

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

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

Johns Hopkins University

2009



Edited by **Darcy J. Hutchins, Mary Maushard,**
Jeff Colosino, Marsha D. Greenfield, and Brenda G. Thomas

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Thanks to Pasco School District and their schools for photographs of school, family, and community involvement activities.

For information:

National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles Street
Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
phone: (410) 516-2318
fax : (410) 516-8890
www.partnershipschools.org

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INTRODUCTION

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES 2009

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

The NNPS team at Johns Hopkins University congratulates all members whose activities were selected for *Promising Partnership Practices 2009*. Every year, more schools, districts, organizations, and states submit their best practices for review. This is a good thing. It tells us that members are willing to share their ideas for involving families in ways that help students succeed in school. It is, of course, a challenge to select the best and most useful activities from diverse locations that will help new members get started in NNPS and experienced partners extend, improve, and sustain their programs.

The editorial team this year—Darcy Hutchins, Mary Maushard, Jeff Colosino, Marsha Greenfeld, and Brenda Thomas—enjoyed the challenge. Over 200 activities were submitted and 111 are included in this collection. Many of those not selected were of very high quality. Some will be featured in monthly E-Briefs that are sent to members of NNPS throughout the school year.

Several things stand out in this year's collection.

- » **Creative Design.** Schools, districts, states, and organizations in NNPS are not focused only on test scores. They are developing and implementing creative activities to engage parents and to spark students' motivation to learn. When activities capture students' and families' imaginations, test scores, too, are likely to increase.
- » **Attention to Dads/Father Figures.** Members of NNPS know that moms, dads, grandparents, and others can be involved in any involvement activity at home or at school. In addition, some schools and districts are developing activities to increase the involvement of dads and father figures and to garner their support for students.
- » **Multicultural Partnerships to Involve All Families.** Most schools and districts in NNPS are looking for effective ways to involve families with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This edition includes several ways to celebrate diversity and increase student learning and success in school.
- » **Involving Families and the Community with Students in Science.** With science tests added to achievement goals in NCLB, schools are beginning to find ways for families and the community to help teachers inspire students to enjoy and learn science.
- » **Collaboration with PTA or PTO.** Many successful involvement activities are conducted in cooperation with schools' parent organizations. ATPs are official committees of the School Improvement Team focused on improving student success, and PTAs/PTOs aim to increase parent leadership and involvement. When the two groups work together, the quality of activities and support and participation increase.

Activities are from members of NNPS in economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities, in large and small schools and districts, in urban, suburban, and rural areas. All are working

to create a welcoming school climate and to engage parents, family members, and community partners in ways that contribute to students' learning and development.

The activities are from 82 schools, 20 districts, and 6 organizations located in 21 states and from 3 leaders in state departments of education. They are organized in four ways in separate Tables of Contents to help readers strengthen their programs:

- » **BY GOAL.** See activities for schools to create a welcoming school climate and to help students increase skills in reading and literacy, math, science, and other subjects, and to improve behavior, health and safety, multicultural awareness, transitions to new school levels, and postsecondary plans for college and careers. Find activities for district, state, and organization leaders to improve leadership on partnerships and to directly assist schools' Action Teams for Partnerships.
- » **BY TYPE** of involvement. Discover ways to strengthen parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Note: Although each page identifies one type of involvement, many activities incorporate several types of involvement by design.
- » **BY SCHOOL LEVEL.** Discover activities for elementary, middle, and high schools.
- » **BY CONTRIBUTOR.** Locate the NNPS members who shared promising practices.

At NNPS, we are inspired and encouraged by members' dedication and spirit of partnership to share best practices. This collection will help many others improve their programs of family and community involvement.

NOTE: This edition and prior collections of over 800 involvement activities are on the NNPS website, www.partnershipschools.org, in the section Success Stories, along with an Order Form for additional print copies.

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

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



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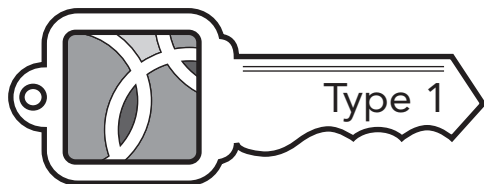
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The Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships



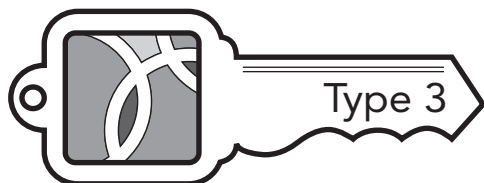
Parenting

Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.



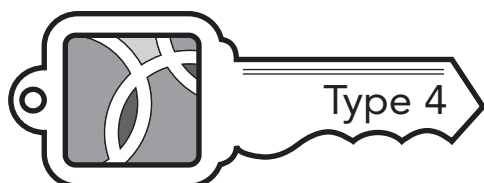
Communicating

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



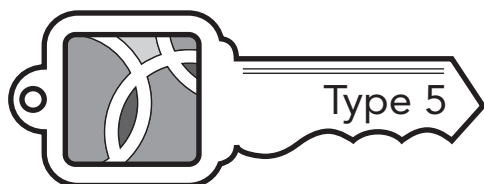
Volunteering

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



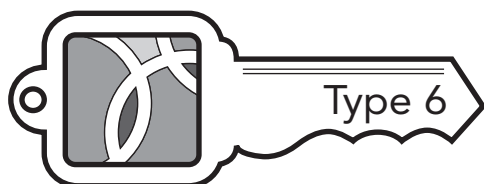
Learning at Home

Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and 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 areas.

A NIGHT AT THE OSCARS

STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

In the evening twilight, as over 300 parents and students began to gather outside the doors of Stevens Middle School, a tingling sensation surged through the crowd. Anticipation mounted as rumors circulated of celebrities who'd been sighted on the school campus, all dressed in their finest gowns and suits. When 6:00 finally came around, the doors swung open, and down the red carpet they went, stepping into the blinding lights of the school hallway.

For the night, classrooms at Stevens were transformed into “venues,” each with a different theme and set of activities that related a connection between reading and the silver screen. A number of them were themed after books—including the immensely popular *Twilight*, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *Marley & Me*—that had been adapted into movies.

Visitors were treated to images from video stills, information or trivia questions about the movies and their stars, human and animal alike, and re-creations of objects or scenes from the films. Like every room at A Night at the Oscars, all of these venues had been designed by the students themselves. For example, the *Because of Winn-Dixie* room included a “bottle tree,” into which ESL students had written positive messages that could be revealed with a flashlight.

Other venues provided other exciting opportunities. One, a celebrity Wax Museum, featured students who were dressed as figures from biographies they had recently read. When attendees pressed a paper button on the student's costume, the statue came to life and told, in the first person, that historical celebrity's story. The *Jeopardy* room pitted students against parents in a book-to-movie trivia contest for fun and prizes.

Attendees also had the opportunity to learn a little more about life in the movie industry from the Behind the Scenes room. Here, visitors learned about the range of career opportunities that happen off-screen, including screen writing.

In another room, a local newspaper reporter held a session on interviewing skills, and gave students pointers on how to write their own interviews.

The evening also provided the school an opportunity to share with parents some of the reading services available from the wider community. The school's computer lab was ready and loaded with a variety of reading-related web sites that parents could use as resources for any grade level; they also were shown how to use the school's Parent Portal software to keep up-to-date on their children's grades. Elsewhere, the public librarian managed a booth where families could sign up for library cards.

Finally, once guests decided it was time for intermission, the cafeteria offered sandwiches, chips, and punch, with live Mexican folk dancing provided by the school's Baille Folklorico dance troupe.

Of course, none of the night's successes would have been possible without joint efforts by the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO). Spearheaded by the school's Literacy Coach, with a theme selected and designed by students, the annual Literacy Night took on a whole new life with the Night at the Oscars theme. The success of the event was apparent, based on how well it met the goal of Stevens' Balanced Literacy Action Plan: “to promote enthusiasm and student performance in relation to reading and writing.”

Based on students' thrill at seeing their hard work pay off, receiving rewards for attending and participating, and their parents' positive reactions to the event, it seems that, at this Oscar party, everyone was a winner.

Barbara Pierce
Assistant Principal
bpierce@psd1.org

BOBCAT BOOKS-TO-GO

BEEBE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

While explaining how a new literacy practice at her school works, one Beebe Elementary student also reveals her enthusiasm for the program: “You get a book from the Bobcat Books-to-Go and you take it home and read it and maybe bring it back the next day and get another Bobcat Books-to-Go book and another and another . . .”

What she’s describing is a 2008–09 School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) initiative to establish a permanent lending library at Beebe in order to encourage independent reading. This student proves that the Bobcat Books-to-Go program has at least one fan. Responses from teachers and parents make it clear that she’s only one of many children who are delving into independent reading at Beebe.

Books-to-Go provides every student a daily opportunity to read a self-selected book at their independent reading level. Each student’s classroom teacher updates this reading level as regularly as necessary. As a result, the books that a student brings home are targeted to improve reading fluency based on his or her individual literacy needs.

The Books-to-Go selection augments the school’s existing Learning Resource Center (LRC) library, which is arranged by Fountas/Pinnell levels. The SFCP highlights the importance of collaborating with the LRC to physically accommodate the new program: the shelving (constructed by the school’s head custodian) and bins used for Books-to-Go required the rearrangement of a portion of the LRC’s space. The books were acquired by soliciting donations from all Beebe stakeholders from the onset of the program. Additional donations came from a book drive at North Central College, a school partner.

A classroom teacher acted as a staff liaison, and together with the administration and SFCP, created a presentation that introduced teachers to the aims and implementation plan for the

Books-to-Go practice. The SFCP also assisted the liaison by promoting the new practice to parents by designing a brochure to explain the program and generate excitement for it. As donations came in, faculty and parent volunteers sorted the books by level and labeled them accordingly.

Prior to launching the program, teachers presented the planning team with a record of the number of students at each reading level. With this information, the team was able to ensure that each reading level was adequately represented, procuring additional titles as needed.

At their classroom’s designated time, students bring a two-gallon re-sealable bag to the LRC to select a book. Students are allowed to borrow one book at a time and may exchange them as often as desired. These books are picked by each student in addition to, and independent from, his or her non-leveled LRC choices.

With a combination of parent and community donations, SFCP/Home and School funds, and building funds, an investment of \$856 covered the labels, bags, bins, shelving, and supplementary books needed to put the Books-to-Go library together. For next year, the district has pledged \$500 for the acquisition of Spanish titles.

Jodi Piekarz
SFCP Co-Chair
piekarz4408@gmail.com

FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT

ROOSEVELT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER NO. 65 BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Curious George, Mother Goose, The Cat in the Hat, and Old Mother Hubbard wandered through the halls of Roosevelt Early Childhood Center one November evening, telling their tales and inviting the youngsters and their parents to talk with them about the stories in which they star. Meanwhile, some of the Roosevelt students performed *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Little Red Riding Hood* in the Fairytale Theater.

It was a whimsical, wonderful night for the 100 parents and 125 youngsters who attended the first Family Literacy Night at Roosevelt, which enrolls students in Pre-K through fourth grade. Also on the program were a book exchange, music and literacy program, and make-n-take activities. The Riverside Branch librarian was on hand to read aloud from award-winning children's books and helped children and adults apply for library cards.

A committee of parents, teachers, and administrators developed the activities and entertainment after school officials studied data from state and local reading assessments. They targeted the needs of children in the various grades. Parents learned about their child's reading needs and found new ways to support learning at home.

The variety of activities and the fun-loving nature of the event won much praise.

"Putting an exciting and fun twist on reading and understanding literature helps the kids embrace it," said one parent. "This was a good way to keep the children reading, not only in school but at home as well."

One student called the event "cool, fun and exciting." A grandparent particularly liked the Mother Goose readings and "signing my granddaughter's favorite book."

Literacy night addressed two needs at Roosevelt: improving specific literacy skills and increasing parent involvement. The reading coach noticed that the amount of parent involve-

ment grew on the same trajectory as the school's reading scores. So, teaming up the activities seemed like an efficient way to promote both school goals.

Students participated in an innovative publicity strategy. They played roles in different situations promoting literacy night, similar to readers' theater, during daily announcements for two weeks before the program. The school offered homework passes to students attending, but they had to be picked up at the door.

