to find expert presenters. Teachers and staff shared leadership to set up and decorate the space, prepare healthy snacks, and answer parents’ questions.

Even with the careful attention to location, encouraging parents’ participation was a challenge. To ensure that high-poverty families were in attendance, teachers sent home invitations through e-mail to parents, weekly classroom newsletters, and notices on the school website. A few days before the event, all families received a

reminder phone call. Because the workshop took place in a high-poverty area, the planning team also focused on maintaining the participation of families who usually attended school workshops. To encourage both populations to participate, the planners provided and advertised free meals and useful take-home materials.

After Healthersize Night, all students and families not in attendance received take-home packets with the information they missed. The school web page also featured information and photos from the night. The activity planners reviewed families’ evaluations within the week.

Funding for Healthersize included a \$1000 grant from Francis Marion University’s Center of Excellence, as well as \$500 from the Delmae APT organization. Going forward, Delmae hopes to host several Healthersize nights in different locations where high-poverty students and families live.

“One of the goals . . .,” the APT president concluded, “is to involve parents who have not traditionally attended events on the school campus. Healthersize...met that goal in one of our underserved neighborhoods, but the event also offered the students, parents, and teachers a chance to interact in an environment that was non-threatening and fun.”

Over 400 parents and other family members attended with over 800 students. No Family Left Behind: Healthersize Night offered a healthy dose of innovative community-building for every family.

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HIGHLANDS CULTURAL KALEIDOSCOPE

HIGHLANDS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Type 2

All aboard for a trip around the world through the Highlands Cultural Kaleidoscope! For one day, Highlands Elementary School became a port-of-call for eleven different cultural groups. Parent and family volunteers immersed students and families in ethnic language, food, geography, clothing, dance, and the arts. Activities culminated in a World Culture Fair that brought everyone a richer understanding of the cultures represented in our school population.

When each child and family registered at the check-in station, they received a welcome bag with an individualized itinerary, a passport, and fun cultural giveaway items. The itinerary listed two countries they had chosen in advance, and one that the school assigned to ensure equal attendance at each destination.

Passport in hand, families began their journey through the eleven classrooms to find their appointed nation. Each presentation lasted twenty minutes and included hands-on activities such as: writing names and learning greetings in different languages; counting or singing number songs in different languages; finding geographic wonders; trying on costumes; making or playing simple instruments; learning a few dance steps; and crafting a simple model of an ornament.

After each family attended three cultural presentations, the port-of-call moved to the gym. Everyone convened for a thirty-minute World Culture Fair. There, all eleven cultures on this year's tour—Argentina, China, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, France, India, Africa, Turkey, and the Netherlands/Norway—came together to share their cuisine, dance, and song. Entertainment included students performing ethnic dances to a music on a CD contributed by each presenter. Said one student, "I am so glad I could do my Indian dance and share it with my non-Indian friends. A parent noted, "Children commented on my costume from Lithuania and how it looked

similar to photos of their grandparents from Bulgaria.

Each family completed an exit survey with their reactions to the Cultural Kaleidoscope. The evening culminated in a huge conga line, as everyone took their passports and giveaways home.

Planning is a big part of any big trip. In this case, parents' cultural representatives worked together to plan their presentations and activities. Teachers helped by providing useful guidelines for good presentations, and by welcoming all family members (grandparents, aunts and uncles) to join in the fun.

Highlands' business partner—a college that holds an annual multicultural fair—also helped the planners create immersion rooms. Many parents met off-site to prepare the information and presentations. They designed passports with their country's flag, selected recipes, identified important landmarks, and decided on something basic and fun to teach in their native languages.

Planning for shared food had to adhere to district guidelines to prevent allergic reactions. Parents who donated food listed and displayed all ingredients. Trader Joe's donated some food items for sampling tables from specific countries.

Highlands Cultural Kaleidoscope enabled nearly 200 students and their families to view the world through new lenses and to appreciate the diverse histories, backgrounds, and customs of friends at Highlands Elementary School. The voyage took everyone on an educational journey around the world and back again.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

HISPANIC HERITAGE NIGHT

FRASCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SULPHUR, LA

At Frasch Elementary, appreciation for the Spanish language and culture isn't reserved solely for students enrolled in the Spanish Immersion program. Hispanic Heritage Night invited all parents, families, and teachers to develop their cultural awareness and respect for diversity in their community.

Hispanic Heritage Night was a chance for Spanish Immersion teachers, students, parents, and other guests to meet and greet each other in the school building. The middle and elementary school principals opened the night with a *bienvenida* (welcome) address.

Participants enjoyed an ethnic food tasting, slideshow presentations, music and dance, and door prizes. Students had prepared for the event by researching Spanish-speaking countries worldwide. Their reports and displays were on exhibit throughout the evening.

The partnership planning team decided to host Hispanic Heritage Night to solve a perceived disconnect between Spanish Immersion participants and others at the school, including other students, parents, and teachers. In this school, the Spanish Immersion students come from all parts of the parish. Many parents had not met other parents or teachers in the school community.

Also, several Spanish teachers also were new to the school, having moved from Spain, Mexico, and Venezuela. The Frasch partnership team wanted to build a bridge to connect all of these members of the Spanish Immersion community. Hispanic Heritage Night also included the local middle school, because many Frasch students continue the Spanish Immersion program in middle school.

To prepare for the event, the Immersion teachers met several times to coordinate the food they would serve and the entertainment that would be presented. They prepared invitations and decorated the gym. They also directed students in researching and preparing in-class projects about Spanish-speaking countries, which students displayed on Hispanic Heritage Night.

To cover costs, the elementary school Immersion teachers teamed with their colleagues from the middle school to host a teen dance at the middle school. The dance tickets helped fund Hispanic Heritage Night. The planning team recommends early planning and clear delegation of responsibilities, particularly for an event like this one, which involved students, teachers, administrators, and parents from the elementary and middle schools.

Hispanic Heritage Night enabled over 125 students and more than 350 parents and other family and community members to learn more about Hispanic cultures worldwide. This not only will spark interest in the school's Spanish Immersion program, but also curiosity about other countries and social studies concepts. One parent said, "I was glad to see more culture being integrated into the language program."

In the midst of this cultural richness, parents networked with each other and with teachers and administrators, and gained greater familiarity with the elementary and middle schools. ¡*Excelente!*

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VOLUNTEERS IN PARTNERSHIP

CHAPARRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHINO HILLS, CA

Type 3

A teacher's work is never done. With help from parents at Chaparral Elementary School, teachers found that they could spend less time on "prep" work and more time planning interesting, standards-based lessons. Volunteers in Partnership gave English- and Spanish-speaking parents strategies to help their children's teachers, thereby creating a climate of multicultural partnerships in the school building.

Parents involved in Volunteers in Partnership (VIP) came to the Chaparral PTA office at appointed times. There, teachers had filled bins with Teacher Request Forms explaining the assistance they needed from the volunteers. Activities ranged from making photocopies to collating learning activities or packets, stapling, cutting and pasting, tracing, labeling, and other tasks that helped teachers prepare interesting learning materials for students' lessons.

Teacher Request Forms were in both English and Spanish. VIP parents worked alongside other PTA volunteers in the resource room. This created a friendly and productive environment in which all parent volunteers communicated with one another. Refreshments were available for all volunteers.

VIP originated to engage more than 20% of parents who were English Learners. The program focused on helping Spanish speakers feel welcome and valued at the school. Bilingual parents agreed to come every Monday and Friday at specific times, so they could translate tasks for non-English-speaking parents and serve, as needed, as interpreters. In conjunction with the VIP program, Chaparral opened its computer lab to parents in the afternoons so they could use Rosetta Stone to develop their English skills. Students who were English Learners were encouraged to join their parents on Rosetta Stone after school.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers designed the Teacher Request Forms and VIP badges for parents, and developed English and Spanish instruction manuals for each task that was left for the volunteers. Parents responded to a flyer that invited them to a training session on the various tasks they may find in the bins and how to use tools in the copy room. Trainings were in English and translated into Spanish. Interested parents left their names and phone numbers, so the partnership team and other teachers could notify them of upcoming volunteer activities.

As VIP continues, Chaparral plans to hold twice-yearly training sessions to ensure that all volunteers are familiar and comfortable with copy machines, die cuts, and other helpful tools and technologies. The \$170 budget for refreshments came from Title I funds and the \$12 bins for volunteer activities were donated.

While VIP parents reap the social networking and language development benefits of being on campus, teachers' lessons also are improving. One teacher reported, "VIP has rocked our teacher world! Prep time is at a minimum Prior to our parents volunteering for VIP, I would spend long evenings and weekends [preparing materials] for our first-grade team. Our VIP volunteers have become an essential part of our program. They help us by copying and prepping our projects, assessments, homework, and [other classroom] materials. Their dedication to education. . .has been incredible. I seriously don't know how we ever managed without them." This is well-deserved high praise for a simple—and simply effective—partnership program.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

KINDER PARTY

ALFRED F. FORREST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VA

At Alfred F. Forrest Elementary School, the staff began to welcome potential families even before their children were officially registered to attend the school. Kinder Party was held to make the transition from PreK to K as smooth as possible. In May, parents and PreK students met teachers and administrators to learn more about the school’s programs and philosophy. The party encouraged early kindergarten registration; provided parents with math and reading readiness materials to use at home; and discussed school policies, procedures, and expectations for students with parents and students—all long before the new school year started.

At the Kinder Party, pre-kindergarten students and their parents visited interesting “stations” set up around the cafeteria. They gathered information of interest on registering for school; transportation and bus behavior; the cafeteria; the PTA; and services of the school nurse. They enjoyed a meet-and-greet with the five kindergarten teachers, who addressed the parents’ and students’ questions.

To ensure that parents could focus on important information, a resource teacher supervised an activity for students at each station. As parents completed paperwork at the Registration Station, for example, students worked with the art teacher to make self-portraits for the “Growing Kindergarten” tree, which reflected the school’s theme: The Place to Grow. At the Meet the Teachers Station, parents received information and were introduced to readiness materials that could be used at home during the summer. At this station, students played games using school equipment with the Physical Education teacher.

Kinder Party grew from an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) member’s research project. Planning began in December for the May event. Parents on the ATP identified the parents

of preschool students to invite. Teachers identified the letter and number recognition skills they wanted students to practice at home before entering kindergarten. Administrators, resource and kindergarten teachers, a special education teacher, and the Parent Involvement Facilitator also attended planning meetings.

Kinder Party, for about 50 prospective students, cost about \$100. In addition to the information and readiness materials which were printed at school, community partners donated popcorn for snacks, and soil and flower seeds for planting to support the Place to Grow theme.

The ATP publicized Kinder Party through ConnectEd phone messages, the school marquee, school newsletter, flyers, and other phone messages. The planners aimed for strategic advertising, to reach parents in the neighborhood who did not have older students at the school.

The ATP also solved program and transportation challenges to avoid conflicts in the school’s schedule. To help parents attend after work hours, the school hosted Kinder Party for flexible attendance over two-hours. Alternatives, under consideration, include conducting Saturday Parties or satellite Kinder Parties in the community, especially in areas where transportation to the school is a challenge.

About thirty students registered for Kindergarten at the Kinder Party. According to the school’s principal, “This was a great way to welcome new parents to our school and to begin building a relationship with them.”

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KINDERGARTEN CONNECT

ANN REID EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER NAPERVILLE, IL

Type 2

When students begin kindergarten, their parents, too, experience a big transition. At the Ann Reid Early Childhood Center, Kindergarten Connect helped the parents of future kindergarteners to meet one another, ask questions, relieve anxiety, and learn about school requirements and academic programs for their children.

Ann Reid serves Pre-K students who, then, may attend 14 elementary schools in the district. Many of the preschoolers have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and about one third are Spanish speakers. To help the families prepare to send their children to an elementary school, Kindergarten Connect invited the rising preschool students and their families to an evening at Ann Reid in May.

Volunteer translators, Home and School presidents, and School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) chairpersons from each elementary school conducted school-specific presentations and conversations. Parents also attended breakout sessions on Interventions, Social Skills, and Dual-Language programs. Ice breakers in each session helped parents meet each other. Parents also got a preview of a typical day at their child's future kindergarten.

Over 100 parents from across the district received invitations to Kindergarten Connect. The SFCP chairperson started planning in February, along with a member of the district's SFCP core team, and the Home and School president. They decided to extend invitations beyond the families at Ann Reid, to include all families in the district with future kindergarteners.

An Ann Reid parent donated printing services with which to create a colorful, eye-catching flyer. The planning team distributed the flyer to families in all 14 elementary schools in the district-wide Kindergarten Roundup folder. Flyers also were distributed at the district office for families who went there to register their

incoming kindergarten students.

Volunteers from each school and translators signed up about six weeks before the event. Then, organizers created signs for the 14 classrooms that were the meeting-sites for the 14 elementary schools. They also developed a map of the classrooms for parents and volunteers, and an exit survey for parents' reactions. The Home and School organization donated beverages and parents donated other refreshments.