The children's theater was particularly popular, based on adult feedback, and will definitely be expanded for the next literacy night. Also on the future agenda are parent workshops, opening the computer lab so parents can explore web-based resources, and including more community members.

Amy Bartel
Reading Coach / Administrative Intern
abartell@buffaloschools.org

FAMILY TRADITIONS READING NIGHT

**THOMAS JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
BELLFLOWER, CALIFORNIA**

Who doesn't, after all, love a holiday? The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Thomas Jefferson Elementary tapped into a universal topic for their Family Traditions Reading Night, making the evening a special occasion by asking students in grades K–6 to write about . . . special occasions.

Inspired by models in the NNPS book *Family Reading Night* (Hutchins, Greenfield, and Epstein 2008), the team designed a program that included reading activities, a book exchange, a presentation by the county's children's librarian, and refreshments. Central to the evening was an essay-writing contest that the students entered before the event.

The winners of the essay contest—selected by teachers based on children's response to the question, "What is your family's favorite holiday?"—were invited to read their essays aloud to the proud parents, students, and school staff. The opportunity for parents to hear what students had written affirmed their connection to what their children were learning in school. The assignment also prompted students to involve their parents in the writing process by asking for specifics about family traditions. By hearing these traditions honored before such a large audience, families were encouraged to feel they had a greater part in the Thomas Jefferson community.

ATP planners added the writing assignment to the program based on the academic needs demonstrated by the CA STAR assessment and district benchmarks. Reading comprehension was a specific target. With the other activities of the night, not only did the essay contest boost reading skills, it also resulted in the school's largest Reading Night turnout yet. "The cafeteria was filled to capacity," wrote the ATP facilitator. "There were many families who came who usually didn't attend family nights."

Students donned their pajamas and brought

their pillows. Many also brought a used book for the book exchange, at which hundreds of children swapped for something new to read. The librarian gave a presentation and handed out applications for library cards. The large turnout, which produced the greatest challenge (albeit a pleasant one), required a few last-minute changes. Instead of having the attendees go to classrooms for the teachers to read to them, one teacher read to all the students and families in the cafeteria. Parents and other volunteers set up, organized the exchange, and provided refreshments.

With all of the time and effort put in by the different groups, costs were minimal: \$50 in Title I funds. Due to the event's overwhelming success, the ATP hopes to recruit even more volunteers—and set aside more time for students to read their essays—for their Family Hero Reading Night in June.

Marilyn Yassin
Facilitator of the ATP
marilynassin@gmail.com

Type 4

READING

HOLIDAY BOOK DRIVE

WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

All 677 students at Whittier Elementary took home a new book shortly after the holidays, courtesy of the local Barnes & Noble Booksellers, their teachers, their neighbors, and even people they did not know.

In addition, the school and the local Columbia Reading Foundation received another 2,000 books, bought through the Barnes & Noble annual Holiday Book Drive, which asked customers to buy one or more books for the school as they checked out. Whittier teachers selected many of the books, and the store offered discounts on some of them.

Whittier's initial involvement with the bookstore was serendipitous. The reading coach contacted the store in early fall to see if it could help the school provide 100 books for a family reading night. The store's community outreach and education director said she might be able to do better than that. The two women soon realized "that our wish for putting books in children's hands was a shared desire and one we could really make happen for the children of the Tri-Cities as well as for our students at Whittier," said the reading coach.

The book drive kicked off November 1 at the store with students and staff attending. Local hockey and football players stirred up some school spirit and by November 26, Barnes & Noble had sold 1,000 books for the school. By Christmas Day, the total reached 2,700.

The store's outreach director tracked the sales, and worked with Whittier teachers to stock the titles they had chosen, even getting some books in Spanish. An extensive publicity campaign, including store displays, a radio appearance by the principal and reading coach, a newspaper story, and an announcement on the district's web site, contributed to the drive's success, as more and more people learned about the effort and eagerly participated.

More than 90 percent of Whittier's students

are eligible for free- and reduced-price lunches, and many of the students and adults are learning English as a second language. Buying books is not easy, or even possible, for many of these families, school officials said. That, however, does not diminish the children's interests in books and reading.

"It was a touching experience to watch as students hugged their books to their chests as they received them," said a Pasco School Board member who helped distribute books.

The school sponsored a Stop, Drop and Read session after the books were dispersed. Some Barnes & Noble employees joined the festivities and received the youngsters' thanks in person.

"This is the best day of my life," said one first-grader as she received a copy of her favorite book, *Wodney Wat*.

"Do we get to keep it? Really?" asked another youngster as he ran to the car after school.

It was truly a holiday season to remember for the boys, girls, and families of Whittier Elementary.

Judy Klein
Literacy Coach
Jklein@psd1.org

I LOVE TO READ

PULASKI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WILMINGTON, DELAWARE

Type 6

What do the following people have in common: the mayor of Wilmington, Delaware; the Delaware lieutenant governor; a United Way CEO; members of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity; the directors of Wilmington’s Latin American and Kingswood Community Centers, and the parents of children at Pulaski Elementary?

Why, they all love to read, of course.

Lucky for them and many more community volunteers in Pulaski’s I Love to Read Guest Reader Program, in February, they got to do exactly that—read. Visiting more than 20 classrooms, the special guests read their favorite children’s stories aloud to students in grades K-5. They shared how important reading was to them in their work and encouraged students to pursue a life-long love of reading.

Not only did the I Love to Read program promote literacy in the school, but it also strengthened the school’s partnerships with parents and members of the community. The project was organized by the Pulaski Literacy Team, but the initiative was generated from discussions and collaborations among the administration, staff, and other stakeholders.

Members of the Literacy Team, which includes administrators and staff, were primarily responsible for recruiting and scheduling guest readers. The principal sent a letter to various community partners informing them of the program and inviting them to read to a class. Potential guests were asked to bring a favorite story or to contact the school for assistance in finding an age-appropriate selection. The visits were designed to be brief—20 to 30 minutes—making it easy for Pulaski’s busy community partners to find time to volunteer.

The team reached out to potential new community partners by explaining the program on a local television show. Pulaski staff, students, and selected guest readers shared their ideas of

the importance of reading with the audience, and invited everyone with a stake in the community to become reading partners. Other community liaisons spread the word in their respective organizations and spheres of influence, as well.

The response was overwhelming. As a result of the literacy team’s publicity, all 400 Pulaski students enjoyed readings by more than 40 visitors, representing a broad range of occupations and levels of community involvement. Since the I Love to Read program occurred, teachers have reported significant improvement in students’ reading fluency and an increase in independent reading. The event also helped to satisfy part of a school-wide reform strategy in its Title I Improvement Plan.

Because the program benefited immensely from the outpouring of volunteer effort, implementing this practice cost almost nothing. The benefits, on the other hand—impressing upon students the importance and fun of reading, even after their formal education ends—remain beyond measure.

*Mary K. Ford
Reading First Coach
fordm@christina.k12.de.us*

READING

IT'S RAINING PUDDING

**VINTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VINTON, LOUISIANA**

Plop. Plop. Plop. Students of Vinton Elementary got to intern as weather reporters for an evening. They were tasked to piece together a story on a common occurrence: a rather unexceptional day, except that on this day, it happened to rain . . . chocolate pudding.

Pre-K–5th-graders were primed for the English and Language Arts (ELA) It's Raining Chocolate Pudding event by other stories about unusual forms of precipitation. Teachers read Felicia Bond's *The Day It Rained Hearts* to the lower grades, while the older students heard Judi Barrett's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. These served as the appetizers for a writing event in which all students participated: to describe the sights, sounds, smells, and—of course—tastes of an imaginary torrent of the soft, fudgy dessert pudding.

The exercise dovetailed with a number of the school's ELA improvement goals that reflected the analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills assessed on the state's LEAP and ILEAP tests. Furthermore, parents got to experience aspects of their children's ELA education firsthand.

Parents were asked to participate with their children in every step of the process. After brainstorming in groups, students employed a "four-square" method to start writing, in which a sheet of paper is divided into four quadrants, with a fifth square drawn in the center. Lower grade levels—2nd and below—filled each portion of the diagram with a single sentence, with their topic sentence in the center. Upper grades—3rd and up—did the same, with whole paragraphs in each section. Students then used these sheets as guides to compose their final paragraph or essay on the aforementioned custard phenomenon.

In addition to inviting parents to get involved, students also were encouraged to participate in the planning process. Any student who attended the planning meeting received a copy of *The Day It Rained Hearts* from the teachers.

Total expenses, paid with Title I funds, were \$350. Organizers advise others who want to conduct a similar activity to ensure that students have enough time to complete the assignment and to secure sufficient space for all attendees.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) will ask local celebrities to read to students at future ELA events to generate more enthusiasm among students, parents, and the community at large.

Students relished the non-traditional writing prompt, as well as the opportunity to work in a more relaxed environment. For their efforts, students and parents were rewarded afterwards with—what else?—cups of chocolate pudding. Said one, "You could almost smell the chocolate pudding before we opened the packages."

Linda Portie
Lead Teacher
linda.portie@cpsb.org

Type 4

READING

MEMORY MAKERS

**T. H. WATKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA**

Type 4

Looking to increase parent involvement at school events, coordinators at T. H. Watkins Elementary figured the best way to get more families to the school was to make the event *about* what makes each family unique—their stories. Tasked to bring only their favorite memories and their willingness to be inspired by their kids, parents joined their children at the school one evening for the first-ever Memory Makers Family Book Writing Event.

Citing research that connects parent involvement to better grades and test scores, the school's Curriculum Coordinator explained that the school drew its inspiration from an item that had been sold at the previous year's book fair. With a grant from the Junior League of Lake Charles and some PTO funding from the school (totaling \$2,800), event organizers bought a book-making kit for every T. H. Watkins student. These kits contained everything that the children, from grades Pre-K–5, would need to “publish” their own book about their family—everything, of course, except for the memories.

Teachers integrated the kits into their class curriculum, assigning the early stages of the project as classwork and homework assignments. First, teachers presented books that were written by children in order to motivate them to participate in the event. Students were also encouraged to involve their families in the homework assignments, in which they created “flow maps” to sequence the ideas of the story they would tell, followed by preparing the text that would appear in their own Memory Makers book.

All that remained was to illustrate the pages, and that is what the Memory Makers evening was designed to do. Two different evenings in March were set aside to give family members an opportunity to schedule the best time to “make memories” with their children. On the night of the event, families collaborated with their child in finishing a creative product using student-

produced materials and the kits for illustration.

Turnout for the first night was too large for the space that had been reserved—the school library—and so the crowd spilled over into two classrooms. As a result, the second evening event was held in the larger “commons” area of the school.

By working together, students benefited from positive and creative contacts with their family members. At the end of the night, everyone brought home a tangible reminder of the fun they had, both at the event and in sharing their family's history.

The evening closed after the books were bound and each family group read its story together. The school combined the Memory Makers event with a Book Fair. After the book-making was finished, parents and children proceeded to the book-buying area.

Compared to previous events with lower family attendance, the Memory Makers event was a measurable success, both in terms of numbers of participants and their qualitative assessments. Many expressed a desire to participate in a similar creative/collaborative event with their families. One parent said it best: “I learned that using my imagination plus my child's imagination is dangerously funny!”

*Jill Crain
Curriculum Coordinator
jill.crain@cpsb.org*

READING

PASCO READS LITERACY PROJECT

PASCO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Tea and cookies set the tone for the Pasco Reads Literacy Project. Calm and serious, but definitely enjoyable, the project took literacy projects to a new level—high school.

The literacy project was an out-of-classroom experience aimed at getting high school students together with adults—teachers, parents and community residents—to read and discuss a novel. The students were equal partners in the discussions, held at various locations, such as the public library or a community coffee house.

Pasco Reads began with the novel *Bless Me Ultima*, written by Rudolph Anaya. The two English teachers who chaired the project chose this book because it involves a young boy growing up in a Hispanic family in New Mexico. The teachers thought the book would be particularly relevant because Pasco has a large Hispanic population, and because the book deals with reconciling cultural differences in and among people.

The reading group decided how much of the book it would finish before each meeting. The teachers devised discussion questions and led the sessions. “Because true learning is taking experiences the author has written about and applying them to one’s own life, we set aside time to really listen to each other and how we connected with the story of the characters,” said the teachers.

Students who, usually, did not like to read, along with those who loved to do so, participated in the voluntary project. All of the students found the book easy to read, yet challenging, depending on how deeply they delved into the themes and analyses. “Working with teachers outside of a classroom builds a relationship. Teachers can be seen learning with students, which is very powerful,” the co-chairs said. Not every reader attended each discussion, but the leaders were careful to keep them abreast of discussions and points of interest. When the group finished the book, there was a gathering to wrap up ideas and to celebrate the group’s success.

The public library and the local Barnes & Noble Booksellers ordered the book and promoted the reading project, as did the high school library. The book store dedicated shelf space to book by Anaya and to various study guides in English and Spanish. The library ensured that students and families who could not afford to buy the book had copies to borrow.

Teachers and parents publicized the project, with some teachers offering extra credit to students who participated. Parents distributed fliers to local grocery and book stores and to coffee houses.

Students were not the only ones to benefit. The adults used it to network, to meet new people, to hang out with their students, and socialize in a nonacademic setting. The organizers felt the project was a success because it encouraged independent reading and good literacy habits. Next year’s plans include a blog and more advanced reading work.

Type 6

READING

Stephanie Post
English Teacher / Project Co-Chair
spost@psd1.org

Steve Rowley
English Teacher / Project Co-Chair
srowley@psd1.org

TRASH TO TREASURE BOOK FAIR

RUTH LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Type 3

Oftentimes, the corporate-sponsored school Book Fair can, for students, become an event that's less about promoting good reading habits than about, well, buying stuff. To put the Book back in Book Fair, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Ruth Livingston Elementary scrapped the traditional, profit-driven event and started turning some students' literary leftovers into others' learning libraries.

In its sixth year, Ruth Livingston's week-long Trash to Treasure Book Fair brings together students, families, school staff, and community partners to contribute their time and resources to a thriving literary event. Gone are the fluffy pencils and glittery notebooks competing for kids' attention and dollars. Instead, students browse a broad sampling of gently used, affordable, and age-appropriate books.

Students and their families are involved from beginning to end. In the weeks before the fair, students bring their unwanted books to school, where they receive \$1 in Book Bucks for every two books they donate. Adult volunteers sort the books, removing any that are too worn for sale or inappropriate for an elementary student.

Students receive Book Bucks for their donations even if they are not put out for sale. At the same time, the ATP Co-Chairs advise, "Be picky . . . Parents don't want junk brought home."

Next, the volunteers see that all the books are cleaned and priced. Every book sells for \$1 or \$2. Chapter books, novels, and other upper-level books in good condition are \$2; board books, picture books, books for younger readers, and those more-than-slightly worn are \$1. Not all the books are displayed at once. Volunteers (working short shifts) re-stock the tables as the books are sold.

Students can visit the fair all week: before and after school, during recess, and as a class during

regularly scheduled library periods. Students who don't have any Book Bucks or money to spend can still browse or find a spot to read in the library.

Initially, organizers had trouble acquiring enough upper-level books. Since the first year, the PTO has provided \$400—the event's sole expense—to supplement the inventory with used books from local thrift stores.

The scale of the event remains impressive by any standard. This year, the ATP reports that 2,775 books were sold.

The fair provides teachers with an incentive they can use to encourage good work in the classroom. This year, they gave 315 students coupons for a free book for a Job Well Done! All 120 students who entered the district's annual Battle of the Books reading competition were rewarded with a coupon. Each teacher selected five books for his or her classroom. Another 65 books went to the school's library, which received every dollar of the fair's profits.

That said, the ATP Co-Chairs caution any team looking to turn Trash to Treasure in their schools: "Remember, it's about the students and the books, not the money."

Josi Geary
ATP Co-Chair

Kelly Longsdorff
ATP Co-Chair
klongsdorff@psd1.org

READING

FAMILY MATH NIGHT AND MATH OLYMPICS

FRANK E. WOODRUFF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BELLFLOWER, CALIFORNIA

What's the difference between the best athletes in the world and the students of Frank E. Woodruff Elementary? Less than you'd think—if the kids are fresh on their math skills, that is.

From the end of January until the beginning of April, students got to “go for the gold” in the school's first-ever Math Olympics Challenge. Whoever completed a regularly held, timed drill of math facts with 100 percent accuracy received a gold medal at a biweekly morning flag ceremony. Administrators didn't spare any of the Olympic-style pomp and circumstance. The school's principal placed the medal around each winning student's neck, and parents were among the crowd that applauded each one. At the end of the 10 weeks, 450 children had received gold medals.

Last year's state assessment results indicated to the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) that students needed to improve their understanding of higher-level math concepts. School officials took a back-to-basics approach, focusing on bringing every student up to speed on the math facts appropriate for his/her grade level. The Math Olympics motivated the children to work on memorizing these facts outside of classroom time—with “training” help, of course, from their families.

No Olympics would be complete without an impressive opening ceremony. Enter Family Math Night, held near the beginning of the spring semester. Families received fliers, in both English and Spanish, calling on them not to “miss out on all the GAME SHOW fun!” The principal developed an interactive PowerPoint presentation—buzzers and all—for the Math Night.

First, parents were shown all the math facts their children needed to learn in each grade. Afterward, parents (randomly selected from those who had sent RSVPs) faced off against children in an *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?*-style math

contest. At every grade level, the kids won. All participating families received prizes.

After the game show, presenters introduced the Math Olympics Challenge, followed by other student-parent math activities for each grade. Finally, the attendees reconvened in the packed cafeteria for refreshments to close out the night.

The whole process involved a great deal of collaboration, but ATP planning and communication helped keep the expectations clear. Teachers and parents alike received fliers that detailed the math facts students needed to know, and were pointed to the math-drills.com web site for more help with materials. The flier for teachers also included information about how to report gold medal winners.

Next year's Olympics also may include silver and bronze medals, according to the ATP facilitator. One parent, summing up her son's thrill over his gold-medal accomplishment, showed the real incentive for the contest: “He told me exactly what he did to get it.”

Marilyn Yassin
Facilitator of the ATP
marilynyassin@gmail.com

FAMILY MATH NIGHT: RAISING MONEY-SMART KIDS

**GRASONVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
GRASONVILLE, MARYLAND**

Money talks. At Grasonville Elementary, the Family Math Night focusing on money skills—spending, saving, earning, reaching financial goals—said a lot about student and family interest and about the Parent Involvement Committee’s (PIC) ability to put together a successful academic night.

The PIC followed the recommendations of the school’s mathematics specialist on what topics would best supplement the students’ classroom work and help parents increase their children’s learning at home. This year’s recommendation was: Money. A recent addition to the parent library at school of Kiplinger’s *Raising Money-Smart Kids* added to the money theme. The school is always looking for new ways to acquaint parents with the material available in the Parent Resource Center.

Family Math Night took the form of a game and a challenge, with the students setting financial goals and the adults serving as financial advisors. Each student received a wallet with \$20 in play money and a form to keep track of their earnings and expenditures. Each student set a money goal—less than \$50, \$51–\$100, and \$101 and up—and enlisted the help of their financial advisor.

Around the cafeteria were activity stations for earning and spending money. Students moved through the stations. There were money bingo tables, dice rolls with opportunities to earn money for extra chores or as birthday gifts, and a windfall spin. The spending stations included a super-shopper stop and a pick-a-trip option.

Community partner PNC Bank provided the last stop—the bank where volunteers counted the money and determined whether students were above or below their goals or right on the money. PNC gave each child a piggy bank and pencil that looked like it was wrapped in a dollar bill. The bank also provided information on children’s savings accounts and financial services

for adults. The math specialist prepared packets for parents filled with tips and web sites to use to build money skills at home.

Nearly 80 parents and 100 students participated in the family night. “Everyone was involved. Everyone had fun. Everyone learned,” said one of the organizers. “The teachers were given a glimpse of the power that parents working together with their child can offer.”

The PIC also showed that working together paid off. School staff members provided materials and worked at the event; parent volunteers worked behind the scenes to organize the night and spread the word to other parents; the community partner donated banks and offered helpful information; and the Parent Teacher Association board members assisted with event planning and funding. For all, it was a worthwhile investment.

Gladys Nemecek
Parent Coordinator
nemecek@QACPS.k12.md.us

Type 4

MATH

HARVEST FAMILY MATH NIGHT

VIRGIE ROBINSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Dressed in autumnal costume, students and parents from Virgie Robinson Elementary picked up lessons in the pounds and perimeters of the pumpkin patch, insights into pattern theory relevant to the arrangement of orange and red and yellow chocolate candies, and other math skills when they dropped by last October's Harvest Math Night.

The current skills and desired math progress of all children in Pre-K through 5th grades were taken into account. Then, the grade-level teams, support staff, parents, and volunteers designed and managed a cornucopia of math activities for the evening. In addition to estimating the circumferences and weights of pumpkins, the activities ranged from finding patterns for pre-schoolers to creating Coordinate-Grid Fall Pictures for older students. The activities accommodated for students' various levels of mathematical understanding and for students' and families' different languages. The school serves a mostly Latino population.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) facilitated the practice. The team revised the school's prior Family Math Night by brainstorming for a new theme. Over the course of two months, the ATP's designated event chairperson gathered all interested staff and volunteers to plan and execute the Harvest Math Night. The event's success is due in a large part to the enthusiasm for Math Night that the math committee generated among students and teachers. The ATP promoted the event in the morning announcements.

Additional help came from another existing school and community partnership through the Kiwanis Club. The Kiwanis Community Partners head a leadership group for 4th and 5th graders every week called K-Kids. These students became leaders at the math night by helping to run stations, greeting families as they entered, and bagging the prizes that were awarded at the activ-

ity booths, including decks of pumpkin-themed cards, dice, pencils, and—of course—candy.

Other community organizations and businesses donated the pumpkins, prizes, and other items that were used at Harvest Math Night. Approximately \$250 in Title I funds made up the difference needed to conduct the event.

By using an in-house ATP evaluation tool, as well as assessing the attendance numbers, the team was able to quantify the evening's success. Roughly 300 students participated with their families in Harvest Math Night.

The benefit of promoting the family-oriented event was apparent from the students' eagerness to share their strategies for winning games, based on their existing math knowledge, with their friends, parents, and siblings. The kids in attendance were able to cement the connections between what they were learning in the classroom and the real-world application of those concepts on everything from patterns, to prizes, to the plump harvest-time pumpkins of Pasco, Washington.

*Valerie Adams
Math Coach and ATP Co-Chair
vadams@psd1.org*

IT JUST MAKES CENTS

ELMWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Let it be known that at Elmwood Elementary this year, when students, parents, and staff were tasked to help make a change for good in their community, they responded by . . . making change.

Penny by penny, children brought in their coins from home every day for two weeks in the school's second year of the It Just Makes Cents donation drive. After the two weeks ended, students had contributed several thousand dollars to the school's own Candy Cane Caring program, which identifies and raises money to assist Elmwood's needy families.

Other parents and individuals at the school contacted the principal if they knew someone who could benefit from Candy Cane Caring. This information remains strictly confidential. The families identified received gift cards that had been purchased with the donated funds. These are distributed, mainly, during the holiday season, but are available to families throughout the year at the principal's discretion.

So much of the success of It Just Makes Cents is drawn by tapping into a time-honored and infinitely renewable resource for motivating students: classroom rivalry.

During their lunch hour, students are allowed to go to the gym to donate their pennies to contribute to their classroom's score. Every penny that students contribute adds a point to their class total. The leading classrooms were declared in the daily announcements, recharging the competition every day.

On the other hand, students were also encouraged to donate change to their rivals' tills—and in larger denominations than they were contributing to their own! Every nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar that a student gave to another classroom subtracted a point from that class's overall score.

As a result, the Co-Chair for School, Family, and Community Partnerships wrote, "Grades and classes battled against each other and worked on

strategies to bring down the previous day's class winner. Buckets and bins full of coins were hauled in by students to play the game." Of course, all of the conspiracy and planning required students to be cool and calculating—literally—because, in order to win, students were forced to employ their math skills.

Parents also could send in cash and checks for their students to use in the fundraising contest. The advantage of the unique scoring system, however, is that it allows all students to play a comparable part in the spirit of the competition, even if they are donating different dollar amounts to the cause. A local bank that partners with the school volunteered to count the change and tally the results.