Parents responded positively to Kindergarten Connect. One parent offered a typical comment, calling the event "a great opportunity to get information on my specific school's kindergarten procedures. I loved the parent volunteer from my school and can't wait for my child to start kindergarten."

Each school in the district organizes opportunities for families to learn about the school and meet other families. This means that Ann Reid's Kindergarten Connect could focus on helping parents understand the special services in elementary schools for students with IEPs and other educational needs. Ann Reid plans to hold an evening roundtable discussion and Q&A sessions about these critical services.

At Kindergarten Connect, over 100 parents of preschoolers had a chance to prepare for the transition to kindergarten. With the help of this program, both parents and students will be better prepared for the changes ahead.

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TRANSITIONS

NAPER FUN FAIR

NAPER SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

At Naper School, no one has back-to-school jitters. That is because Naper kicks off the school year with a Fun Fair for students and families, complete with carnival games, simple food concessions, balloon twisting, a face painter, and a prize tent. The school offers one special feature unlike any other carnival—a Teacher Raffle, where teachers donate their time to conduct an activity with a winning student.

The Naper Fun Fair took place on the school field and blacktop during the first Friday of the school year. Stations included athletic games, such as a moon jump; an inflatable obstacle course; bean bag toss; a duck pond; twisting balloon animals; artistic events, such as face painting and a colored-hair-spray booth for parents and children. Some games had math components to them, such as estimating the number of beans in a jar. In the Monkey in the Middle card game, the player had to use probability skills to determine whether the value of a face-down middle card was between (or higher or lower than) two cards facing up on either side of it.

The Fun Fair culminated with teachers drawing names for winners of the Teacher Raffle. Winning students received various gifts of time from their teachers, such as a trip to the book store for two students, or a scavenger hunt for five students. The chairs of the Fun Fair said that the Teacher Raffle is instrumental in “bridging the gap between staff, families, and students and creates a real sense of community, which is invaluable when generating excitement and energy at the start of the school year!”

Parent volunteers made Fun Fair Possible. Parents sold tickets, worked the concession stand and the prize booth, baked or bought treats for the Cake Walk, and took a shift at carnival booths along with teachers, staff, and administrators. Parents on the partnership team and others coordinated the event and, with help from the janitorial staff, set up and cleaned up the fair.

The Naper Fun Fair is financially self-sustaining. It makes a profit of approximately \$1200 over the \$3500 cost of the event. All students received a complimentary ticket to the Teacher Raffle, but additional tickets also could be purchased for \$1. Carnival game tickets and food concession tickets were available for 25 cents, and attendees could use tickets or cash for food. Each carnival booth cost between zero and four tickets to play. Most food and paper products were donated.

Because the Fun Fair took place so early in the year, event organizers secured volunteers at the end of the previous school year and during the summer. To combat allergy concerns at the cake walk, all treats were nut-free and pre-packaged. None were consumed on school grounds. The school had a well-organized volunteer committee that divided responsibilities for specific jobs—for example, the Volunteer Coordinator was solely in charge of dealing with the many volunteers.

The Naper Fun Fair promotes positive interactions among all members of the school community, as students, families, and parents interact with teachers and staff as the school year begins. This kind of enthusiasm, said one parent, “reminded me how great the Naper staff was—my kids loved interacting with their teachers at the Carnival Booths.” When school starts off with a Fun Fair, it sets the stage for a great year.

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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.

BUILDING TRADITIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

CENTRAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SAINT CHARLES, MO

Just because a school is big—like Central Elementary School with 830 students—doesn't mean it must lose its personal touch. In fact, thanks to Building Traditions of Parental Involvement, each grade-level team designed a unique partnership activity for its students and families. Each grade level created a “tradition” that students and families can look forward to each year.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Central's teachers wanted parents to have at least one predictable event each year to celebrate their children's learning and development. Also, although other activities may bring together the whole school community, grade-level traditions ensure that the parents and students enjoy a partnership activity with a smaller, personalized, and more manageable group—the teachers, parents and students at their own grade level.

After teachers discussed the challenge to build a family tradition at each grade level that would reflect students' growth that year, they responded wholeheartedly. The traditions began in kindergarten, with the Kindergarten Graduation for parents and family members. The ceremony included songs and poetry, and captured the great growth of the youngest students at the end of their first year in elementary school.

The team of first grade teachers planned the First Grade Musical. Students performed as a choir for families. They sang songs based on themes of character-building and academic development.

Starting in second grade, some school traditions targeted selected family members for school involvement. On Grandparents Day, grandparents and students traveled through stations together. They completed a family tree, enjoyed snacks, and attended a book fair.

In the third grade, Muffins with Mom brought mothers to school on a day near Mother's Day for breakfast and activities with students and teachers.

Parents and students rotated through educational stations at the fourth grade Veterans Celebrations, learning about the U.S. military branches and hearing from local veterans who volunteered as guest speakers.

The local Sheriff's department sponsored a fifth grade DARE Graduation, which helped families encourage the oldest students in the school to make good decisions as they prepared to enter middle school.

District resources covered the \$500 cost of these events that build school and family relationships across the grades. The grade-level traditions created friendly, innovative opportunities for parents and other family members and community partners to come to school to recognize their students' work and growth at each grade level.

This was the first year of the “traditions.” Central's principal reflected on the concept and activities: “Regardless of whether [students] were on a stage or learning with a family member at their desk...they benefited from school and home coming together for a common purpose.” The grade-level traditions also helped families strengthen their social networks with other families who would be partners as their children progressed through the elementary grades.

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Type 3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

DADS AND DR. SEUSS

EDWIN MARKHAM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

What's the best way to a dad's heart? At Edwin Markham Elementary School's Dads and Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, the answer was food, books, and fun.

At 8:00 in the morning on Dr. Seuss's birthday, dads and other male family members followed signs to the school gymnasium. They signed in and received a Dr. Seuss pencil and bookmark for their children. Then, dads, father figures, and other family members and students went to the cafeteria, where teachers and volunteers from the donating restaurant served biscuits, drinks, and delicious (yes, delicious) green eggs and ham.

After breakfast, guests returned to the gym to enjoy an enthusiastic student performance. Arranged by grade level, the students presented a choral reading of the *Green Eggs and Ham* story, which they had developed and practiced in their music class.

Students were involved in the Dads and Dr. Seuss event from start to finish. In class, during writing time a week before the event, every student made a personalized invitation to invite their dad, grandfather, uncle, brother, or special friend to the literary morning. Students hand-delivered their handmade invitations to their guests, and the school sent flyers home and hung posters at school as event reminders.

The activity cost about \$100. Costs were covered by a grant from the local teachers union for implementing a Dr. Seuss-themed activity. Edwin Markham's community partner, The Country Gentlemen restaurant, donated the green eggs and ham.

With 100 dads and 200 students participating, the green eggs and ham nearly ran out. The restaurant responded by bringing extra eggs and ham that were not dyed green, but that were still delicious. The ATP and other planners urge others conducting a similar activity to have ample food supplies, because the meal was such a hit.

One dad remarked, "This is how you get dads to come to school—offer a great breakfast."

While Edwin Markham typically has a lot of support from mothers, the teachers believe that students benefitted from having their fathers in attendance. Students who saw their fathers enjoying books became more eager to improve their own reading abilities.

In the relaxed atmosphere, teachers were able to make new connections with students' dads and extended family members. And students gained exceptional familiarity with *Green Eggs and Ham* through their choral reading. They not only learned the story, but also learned to express the correct rhythm of the book.

In the future, Edwin Markham plans to have boxes of different books on hand and will encourage students and dads to bring a book they want to read together. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) was pleased with the activity, and did not see much to improve. Students, teachers, and male role models got to read, learn, perform, and enjoy each other's company. No one was heard saying that famous phrase, "I will not eat green eggs and ham!"

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DRIVE IN

EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER —CENTRAL SCHOOL ROAD, ST. CHARLES, MO

What better way to celebrate The Week of the Young Child than with an evening Drive-In Theater? At the Central School Road Early Childhood Center in the Francis Howell School District, preschool students designed their own cardboard-box cars in which to watch educational and fun movies with their parents.

On the night of the Drive-In Theater, students in the early childhood center and their families arrived to find classrooms set up as artistic automobile assembly lines. Children selected their boxes and moved to an assigned “detail room” in a color-coded classroom. There, students and their parents had about 30 minutes to decorate their boxes and turn them into colorful cars. A wide variety of art supplies were available for the activity, including paper plates, coffee filters, construction paper, glue, markers, pipe cleaners, duct tape, and more.

After the students and parents had decorated their cars, they headed to the multipurpose room with their families. The children sat in their cars while watching short films each on a preschool-appropriate theme such as sharing, telling the truth, and including others. Students and parents enjoyed popcorn and drinks while they watched the movies at the drive in.

To encourage parents to support children’s learning and creativity, parents received a handout about reading with children at home and information on Francis Howell’s preschool programs. Children went home with an extra box and supplies, so siblings could create a car of their own and join in the fun.

The Drive In supported the school’s parent involvement goals of bringing more and different families into the center and promoting children’s creativity. The event brought families

together to celebrate both The Week of the Young Child and the statewide recognition of the Early Childhood Center by the Missouri School Board Association for the quality its education program.

One site leader was happy that the children “were able to participate in an open-ended, family-based project... Children spent quality time with their families creating their cars and watching the movies.”

Drive In coordinators contacted district offices and asked them to save boxes for about one month before the event. A Francis Howell employee traveled collected the boxes from the donation sites. To ensure that the evening ran smoothly, the school’s office staff and parent volunteers pre-painted boxes with solid colors, so the paint was dry and ready for decorating. Children had their choice of car colors and personalized their decorations.

The event brought preschool children and their parents back to a time of souped-up cars and drive-in movies. The creative event was nostalgic in spirit but current in its results to strengthen school and family connections and to support learning and development.

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FAMILY HOLIDAY FESTIVAL

RONALD E. MCNAIR MIDDLE SCHOOL LAKE CITY, SC

Type 3

When Ronald E. McNair Middle School (REMMS) decided to bring together students, families, staff, and community to celebrate the holiday season, no one could have anticipated the joy it would bring. At Family Holiday Festival, parent liaisons “wanted every family to know that we think of them not only as family to the children, but also as part of our family here at REMMS.” For almost 400 attendees, the community party achieved that goal and more.

Family Holiday Festival began with flyers sent home with each student announcing the “big event.” This was followed by RSVP invitations sent by the school’s phone messenger system and on the radio. Families were invited to decorate a holiday table, replicating the unique style and appearance of their own family tradition, and to bring a dish of their choosing for the buffet table. Community members, local merchants, surrounding communities, and REMMS staff also received invitations to the Festival.

At 6 p.m. on December 8, the Family Holiday Festival opened its ornamented doors. Families had decorated their tables, and each department at REMMS and various school clubs also took the opportunity to participate and decorate their tables.

School clubs took a lead role in the entertainment and the school’s cheerleaders performed a dance to the large and receptive crowd. A version of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas,” was written, and included students’ comical portrayals of the principal, vice principal, and other school staff.

The response from community, family, and staff was so positive that the gym-turned-banquet-hall barely accommodated everyone. In addition to filling seats at the decorated tables, some attendees sat in the bleachers.

Parents, teachers, and community members provided food that represented every culture of students in the school. There was soul food, and German, Irish, Chinese, Mexican, and other ethnic cuisine. Community members, custodians, and office staff donated their time to help set up and serve food at the event, and students acted as ushers and servers.

Door prizes and prizes for the best-decorated tables were donated by parents and community partners. Because supplies, food, entertainment, and time were generously donated, the only cost that REMMS incurred was about \$100 for paper products.

Parents, students, and staff agreed that they had “never had a better time at a school event.” Everyone “felt [so] welcomed and relaxed” that they “would like to do it again every year.” Students, family, school staff, and the community attended Family Holiday Festival in an atmosphere of goodwill and togetherness. It was, indeed, an evening spent in the holiday spirit.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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GRANDPARENTS DAY

ROBERTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WAYNE, PA

When it comes to history, grandparents have a lot to teach the younger generations. They got the chance to do just that at Roberts Elementary School's Grandparents Day. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATPs) and teachers and principal invited grandparents and senior citizens to school to learn with their grandchildren, enjoy an historical reenactment, sing together, share knowledge, and further solidify the bonds across generations.

Grandparents Day began with a grand welcoming assembly. Parents donated food for a welcome breakfast, and the music teacher worked with all classes to perform songs from the grandparents' childhoods.

After the performance, students met their grandparents in their classrooms. Teachers had prepared lessons that took advantage of the grandparents' expertise in the content areas of social studies, history, and language arts. Grandparents shared knowledge on topics such as immigration, heroes, historical figures, government, geography, and character education. Some classrooms also completed art projects and shared literature. One grandparent said, "Our favorite part was when our grandchild read her poem to us." Another commented, "I enjoyed talking with the children about how things were when I was their age."

Next, students and their guests enjoyed a unique historical reenactment of life in the one-room schoolhouse that is located on the Roberts Elementary School property. With help from the Upper Merion Park and Historic Foundation, children researched what school was like in 1850 at the old schoolhouse. Selected students in costume gave grandparents a tour of the schoolhouse, and reenacted a sample Friday afternoon lesson from 1850.