Even though this year's Candy Cane Caring program sought to serve more families than in the past, and even though organizers were concerned that fewer families would be able to donate, the school's support of the program and the early promotion of It Just Makes Cents ensured that the SFCP was able to meet the challenge of helping every one of the families that had been identified as in need of assistance. Some of these families even returned the gift, expressing their gratitude for the school's help and suggesting others who could benefit from the caring even more.

Debbie Montrose
SFCP Co-Chair
dmontrose@wowway.com

MAKE A MATH DATE WITH YOUR CHILD

BIRDNECK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Parents and students “did lunch,” as well as math during a series of date days at Birdneck Elementary. Everyone seemed to enjoy the special occasions that brought parents right into math classes to problem solve along side their children.

Make A Math Date with Your Child invited parents into mathematics classes to see the skills that teachers taught at various grade levels, to learn the math objectives for each grade, and to observe their children’s strengths and weaknesses. Parents were also invited to have lunch with their children either before or after class.

More than 100 parents and other caregivers accepted the invitation and made a date to see their child in class. Teachers prepared hands-on math activities that adults and children could do together. Each grade level had its own day so that parents with more than one child at Birdneck could participate with each student. The school accommodated parents’ busy schedules by hosting the events in both the morning and the afternoon.

In addition to class and lunch, parents were treated to a math presentation by resource teachers and administrators. They also received a packet of math games and activities and an Everyday Math deck of cards that they could play at home with their children to increase math skills.

“The event proved to be a fun, as well as eye-opening, opportunity for parents while they learned which math skills their child needed to practice,” said the parent involvement coordinator. The impetus for the date days was the school’s goal to improve math scores on standardized tests.

Despite invitations, flyers and other publicity, some parents were initially reluctant to attend. Tying the event to lunch increased participation, and those who came were happy to have had the opportunity to spend time in school with their child. These parents said that they would be better

able to help their children at home with math assignments and questions. Children, of course, were happy to have their parents in school and at lunch.

Birdneck plans to have more Math Date days, and will work hard to encourage more parents to pencil them in.

*Wendee Long
Parent Involvement Coordinator
wendee.long@vbschools.com*

MATH MADNESS NIGHT

**CENTREVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CENTREVILLE, MARYLAND**

Students who spent the evening throwing down cards, dice, and dominoes at Centreville Elementary’s first-ever Math Madness Night might have been having too much fun to realize they were picking up math, communication, and social skills at the same time.

Looking to revitalize the school’s annual family math night, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) demonstrated to parents that many tools for reinforcing their children’s basic math abilities were available in their own homes. Split into small play groups and accompanied by their parents, 65 children in grades Pre-K–2 engaged in some friendly competition over games such as UNO, Yahtzee, Chutes and Ladders, and dominoes. Each group was assigned a teacher who, in addition to providing instructions to the students, also modeled how parents could integrate counting, number sequence, number relationship, and strategic thinking lessons into play.

Furthermore, organizers used the event to reinforce pillars of the school’s Character Counts Program, such as fairness, respect, caring, and responsibility. Children were encouraged to practice these traits by playing according to the rules, taking turns, treating one another with respect and kindness, and helping to clean up after each game. “I heard children talking about playing fairly,” said an administrator, who added, “It was nice to see the interaction between adults and children.”

Math Madness Night also provided students and families the opportunity to interact with local high-schoolers and residents of the nearby Symphony Village retirement community, some of whom volunteered to assist children with the games. The Centreville Elementary PTA provided refreshments for the attendees.

To publicize the event, students took home flyers, which doubled as a crucial pre-registration form. Asking families to pre-register helped ATP

members estimate the number of games needed, select a space appropriate for the event, and divide the students into multi-age groups so each group had games appropriate for various age levels.

The Symphony Village retirees also donated about \$300 to buy the games for the event. The seniors’ generosity, prompted by a call from the school’s guidance counselor, ensured that every student who attended was able to take a game home. These door prizes encouraged further student-parent interaction—and skill-strengthening—outside of school.

“Now [my child] is excited to play at home with his brothers and Dad!” said one parent.

At next year’s Math Madness Night, ATP members plan to have more games so that students, families, teachers and community members can work together in smaller groups. In addition, the team plans to send all parents, regardless of whether or not they attend the event, a list of games and the academic skills and positive character traits they can foster at home.

*Lynn Beauchamp
Math Specialist*

*Rebecca Van Aken
First-Grade Teacher*

*Linda Gent
Reading Specialist
gentl@gacps.k12.md.us*

Type 4

MATH

MEASUREMENT MANIA

NEWTOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Follow the Liter. Balancing Act. Angles, Angles, Angles. Estimation Station. Time Concentration. What do all these things have in common?

If you guessed that they all have something to do with math skills, you would be . . . close. You might have to be a maniac, however, to think that these were the names of engaging games and activities—unless, this March, you attended Newtown Elementary’s Measurement Mania. If you had, the idea might not seem so crazy after all.

Newtown Elementary is actually the second- and third-grade division of a unique arrangement of Virginia Beach schools called the Bayside Tri-Campus. Filling out the trio are Diamond Springs for kindergarten and first grades, and Williams for fourth and fifth grades. After Newtown’s team began planning in May 2008 for this year’s math night—identifying measurement as an area in which students needed improvement—it was decided to include the other Tri-Campus schools as well.

Measurement Mania swept through the halls of all three schools weeks before the event, and symptoms heightened as the night approached. Reminders were sent home with the children a week in advance and on the day of the event. Students wore Measurement Mania stickers to let others know they were afflicted with the desire—highly contagious—to learn and have some fun at the same time.

Everyone was served a free dinner beforehand, sitting at brightly colored tables decorated with cut-outs of M&M candies—a reoccurring symbol that set the visual theme for the night (from *Measurement Mania*). With their parents to assist them, Tri-Campus students chose among 22 different booths, each with its own measurement-related game and staffed by the teachers. Most of the activities were set up in the gym, but some games were in the school’s library

and computer lab, especially if they made use of the resources available in those locations.

Because brainstorming for the event began early, organizers were able to acquire the resources needed well in advance. Community members donated raffle prizes and teachers handled set up, clean up, and food service, in addition to staffing the booths. Supplies cost about \$900; the school used Title I Parental Involvement funds to cover the cost.

By encouraging parents to attend and participate in the games with their children, the Measurement Mania event supported parent involvement goals of the school’s Plan for Continuous Involvement (PCI) and demonstrated how families could foster better math skills at home.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) advises that organizers press students and parent to RSVP, but also to be prepared for the possibility that many more will actually attend the event. Also, the team advises delegating responsibilities early on, assigning jobs and asking for volunteers. This way, all the “mania” happens at the event, rather than infecting the planning stages.

Molly Wilson
Math Resource Teacher
Molly.Wilson@VBSchools.net

ST. JUDE'S MATH-A-THON

BEL AIR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND

The ways to serve others are many and varied. At Bel Air elementary, students are reminded how, sometimes, the best thing that you can do to help those who need it may also involve helping yourself.

Bel Air is one of a large number of schools that participate in St. Jude's Math-a-Thon, a fundraising drive for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital. Every March, students in grades K–5 solicit pledges from their families and the Bel Air community. After acquiring pledges, students receive workbooks of math problems. Donors have the choice of giving a certain amount per correctly-answered problem—10¢, 20¢, or more—or simply making a donation to St. Jude's.

The 134 Bel Air students who participated—representing over 60% of the total student body—raised \$5,841.03 for the charity. But the benefits extended beyond the quantifiable. While students are actively participating in a service activity, the program also encourages students to make a mental link between doing good for others and doing well in school.

The math activities in the St. Jude Math-a-Thon *Funbooks* are more colorful and entertaining than what students are accustomed to in their everyday homework exercises. Many of the grade-appropriate Math-a-Thon activities involve fun, real-world applications of mathematical concepts. A sampling of the problems is available at <http://www.mathathon.org>.

The St. Jude's Math-a-Thon is one of several events that the Bel Air Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) held this year to raise funds for a worthy cause. The school has participated in a Breast Cancer Awareness drive, a Diabetes Research drive, and several holiday food and clothing drives. Because the area that Bel Air Elementary serves is a less affluent part of the county—and because of the weakened national economy—ATP organizers were concerned about requesting funds from the families and commu-

nity. However, due to overwhelming community generosity—with some extra outreach work by ATP members—the donations this year were greater than ever before.

The ATP helped get the word out by directly mailing information to community business partners. “Writing letters was more beneficial than e-mail or telephone calls,” wrote the Team Chair. “Communication on school letterhead, with a detailed description of the activity, was helpful to companies when they were considering their donations.”

Two of the community partners donated directly to the school and another pledged matching funds for money raised by the children of its employees. One partner specifically donates to the Math-a-Thon fundraiser because he believes that the math activities are important to student development and he “appreciates the effort the students make to succeed in this event.”

As a result of the continuation of this practice, the Chair proudly reported that former Bel Air Elementary students continue participating in the Math-a-Thon after they graduated and moved on to middle school. Furthermore, many parents ask when the Math-a-Thon is going to be held each year, eagerly awaiting the opportunity to work with their children on the activity. The ATP noted that “our students will participate in the Math-a-Thon for as long any [of our members] is employed at the school. We hope it will continue even longer than that.”

Janice Shoup
NNPS Team Chair
janice.shoup@acps.k12.md.us

A NIGHT UNDER THE MILKY WAY

SALISBURY MIDDLE SCHOOL
SALISBURY, MARYLAND

Much in the way that stars pull together to form galaxies, three events were clustered into one shining evening at Salisbury Middle School's second annual Night Under the Milky Way this year. By scheduling parent-teacher conferences, a family dinner, and a science expo back-to-back-to-back, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) pulled off a mega-event that was, by all accounts, stellar.

Student-constructed displays of galaxies and the planets of the solar system constellated the walls of the school's classrooms, hallways, and lobby, while parents spent the first 60 to 90 minutes meeting with their children's teachers. To receive a ticket for the free dinner—pizza, salad, and dessert prepared and served by the PTA, parents first had to visit with at least two of their children's teachers.

The big draw for students and their families, however, was the main event. With the assistance of Salisbury community partners, including NASA and the local police lab, over 15 activity areas were set up around the school, each dedicated to a different topic in the science curriculum. Science was scheduled to be tested for the first time on the 2009 Maryland State Assessment (MSA) for 8th graders. The science activities and information were targeted to the 8th grade students, as well as to the 6th and 7th graders, who would take the test in the future.

At each activity booth, students and parents worked together to complete various assignments, which the ATP planners dubbed "missions." On these missions, families collaborated on questionnaires, used technology, built and launched paper rockets with NASA, observed the night sky in a planetarium that had been set up in the gym, and more. Through the PTA, a number of parents also staffed the "mission centers."

The missions bolstered other important skills on the MSA by assisting students with their writing, reading, math, and critical thinking skills

as they conducted research and analyses, drew conclusions, and prepared summaries. At the same time, parents developed a better understanding of the academic program their children were responsible for at school and gained ideas of how to reinforce the curriculum at home.

The event contributed to an additional positive side effect on overall parent involvement: PTA participation, for example, increased by 42% for the year.

Technology was an important part of both the event and the publicity. Administrators and teachers were costumed as astronauts and aliens for a series of humorous "television commercials" that announced the occasion. These publicity spots featured special appearances by Darth Vader, Princess Leia, and cameos by other Salisbury Middle School students.

A partnership with the Discovery Channel provided the school with raffle prizes—including the grand prize, a computerized telescope. All star-faring students who completed five missions could enter the drawing as a reward for their success.

Any who doubt the bravery of these enterprising cadets should heed this 6th grader's testimony: "Chocolate chip cookie mining in the Moon Archaeology Mission was awesome! I loved eating my moon!"

Tara A. Elliott
RELA Teacher / Co-ILT Chair / Co-NNPS Chair
telliott@wchoe.org

Type 6

SCIENCE

DANGEROUS DADS

**GEORGE ROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA**

Type 4

Whether they're flipping burgers over a flaming BBQ grill, standing precariously at the top of a ladder holding a lightbulb, or preparing for battle against invading spiders and mice, dads are historically renowned for their willingness to be risk-takers. When it comes to educational involvement, however, members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at George Ross Elementary noticed that students' male role models were largely under-represented at school events and parent-teacher conferences.

To make better use of dads' more adventurous spirits, the ATP enlisted their help for its first Dangerous Dads Math and Science Night this fall. Not only did the team want to encourage students' fathers and father-figures to attend a school event, but also to give them an opportunity to take a leadership role in one. The Dangerous Dads manned booths where, with a host of related activities, attendees were able to learn more about the school's science and math curricula. While the planning and implementation of the event was managed by the Dangerous Dads, it was open for all family members to attend.

In addition to supporting male family partnerships at George Ross, the Math and Science Night also helped realize specific school improvement goals related to the two subjects. By linking the math and science content with family interaction, students and parents were better able to internalize the importance of both.

At the ATP's summer planning sessions, the idea for the night arose from a member who was also a father of two George Ross students. The team immediately supported his idea and the first steps of planning were taken quickly in order to have the event in the fall. The ATP partnered with the community. One local science education group hosted activities at one of the booths and another company provided safety equipment for the Dangerous Dads who were presenting science

phenomena.

Beyond the usual publicity channels—flyers, newsletters, online resources, and so on—the ATP sent specific invitations to each student's father or male guardian. Teachers selected father/student teams from each classroom to run the booths. The Dean of Students held a training session for the Dangerous Dads on the activities they'd be presenting.

The Dangerous Dads Math and Science Night opened with a science presentation for attendees. Each student received a "lab sheet" that walked them through the steps of the scientific method. This first presentation also modeled how students could use the lab sheets to record information from the experiments. The same lab sheets were available at every booth and students (with their families' help) were expected to fill one out for each activity, detailing what they learned. At the end of the night, the families gave these lab sheets back and the ATP evaluated the practice's success based on the quality of the responses.

At each of the booths, district curriculum materials and supplies were on display for families. Parents were invited to review these and speak with school staff if they wanted to know more. The activity stations also featured instructions on how to replicate the experiments at home, all of which could be done easily with household items.

Altogether, the event cost \$1,000 in Title I funds. At next year's event, the ATP would like to expand the event to include more presenters—along with a few outdoor experiments, which should encourage more Dads to be even more Dangerous.

Camille Hopkins
Principal
cahopkins@lancaster.k12.pa.us

SCIENCE

FAMILY SCIENCE NIGHT

HIGHLAND PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Even the scientific method starts out with a problem. At Highland Park Elementary, the problem itself was science—specifically, the need to improve a 37% proficiency rate among 5th graders on the science portion of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II (MCA-II).

Faced with this problem, staff came up with a solution based on other school improvement goals. Organizers of the school's first-ever Family Science Night hypothesized that they could, with one well-planned event, simultaneously address a number of school improvement objectives. They had four goals in mind when planning this year's Family Science Night:

- » *to demonstrate to families how students at Highland Park have investigated various science standards throughout the year;*
- » *to provide an opportunity for students to be the "experts" and teach their parents about a science concept that they have already learned;*
- » *to provide an opportunity for parents and students to have fun while talking and working together on science activities; and*
- » *to create a positive connection between home and school.*

"We wanted to provide an opportunity for families to experience science together in a format where they could actually do science [rather than] merely observe science," explained one leader. The grade-appropriate, standards-based topics included The Five Senses, The Scientific Method, Color & Light, Volume & Density, Microbes, Magnetism, Matter, and more. Each classroom was responsible for one activity related to one topic that they had investigated during the year. As families entered the gym, they received a program that listed the activities, picked up

their own "Activity Ticket," and began visiting the exhibits in any order they chose.

Students who attended played dual roles as both spectators and authorities. As they visited each table with their families and observed various activities, but also demonstrated their knowledge in areas of their expertise. Similarly, the parents, staff, and community members who participated in the event wore two hats: as volunteers—helping to set up tables, serve dinner, and clean up—and as learners.

Students affixed a sticker to their Activity Ticket from every station they visited. The completed tickets were submitted for a drawing at the end of the evening. Students could win a science activity book or the chance to attend—with a friend of their choice—a private science night and pizza party later in the year.

Attendees also enjoyed a pasta dinner, compliments of the PTA. The dinner was included as a little something extra to attract families, the Science Specialist notes that other schools could omit the catered meal to reduce costs.

After thoughtful analysis, if they conduct Family Science Night next year, planners want to address the transportation needs that were a challenge for some families. Strategies may include organizing car pools or using Title I funds to hire cabs for those in need. By considering ways to improve transportation, publicity, and outreach, the planners demonstrated their dedication to a vision of Family Science Night that includes every family.

Eileen Cotter
Science Specialist
eileen.cotter@spps.org

SCIENCE NIGHT WITH NAUTICUS

**MCINTOSH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA**

Type 6

To drum up excitement for science education, the Parent Involvement Team at McIntosh Elementary partnered with a nearby museum to bring added expertise and resources directly to students and their family members. This year, when educators from Nauticus—a nautical and science museum in Norfolk—set up shop in the school’s gym for the annual Science Night, the resulting thrills for students were quite literally hair-raising.

The effect of static electricity, however, wasn’t the only science topic that Science Night attendees had the opportunity to get their hands on. Nauticus representatives set up a series of five stations, each covering a different area. In addition to the electricity exhibition, Nauticus presented demonstrations on the weather, flowers, the water cycle, and sound—all of which matched the curriculum of the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) for science.

Organizers split the two-hour event into six 20-minute time slots. This gave students and parents an opportunity to participate in all five of the Nauticus science stations. The school integrated its Book Fair into the Science Night event and families could spend the remaining 20 minutes browsing through books to take home.

In addition to the presentations and demonstrations, Nauticus provided take-home booklets for parents that showed how to replicate some of the activities at home. These were written in English and Spanish.

The Nauticus “brand” was instrumental in encouraging families to attend. Children at McIntosh were already familiar with a local program that the museum offered once a week on a morning news show. Recognizing students’ fondness for Nauticus’s *Bill Nye the Science Guy*-inspired program, the school presented the idea for the science night to the museum. The museum leaders were happy to participate.

In advance of the event, teachers collabo-

rated on a list of SOL science topics and provided them to Nauticus. The museum designed the Science Night with these requirements in mind. A particular challenge, says the Parent Involvement Specialist, was to ensure that the educational materials and demonstrations pertained to state science guidelines for *all* grade levels, K–5.

Not only did the Science Night engage students in fun, interactive instruction that reinforced the SOL-tested curriculum, but showed parents what their children were expected to know on these tests. Teachers also benefited by meeting the students’ families and observing all of the science-related interactions. Over 150 students and 200 family members came to the event.

Funding for the activity, \$500 for Nauticus’s fee and miscellaneous materials, came from the school’s Title I budget.

Due to Science Night’s success, planners expect to invite Nauticus to return in the future. The team also will seek other museum partners to provide a variety of programming.

Leslie Wilson
Parent Involvement Specialist
leslie.wilson@nn.k12.va.us

SCIENCE

THE TRUMPETER SWAN SOCIETY

L'ÉTOILE DU NORD FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

It began with a newspaper article. In their English language arts class one day, 2nd graders at L'Étoile du Nord—a French immersion school—read an article in the local newspaper about a trumpeter swan being treated at the nearby Wildlife Rehabilitation Center after it swallowed a lead bullet in the Mississippi River. Immediately, the students wanted to know more about the swans. Where in Minnesota did they live? Why were they falling ill? And—most important—what could they do to help the local swan population?

Populations of North America's largest waterfowl, the once-endangered trumpeter swan, have rebounded across the country in recent decades. The Minnesota trumpeter swans, however, are still considered threatened. As students learned more about the swans from books, videos, and informational brochures, it became clear that the class had found itself a pet project.

Integrating English and ecology, students discussed in class the things they learned in their reading: how the swans were losing their natural habitat and what recovery efforts were being made to ensure their safety. Lessons in their Readers and Writers' Workshop centered on the swan as a theme; their curriculum incorporated non-fiction texts about the birds' identification, habitat, behavior, and population. Students augmented their reading by practicing other study skills, investigating population graphs and migration maps. They continued to keep up with current events related to threats that the trumpeter swans face in Minnesota.

Not only was the students' swan project a cross-disciplinary effort, it also integrated home- and community-based service components into their studies. After initial research, the class prepared for a day of swan sightseeing in two very different environments. First, they visited the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center to see injured and ill swans. This opportunity resulted from a

partnership between the school and the Center, which rarely gives tours to the public. After leaving the Center, they went to see them in the Swan Park habitat in nearby Monticello.

A number of parents accompanied the students on the field trip and were astonished at the students' curiosity. The school's Service Learning Coordinator was surprised by how much the students shared what they learned about the swans at home. She related, "One parent told me that his son kept talking about what he is learning when he comes home from school. This student enjoyed quizzing his father with questions like, 'How many eggs does a trumpeter swan lay?' or 'Why are they endangered?'"

With their parents' help at home, students applied their knowledge to creating and performing skits about the swans. Community members were invited to come see the classroom presentations and many were thrilled to see how much effort the students had put into researching a topic of local interest.

Throughout the practice, organizers drummed up support and excitement about the program outside the classroom as well. They regularly published articles about the students' work in the school's *Quoi de Neuf?* newsletter and hung trumpeter swan display materials in the hall. These and other expenses totaled \$500, funded by the St. Paul Department of Community Education's Service Learning Program.

Pulling together material appropriate for English, science, and social science, the Trumpeter Swan Society Project also promoted students' sense of civic responsibility and showed them how, with their families' help, they can be a powerful force for good.

Christi Schmitt
Service Learning Coordinator / ELL Teacher
christi.schmitt@spps.org

4TH GRADE WAX MUSEUM

MACHEN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

Type 4

In the dimmed hallways of Machen Elementary, the spotlight shone—literally—on each of the school’s 100 fourth-graders one evening. Standing statue-still for their visiting family members, teachers, and other guests, the students came alive, with a tap on the shoulder, as a living, speaking reincarnation of history.

They were Amelia Earhart and Duke Ellington, Frederick Douglass and George Washington, Bill Clinton and Jackie Robinson. Each child had been assigned a historical figure to portray, chosen from among people the students had studied that year.

So went the school’s first 4th Grade Wax Museum, a project aimed at helping the students retain information for their upcoming state Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment, as well as giving parents a sense of their children’s accomplishments in the classroom. The students researched their characters, using print and online sources, with assistance from the school’s librarian and media specialist. Teachers provided general instruction on memorization techniques.

Because students were required to transform this research into spoken lines about their respective characters, their classroom education was bolstered by having to teach what they learned back to others. “I talked about my character so many times that I know everything . . . now by heart,” reported one student.

Asking the students to dress in full costume instilled in them a sense of ownership of—and responsibility for—the figures they portrayed. Furthermore, gathering and assembling the costume materials provided an important opportunity for parents to become involved in the project. “I learned lot myself just from helping her prepare for this night,” said a parent. “It was a great refresher for me.”

Special invitations and dinner for the students and their guests added to the splendor of the evening. Additional volunteers helped with

serving dinner and ushering the crowds of visitors through the exhibits.

Ensuring that students took their designated positions at the right time proved to be one of the event’s logistical challenges, but the adults pulled together to organize the students when it was time for their exhibitions. The event team underscored the importance of establishing a layout for students in advance, as well as providing sufficient room for guests to move among the “statues.”

The team emphasized that the museum project was rewarding and did not require a unreasonable effort. The printed invitations and the school’s Connect-Ed phone message system organized the publicity campaign. Altogether, the event cost \$300, an amount offset primarily by Title I funds.

Organizers plan to re-open the wax museum with next year’s fourth-graders. They are considering using more school space and inviting more students to participate.

OTHER SUBJECTS

Tamera Clarke
Parent Involvement Facilitator
tcrosby@sbo.hampton.k12.va.us

A NIGHT TO CELEBRATE THE ARTS

POINT O'VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Point O'View Elementary had a definite point o'view about the artistic talents of its students. The school's art and music specialists, partnership team, and many family and community partners designed and conducted an evening to celebrate the young painters, pianists, and other prolific personalities at the school.

The library became an art gallery for a ritzy reception at the school's A Night to Celebrate the Arts. Students, parents, staff, and community members experienced first-hand the creative work the children of Point O'View undertake both during and after school. The exhibition showcased students' accomplishments in both visual art and in music.

The school had held a musical talent show in the past. This year, to give more students the chance to share their individual gifts, and to celebrate Arts in Our Schools Month, in March, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) opted to expand the tradition.