To make sure that all students had a grand-friend in attendance, Roberts partnered with the Upper Merion Senior Service Center.

About 25 to 40 senior citizens volunteered as surrogate grandparents for students whose grandparents could not come to school. This was particularly important to students in the school's growing immigrant population whose older family members are not in the United States.

Throughout the day, trained Student Ambassadors welcomed the senior guests, and Roberts service groups (such as the Alpha Club and Safety Patrol) acted as tour guides. The students modeled volunteerism and service. Teachers also helped take photographs, so everyone could remember the exceptional day.

Roberts Elementary implemented Grandparents Day because in today's fast-paced life, students were at risk of losing ties with the older generation, weakening their cultural identity, and, for some, missing support from elders who lived far away. To maximize participation, the ATP communicated with seniors by the phone, rather than using electronic modes of communication. The team enlisted the help of homeroom parents to conduct personal phone calls to grandparents in or near the area, and administrators met with people at the senior center to continue their strong connections with Roberts Elementary. Over 300 parents, grandparents, and other senior citizens participated.

Grandparents Day celebrated and recognized grandparents and senior citizens, and helped students develop an appreciation for the older generation's contributions. There is little that could solidify the value of caring and inter-generational respect more strongly than learning together on this unforgettable day.

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HANDS ACROSS ANSONIA 9/11 CEREMONY

EMMETT O'BRIEN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL ANSONIA, CT

Type 6

All Americans were affected by the horrific events that toppled the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing thousands of innocent people on September 11, 2001. To mark the 10 year anniversary of historic date, the principal of Emmett O'Brien Technical High School recommended a local parade to honor the memory of those who died or were injured on 9/11. The goal was to instill pride and patriotism that would be positive forces in students' lives for a long time.

O'Brien Technical High School is located in the hilltop suburb of Ansonia, Connecticut. Close by are two large elementary schools and Ansonia High School. When the principal contacted her fellow principals and shared her vision, they joined the project. The principals, parents, and teachers representing all four schools and a representative from the local police department became the planning team. They named the event Hands Across Ansonia, 9/11 Ceremony.

All parents were notified with a "telephone blast" and invited to participate. They also were asked to contact people they knew in local agencies (e.g., police, fire fighters, armed services) to invite their participation and support.

By design, the children from kindergarten through high school, teachers, and administrators created a line along the main road and held hands at exactly 9:40 a.m., when the first tower was hit on 9/11. In this show of unity, over 2,400 students held hands. They created a human chain and a moving demonstration of respect and care. Then, a parade passed by with representatives from the schools and the broader community.

The parade began with ten O'Brien students holding a large American flag. A sign followed stating proudly, "United We Stand." Following was a float with the twin towers decorated in red, white and blue, developed with donations from parents and students. Employees from the local funeral home played bagpipes and

Taps on a bugle. Next were mayors from Ansonia and Sheldon (the next town), the State Representative from the district, a marine currently serving, and the school Superintendent. Neighbors also lined the streets.

The parade continued with athletes, class officers, and club members from the two high schools. Other classmates lined the streets holding hands with the elementary students. The Ansonia High School Marching Band followed with students waving flags and banners. Periodically the band stopped and played the National Anthem. When the parade passed a school where students were all lined up, the principal joined the parade. Completing the parade were several fire trucks and other emergency vehicles from the community.

When the parade returned to O'Brien Technical High School, there was a huge American flag flying, held up by two fire trucks. Again Taps was played. Students gathered under the flag to sing several patriotic songs. The principal closed the ceremony with a moving address. Students returned to their classroom, aware that they had shared an extraordinary experience.

The local newspaper covered the Ceremony and talked with some of the participants. One student reported that the event raised awareness of the people who sacrificed their lives on 9/11 and added, "This event makes me glad for my freedom." Another student shared a similar thought, "I feel very touched to be a part of this."

Leaders suggested that a parade might be appropriate on 5-year or 10-year anniversaries of 9/11. This tribute not only was inspiring and educational, but also was noteworthy for creating a sense of community as students held hands across Ansonia.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

HEARTFELT THANKS FOR VOLUNTEERS

BURBANK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VA

Burbank Elementary School’s staff knows how important it is to appreciate and celebrate the work that volunteers do to support the school. The Heartfelt Thanks for Volunteers program gave the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators a simple, inexpensive, and powerful way to thank volunteers. Each volunteer was presented with a personalized heart-shaped necklace at the annual Volunteer Appreciation Picnic. The necklace stood as an important symbol of the school’s gratitude and as a call to encourage volunteers to continue their service.

During Field Day every May, Burbank Elementary holds a Volunteer Appreciation Picnic for parent, family, and community volunteers who have helped the school, teachers, and students during the school year. The agenda is short and sweet: Provide the volunteers with lunch and an opportunity for fellowship with other volunteers; conduct a brief program of heartfelt thanks; and give every volunteer a gift from the school.

To prepare this year’s gift, the Parent Involvement Facilitator (PIF) made 200 4”x4” cardstock hearts about three weeks before the ceremony. With teachers’ support, students decorated the hearts with artwork, appreciative messages, and added their first names. When all the hearts were decorated, parent volunteers laminated the hearts, punched holes in them, and thread each heart with a long piece of colored yarn to serve as a necklace keepsake.

On Volunteer Appreciation Picnic day, the principal welcomed everyone. During dessert, fourth- and fifth-grade student volunteers, each with 30 or 40 handmade heart necklaces, were stationed around the picnic area. As the PIF read the names of each volunteer and the tasks they performed, students gave them personalized heart necklaces. Some received more than one heart to recognize multiple roles that the volun-

teers served at school. The principal closed the program after all volunteers were recognized.

Heartfelt Thanks acknowledged over 50 parents and community members. The cost of about \$28 was paid by Title I Parent Involvement funds. The PIF reported, “Volunteers loved getting the heart pendants . . . When they leave the event, many volunteers are wearing multiple hearts, of which they are very proud.”

The planning team emphasized the importance of involving students in showing meaningful appreciation to the volunteers, and erring on the side of inclusion. When Burbank first held its first picnic, parents who volunteered to help on that Field Day were not acknowledged for working at the school throughout the school year. The next year, planners included invitations to those who helped at the picnic, because their help was important, too. The school decided that all volunteers were important and worthy of recognition and thanks. The number of volunteers and participation at the picnic increased.

Not only did Heartfelt Thanks engage students in thanking parent and community volunteers, but the activity highlighted the variety and depth of volunteer jobs performed for the school during the past year. Volunteers reported that they keep their hearts from prior years and look forward to receiving new ones each May. To Burbank volunteers, the appreciation necklaces are more valuable than necklaces found behind the jewelry counter!

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INTRAMURAL BASKETBALL FOR INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS

ANNIE BURNSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COLUMBIA, SC

Type 3

The tweet of the coach's whistle. The screech of rubber-soled sneakers on the gym floor. The thwack of the ball against the backboard. These are the sounds that Annie Burnside Elementary's Intramural Basketball for Intermediate Students brought to life at school. Although most elementary schools in the area did not offer afterschool sports, Annie Burnside wanted to build a basketball program from the ground up.

When 3rd-5th grade students expressed strong interest in joining a basketball team, Burnside Elementary's leaders sent letters home explaining the idea for a team and asked for volunteer coaches and volunteers to provide students with transportation after school. Parents and teachers enthusiastically agreed to serve as coaches and assistant coaches. The coaches held grade-level tryouts, but every interested student was placed on one of five mixed-grade teams of about 15 students each—indicating the students' strong interest in basketball in the school.

Students attended one-hour practices once each week. On Friday game days, community members refereed, law enforcement partners brought half-time music, and members of a nearby church came to watch the games.

Most importantly, there was great parent turnout at the games—nearly double the 75 involved students. Parents who had never come to the school before cheered from the bleachers. Teachers used the game time to talk with parents about school programs and their children's progress. One teacher said, "I can't believe I can see this many parents all at once! Wow!"

Despite the ever-growing game attendance, the program still needed to attend to funds to support the team's equipment and materials. During the first game, teachers donated money or items for the concession stand. The stand was so successful that it paid for itself every week thereafter. The proceeds from the concession stand

allowed coaches to conduct a cookout after the championship game.

Every good team has a team uniform. One Annie Burnside parent found a low-cost local tee-shirt shop that offered \$7 shirts. The school was prepared to make sure that all students had shirts. Surprisingly, many parents ordered team tee-shirts for themselves!

One mid-season challenge was the lack of a school policy that connected students' report card grades with permission to participate on a sports team. Coaches began to check with teachers about grades and behavior before letting students play in the games. Consequently, students had to complete schoolwork and some needed to practice anger management in order to continue playing basketball.

Intramural Basketball originated to support students' interest in the sport and as a way to heighten parental involvement. Annie Burnside exceeded that goal. Parents heard positive feedback about their children from the teachers, coaches, and team supporters. They also learned ways to help their children with homework. Students developed more confidence, self-discipline, and healthy exercise habits. As one fifth-grader put it, "Basketball was the best thing that ever happened at Burnside!" It would be difficult to disagree with his enthusiasm. This program was a definite slam dunk.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

LOUISIANA DAY

HENRY HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Louisiana is a state rich in history, diverse cultures, and great resources. Yet, many students at Henry Heights Elementary School (HHES) rarely leave the area in which they live. To spotlight the resources around them, the school and community brought the state's rich heritage to the students.

On Louisiana Day, over 400 students, 65 school staff members, and 150 parents and community members were energized by a performance by the Twelfth Night Revelers, the city's official ambassadors for Mardi Gras. Dressed as jesters, the revelers danced on stage and threw Mardi Gras beads to the students, ultimately leading students in a dance line around the cafeteria.

After the performance, teachers led their classes to different stations on a prearranged schedule. The mayor of Lake Charles and the HHES principal joined forces to teach students how to peel and eat 200 pounds of donated boiled crawfish. In the Food Tasting Area, students also ate red beans and rice, Cajun-style boudin balls, and bread pudding. The HHES cafeteria changed its schedule to provide jambalaya for lunch.

Food stations were just the beginning of the fun. Coushatta Indian dancers dressed in traditional garments demonstrated their native dances. Then, they danced with students. At the History and Doll Making station, students learned about and practiced the creative arts of the Acadian culture. At another Louisiana location, Captain Sammie taught students to cast a fishing pole and showed them pollutants found on the beach. Louisiana Trivia featured French and English, since HHES is a Title I French Immersion School. The school's Partner in Education—McDonald's—provided prizes.

The jam-packed day ended with two more special performances. One of Louisiana's State Senators read the story of *The Three Boudreaux* in both English and Cajun French, displaying the

images on a slide show. Finally, the HHES principal joined a Zydeco Band for a traditional music performance.

Louisiana Day was a true partnership of the school, families, and the community. Community members covered 100% of the cost, donating all goods and serving as guest speakers and performers. "The community involvement was wonderful," noted the HHES principal, "because we would never be able to afford a day like this on our school budget."

Parents cooked or bought food for the tasting area, provided lunch for teachers, and volunteered at each station throughout the day. Pre-k teachers organized the event, classroom teachers extended the topics into their curricula, and faculty and staff set up and cleaned each station. The principal designed the tee-shirt for Louisiana Day and worked at a station. The assistant principal photographed the event and ensured good student behavior for the day.

Louisiana Day activities supported goals in the HHES School Improvement Plan to promote student engagement through learning by doing, higher-order thinking, and real-world connections. Clearly, this activity required thorough and advanced planning, as well as advertising in local and school newspapers, on the school marquee, and via phone, e-mail, and Twitter. The project leaders also made sure to thank all of the sponsors and volunteers.

Students learned more about the state's history. Teachers, parents, and community members strengthened the school's welcoming environment. And, one third-grader piped up, "Can every day be Louisiana Day?"

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LUNCH WITH YOUR CHILD

GEORGE ROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LANCASTER, PA

Working moms and dads usually take a lunch break. Why not come to school for lunch? George Ross Elementary School's partnership team and Parent Educators invited parents to the school cafeteria for Lunch with Your Child.

To strengthen the school's positive connections with parents, the partnership team designed an activity to make parents part of their child's school day. They linked the school lunch schedule to parents' work schedules so that parents could come to school for lunch with their child.

In addition to spending time with their children, parents had opportunities to observe the social aspects of lunch and recess, including peer interactions among the students. One parent said, "I loved having a chance to see what my child's lunch procedure is like."

The educators took photographs of the 100 parents and 300 children at Lunch with Your Child. The photos became a school wall display entitled "Strong Partnerships." Parents received their own copies of the photos.

The George Ross principal said, "I loved chatting and snapping photos of our children with their parents. Parents also asked friends of their children to join them for lunch." In that way, students whose parents could not come were included in conversations and interactions.

Parents were given the option of ordering lunch from school or bringing their own. Thus, there was no cost to the school for the event.

If there is another lunch day for parents, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) may look into having the adults' lunches donated by community partners or local businesses. The main challenge that emerged and that will need to be solved in the future was scheduling lunch for parents with more than one child in grade levels that usually have lunch at different times.