Students were aware of the plans in advance. The school's art specialist selected artistic pieces throughout the year, including contributions from students at each grade level (1–5). The school distributed fliers and its television stations advertised the celebration daily, prior to the scheduled event.

Teachers served as curators, arranging for art boards and easels to display the students' work, while parents and staff members set up the gallery, tables, and chairs. These helpers also arranged for punch and finger-friendly foods—served on donated silver and crystal trays.

The artwork was clearly labeled with students' names so that each young artist could be identified and recognized. One particularly impressive touch was the pair of murals that the members of the fifth-grade Art Club painted especially for the event.

The cascade of self-expression didn't end

there. Guests were also treated to an exclusive performance by the six Point O'View students who had been selected for the Virginia Beach All-City Chorus. They sang six of the songs they had learned for the All-City Concert earlier in the year.

The evening unfolded elegantly and attendance was much greater than organizers had anticipated. An estimated 200 people celebrated the arts that night—twice the number for which the ATP had prepared. Bad news for having enough food, but good news for building a great sense of pride among the student artists. A Night to Celebrate the Arts boosted everyone's attitudes about the importance of the arts in education and in their daily lives.

Kelly Archibald
Art Specialist
kmarchib@vbschools.com

Liz Griffin
Music Specialist
ergriffi@vbschools.com

CHAT WITH CONÉCTATE!

**EDWARD HAND MIDDLE SCHOOL
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA**

Type 1

At Edward Hand Middle School, families of students who are dually identified as needing both Special Education/IEP and English as a Second Language/ELL services are invited to join a series of workshop sessions designed to meet their unique needs. The CHAT with Conéctate! program is the result of planning by the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) that came up with the name from an acronym meaning Collaborative Hand Action Team and from the Spanish verb meaning "to connect."

The ATP identified the need to reach out to this subgroup of families based on School Improvement Plan (SIP) data. After a brainstorming session, the team decided that the CHAT workshops would be a novel and direct way to ensure that these families had access to stronger support systems for their children.

The six CHAT sessions that were conducted during the school year—in both Spanish and English—each included a hands-on collaborative activity that was paired with information about how to support children's academic success. The meetings were held to engage parents and encourage their participation both in and out of the school setting. The CHATs were conducted in the school building and each meeting was given a different seasonal or cultural theme, in addition to the discussion topic.

Discussion topics included homework, absence and truancy, ELL techniques, gang awareness, and state testing. A sixth session's topic was left open for parents to decide. A guest speaker from the school or community kicked off every CHAT, before moving on to a family activity.

At first, the school provided meals for the CHAT events. After several sessions, however, the parents suggested that they switch to potluck dinners, featuring homemade contributions inspired by their own native cuisines.

In the program's second year, families were

better informed about the meeting times. They also were invited to the school's parent advisory council meetings, additional conferences that were relevant to their needs, and encouraged to participate in a culminating Bloom into Spring event. A number of community guest speakers shared information and materials about school and community resources that parents can use during the school year and over summer vacation. Families also participated in an activity in which they decorated clay pots and planted spring flowers.

The school's principal wrote, "The 'personal touch' was an essential component of the effectiveness of the program." The practice was implemented with direct contact of the staff, administrators, and parents. This included personal phone calls and even home visits by the principal. The principal advised having one staff member in charge of overseeing the details of the practice, which allowed the CHAT program to follow through on the ATP's design.

Of the dually-identified IEP/ELL subgroup of students, nearly two-thirds of the students increased their reading and math achievement during the school year. The Conéctate program is only one of a number of components contributing to that growth, though an important one. Based on these successes, organizers hope to extend the practice to families who are only receiving one of the two special services next year.

OTHER SUBJECTS

*Larry Mays
Principal*

lhmay@lanaster.k12.pa.us

ELECTION CENTRAL 2008

SUDLERSVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SUDLERSVILLE, MARYLAND

With an historic Presidential election unfolding around them, the students and parents of Sudlersville Elementary School (SES) were encouraged to understand the core processes of democracy in the school's Election Central program. Through a host of social studies related activities and an in-school mock election, students learned the value of citizenship in their school, community, and country.

Parents, teachers, and community members formed a team to work together for voter education in the Sudlersville community, using the school's Election Central practice as a hub. The members of the Election Central Steering Committee met monthly, from May to October, to prepare for the various activities of the program. The Committee prepared "portfolios" for twelve aspects of the program, including communication, donor solicitation, publicity, and coordination for both the in-school and "main event" programming. A pair of co-coordinators was responsible for meeting the objectives of each portfolio.

Prior to the Election Central evening, American Legion members visited 1st and 2nd grade classrooms to discuss the Pledge of Allegiance. The Queen Anne's County (QAC) League of Women's Voters provided voter education for students in grades 3–5, and 6th and 7th graders prepared for, and participated in, political debates. A mock election—with real electronic voting machines on loan from the QAC Board of Elections—was held at the school so that students could put their new knowledge to work in practice.

Anticipation built as the Election Central evening approached, when the results of students' voting would be revealed. At the event, students managed a series of social studies themed booths, with titles such as Know Your States, The Voting Maze, Founding Fathers Football, and an American History Corner. Teachers, dressed as historical celebrities, visited the History Corner booth throughout the night to tell the stories of the

figures they were representing.

Community organizations ran their own booths, including the QAC Department of Economic Development, Agriculture, and Tourism; the QAC Character Counts program; the QAC Sheriff's Department; SES' Sailing through the System program; the SES chapter of the PTA; the QAC League of Women Voters; and the QAC/Kent County Memorial Post 192 of the American Legion.

The League of Women Voters, with the assistance of the 5th graders they had trained in the process, showed attending parents how to operate the voting machines. These parents were also given the opportunity to register to vote. Election Central had been scheduled so that these new registrants would be able to vote in the November election.

Nearly 1,000 attendees—including students, parents, staff, and community members—were treated to baked goods and hot dogs, a display of a large community tapestry, and musical performances by students and a band.

The PTA spent \$300 in start-up funds for Election Central. Activity booths cost 25 cents, and all food was sold for under 50 cents. The school recouped its costs of \$340 for other materials. The rest of the funds raised at the event—a surplus of \$4,500—were spent on new playground equipment for the school.

Elaine Butler
Parent Coordinator
butlere@qacps.k12.md.us

FAMILY GAME NIGHT

**COLUMBIA MIDDLE SCHOOL
PEORIA, ILLINOIS**

Type 4

Family Game Night was only the beginning of the fun for 42 families with students at Columbia Middle School. Not only were they invited to school to learn and play, but they were also given a game to take home to conduct their own game nights. The games linked to math, reading, language arts, and thinking skills that would help students in their school subjects.

This semi-annual event brings families together for a light dinner, an opportunity to meet other families, spend time with those they already know, and engage in a low-cost activity that encourages their middle-schoolers' higher level thinking skills.

"Our families have limited resources and appreciate the time they spend with their children," said the school's intervention specialist. "Parents appreciate activities that support and promote their child's learning."

When families RSVP that they will attend game night, they choose three games that they would like to play from a list prepared by the school. Families can bring all of their children, not just those attending Columbia. The school buys the games and adds a few extra, for those who reply late.

The evening starts with dinner, served by volunteers from the Adopt-A-School partner. After dinner, the adults and children go to classrooms where the games are set up – one board or card game in each classroom. Teachers explain and demonstrate the games and answer questions about rules. After a game-playing session, the event ends, with the families taking home a new game.

One sixth-grade parent said family members had so much fun, they were on their way home to continue playing. The day after game night, a seventh-grader said he was excited to go home after school so his family could play the game again.

Among the games played were Blokus, a favor-

ite of the mathematics teacher, because of the use of patterns; Scrabble, and several card games.

The program brought together the whole Columbia community, with teachers, administrators and community members all working to make the families feel welcome and connected to the school. The school draws students from several different neighborhoods, so many families do not know each other, except through events such as game night.

Game night cost about \$1,800 for the food, supplies and games, with the money coming from the Title I fund. Because of the positive response and the good feelings it fostered, math night represented money well spent.

OTHER SUBJECTS

*Anne Castagna
Intervention Specialist
anne.castagna@psd150.org*

FAMILY INTEREST FAIR

FLINTSTONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FLINTSTONE, MARYLAND

The Family Interest Fair proved how wide-ranging the interests of the families at Flintstone Elementary School really are. When given the choice to pick a topic for a family-school project, the students and their families dug deep into their hobbies, talents, and curiosity to put together a fascinating event.

The Family Interest Fair replaced the school's annual science fair, which had drawn small crowds and limited interest. After brainstorming ideas for an alternative, the school staff decided on the interest fair. Once introduced to the idea, the Flintstone students and their families participated with energy and excitement—108 of the school's 240 students contributed projects.

Among the interests displayed:

- » *One family built its project around its first-grader's interest in horses. The family visited a horse farm, where the youngster interviewed the owner after devising her own questions. The family took photos that were included in the display.*
- » *Another family researched the history of the Teddy Bear. The family used a wooden cutout of a bear, painted by family members, on which to display their findings about the history and continuing popularity of this toy.*
- » *Another family followed the lead of its second-grader who loved to write. The family encouraged her to write a book. The parents edited and proofread her work and illustrations accompanied the final version.*

At least one family stayed with the science theme. Using a variety of sources, they researched dolphins' lifecycle, evolution, characteristics and behaviors. Atop the presentation board was a large, inflatable dolphin with its body parts labeled.

"It was amazing to see such enthusiasm from our students," said one teacher. "They loved being able to choose a topic that interested them and work on creating a display with the whole family."

More than 180 people attended the April Interest Fair in the evening. Students had an opportunity to see their classmates' work during the school day.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the school faculty and administration were actively involved in the planning and presentation. Students chose their topics in early March and presented proposals to their teachers for approval. After that, the families joined in the effort. The school held a family work night, opening the school's computer lab and media center, and supplying various materials for the displays. Teachers also helped students and families with research and other aspects of their projects.

"Parents and teachers worked side-by-side to support each other, creating more dialogue focused on learning more about the child and the family and their interests," said the fair committee chairperson.

Seeing no lack of interest in the Interest Fair, Flintstone plans to schedule another next year, possibly making it a two-day event and encouraging local businesses to further display the projects in their windows and stores.

Staci Noah
Teacher / Interest Fair Committee Chairperson
staci.noah@acps.k12.md.us

FRONTIER DAY

MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Using a vacation day from work to attend Frontier Day was well worth it for more than one parent at Mark Twain Elementary. “I always look forward to this event . . . and plan on coming back next year,” said a satisfied parent.

Others shared her enthusiasm for this Mark Twain tradition that showcased students’ work and helped to build family and community support for the school. The 2009 Frontier Day was the 15th annual and the crowds were greater than anticipated.

This western-themed event was the culmination of the students’ study of the 1800s and what life was like for the Pioneers. The students dressed in period costumes and set up stations depicting various aspects of early American life on the school grounds and throughout the building. Among the topics covered were Native American storytelling, pioneer chores, mountain men and the Wanapum Indians. Students and their families worked their way through the stations, and the children had an opportunity to talk about the topics with parents and community members.

Along the way students learned how to make cornmeal, how to pan for gold and split cedar wood. The “animal viewing ranch” allowed students to see a miniature horse, bull, and ducks.

The day kicked off with a parade, and continued with a lunch-time barbeque outside, with hot dogs and chips provided by the cafeteria. The day closed with an all-school assembly featuring a slide show of photos taken by faculty and staff. A musical group played banjos and fiddles during the show.

A special guest this year was the sheriff, portrayed by the school’s business partner from a local financial firm. He marched in the parade, wearing a 10-gallon hat and a badge. Some students even asked for his autograph.

Frontier Day garners a lot of community support, including many in-kind services and

donations of time and money. The Sheriff’s department (the real one) provided the small animals for the viewing ranch, a waste management firm donated portable toilets, and another group pitched in 50 bales of straw.

Nearly 200 parents and community members joined the school’s 600 students and 60 staff and faculty for the old-fashioned good time. “I liked the bull the best,” said one student, “because it was white and big and had a ring in his nose so it would not run away.”

Frontier Day is not only fun, but also an opportunity for the youngsters to bring their learning to life, to translate what they read in the textbook into hands-on experiences.

*Nancy Kettering
Frontier Days Co-Chairperson
nketterling@psdl.org*

IMPRESSIONS

MEADOWVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN

Meadowview Elementary's annual Impressions event gave an innovative twist to the time-honored format of the science fair, but focused on students' self-expression.

Every Meadowview student in grades K–5 is invited, once a year, to create an artistic project in one of the following categories: Visual Arts, Photography, Music/Dance, Literature, or Animation/Video. The variety of artistic media accommodates a range of individual talents. Entry is voluntary, but, this year, 147 students submitted projects—nearly a quarter of the student body.

On the evening of Impressions, parents, teachers, and staff joined the students in exploring the creative work of their peers. Since the Meadowview PTO first implemented Impressions in 1994, the event has expanded to include an inexpensive healthy dinner, as well as family learning opportunities. For example, in past years, the staff arranged for multi-media presentations, storytellers, math and reading exercises, mini-sessions on school initiatives, and team-building activities for the attendees.

The event was the finale of the project. Work got underway at least a month beforehand. Students were directly involved from the beginning. First, they were asked to contribute theme ideas (recent examples included Fairy Tales, Winter Fun, and Underwater Adventures). The entire student body voted on its favorite theme from among three finalists chosen by the committee. The student who suggested the winning theme received a gift certificate to a local bookstore.

Then, the PTO gave kick-off presentations in each classroom, explaining the theme and official rules. Students had three weeks to work on their projects at home. All work had to be created by the student.

On the day of Impressions, participating students received equal recognition: a certificate

and a button, which they wore proudly throughout the day.

For judging, there were two age groups in each category. Parents, teachers, and community members volunteered as judges. To preserve objectivity, parents reviewed only categories in which their children were not entered. Similarly, no teacher judged an age group in which they had students. Overall, 25 percent of the entries were recognized as winners.

The necessary funding was minimal—\$450, this year—and provided entirely by the PTO's annual magazine fundraiser. The partnership coordinator suggested that other schools that wanted to implement the program “start small and grow.”

In the end, students received some arts education to round out their core curriculum and also had an opportunity to demonstrate talents that may not otherwise be recognized in the classroom or on the playing field. The Impressions program, now a Meadowview tradition, continues to develop, reaffirming to students—as well as their parents and teachers—a more expansive sense of what they can do.

Sue Lindstedt
Partnership Coordinator
slindstedt@ecasd.k12.wi.us

POLYGONS, PUZZLERS, AND PIZZA

DISCOVERY SCHOOL No. 67

BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Creativity and critical thinking play a big part in teaching and learning at the Discovery School. That's what led to Polygons, Puzzlers, and Pizza—a family night of fun and learning with a specific purpose.

When the results of the New York State tests showed that Discovery School students in pre-K to second grade were weak on polygons, schools officials and teachers were puzzled. The children regularly demonstrated knowledge of these many-sided shapes. Nevertheless, the school decided to heed the tests' warning and refresh the students' knowledge with a little help from parents and pizza.

Following the school's philosophy of "Hands-on, Minds-on," the staff put together a program that focused on mathematics activities combined with language arts exercises, concentrating on geometry and descriptive writing. This reflected what the tests emphasized, but the school staff also thought more families were likely to attend an event that focused on two academic areas.

Families with children in pre-K through third grade worked in one area of the cafeteria while students in fourth through eighth grades worked in another. They used marshmallows and toothpicks to shape different polygons—squares, triangles and rectangles for the younger students and pentagons, parallelograms, and rectangles for the older ones. Once they had finished the shapes, the families moved to a writing area to complete a 4-square organizer for each grade level. Using this tool, the children and adults wrote riddles and poems about the polygons and shared the riddles with classmates. They also made math vocabulary words and wrote sentences and paragraphs describing the shapes.

After that, the popular shape was round – it was time for pizza. A book swap also accompanied the evening's excitement.

The Discovery School staff designed the activities with support from the faculty and teacher

candidates at Buffalo State College and from the school-based Management Team. Several action team committees divided the planning and implementing duties and worked together to make the program successful. The school received a grant from the college for the \$400 in expenses, including the pizza.

More than 90 parents and 109 students attended the November event. "I look forward to more family-night inspired activities," said one parent. "It was something fun and educational for the family," said another.

The Discovery School staff will be looking at the results of the state tests to see if the activity brought long-term improvement in students' scores, particularly those pertaining to polygons. In the meantime, Discovery students shared a learning-evening with their families at school, and parents gained a better understanding of the kinds of academic challenges faced by the students and school staff.

Type 4

OTHER SUBJECTS

*Nancy Kenny
Teacher*

nkenny@buffalopublicschools.org

RISING STARS

LEVI DICKEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ONTARIO, CALIFORNIA

When it comes to celebrating students' academic successes, parent pride and school-wide recognition go a long way toward helping children develop good study habits and self-confidence. To really encourage students to go the extra mile, Levi Dickey Elementary also provides a hearty meal of spaghetti, salad, garlic bread, and cake. The positive spirit feeds the hearts of Rising Stars and the good food feeds their minds.

Two years into her term as an administrator, the vice principal discovered that parent and community attendance at most school events averaged only 1 percent. Since implementing the Rising Stars celebration, she reports that many school events have a packed house, with more parents involved on planning committees, as well. She connected the increase in parental involvement with this year's 37-point increase on the school's Academic Performance Index (API), a gain that officials hope to double next year.

Through a partnership with a local restaurant, Vince's Spaghetti House, the school recognized all students who achieved a "proficient" or "advanced" result on the previous year's CST assessment with a celebratory spaghetti dinner. Event organizers intentionally scheduled the celebration when the current year's CST exams are approaching. The practice boosts morale as students prepare for the test, encouraging successful students to repeat the feat, and establishing them as role models for others.

In addition to donating the \$1,000 needed for the event, the PTA identified parents and teachers who helped out in setting up and serving the food. The food was provided at a discount by the restaurant partner.

Students received the red carpet treatment—literally. They walked down an actual red carpet, had their photos taken, were welcomed by school administrators, and were awarded a medal based on their level of achievement. Students were

invited to wear their medals the next day at school and at a kickoff assembly for CST testing.

To drum up publicity for Rising Stars, every student who qualified for a medal was called into the office to meet with administrators and to celebrate their achievement. These students also were given a letter, in English and in Spanish, inviting their families to the event. Then, the principal followed up with anyone who did not return a participation slip to encourage all families to attend.

The school highly values the participation of parents. At the Rising Stars event, students have an opportunity to see their families' pride in their accomplishment—an accomplishment in which parents come to understand the importance of their own roles.

Kathy Nash
Assistant Principal
kathy_nash@chino.k12.ca.us

SOL CARNIVAL

WINDSOR OAKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Type 4

To help students prepare for their upcoming state assessment, Standards of Learning (SOL), teachers swapped note cards and study guides for carnival games and hot dogs at Windsor Oaks Elementary's SOL Carnival night. The price of admission? Know your stuff!

Students lined up at stations placed around the school to prove they had mastered SOL-type skills and information. If they did, they were rewarded with food, games, and prizes. They held punch cards and received new punches from each station where they correctly answered a grade-appropriate SOL-style question. At the end of the evening, they turned in their completed punch cards for prizes.

Children weren't the only ones who enjoyed the carnival. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) made an extra effort to reach out to parents. The team acknowledged that many parents helped their children at home, but some had a hard time making it to school events. About 46 percent of the students at Windsor Oaks received free or reduced-price lunches. The ATP hoped that the carnival would attract some of the school's economically-stressed families in order to recognize and celebrate their own hard work, along with their children's.

Many teachers were involved in the planning process, but the actual set up and management required the assistance of the Virginia Beach community. The school's military partners from all three branches, along with high school students in the National Honor Society, and local business partners stepped in.

According to the parent involvement coordinator, the volunteers manned the game booths, served dinner, directed traffic, and helped with everything else. "It is amazing how many people are willing and excited to help when they are asked," she added.

The carnival was not spare on activities. Along with a bevy of regular carnival games, students

could bounce around in a moon walk and interact with exotic animals at a petting zoo. Dinner was a hot dog, chips, and a cookie, with snow cones and cotton candy also on the dessert menu—provided, or course, that students were ready to answer test questions to receive their treats.

While the school's third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders were preparing to face the SOL, the ATP invited all of the younger grade students and their families because "even though they are not being tested, they are learning material that they will eventually be tested on."

As this was Windsor Oaks' first carnival, the initial cost was about \$3,300, paid from Title I Parent Involvement funds. The costs should be lower in the future, now that materials have been purchased and assembled.

The carnival left students feeling, not as if they were being quizzed or prepared for a test, but rewarded for studying and working hard in school. Parents were able to see their children's pride in their work and encouraged them to keep studying and learning at school and at home.

Denise Read
Parental Involvement Coordinator
denise.read@vbschools.com

OTHER SUBJECTS

STANDARDS SUPPER

WEST HERTEL ACADEMY BUFFALO, NEW YORK

In public school districts across the country, families are frequently reminded of the importance of their children’s success on state assessment tests. Often, however, many of the specific standards of student achievement are omitted from the dialogue. Parents are left in the dark, so to speak, when it comes to what’s expected of their children both in the classroom and on state tests.

To fill this information gap, the parent involvement team at West Hertel Academy—a Pre-K–8 school—reached out to parents by holding a Standards Supper shortly after the beginning of the academic year. Expanding upon the usual fare for open house or orientation events, the school partnered with community organizations to emphasize not only the importance of students’ academic “grooming,” but also their physical and social well-being. “[We began] our school year fueling our parents with as much knowledge as possible,” writes the Parent Involvement Coordinator.

In advance of the event, the team researched proven materials and strategies that parents could use at home to connect with school and state requirements, providing them with “more than just a score.” The standards, prepared in a user-friendly manner, were presented and distributed by math and English language arts teachers at the Standards Supper event. These were linked to grade-appropriate activities that parents could conduct at home to support and extend their children’s academic progress. For example, parents were guided in how to boost students’ abilities to discuss a specific book, or to do a collaborative writing exercise of a particular length and topic. Teachers also demonstrated, where appropriate, how a number of the state standards overlap, and how to take these interlocking skills to the next level.

Other teachers, with help from students and Closing the Gap sponsors, guided parents from

the information sessions to other stations that were set up in the school building.

Parents were given a tour of the school’s dedicated Parent Room and invited to sign up for future meetings. The school’s social worker discussed support resources that were available for families needing these services. Representatives from Every Person Influences Children (EPIC)/Character Counts described parenting classes on the importance of being a positive role model in the home. Presenters from Sisters Hospital were on hand to discuss the importance of emotional and physical health for children’s academic success. In addition, the event reinforced health values for the whole family by providing free cholesterol and blood pressure screenings.

Project Flight donated over 1600 books to the event and the Buffalo & Erie County Library was available to distribute library cards to families. Other community organizations, such as Literacy Volunteers of Buffalo & Erie County, the Huntington Learning Center, and WNED/Think-Bright (a local public television station and affiliated suite of digital educational programming) also sponsored the event.

To facilitate the large group of guests, the event was split into two sessions, so that half the families were seated for the school-provided dinner while the rest toured the various presentations.

By supplying parents with information and materials—from within and outside the school system—the staff at West Hertel not only have seen a boost in students’ state test scores, but also demonstrated that teachers, parents, staff, and community partners are on the same team in supporting student success.

Mary Fleming
Parent Involvement Chairperson
mfleming@buffaloschools.org

2

NON-ACADEMIC GOALS



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

ATTENDANCE ROUNDUP

FROST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FROSTBURG, MARYLAND

When it comes to school attendance, absence neither makes a student's heart grow fonder, nor mind grow sharper. Faced with a drop in overall attendance during the first semester, school officials tapped the Partnership Action Team at Frost Elementary to activate the school community to increase the number of children in school every day.

If the poor attendance, continued in the second semester, Frost Elementary was in danger of falling short of its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goal for attendance. In response, the team actively publicized the initiative among parents in a letter and in the Frost Elementary Newsletter. At a PTA meeting called to discuss test scores, the School Improvement Team addressed the attendance problem. Then, the PTA invited the Partnership Action Team chairs to present the school's plan for the remaining months of the school year.

Starting in February, the action team put in place a set of incentives to re-prioritize regular attendance. The practice was reinforced very frequently and very visibly: every day, any class in which all students were present displayed a banner (designed by PTA members) that recognized their collective accomplishment. These classes were also acknowledged in the daily afternoon announcements. The class-level incentives showed, in a tangible way, how individual students affected shared goals—for the class as well as the school.