The whole school got involved in making Lunch with Your Child a success. Building-level staff members greeted parents, and parent volunteers signed in visitors as they entered the building. Teachers gave parents an overview of their child's classroom and school environment, and students provided classroom tours. No one forgot about the main purpose of the activity. The cafeteria manager placed the order for the food the adults would enjoy along with their children.

George Ross Elementary School's Lunch with Your Child event helped bridge the gap between home and school. Parents saw that the school was a positive and safe learning environment. Teachers and staff saw that parents were their equal partners in supporting students as learners. After the event, the principal noticed that more parents attended monthly PTO meetings. Parents, their children, and lunch at school was a good recipe for partnership program development.

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Type 3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

ME 2! GETTING PARENTS INTO MIDDLE SCHOOL

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

In two hours, you can bake a cake, watch a movie, or—thanks to Park Middle School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP)—help make school a welcoming environment for all parents, including those who do not speak English at home. The Me2 program has shown that parental involvement is wanted, needed, and expected, by encouraging every parent to share two hours of their time at or for the school over the course of the school year. The program not only communicated this message to parents, but also let students know that their families remained important influences in their education in the middle grades.

At open house and at sixth-grade orientation before the school year began, Park Middle’s principal explained the Me2 program. Park hoped that every parent would donate two hours to the school during the school year. Parents received a checklist of possible volunteer activities, including “Attend an awards assembly,” “Join your child for lunch at school on their birthday,” and many others. As guided by NNPS, the school included audience attendance in its definition of “volunteers” who contribute their time to support students’ activities at school.

Throughout the year, teachers and administrators highlighted the Me2 program at all school functions that parents attended. A large thermometer-type display at the school tracked the volunteers’ progress toward the 1800-hour goal. On a monthly basis, students brought home notes with various volunteer opportunities to inspire their parents’ involvement.

In late April, a “nearing the goal” celebration was conducted during the regular awards assembly. School leaders reported that parents had volunteered over 1000 hours at or for the school, and encouraged further participation. Local community media was invited to the celebration.

The biggest challenge that Me2 faced was changing some parents’ mindset that they did not need to be involved in school at the middle school level. To ensure that teachers were on board with the idea that the school wanted and needed parental involvement, the ATP asked teachers to list volunteer activities that would help them and/or the students in their classrooms.

The ATP and teachers remained attentive to the program throughout the year, often reminding students and parents about the two-hour donations of time. Next year, Me2 may invite parents to attend a class with their child for at least one hour during the school year. This will further “stretch” the concept of volunteering.

The teachers observed that students improved their academic performance and school behavior when they saw their parents at school and when they realized that their teachers and parents would, in fact, communicate with each other. Many parents remarked that they had a clearer understanding of school expectations because of their time at school. One sixth-grade parent said, “I never knew you guys would want our help anymore.” Another reported that, “because of the Me2 goal, I set aside one day a week to come into the school and work.”

The Me2 program at Park Middle School has helped make parental involvement a priority, without making unreasonable demands on parents’ time. Now, when middle school students say they like to go to school, their parents can say, “Me2!”

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OLIVER WOLCOTT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL GENERATIONS PROJECT

OLIVER WOLCOTT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL TORRINGTON, CT

Type 6

It's no secret that Oliver Wolcott Technical High School (OWTS) is proud of its history and its community. As the only technical high school in Litchfield County, OWTS frequently taps the community for student internships, job placements, and other services and opportunities to increase student learning.

To honor and celebrate its graduates in the community, OWTS implemented a Generations Project. The goal was to collect artifacts, photographs, uniforms, and memories from the school's alumni for display throughout the school.

OWTS also created a Family Engagement Center (FEC) and a Work-Based Learning program, both of which emphasized the value of family and community involvement at the school.

One member created business card-sized handouts and another made a poster asking, "How many generations of your family have gone to OWTS? Send us a picture and let us know." The committee hung copies of the poster in the school gymnasium and in various community locations, and included it in the monthly mailing to all students and families.

To collect alumni artifacts technologically and in person, the Generations Project committee established a receiving website and a drop-off location at the school. They continued to promote the project by taking a booth at a local expo. Also, students, teachers, and administrators spoke about the project at open houses, sports and community events, and community service programs.

The Generations Project is a big project with several components. The next steps will be to gather and arrange the many artifacts and pictures into an attractive and permanent display at the school. The project will continue so that more graduates hear about the project and submit

something about their high school lives and post-high school accomplishments.

Even Phase I of the Generations Project has produced positive results. The project heightened awareness of OWTS in the community at large. This has spurred more businesses than in the past to visit the school and offer internships and jobs to the students.

The Generations Project will help students, teachers, and community appreciate Oliver Wolcott Technical School by learning more about its history. The committee's energy and enthusiasm has rubbed off on others. One teacher said, "I never knew [before] how rich our school's history was!" The OWTS assistant principal agreed, adding, "We are very proud of our school program and excited to learn the stories of our alumni."

As the Generations Project continues at OWTS, it will add to the long and proud story of this 97-year-old school. It is an important community institution.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

RE-THINK, RE-PURPOSE, RE-VITALIZE: A NEW SCHOOL COMMONS

GLENFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NJ

At the start of the academic year, Glenfield Middle School’s administrators determined that their library and outdoor space needed serious sprucing-up in order to increase students’ uses of these resources. They challenged the school community of teachers, parents, and students to develop creative and cost-effective plans that would transform these places into a fresh and dynamic media center and an attractive and accessible outdoor learning and recreation space. The whole school responded to the call for designs of the new Glenfield Commons.

The School Action Team for Partnerships (SATP) kick-started the ambitious project by establishing a working group that included parents, teachers, and school administrators. The group agreed that Phase I of the project would focus on a quick redesign and freshening of the media/library space. Phase II would revitalize the courtyard and upgrade books, content, media, and technology in the media center. Phase II also would explore a potential partnership with the local township public library.

Everyone was invited to participate in planning and implementing the project. Teachers helped focus groups of students to discuss ways to create more student-friendly spaces. Teachers and media specialists shared imaginative ways to reconfigure these spaces to meet student and faculty needs. They emphasized safety, easy access to media and library resources, and opportunities for new educational activities.

Parent planners, including a professional landscape designer and interior designer worked pro-bono to develop floor plans and color palates. More than ten local businesses contributed funds thorough a PTA fundraiser. The Family Life/Consumer Science teacher secured a grant from a local foundation—the Montclair Fund for Educational Excellence—to help pay for the school gardens.

In Phase I, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, and students (who received community service credit for their work) gathered in the library. They reconfigured furniture, discarded bookshelves and tables that were damaged beyond repair, painted walls, and added accent colors.

Outside volunteers built five raised vegetable beds. With grant funds, the volunteer landscape designer directed the planting of hanging gardens. Art, music, and science teachers are considering gallery, performance, and experimental space.

To accommodate the schedules of so many volunteers, the working group communicated effectively and primarily by e-mail. Recognizing budget constraints, all team members came to the table with wish lists and then worked together toward a clear and fiscally feasible plan for the project.

Glenfield Middle School has more work ahead for its Re-Think, Re-Purpose, Re-Vitalize: A New School Commons. They are, however, already seeing results of their efforts. “The space is so much more alive and inviting!” said one Glenfield SATP parent. The main “customers” agree. After the redesign, 95% more students are using the library for homework, leisure reading, group research projects, and computer and media resources.

Even more activities, classes, and exhibitions are planned for the library and courtyard spaces next year. It is clear that Glenfield has repurposed and rejuvenated its interior and exterior spaces and revitalized students’ motivation to learn.

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ROOM PARENT PROGRAM

INDIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL FRANKLIN, WI

Type 5

Indian Community School enrolls Native American children, for whom *family* is an extremely important part of culture. To represent family values in the school building, the Family Resource Center (FRC) implemented the Room Parent Program, designating volunteer parents to serve as liaisons to connect the teachers, parents, and students in class.

Parent volunteers become parent leaders for an assigned classroom. Their first task was to compose a letter to introduce themselves and the program to other parents of students in the class. They acted as the voice of other classroom parents and got to know the students and staff at school. Throughout the year, Room Parents had several opportunities to contribute to students' learning.

They asked all parents to provide their best contact information and asked about their interests in volunteering and participating in school activities. A short handbook, *Guidelines for Room Parents*, explained, "Include all parents in your assigned class. You do not have to do [all of this work] alone."

During the school year, Room Parents made substantial contributions to their classrooms. They read to students, helped with math or social studies, assisted classroom-based activities, coordinated volunteers when needed, and helped teachers communicate with other parents. Room Parents maintained weekly contact with their assigned teachers by phone, e-mail, or in person.

Room Parents' leadership paid off in the classroom. One teacher said, "My Room Parent was so helpful this year and my students...really liked having her in our classroom. They would get so excited knowing that the Room Parent was coming in to help."

Indian Community School supported its parent leaders in many ways. FRC staff held an open information meeting at the beginning of the school year to give curious parents information about program. Only parents who wanted to make a commitment to the program signed an agreement.

The agreement outlined the responsibilities of Room Parents. They were asked to be available on a weekly basis. They were expected to respect all students and their families equally. They were not to purchase supplies for classroom activities nor supervise students on their own. The initial guidelines helped clarify Room Parents' roles. Monthly meetings with FRC staff enabled Room Parents to share their joys, ask questions, and discuss concerns.

One of the challenges that the FRC faced was organizing childcare that allowed the Room Parents to meet in person. The FRC asked parents to identify their childcare needs so that plans for this service could be arranged. The program planners aim to recruit volunteers before the start of the school year and will ask retiring Room Parents to recommend their replacements.

The Room Parent program offered parents an opportunity to give back to their children's school by taking on vital and much-appreciated leadership roles. Students in each classroom gained a mentor and friendly adult on whom they could rely for help with classroom projects. Room Parents brought home and school together in highly visible and important ways.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

SMILES FOR SENIORS

STEEPLE RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

During Turn Off the TV Week, Steeple Run Elementary School hosted a community service project of note. Students of all grade levels gave an hour of their time after-school to make senior-care-kits that brought Smiles for Seniors who were residents with low-incomes in the Naperville community.

After the school day, about 100 students gathered to hear a representative from a local service agency—the Humanitarian Service Project—discuss the importance of supporting the senior citizens in the community who face economic hardships. Next, the school librarian read an excerpt citizen from Nancy Loewen’s book *We Live Here, Too! Kids Talk about Good Citizenship*.

Students in kindergarten, first, and second grades were paired with students in third, fourth, and fifth grade. The older students helped the younger students in making “thinking of you cards” and decorating white lunch bags with artistic designs. They also “shopped” for seniors by filling the bags with items donated by students, families, teachers, and community members. The next day, parent volunteers dropped off the gift bags at the Humanitarian Service Project warehouse. They were distributed to the senior citizens later in the month.

To make Smiles for Seniors a success, advertising began early. Several weeks before the event, a flyer went home asking families to donate items from the seniors’ wish lists provided by the Humanitarian Service Project. Examples of wish-list items included crossword puzzle books, facial tissues, toothbrushes, soap, and cough drops.

School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team members wrote articles in the monthly school e-mail and newsletter to remind students, parents, and the staff of their roles in the project. Teachers talked about the project in class and administrators promoted it during daily announcements.

On the school’s Smiles for Seniors day, parent volunteers sorted and organized the donations on tables in the school gym. Donations were made by families, teachers, and a community dentist. The partnership team noted the importance of soliciting donations from local businesses, service providers, and medical professionals such as doctors or dentists. The school provided paper for the cards and the art teacher gave students crayons and markers to make their cards and decorate lunch bags. The only cost for the project was \$5 for white lunch bags. Over 30 parents and more than 25 teachers participated as leaders and volunteers in the project.

The assistant principal summarized the effort of the students and volunteers: “This was one of our most well-attended service projects... Our students talked about this event well after it concluded.” So did the Humanitarian Service Project. The organization blogged about Smiles for Seniors that included expressions of gratitude such as, “We want to thank you for your donation of 100 amazing and greatly needed senior care kits for the needy seniors! ... Your support is greatly appreciated.”

During Turn of the TV week, a community project is an excellent alternative to regular programming. Students worked cooperatively with parents, teachers, and with each other. Smiles for Seniors helped students learn that they could have a positive impact on their community.

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BASSICK HIGH SCHOOL BRIDGEPORT, CT

Type 5

All schools want to identify the skills and talents of potential volunteers and match them to the needs and requests of teachers, administrators, and students. That match should result in the productive use of everyone's time and, ultimately, in more successful students.

Bassick High School uses the A.S.P.I.R.E. Survey™ to learn more about the special talents of parents and others in the community. The inventory gathers information on six resources that volunteers may want to share: Assets, Skills, Professions, Interests, Relationships, and Environment.

People with each of these resources may be connected in different ways to the curriculum, extra-curricular activities, fundraising strategies, and to other purposeful roles as volunteers. As the A. S. P. I. R. E. literature suggests, schools "do not want to ask a parent with marketing or graphic design skills to bake brownies, when she could be creating dynamic publicity. . . for the school." Bassick High School wants to match parents' talents and preferences with tasks that create a welcoming climate and enrich student learning.

The A. S. P. I. R. E. survey is administered in a group meeting. Participants are placed in small groups of 5 to 8 people. Attendees sign-in and provide their contact information. A packet, including a recording sheet, is provided to each group. The facilitator leads by explaining and providing examples of each of the six resources, one at a time.

Each small group discusses each component for six to eight minutes, and tells whether their skills or interests match. The recorder for each group notes information on a recording sheet and shares 2-3 facts or ideas from the small group with the full group before everyone moves on to the next section of the survey.

Participants at Bassick High School reported that they found the process interest-

ing and reaffirming. The recording sheets were collected and the data entered into a data base for teachers and for the school's parent organization so that parents with particular skills could be contacted.

The group meetings of potential volunteers not only helped the school identify volunteers with particular talents and interests, but also enabled parents to meet each other and to draw upon each other's professions, skills, and abilities. Each time the survey was conducted with a new group of potential volunteers, the data were added, electronically, to the school's data base. To date, over 160 parents and community partners have participated in the process.

Bassick High School sent each parent an invitation to the A. S. P. I. R. E. sessions to ensure that all parents knew that their talents, hobbies, and skills were valued by the school. There was no cost to administer this survey. Information on A. S. P. I. R. E. is at www.theaspireurvey.com.

As the process proceeds, students will benefit if parents and other volunteers bring their knowledge and talents to bear on the students' experiences in specific subject classes; in sports, the arts, and other clubs; in mentoring relationships; in placements for internships or part-time jobs; and in other ways.

Parents, teachers, and community members gained a deeper appreciation of the human capital and talent pool at Bassick High School, and the importance of engaging parents and community members in meaningful and purposeful ways. The A. S. P. I. R. E. survey was an easy way to discover many treasures in our school community that may be used to benefit our students.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

TWO-HOUR VOLUNTEER CHALLENGE

MARY EMILY BRYAN MIDDLE SCHOOL SAINT CHARLES, MO

For parents, volunteering at their children's schools may be reward enough—but Mary Emily Bryan Middle School decided to sweeten the idea for students. The school implemented the Two-Hour Volunteer Challenge, which offered students special privileges for every two hours of time that their families donated to school. With more volunteers, better hourly tracking, and student prizes, the Two-Hour Volunteer Challenge was a win-win for the entire Bryan Middle School community.

In planning the initiative, the school's Parent Involvement Team (PIT) generated a list of current and new volunteer opportunities for parents, other family members, and community volunteers. The team posted the list online with descriptions of the tasks, times, and dates, as appropriate. Parents could sign up online for specific time slots, and, in some cases, tell when they were available to volunteer. Their hours were easily tracked when they completed a task or signed in at school on a visitor log-in sheet.

When parents accrued two hours of volunteer time, the students who earned rewards were recognized in lunchtime announcements. The students received cost-free incentives, such as the right to use an iPod at lunch, the opportunity to go to the head of a line, or bathroom and locker passes. Families who reached the two-hour mark were entered into a raffle for free dinner coupons. Community partners donated the restaurant certificates.

The Two-Hour Volunteer Challenge made students more amenable—even excited—about their parents coming to school. With over 100 family members donating over 1000 hours, Bryan Middle School nearly tripled its volunteer hours in one school year. The assistant principal said, "We have...seen all students embracing the idea of parents in the building."

The PIT recommends asking students what privileges they would like to win to be sure

that the incentive system works well. The free online sign-up engine was instrumental in the success of the program because it allowed parents to sign up to volunteer without having to come to the school or contact anyone in person.

As the PIT plans to strengthen this program, they will try to include more volunteer activities outside of school hours so that more employed parents participate. The team may include options for volunteers to conduct activities at home or in the community. The PIT will continue offering family dinner incentives to support family time together. The team will encourage teachers to think ahead and be creative in listing how and when volunteers would be helpful to them and to the students in and out of the school building.

Parents who volunteered in classrooms formed strong connections with teachers. They saw how children learned and how teachers supported all students during the school day. During lunch and other activities, volunteers engaged in conversation with students and helped them gain social conversation skills. A teacher assessed the results of the project, "It has been rewarding to interact with the parents. I appreciate getting to know [them] on a different level." Bryan Middle School set the Two-Hour Volunteer Challenge and met its goals, resulting in benefits for volunteers and for students' education.

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VETERANS DAY CELEBRATION

CASTLIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MO

Type 6

In November, Castlio Elementary School's monthly Family Night celebrated veterans in the St. Charles community and their service to the country. The Parent Involvement Team and school leaders invited veterans to school for a night of music, pancakes, reading, a Wall of Honor, and appreciation for their service.

Veterans were invited to be guests for the evening. At the sign-in table, they received ribbons designed and produced by parent volunteers and the school library staff.

In the gym, all guests enjoyed patriotic music. A local Boy Scout Troop led the opening flag ceremony. Then, Student Council members and staff volunteers served everyone a pancake dinner and cleaned up later on. Each family paid \$3 for their dinner reservations, which paid for great pancakes—flipped then and there—by a specialty caterer from St. Louis.

Guests browsed the Veterans Wall of Honor displayed in the hallway. Students, their families, and the veterans read stories together as part of Accelerated Reader Night. Students from the Middle School Band played music and elementary students sang songs that they learned in music class. A closing flag ceremony led by the Scouts concluded the evening.

Students and families helped prepare for the event. Every student brought home a Wall of Honor sheet on which parents provided information and pictures of a veteran they knew. Students wrote information about the veteran, his/her relationship to the student or family, where and when the veteran served, and why the veteran was special to the student. When students returned the sheets to school, parent volunteers and library staff attached a red or blue background to each sheet and displayed them in the hallway under a Veterans Wall of Honor banner. Kindergarten and third-grade students paired up to make themed placemats for the dinner.

About 125 students, 80 parents, 60 community members, and 25 teachers attended the Veterans Day Celebration. To make the most of this excellent turnout, the PIT incorporated a reading night with the family dinner. In this way, families and veterans reinforced students' reading attitudes and skills. The celebration also served as the culminating event to the week-long fundraiser for Greater St. Louis Honor Flight, which raises money to help World War II veterans travel to Washington, DC.

Many students brought older relatives or grandparents to the celebration. More than 200 students contributed information and/or photos to the Veterans Wall of Honor. The principal called the night "a great opportunity for generations to come together and celebrate and honor our veterans."

Looking forward, if the activity is conducted again, the PIT will emphasize the importance of families' RSVPs and prepayments for dinner to ensure comfortable seating and enough food. The team or school leaders will formally introduce each veteran at the opening ceremony.

The activity linked students' reading, the school's appreciation for local veterans, and the community's support for the Greater St. Louis Honor Flight project. The Veterans Day Celebration was a personal way and a shared way for students to recognize some of the heroes in their community.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

VOLUNTEER FAIR

UPPER MERION HIGH SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a—volunteer match? That could have been the theme song of Upper Merion High School’s (UMHS) first annual Volunteer Fair. There, community organizations seeking volunteers met with students interested in donating their time.

Volunteer Fair in April was one activity in National Volunteer Week. UMHS hosted eight local organizations that were interested in increasing the number of student volunteers, including the UM Township Library Reading Buddy program and Teen UpRise. Student volunteers met the representatives of each group and escorted them to the school library. Each organization had a table where they could meet with students to discuss the organization’s activities and students’ interests in volunteering.

One grade level at a time came to the library to meet with the organizations. Classes signed up in 15-minute blocks. Some teachers brought their entire classes, whereas other teachers asked interested students to sign up. Representatives from each organization provided information about their work. Students took the representatives names and contact information if they wanted to become volunteers with that group. In all, over 200 students met with organizations during the Volunteer Fair.

The idea for the fair stemmed from a comment by a community member on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) who volunteers for the local fire company. When he mentioned that the volunteer rate among high school students had been declining, a UMHS counselor observed that many students were seeking local volunteer opportunities, but did not know what was available. The Volunteer Fair was designed to bring together the two groups.

Parents, teachers, community members, and administrators helped identify and contact local volunteer organizations. UMHS contacted organizations by phone and e-mail to learn of their interest in recruiting student volunteers. The project leaders sent each organization that expressed interest a follow-up letter and e-mail with date, time, and RSVP information to confirm participation.

UMHS planned carefully for the Volunteer Fair. This included getting commitments from organizations about two months in advance. Some organizations do not accept volunteers under the age of 18. It was important to check the regulations and age specifications of organizations so that even ninth graders could find opportunities to volunteer.

Did Volunteer Fair succeed in its match making efforts? “I wanted to let you know how successful we were in getting volunteers to help our cause,” the UM Township Library representative reported. “We received 17 applications from your high school students to become Big Reading Buddies. In addition, many of your students took our volunteer forms and said they would e-mail their decisions to me. ... A few students in your ESL program who speak a second language (Spanish, Thai) volunteered to work with young emerging readers.”

At the UMHS Volunteer Fair, local organizations and high school students were a match made in community-service-heaven.

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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.

BOOKS IN THE PARK

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ALTOONA ALTOONA, WI

Leaders in the School District of Altoona were aware that some of its most academically vulnerable students lost reading skills over the summer. The district wanted to stop—and even reverse—the summer slide with Books in the Park. This program invites all students to come periodically to a neighborhood park for fun events and free books for summer reading. It also pairs struggling students with a reading mentor for extra encouragement to read books all summer.

To ensure that struggling readers keep reading for pleasure during the summer, the Title I director developed a list of students who would benefit from reading mentors. Teachers and the Title I director assigned staff and community volunteers to serve as mentors. They were asked to contact their mentees four times during the summer with phone calls of about 15-20 minutes each.

Students who had parents' permission to participate in the program chose four books to read. The district Reading Specialist helped the students select books at their reading levels. The reading mentors delivered the books to their students. They also contacted their students one or two days prior to each Books in the Park giveaway to encourage them to attend.

Books in the Park started as a pilot program in 2010. Two teachers drove to various neighborhoods on specified days and times to distribute free books. It was hoped that if students had books at home, they would read them.

In 2011, the district added the mentorship component. The RTI (Response to Intervention) model undergirded this practice. All students were encouraged to attend Books in the Park (Tier 1-a universal, preventative activity). The reading specialists and Title I director visited every elementary school class before the summer break to stress the importance of summer reading

and to invite all students to attend Books in the Park.

At-risk students were assigned mentors (Tier 2-a targeted service for extra help). Teacher mentors tended to exceed the required time commitments. Some even read books weekly with their mentees. The teachers did not want their students to lose the reading skills that they had worked so hard to develop during the school year.

The main cost of Books in the Park was for the books given to students. That was offset by financial and gently-used book donations. Classroom teachers donated Scholastic points to buy as many books as possible. The Altoona Children's Council, Pederson Elementary PTO, and Altoona Middle School PTO donated funds to purchase new books for students. The Altoona district leaders and teachers believe it is important for students to own books. One noted, "Owning a new or gently used book at the level you can read makes children feel special and makes reading enjoyable."

To evaluate Books in the Park, the district measured each student's reading level at the end of the school year and at the beginning of the next year. After summer 2010, data for struggling readers indicated an average reading loss per student of two reading levels. After summer 2011, the average struggling reader with a mentor lost less than one level or gained a reading level.

The measurable success for struggling readers yielded an important message for teachers and parents. Summer is not the time for "a break" from reading. It is time to enjoy reading over the break!

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BUILDING STRONG SCHOOL ACTION TEAMS FOR PARTNERSHIP

MONTCLAIR PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT MONTCLAIR, NJ

Montclair Public School District's leaders shared a vision to engage more families in their children's education, including those whose voices have not been heard before. To this end, the district adopted School Action Teams for Partnerships (SATp), which replaced an earlier process called School Review. The new research-based team structure enabled the district's Parent and Volunteer Coordinator to guide all 11 schools to plan their programs and practices to increase the involvement of all students' parents in ways that contributed to students' achievement and success in school.

The district Coordinator began by orienting everyone to the need for greater inclusion of every student's family in their education. She provided team training for the schools' SATp. This helped them understand the research base for the new structures and customize their programs to help students reach important goals for learning and development. A Parent Leadership Academy had been conducted the prior summer and parents who successfully completed that training were encouraged to become members of the SATp in their child's school.

In Montclair, the SATp serves as an advisory committee to the principal with two major goals. First, each SATp aims to provide an open and inclusive forum for involvement by its school community in developing, implementing, and evaluating education programs and policies. Secondly, each SATp aims to activate the Six Types of Involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—in its school's action plans for partnerships, based on the needs and goals of its students and families.

There was evidence in the first year that more schools were including new faces and voices in school meetings and activities. For example, at the high school, a parent co-chair reported that parents' interest increased and that 40-50

parents were attending some meetings. At a middle school, parents' enthusiasm was high and was supported and sustained with new ideas from a new principal who was assigned to the school.

All principals submitted their school's Action Plan to the Department of Instruction at the beginning of the year. Each school posted information on the district website about its SATp committee members; SATp meeting dates, principal's newsletters; PTA council; Advisory Board meetings; minutes from monthly meetings; and partnership activities.

The district's Parent and Volunteer Coordinator's visited the schools and attended SATp meetings. The Coordinator encouraged the schools' action teams to implement the activities in their action plans for partnerships. She also checked that each SATp included members who represented all families and that outreach to all families was broad and equitable. All partnership teams were evaluated at the end of the school year to chart their progress on their goals and objectives. Montclair knows that systematic planning and accountability are paramount to the success of the schools' teams and to parent and community engagement.

Other than the cost of membership in NNPS, no extra funding was needed to implement the new approaches. Commitment to and trust in the new processes were essential. The Coordinator reports that in all schools all families now have a voice and many ways to support their children's success in school. Taking a new path to partnerships—organized, implemented, and evaluated—is making a difference in Montclair.

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CONNECTING PARENTS TO EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Parents want to understand how their children's schools work and how they can best help their children succeed in school. Connecting Parents to Educational Opportunities (CPEO) is designed to establish strong relationships among families, teachers, administrators, and district leaders, and to open avenues for communicating useful information to families.

Minneapolis School District (MPS) uses CPEO to help improve connections with parents, including those with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and others who may not have been involved in the past. MPS wanted to provide better information for families to encourage their students to succeed in school, stay in school, and be prepared for college or careers.

CPEO is a parent training curriculum that the district purchased and translated into Spanish, Hmong and Somali languages for use with its parents. It was piloted at five schools with parents who registered for the seven week course conducted by trained district staff.

The first four weeks covered topics such as: Orientation to the school system; Explanations of GPA; Establishing academic standards for children; Parenting tips (e.g., on communicating, supporting social development, and positive discipline strategies); Positive motivational strategies for children; and How to prepare for college from an early age. In the fifth week, the school principal came to answer parents' questions. Parents also took part in a session about financial aid for college, facilitated by the Office of Higher Education. They learned how all students can go to college or other postsecondary education programs, regardless of family background and family finances. In the sixth week, parents toured local college campuses, some with their children.

The seventh week was the graduation ceremony. Graduates received a program completion certificate; a free registration for an

Early Childhood Family Education class and a Community Education class; and a certificate if students qualify for a college scholarship from the University of Minnesota and/or Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

Though costly (about \$350,000 per year), the program has benefitted the families who participate. District and school leaders reported that CPEO parents are more active than other parents on school and district councils, at parent-teacher conferences, and in other activities.

A Hmong parent reflected, "This is my first time to know that preparing my children to college is not as hard as I thought it would be. Now, I can be more prepared ...while they are still in the elementary grades. . . . Living in America gives our children equal opportunities to go to school and continue to attend higher education." Another parent wrote of her son's reactions: "Thank you for the tour at U of M. It had a huge impact on my son. . . . He was telling us the plan he will need to execute to make it there. Actually visiting made it real."

To date, 800 parents participated in CPEO. One principal of a pilot school summed up benefits he has observed: ". . . Our parents have increased their self-esteem, learned about the school system and how to better assist their children, how to advocate for their children, and how to be a real and functioning part of the school community. It is amazing what can be done in seven short weeks." The district expects that CPEO will result in higher student attendance and graduation rates as more parents guide their children through the grades toward high school graduation and beyond.

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LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR STRONG PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SEATTLE, WA

In Seattle Public Schools (SPS), the School Family Partnerships (SFP) Department is moving forward in organizing its leadership on partnerships. With the Superintendent's School Family Partnership Advisory Committee (SFPAC), the leaders for partnerships are addressing two important responsibilities to strengthen programs of family and community involvement. Leaders are (1) conducting district-level leadership activities and (2) facilitating each school's partnership program development.

In the past year, two successful district leadership projects were launched. The *FEAT Connections Newsletter* was developed to increase communications between district leaders and school-based Family Engagement Action Teams (FEATs). District leaders and school teams contributed articles, photos of family and community activities, and ideas for schools to improve their programs and practices.

Seattle produced annual guides, *Promising Practices in School Family Partnerships*. These collections showcase schools' successful family and community engagement activities to encourage schools to learn about and borrow ideas from one another. The guides also include tips for schools to keep improving their partnership programs. The newsletters and best practices are posted on the website at www.seattleschools.org.

In addition, district leaders conducted face-to-face meetings with schools' action teams to ensure that each FEAT: included all stakeholders as team members (i.e., families, teachers, support staff, administrator and community members); had a firm schedule for meetings and activities for engaging families to support student success in school; and included time for reflection on the strengths and improvements needed in the family engagement activities they conduct.

District leaders also developed and adapted tools to help FEATs organize their plans for partnerships. They provided the teams with the

Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) Checklist, FEAT Meeting Agenda template, *Family Engagement Action Team Event Planner* template, *Family Engagement Action Team Evaluation of an Event, FEAT Year-End Report Form*, and sample *Family Interest and Skills Surveys*. Schools responded appreciatively, as one team noted, "Thank you for providing support and guidance for our FEAT team so that we are more successful in engaging the diverse families in our school."

All partnerships activities aim to meet the district's overall goal that all SPS students will graduate ready for college and careers. The School Family Partnerships Department aims to help meet this goal by improving two-way communications among educators, families, and community partners; solving social and cultural challenges so that all families are engaged in their children's education; and increasing school and family capacities to work well together on behalf of children's success in school. Over time, partnership leaders plan to scale up the number of schools that take systematic approaches to family and community involvement and to scale up the quality of partnerships programs. Its work is supported by Title I, Title III, general funds, and other targeted funds for school, family, and community partnerships.

Seattle Public Schools is serious about making connections that will improve student achievement, attendance, and other school behaviors. The district connects actively with NNPS and with its schools. Leaders help schools connect with students' families and communities. With its book of best practices, the district connects school FEATs with each other. All in all, Seattle is accomplishing quite a feat!

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IS YOUR CHILD KINDERGARTEN READY?

ST. CHARLES PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOLS LULING, LA

Because parents are their children's first teachers, they need some good information to ensure their children are ready for kindergarten. Leaders in St. Charles Parish Public Schools planned a pre-kindergarten event—Is Your Child Kindergarten Ready?—to help parents understand the district's and state's expectations for students entering kindergarten. This activity assessed pre-kindergarteners on the expectations of Common Core State Standards, and offered parents many ideas to help prepare their children to be academically "ready" for kindergarten.

On two days, from 9 a.m. to noon, parents of students who were registered for kindergarten came to the testing location with their children. There, each parent signed and each child received a lanyard with a punch card indicating a series of centers located in the room. Parents guided their child to each of ten centers where the child sat one-on-one with a team member to complete the assessments.

The ten assessments focused on counting, one-to-one matching, letter identification, vocabulary, familiarity with print, rhyming, puzzles, cutting, writing, and directional positions. Parents were encouraged to sit beside their children as they completed the assessments. Most children finished the activities within 30 minutes.

When an assessment was complete, the team member at that center punched a shape into the child's card. The team member also spoke briefly with the parent about how the child performed and offered suggestions and specific ideas on activities to conduct with their child in the months prior to kindergarten.

Parents completed an evaluation form. Over 102 parents and 83 students participated in Is Your Child Kindergarten Ready? Most parents wrote positive comments, such as: "I liked seeing what my child was able to accomplish and what

he needs to work on."

Is Your Child Kindergarten Ready? was developed after district leaders and kindergarten and first grade teachers saw the need to help more pre-kindergarten children come better prepared for school. About 25% of incoming students did not have basic pre-kindergarten skills on entrance assessments.

District leaders, including the Family and Community Involvement System-Based Team, and teachers brainstormed ways to help parents learn about the state's expectations for incoming kindergarteners. The planning group decided which skills to evaluate, developed assessments, and prepared hand-outs for parents on ways to help a child who did not score well on a given the task. Making a game of rhyming, naming letters, counting to 10 or more, cutting paper, and all tasks on the pre-assessments are things that any parent—every parent—can do with a young child. The team sent flyers to all parents of current four-year-old students and to all preschools in the school district.

The informal screening of pre-kindergarten students helped the kindergarten teachers to prepare their curricula for the students who would soon enter their classrooms. The assessments and discussions with teachers helped more parents play games and conduct activities with their children to help them get ready for this important transition.

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LUNCH BUNCH

**NAPERVILLE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT 203
NAPERVILLE, IL**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Family and community involvement is work of the heart! Districts and schools must care that all parents are involved in their children’s education. It also is work of the head. Family and community engagement activities must be productive and focused on students’ success in school.

To continue the district’s history of strong heartfelt and purposeful partnership programs, while also honoring everyone’s time, the Naperville’s Core Team of leaders and advisors on family and community involvement, conducted Lunch Bunch. This was designed as a relaxed and comfortable way to focus on strengths of the schools’ partnership programs and ways to make them even more effective. At Lunch Bunch, there were heart-to-heart and head-to-head conversations about the work on partnership program development in the district and in Naperville’s schools.

The Lunch Bunch meeting responded to a request from School, Family, and Community Partnership team chairpersons, who wanted an opportunity, at mid-year, to share ideas, best practices, challenges that arose as they worked on partnerships, and to discuss solutions to those challenges. The February gathering was organized as a working lunch. Schools’ SFCP chairs or co-chairs were invited to attend. They were asked to bring a lunch and an idea to share. Lunch Bunch was advertised on the district calendar, which all SFCP team chairs receive. It also was announced at the first SFCP team chair meeting in October and a reminder was sent, electronically, close to the date for the Lunch Bunch.

The Lunch Bunch convened at noon. Name tags, soft drinks, and desserts were provided. As participants ate their lunches, they listened to a presentation from Kids Matter, a

local organization whose mission is to equip families with tools to manage the stress of everyday life through school and community programs.

Then, SFPC teams shared their schools’ best practices, asked questions about upcoming activities, or exchanged ideas for future work on family and community engagement. The meeting adjourned at about 1:30 p.m., with positive feedback from the participants. The Core Team and district leaders plan to improve future Lunch Bunch meetings by meeting separately with SFCP teams by school level—elementary /middle and high for even richer, grade-specific sharing. They also may omit the external speaker so that the schools will have more time to talk with and help each other.

One parent who was an SFCP co-chair explained, “I brought the woman who will be taking my position as SFCP co-chair next year . . . and she learned a great deal from the ideas shared by the group. This open format also gave her the opportunity to meet some of the chairs from other schools in the district.” SFCP team chairs gained ideas from others, and learned about many practices that had been implemented in schools throughout the district. The participants noted their appreciation of the open and active exchange of information and ideas. Several SFCP team chairs exchanged e-mail addresses for further interactions. These are good results for a workable working lunch.

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MANY FACES, MANY PLACES: A WORLD OF F.U.N.

WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT WAUSAU, WI

Many Faces, Many Places: A World of F.U.N. was a real partnership activity. The Wausau School District partnered with the Family University Network (F.U.N.) to create a multicultural event that focused on cultural exchange, racial equity, and cultural competency. The activity celebrated the district's diverse population and strengthened connections among different cultural groups to increase awareness, respect, and understanding in the community.

All elementary and preschool students and their families in the district were invited to Thomas Jefferson Elementary for Many Faces, Many Places for a Saturday afternoon of fun. Families signed in and placed a pin on a world map indicating the countries from which their families and ancestors originated.

Attendees viewed cultural displays provided by one elementary school whose 4th grade students had selected a country, conducted research, and created information posters. The American Indian Resource Center of Marathon County and the Northcentral Technical College (NTC) International Department's students also provided cultural displays. Ethnic food samples from licensed local vendors expanded the families' taste buds with international dishes such as flautas de carne with salsa and chips, strudels, and egg rolls.

After viewing the students' displays and posters and eating an international lunch, families went to the gymnasium for a cultural presentation. NTC students from El Salvador shared stories about life in their home country and taught native dance steps to children. Then, students and parents were divided into two groups. One group participated in Hmong children's games while the other group designed and decorated a family garden stone to take home as a creative keepsake.

Families were encouraged to talk with the children and presenters about their displays. Prior to leaving, families completed a brief survey, for which they were entered into a prize drawing.

Many Faces, Many Places was planned, collaboratively, by F.U.N., the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, AmeriCorps VISTA, and one of the Wausau district's elementary school's PTO. The district's Communication Coordinator endorsed the spirit of partnership, saying, "This event demonstrated the power of collaboration. F.U.N. is most effective when it brings people together around shared interests."

The Wausau School Foundation funded a Reach for the Stars grant to help offset costs of Many Faces, Many Places, and local restaurants donated gift cards as prizes. The planning team assessed and debriefed with the help of nearly 50 parents' surveys after the celebration.

The Wausau School District valued the cultural and ethnic diversity of families who attended Many Faces, Many Places. Young students gained an appreciation for other cultures and spent some very high-quality time with their families at this family-friendly activity.

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NOURISH EXPO 2012

GREENDALE SCHOOL DISTRICT GREENDALE, WI

Realizing that children learn, grow, and thrive when they are healthy, Greendale Schools decided to make “wellness” a priority in the 2011-12 school year. District leaders took stock of wellness programs in the schools, and planned to strengthen existing practices and/or develop new ones to create a culture of wellness in Greendale. The culminating activity was the Nourish—Mind, Body and Environment Expo 2012, which provided students, staff, parents, and the community in Greendale with many opportunities to learn about and participate in activities that promoted physical, environmental and emotional well-being.

At Greendale High School, exhibitors for the Expo included Greendale’s Health, Police, Parks and Recreation, Library, Interfaith, and Aging Departments, health clubs, hospitals, merchants, practitioners, master gardeners, and, of course, students. Presentations and demonstrations were held on healthy cooking, master gardening, being a patient advocate, and living a long and healthy life.

Middle and high school students’ booths showcased their health-related service-learning projects conducted in science, physical education, health, and business and consumer education classes. Their projects addressed topics such as diabetes and lung cancer awareness, effects of tobacco usage, oral hygiene, dangers of drugs and alcohol, healthy plates, healthy gardens and student-developed fitness logs. Elementary students sponsored activities, such as make your own healthy snack, plant a seed, and a fundraiser for a new community playground. Many exhibits were interactive for students at all grade levels.

A Community Cookbook featured healthy recipes submitted by students, parents, staff, and community members. Some recipes were studied in health class, and some were cooked at the Expo by consumer education students. Attendees engaged in fitness activities coordinat-

ed by physical education teachers, including yoga, self-defense, obstacle courses, family volleyball, Zumba, Wii Fit, and chair exercises. The school’s pool was open for water aerobics and open swim.

During the year, each school’s Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) adopted wellness as one of their partnership goals. One school conducted a Healthy Snack Contest. The winning classroom’s snack was featured at the Expo. In Walk and Talk, students walked a mile and talked with a partner about a book they read—combining attention to wellness and reading.

Teachers featured wellness material in math and science classes to teach, as they taught skills such as graphing hours of student exercise or studying the life lifecycle of plants in their school gardens. Schools’ PTOs and the Health Department organized “Step Up to Better Health” with a Fun Run/Walk fundraiser. There were 771 registrants!

Countless students, parents and community members volunteered to help with the Nourish Expo. Area businesses donated funds for schools’ wellness activities and many sponsored booths at the Expo.

Academically, all students learned a great deal at the Expo. The middle and high school students gained extra skills in their service learning projects, including project management, marketing, teamwork, and problem solving. More than 350 parents and community members attended Expo 2012. Nourish Expo 2012 was a great way for families to enjoy a day together, while engaging in and learning about how to lead healthy and environmentally-friendly lives.

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RICHLAND ONE PARENT AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT CALENDAR

RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE COLUMBIA, SC

Richland School District One has some outstanding student artists in its schools. The district and school leaders decided to showcase these students to accomplish two strategic planning goals: (1) increase parental involvement across elementary and secondary levels and (2) create a tool to keep district employees abreast of important dates. These goals were met with the Richland One Parent and Family Involvement Calendar—a large-scale project that produced a copy of a calendar for every family in the district.

The Strategic Plan Team thought it would be wonderful to create a wall calendar featuring student artwork from across the district. The calendar would note important district dates such as testing and family engagement events. It was hoped that the calendar would be more than a date repository. The leaders wanted to include some creative ways to encourage and track parental involvement.

Monthly coupons in the back of the calendar included questions derived from other information in the calendar. If parents answered the questions correctly, signed, and submitted the coupons, their student was entered in a monthly prize drawing at their school. Schools received envelopes to collect the coupons, directions for conducting a drawing, and prizes for the winners. Then, the coupons from all schools were returned to the district office to learn more about the patterns of parental involvement throughout the district.

Delivering the calendars offered another opportunity for family engagement. A member of the Strategic Plan Team and the district Superintendent delivered calendars to the featured artists. They were joined by a camera crew from Richmond One TV. Students from the elementary and secondary levels were thrilled to become published artists.

The Professional Development Consultant recalled, “One little boy had his parent present at the visit. This particular child has learning obstacles, and his success with being selected as an artist for the calendar really made him proud.” In addition to making home visits to the artists, the Strategic Plan Team mailed a calendar to every family in the school district, and supplied schools with extra calendars in case families did not receive one by mail.

Many Strategic Plan Team members from several district departments collaborated on the calendar. The process included proposing and designing the calendar; soliciting and selecting student artwork; collecting and organizing important dates to list in the calendar from across the district; developing the interactive coupons and questions; researching cost; securing artwork permissions; printing and delivering calendars; and advertising the project via auto-dialer and Richland One TV. Strategic Plan funds covered the cost of the calendars, which were sent to thousands of families.

The Parent and Family Involvement Calendar allowed students to encourage parents to use the calendars to complete the interactive coupons each month. This helped students, families, staff, and district board members understand and plan for important district activities that would engage families in many ways that contributed to student achievement and success in school.

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ROAD MAP TO ATP SUCCESS

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT

PASCO, WA

If you don't want partnership programs to be a secret in your district and schools, then it is necessary to raise the flag, use the bully pulpit, toot some horns, spread the word—in short—send clear messages about the importance of family and community involvement in children's education. In Pasco School District, leaders for partnerships help all schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) create awareness about their plans and scheduled activities for family and community engagement. With good information, teachers, families, and community partners can, indeed, work together to increase students' positive attitudes about school and learning.

One way to create awareness and strengthen partnerships is to publicize scheduled activities. One school's ATP created a Road Map to help team members keep track of scheduled activities for family and community involvement. Pasco's district leaders wanted to share this useful tool with all schools. They developed their own district Road Map to ATP Success with the theme Wizard of Oz/Yellow Brick Road. The path through the school year included district-level partnership activities and meetings, and NNPS deadlines and opportunities for networking.

The district leaders encouraged the ATPs to create their own Road Maps showing the dates of the activities in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships. They agreed to provide snacks for one ATP monthly meeting for teams that completed their Road Maps and posted them in their schools for all to see.

Teams were creative. One ATP went digital and created a PowerPoint presentation that ran on a TV in the front office. Another used the school's theme for the year—In It to Win It—and included their ATP co-chairs' pictures in a hot air balloon traveling across the road as each month's partnership events came up. Road maps ranged from poster size to one that filled an entire wall.

They helped ATPs visualize, record, keep track of, and share their schedules of planned partnership activities. Many ATPs enjoyed the district's promise of nutritious snacks at a monthly team meeting.

The ATP chair at Pasco High shared that a security guard stopped to look at the road map. The chairperson saw the opportunity for recruitment, and how the guard is considering joining the ATP. At an elementary school, students viewed the road map on their route to the cafeteria and could remind their families of upcoming activities. This school also posted pictures after the events of the children and their parents at the activities.

In monthly e-mail messages, district leaders for partnerships reminded principals and ATP chairs about keeping their Road Maps up to date and front and center in their schools. The district's monthly ATP Connection newsletter featured a school and the way it used the Road Map as an attractive way to publicize partnership activities.

Pasco's school-based ATPs know that their district leaders for partnerships always find new ways to help them improve their programs and share good work. In this district, schools learn from their district leaders, who, in turn, learn from their schools.

The Road Map for ATP Success was one strategy for helping ATP members pace themselves as they planned their work. It also served as a communicating tool to create awareness for everyone at the school about upcoming activities. The Road Map for ATP Success turned out to be a simple, yet effective, way to keep Pasco on the path to partnerships.

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STAY CONNECTED AND ONLINE WITH TECHNOLOGY

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT LITTLE ROCK, AR

Because technology has been integrated in classroom instruction, the Little Rock School District wanted to help parents learn more about the technology that teachers and students use. On a parent survey, results indicated that parents were baffled about new technologies. The district's Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) designed and conducted a workshop—Stay Connected and Online with Technology—to explain the role of technology in school classrooms and children's learning.

Participating families arrived at 8:30 a.m. for a continental breakfast and to view technology-based exhibits. The opening session included an introduction from the District Administration and School Board members. Four presentations followed. In Understanding the Common Core for Elementary and Secondary Math and Literacy, the presenter explained requirements for students and teachers across grade levels and suggested ways that parents can ease their children's transitions.

Instructional Technology in the Classroom was a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) event that showcased current technologies and reviewed how Smart Boards, SMART Responders, iPods, iPads, and laptops can be leveraged in the classroom for student success.

The next session, Impacting Achievement through Student Attendance, provided an overview of the district's efforts to address truancy and improve attendance. Finally, The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Texting Versus Formal Written and Spoken English explained how excessive texting could affect students' future employment prospects and results on statewide, end-of-year, end-of-level, and Benchmark Exams.

Each workshop awarded door prizes, and two laptop computers were awarded to families who did not have a computer in their home. After each presentation, the audience used a Smart Responder and selected comments were posted

on a Smart Board. Parents also filled out English and Spanish-language evaluations on paper. Before they left, participants received a flash drive with parent involvement information, educational websites, tools, and resources to assist family involvement in technology education.

Title I provided the major source of funds for Stay Connected and Online with Technology. The PIC held several meetings to determine logistics for the morning, with committees for workshop/exhibitors, facilities, hospitality, child-care, translations, transportation, registration, and publicity. Community organizers volunteered to assist with committee responsibilities, facilitate workshops, acquire door prizes, provide resources for the information packet, and perform opening and closing duties. The Publicity team advertised through schools, community centers, local radio and news station, youth and faith-based organizations, and the LRSD-TV and website. In addition to students' parents, participants at the workshop included educators from elementary, middle, and high schools, school parent facilitators, and parent coordinators.

The Stay Connected and Online with Technology workshops gave parents an opportunity to experience today's technology in a welcoming, educational setting. Technology is changing at a rapid rate, and it is critical to help parents keep up so that they can talk with their children about these valuable resources for success in school.

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TAKE AIM: TARGETING FAMILIES FOR PARENT WORKSHOPS

KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT KENNEWICK, WA

What is difficult for a single school to accomplish may be easier if tackled as a district initiative. In the Kennewick School District, one school's principal and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted to conduct workshops to help parents of students who were struggling in math, reading, and/or homework completion to gain strategies to help their children at home. The school did not have resources to plan, conduct, and evaluate these workshops, so the District's Parent Involvement Coordinator agreed to take the lead.

Four elementary schools that are members of NNPS were invited to collaborate on this project, Take Aim: Targeting Families for Parent Workshops. The ATP chairpersons and the district Coordinator agreed that parents' interest in learning how to help their children at home was highest immediately following parent-teacher conferences. They planned the Take Aim workshops to occur shortly after the conferences.

District math coordinator agreed to teach a session on math strategies that parents could use with their children at home. The literacy/language arts curriculum specialist conducted a similar session on reading. The ATP chairperson from a school with a successful Blue Ribbon Homework Center led a session called Making Homework Work for Your Home. The math and reading workshops were separate for parents with children in the primary and intermediate grades. Some families attended both. Each ATP hosted one workshop by greeting families, setting out refreshments, and making translation headsets available, where needed.

The district Coordinator and the ATP chairpersons talked with teachers to identify parents of students who were struggling in math, reading, and homework completion. The teachers listed parents to invite, and the district Coordinator took care of invitations in English and Spanish, phone calls, flyers, and other infor-

mation for the targeted group. The day before each workshop, reminder phone calls were made in the family's home language.

The district Coordinator ordered refreshments and supplies for the presenters, scheduled interpreters, and invited local agencies to share information and resources with the families. The public librarian came to enable families to sign up for library cards. The district's Ready for Kindergarten program representative registered younger siblings. A reading foundation donated books for each participant to take home and prepared baskets of books to use as raffle prizes at each workshop. High school students volunteered to work with young children on educational games and activities while their parents were in sessions.

In the math workshop, presenters showed parents how to use various materials with their children, including math flash cards on basic skills, and cereal and licorice sticks to practice measuring. In reading, parents worked with examples such as using a fresh-baked gingerbread cookie to prompt a child to think, talk, and write about how s/he might eat the cookie, a family tree activity, and keeping a writing journal. The homework workshop helped parents think about setting up a homework center and having useful supplies at home. Targeted families who could not attend the workshops were given copies of the workshop materials.

The district coordinator was pleased to see families who, typically, did not attend school meetings. The math session presenter added, "Watching parents smile as they made patterns with colorful cereal, or laugh as they quizzed each other with fun math fact cards. . .[let me know] that these parents felt good about their abilities to support their children academically."

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TEAM SPIRIT CELEBRATION

BRIDGEPORT SCHOOL DISTRICT BRIDGEPORT, CT

Schools in the Bridgeport School District are conducting many excellent practices to improve the connections of home and school, but they do not always have time and opportunities to share their activities with one another. The Team Spirit Celebration gave schools a formal occasion to share their promising practices with staff, parents, and community members throughout the district. In this way, all schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) could learn about effective strategies and activities that they could implement or adapt in their own school's partnership program.

At the Annual Parent Convention, a year-end partnership celebration, schools' ATPs added the new component—Team Spirit Celebration. Every school was asked to share one best practice at the convention. Thirty-three schools' ATPs set up displays around the room. They also provided an information sheet on the featured activity.

Parents and others who attended received a plastic envelope to hold information that they gathered from each display. They also received a numbered list of schools and practices on display, along with a card with the same list of numbers. Parents were asked to visit the displays, learn about the practices, and have the presenters from each school sign their card. Parents who visited all displays voted for their three favorite activities and were entered into a raffle to win one of several prizes donated by a district community partner.

The three schools with the parents' favorite partnership activities won Parents' Choice Awards. Each received a \$250 stipend to support a parent engagement activity for the upcoming school year.

In preparation for the event, the District Leader for Partnerships and her staff provided tri-fold foam display boards and a Team Spirit Celebration template to each Home School Coordinator (HSC, or parent liaison) on the

school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP). The HSC and school's ATP decided which of their school's family and community engagement activities to feature for the Team Spirit Celebration at the Annual Parent Convention.

The HSCs brought their displays to the convention along with 150 copies of the information sheet on the featured activity to distribute to parents. Each display was numbered so that the parents knew which schools they visited and could vote for their three favorite activities.

Funding for the event came from the budget for the district's partnership office and from the Connecticut Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC). Over 250 parents and more than 100 community members attended the convention, along with many school and district staff.

The Team Spirit Celebration generated great enthusiasm for sharing and learning about schools' best partnership practices. One parent liaison said, "I was humbled by the interest and incredulity that was shown by the parents and visitors for the display of our perennial garden—one of the greatest activities in our school!" It is likely that such enthusiasm will translate to schools adopting or revising ideas from each other as all schools in the district continue to improve their programs of family and community involvement.

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ADD-ON CERTIFICATION FOR TEACHING IN HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FLORENCE, SC

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

One big challenge to partnership program development is the lack of preparation of future teachers to conduct family and community involvement activities that contribute to student success in school. The challenge is particularly serious for teachers who will teach in schools that serve high-poverty populations. Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence (COE) is known for educating teachers who will be in these settings. Also, COE's leaders for partnerships are experts in guiding schools and districts in South Carolina to organize goal-linked partnership programs. The two emphases—teacher preparation and developing programs of family and community involvement to increase student success in school—contributed to an important COE initiative: Add-On Certification for Teaching Children in High Poverty Schools.

The goal was to obtain approval for state-wide Add-On Certification for teachers who gain knowledge and skills to teach children who live in poverty. For this certification, teachers must complete four courses at the University: Living in Poverty; Language, Literacy, and Poverty; Teaching and Assessing Children of Poverty; and School, Family, and Classroom Partnerships in High-Poverty Schools.

The last course prepares educators to understand, communicate, and collaborate with parents, extended family members, community leaders, businesses, and organizations to help students succeed in high-poverty schools. FMU-COE's director served as a task force leader and liaison to State Department certification officials. After eight years of planning, development, and discussions, the State Legislature approved the proposal and the FMU Add-On Certification Program.

In more than one-quarter of schools in South Carolina, at least 90% of the students live in poverty. In about two-thirds of primary, elementary, and middle schools, at least 70%

of the students live in poverty. Many of these children enter school lagging in academic skills. They have low standardized test scores and may fall further behind over time.

Many teachers in high-poverty schools have limited personal experience with life in poverty and may not understand the problems of families who struggle to make ends meet. Presently, few teachers in high-poverty settings obtain specialized training in how to best teach these children. The Add-On Certification aimed to fill this void.

To date, the introductory course has been offered to four cohorts of future teachers. This course includes attention to research and practical approaches on school, family, and community partnerships. Independent evaluator-facilitated focus groups at one elementary school revealed a typical reaction from teachers: "Our school is completely different because of this course. We are seeing parents [including dads] that we have never seen before. Students are making sure their parents attend events and bring them to us to introduce them. . ." In focus groups and pre-post surveys, more teachers report that parents feel welcome, student attendance is better, and teachers are happier in schools that are working to implement activities with families who are struggling economically.

Future evaluations will compare the achievement of students in the classes of teachers with and without the new knowledge base. It is expected that the Add-On Certificate for Teaching Children in High Poverty Schools will help many teachers in South Carolina's schools to reach all parents and teach all children.

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LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

CUYAHOGA COUNTY UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLEVELAND, OH

When schools have tough financial decisions to make, the arts and field trips are often the first to be put on the budget cutting block. The Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) wanted to ensure that young children and their families had opportunities to engage with the arts. In Learning through the Arts, various activities for parents and for children were conducted throughout the year. Families visited museums in the area, participated in performances at school, and worked together to create public art pieces that will be shown at early child care and education centers for years to come.

With a grant from the National Council of Jewish Women, UPK hosted an unusual Back to School Night as the first activity in Learning through the Arts. Families from all 27 UPK preschools visited for the Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Western Reserve Historical Society, and Cleveland Botanical Gardens.

The evening started with a welcome from community leaders and a light meal for the whole group. Then, tour guides took students and families to their museums in small rotating groups. Families received passports that were stamped at each museum. At the end of the evening, they exchanged their fully-stamped passports for a backpack filled with supplies for their child. Families also listened to live music, and children received mini violin lessons.

School-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) picked up the theme by including art activities in their annual action plans for family and community involvement. Different schools planned art shows, family dance classes, Cleveland Orchestra field trips, family music classes at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland Playhouse performances at school, holiday concerts, and other exciting interactive activities.

A grant from the Bruening Foundation helped the UPK schools create public art. Along with partners from Young Audiences of Northeast Ohio (YANEO), UPK, ATP, and other school leaders invited students and families at school to create unique murals for their schools. Parents, children, extended family, and staff worked with YANEO artists to complete murals based on puzzles, mosaics, ceramic quilts, mixed media, everbloom, and literacy. A video of families working together on these murals was shown at the UPK November meeting, and the murals were one of the highlights of June's End of the Year Celebration with all UPK schools.

Across schools, over 1200 students, more than 350 parents, and more than 100 UPK, school, and community partners participated in and benefited from Learning through the Arts. One teacher commented, "I can't believe how many dads came out to help with the mural."

Students had many opportunities to express themselves with hands-on experiences in dance, mosaics, musical instruments, painting, drawing, and acting. Many parents have continued to volunteer at their child's school after their engagement with Learning through the Arts. Cuyahoga County is helping to create a community of young artists who can enjoy the arts in partnership with their families and schools.

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PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SUMMIT

RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND 23RD DISTRICT PTA RIVERSIDE, CA

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) set a goal: All students [in the County] will graduate from high school well prepared for college and the work force. Leaders of RCOE know that family and community involvement will help schools and students reach this goal. In collaboration with the 23rd District PTA and the Parent Engagement Leadership Initiative (PELI), RCOE organized a Parent and Family Engagement Summit. About 250 parents, educators, and other stakeholders in education from across the County gathered to learn about, discuss, and propose improvements for programs and practices of family and community involvement to contribute to students' achievement and success in school.

A speaker from Colleagues on Call presented the keynote address. Using humor and parables, he offered insights on why parental involvement is needed at home and at school to support, motivate, and increase student achievement. He discussed how schools' well-organized family and community involvement programs enable more families to become and remain engaged as their children proceed through school.

Participants selected two of eleven breakout sessions. Some interesting topics linked to NNPS guidelines for effective partnership programs, such as: Parent Engagement—The Key to Student Success, which provided an overview of the framework of six types of involvement, resources from the California PTA, and Action Teams and Action Plans for Partnerships.

Other sessions focused on the six types of involvement in detail as in Volunteer and Decision Making: How to Make a Difference; Communicating: Opening the Door to Partnerships for Student Success; Learning at Home: Creating a Home Environment that Supports Student Success; and Positive Parenting in Public Education: Every Child Needs One Person Who Is Crazy About Him! Still other topics included

information and discussions on the Internet, the transition to kindergarten, promoting children's reading at home, career and technical education, and dropout prevention.

At lunch, an award ceremony recognized outstanding achievement in family engagement. This year's recipient was the District English Learner Advisory Committee from the Moreno Valley Unified School District. The committee was honored for providing workshops for parents and for creating of a Parent Resource Center, among other leadership activities.

The day continued with attention to the use and importance of Action Teams for Partnerships and annual action plans. Participants worked together to draft leadership plans or school-based Action Plans for Partnerships.

The Summit combined information, inspiration, and useful hands-on activities. A business partner donated school supplies for parents to take home. RCOE funds and participants' registration fees supported the Summit. The 23rd District PTA gave scholarships to register parents of students who are chronically absent.

Participants learned of RCOE's strong support for their work on parent and family engagement. Attendees were challenged to become leaders for partnerships and to share what they learned with their colleagues and schools to "scale up" this agenda across the County. One parent shared, "I will apply what I learned at work, at home, and [will] share with my family." A teacher reported, "This was great! It more than met my expectations. Our district will be richer for this Summit."

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**GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS
PUEBLO, CO**

When parents focus on what their children do right, identify and cultivate their children's strengths, and practice the golden rule, the children are more likely to become all that they can be. This is a key belief of Global Partnership Schools (GPS) and the Pueblo School District. These themes guided a strengths-based workshop for parents of students in a GPS school in Pueblo. The workshop included an inspiring, expert-led session on helping students meet their best potential.

GPS recruited expert presenter Charlie Appelstein, a nationally prominent youth-care specialist and author, to speak to parents of students at one of its Pueblo GPS schools. The Family and Community Engagement Team (F.A.C.E.T.) invited families to the workshop, secured a venue, arranged catering for dinner, included an interpreter for Spanish-speaking parents, and organized volunteer childcare for participating families.

The workshop included information on several strengths-based principles and strategies to help parents maximize the greatness that is in every child. Presentations and discussions covered such topics as: What is strength-based parenting?; Communication strategies that help parents engage and inspire their children; Techniques for enhancing students' self-esteem; The importance of being developmentally-friendly; Creative self-management strategies; How to manage parents' emotional responses; and The nuts and bolts of setting respectful limits for children.

After a slide show presentation, parents and families joined small break-out and focus group sessions for dinner and discussions. FACET members led open discussions and debriefings as part of the focus groups. Parents filled out an evaluation form in their focus groups.

All attendees received a packet with supporting and supplemental information. A Tiered Intervention Grant covered the \$800 cost for the presentation, materials, and dinner. The presenter's rate was discounted because he was already in town doing school visits.

FACET members recommend having ample time to send promotional materials to parents. They suggest that all interested schools should promote the program with posters and signs. This year, one GPS school's parents were engaged in this activity, but future plans for useful workshops might be planned to reach more Pueblo parents.

Parental Engagement: Help Kids Be All That They Can Be is a prototype for other programming that will help parents focus on positive strategies for raising their children, and positive ways for schools and communities to support students' families. With the help of the strength-based principles presented at this workshop, parents, teachers, and administrators have more tools to bring out the talents and potential for success in every child.

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HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF A PIC MEETING

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION COLUMBUS, OH

For many years, Ohio Department of Education's leader for partnerships attended, presided over, and presented at the Ohio Association of Administrators of State Federal Education Programs (OAASFEP). Feeling comfortable with the objectives of the organization, she took the next step and organized and conducted biannual Parent Involvement Coordinators (PIC) Meetings at the start of the OAASFEP statewide conferences.

The ODE leader's meetings at OAASFEP offer PICs up-to-date information on family and community involvement. Also, the PICs may earn professional development contact hours for continuing education credits. PIC meetings review parental involvement requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Section 1118, and share ideas to help PICs improve family and community involvement at their sites.

PIC meetings are designed to demonstrate how PICs may conduct parent meetings at their own schools, with well-planned agendas, expert speakers, snacks, and door prizes. In 2011, speakers shared information on various topics, including Ohio's special education Parent Mentor program, Common Core Standards, Ohio Career Information System, State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), the Ohio PTA, competitive grants, and other topics of interest to the PICs.

At one meeting, attendees received copies of the PowerPoint presentation on the requirements for parental involvement in Title I. Then, staff from various school districts shared examples of written parent involvement policies, school parent involvement plans, and school-parent compacts. Each attendee wrote their questions on a Question Sheet for discussion in or after the meeting. Tables around the perimeter of the room offered information that PICs

could take with them. About 200 school, district, parent, and community leaders attended the two PIC meetings in 2011-12.

The time to share best practices may be organized for whole group reports or for as small group discussions. In the past, participants shared best practices on family reading academies, effective home visits, preschool transition programs, community partnership programs, and other topics that their schools addressed with practices to engage families and the community in support of student success.

Announcements at recent PIC meetings included information about NNPS as a resource for districts and schools, the date of the next PIC meeting, and other news of interest from the Ohio Department of Education. At each meeting a different evaluation tool is discussed and demonstrated. These give PICs examples of assessments that they may use in their own schools and also give the state leader the PICs' reactions to and suggestions for the contents of the PIC meetings. One attendee expressed the views of many: "I never knew how many resources were available to help set up parent involvement."

PIC meetings at the OAASFEP conferences go well beyond a narrow focus on Title I requirements for parental involvement. The meetings provide PICs with ideas to improve their leadership, meetings, and school-based programs of family and community involvement. They fulfill the ODE leader's goal to "get the message out" to keep improving district and school programs of partnerships for student success in school.

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STATE LEADERSHIP

STATE LEADERSHIP



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