Students also were rewarded individually. In the daily announcements, children were informed of prizes they could receive for perfect monthly and quarterly attendance. Every month, any student who didn't miss a day earned a gift certificate for a free meal, donated by a local restaurant. All students with good quarterly attendance received a certificate, and those with perfect quarterly attendance also were invited to a popcorn party, with popcorn donated by AMC

Theaters.

Because the team successfully solicited donations with which to reward students, the program cost the school nothing to implement. Results were simple to evaluate and proved the program's success: between January and March, the overall attendance rate increased by 2%, with a 5% increase among students receiving free and reduced meals. As the end of the year approached, the school was no longer in danger of failing to meet its AYP goal for attendance.

As a result, teachers were able to devote less time to make-up work and re-teaching concepts. The businesses who made donations were thanked and given visibility for their generosity. Parents were able to see the correlation between their children's attendance and their academic success. Of course, the students were encouraged to value "responsibility, dependability, and dedication—attributes of life-long learners and effective employees," reflected a Partnership Team member and teacher.

Attendance Roundup served as a strong example of an important advantage of multi-tiered partnerships: when everyone contributes, everyone benefits.

Lori Beeman
Partnership Team / 5th Grade Teacher
lori.beeman@acps.k12.md.us

CARE FAIR

NELLIE STONE JOHNSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Type 1

Intended to build strong relationships and reduce student suspensions, the Care Fair showed families that their school staff cared a great deal about their well being. It also stressed that the teachers and administrators cared enough to offer families personal support, as well as referring them to organizations that might address students' behaviors that warranted suspension.

Looking at the school's suspension rate and research showing that student achievement decreases drastically after three suspensions, the social worker suggested an after-school event especially for the parents of fourth- through eighth-graders who had been suspended.

About 25 parents or caregivers and 30 students attended the Care Fair, which combined dinner, a question-and-answer session, and an opportunity to enjoy some special services—massages, yoga lessons, and a photographer to take family portraits. Community organizations also provided information packets and referral registrations for their programs.

The school social worker and administrators believe that one way to reduce suspensions is to link students and their families with community resources, such as counseling, mediation, extracurricular programs, and summer camps. During the fair, nine students were enrolled in a mentoring program and two students were referred to mental health services. All parents said the fair was a positive experience, reinforcing the image of Nellie Stone Johnson as a safe and nurturing environment.

Teachers and administrators made important connections and began to build relationships with families that do not often attend school events. Parents had an opportunity to learn about appropriate student behavior, school discipline and suspension policies. Students, too, were glad their parents had a chance to attend: "My mom needs to relax and have a massage," one student

commented.

The fair cost \$250. Many organizations donated their time and the parent involvement committee bought the food.

Next year, the school hopes to extend the Care Fair to students and their families in all grades, K-8, with an eye to preventing student behavior problems before they become serious.

BEHAVIOR

Stephanie Johnson
School Social Worker
stephanie.johnson@mpls.k12.mn.us

FROM MY HOUSE TO YOUR HOUSE

PEYTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

Oftentimes, successful school and family partnership practices are supplemented with take-home materials for parents. These may include ideas for mini-lessons and activities, information about school programs and standards, and resources such as books or toys to support children’s academic and social development. In its own way, Peyton Elementary allows families to bring home one of the school’s most valuable resources—the principal.

Called *From My House to Your House*, the 15-minute video stars Peyton’s school principal. She discusses parenting topics with insights drawn from her own experiences as a mother and shares parenting tips that did or did not work in raising her children. Distributed to parents on a DVD at least twice a year, the video is shot—where else?—at the principal’s own house.

After the taping, experts on the school staff review and edit the footage. The central office duplicates the DVDs, which are distributed to the teachers. The teachers, then, send the discs home with their students, along with a parent questionnaire.

After the parents view the DVD, they return the completed questionnaires to the school. The main topic changes for each “episode,” and ideas for the next discussion are based on parent feedback, which is reviewed by the principal, staff, and school parent partner. Records of the comments are maintained for future episodes as well.

From My House to Your House follows a previous practice called *Parent Parties*, in which informal discussions on parenting skills were held in parents’ homes. The principal reports that the parties were a success for those who were present, but that relatively few were able to attend the events. The DVD builds on the friendly spirit of the *Parent Parties* while allowing family members to engage with the material on their own time.

93% of Peyton’s students in grades Pre-K–5

are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Many families worked during the school day and had limited free time, but were able to take a few minutes to view and interact with the DVD. The school also invited families who did not own DVD players to watch the videos at Peyton, either during the school day or in the evening.

Parents were informed about the DVD series at Peyton’s First Day of School Celebration. Additionally, articles discussing the next DVD were printed in the school’s newsletter.

Because the filming and editing was done in-house, the DVD series cost approximately \$100 in Title I funds.

The principal advised others who want to implement a similar practice to keep the videos brief, even though it is difficult to cover a topic in a short time. “Begin with two videos for the first year,” she suggested, on topics like “discipline, manners, or report card grades.”

Finally, and most important, the principal suggested to use parents’ feedback to select new topics to discuss and to talk with parents one-to-one. “Talk as a parent,” she said, “and not as a person reporting on a research topic.” When parents understand that others—including school officials—share the same experiences and concerns, they are more willing to become active participants in their children’s education, thereby deepening relationships with the school to support mutual goals for student learning and success.

Marion Ward
Principal
mkward@access.k12.wv.us

LOWELL HEROES

LOWELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

Type 6

Not laser eyes or razor claws or superhuman strength, but trust, compassion, citizenship. These are the superpowers of the Lowell Heroes. More giving than the average giver, more courageous than the not-so-brave bystander, with help from the Lowell Heroes Program, students in grades 3–6 have gone from littering a neighbor’s yard to planting trees, and from jumping fences to leaping sky-high social and academic barriers in a single bound.

“What is a Lowell Hero?” asked the Director of the Lowell Neighborhood Resource Center (NRC), who partnered with Lowell Elementary to implement the program. “A Lowell Hero is someone who has the courage to stand up for themselves, their community, and the people around them. We want to show them how to have this courage.”

Indeed, it was a complaint from a neighbor that inadvertently brought the Heroes together. This citizen came to the NRC to discuss a lack of civility from Lowell students, who, he reported, regularly jumped his fence and trashed his yard.

Rather than leaving the issue behind with his complaint, this neighbor worked with the NRC director and another NRC staff member—who would later become the Heroes Coordinator—through the summer months. In concert with the school, they developed a plan of action to tackle the greater problem of student behavior.

In this way, the Lowell Heroes Program was born. In after-school sessions, students received the tools needed to become upstanding citizens in the classroom, the home, and the community.

At first, home visits were made to get the permission of parents whose children would be invited to participate in the program. Students were never required to go to the after-school program, but slowly, they began to attend in greater numbers. As word spread among students and parents alike, it was clear that word-of-mouth was the best publicity the program could get.

The Heroes Coordinator worked 32 hours a week on the project, on- and off-site, interacting directly with the students. He met with the Lowell Heroes at least once a week after school. At these meetings, the students and coordinator discuss pillars of good character and citizenship. The Heroes put what they learned into practice, volunteering in as many as eight community service projects last year. The Heroes Coordinator also met with students one-on-one, acting as a mentor.

“Teachers and administrators refer students to him when students are having a bad day,” says the NRC Director. “They are counseled and assisted with school work and then returned to the classroom . . . Students know that their behavior and grades will be reported to [the Heroes Coordinator] and that they can be excluded from field trips or other activities.”

In addition to the service projects, students were rewarded with an end-of-year dinner at a nice restaurant—a reward that doubled as a workshop in good table manners.

The NRC Director reported significant improvements in overall behavior and a drop in suspensions at Lowell. Parents noticed a difference in their children’s home manners as well, and teachers confirmed that the Heroes program had a positive impact on students’ classroom performance.

And the Heroes themselves? Surely, one of the best things about being a Lowell Hero is that there’s no need to keep a secret identity. Instead, these courageous heroes can walk freely through their neighborhood with heads held high, proud of what they do and who they have become.

Connie Provencio
Director, Lowell Neighborhood Resource Center
connie.provencio@fresnounified.org

BEHAVIOR

PARENTING LAB

PHOENIX ACADEMY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

As an alternative school in the Fresno Unified School District, Phoenix Academy faces a tremendous need to support families' parenting skills. The principal and vice-principal wrote that the vast majority of their students came from homes that experience extreme poverty and many families have not had positive relationships with their children's previous schools. With its weekly Parenting Lab, Phoenix Academy looks to change that relationship.

New students in grades K-6 enter every week, so the school holds an intake orientation for new students and their families every Thursday. During this orientation, attendees learn that the school's effectiveness relies on the strength of its connection with family members. Administrators make it clear that they are committed to fostering a relationship that is cooperative, not adversarial.

The Parenting Lab series, held every Friday afternoon, manifests that commitment. The practice began in October of 2008. An anonymous benefactor delivered bagels, eggs, and tuna to the academy each week, to be distributed to families. Organizers scheduled the lab to coincide with the popular food giveaway.

Administrators started the Parenting Lab after observing that some parents had limited "parenting toolboxes." They heard other parents express frustrations about school discipline and students' behavior. In addition, families of children sent to the school often felt isolated and ostracized, according to administrators. The Parenting Lab augments school-family communications that already include frequent phone calls and behavior charts.

Since the initial workshops in October, the Parenting Lab has become more flexible and inviting. At first, it was organized mainly by the administration. The vice principal presented workshops and discussions on four topics: playing

with your child, praising your child, setting limits, and consequences of behavior.

As parents became more comfortable and confident, the lessons became parent-driven discussions, during which families shared successes and roadblocks in implementing behavior-reinforcing strategies. There is no longer a set length for the meetings and the format changes as needed. Even though there is a prepared lesson each week, organizers follow the directions that parent conversations take. Every session ends with a tangible strategy for parents to try—in other words, their "homework" assignment.

With the school's other outreach programs, the Parenting Lab has brought families closer to Phoenix Academy. A district survey found that 97 percent of the school's parents felt "supported, respected, and welcomed"—the highest percentage response of any school in the district. The school polled all parents who had participated in the Parenting Labs, asking whether their children's behavior at home had improved. Fully 100 percent said "yes," with some citing positive comments from other family members and neighbors about their children's conduct.

The administrators reported that parents were more willing to ask the school for guidance. Some, they say, continued to call for advice, even after their students have made the transition back to comprehensive schools.

Jack Kelly
Vice-Principal

Brian Radtke
Principal
Brian.Radtke@fresnounified.org

UNLOCKING YOUR CHILD'S POTENTIAL

NAPERVILLE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Type 1

Understanding and addressing the myriad behaviors associated with students' academic underachievement can be complex and challenging. Based on various requests and feedback from parent surveys, the team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) at Naperville Central High School took the initiative to respond to parents' and teachers' concerns about students who were not working up to their academic potential.

The resulting program, a two-part series called *Unlocking Your Child's Potential: Exploring the Behavior of Underachievement*, reflects the SFCP's efforts to partner with community experts and provide families—from throughout the district—with the tools they need to remediate academic underachievement.

The SFCP began by contacting Naperville Central staff, local mental health experts, and several nearby universities. They hoped to learn more about the nature of underachievement and what efforts were being made to help these students both inside and outside of school. From these contacts, the team assembled a committee, which met for the first time in December 2008.

Benedictine University, a long-time partner of Naperville Central, hosted the committee meetings and played an important role in developing the *Unlocking Your Child's Potential* program. Committee members assembled a panel of experts to speak to parents at the first of two events—a presentation with Q&A in March. One of the panel members, a Benedictine professor, assigned her Educational Psychology students to produce an interview-style DVD for the program.

Their projects were compiled in a single video presentation shown at the March event. On the DVD, interviewers spoke with students, parents, and teachers, asking them to identify contributing factors, negative effects, and strategies for managing academic underachievement. The video closed with an examination of remedial tips

for families of underachieving students.

Parents were asked to write questions for the panelists on index cards. As discussion monitor, the assistant principal selected questions for the panelists. The Q & A session also was video-taped and replayed on the district's educational access channel. At the end of this first event, 110 audience members fill out evaluation forms.

Based on topics discussed at the presentation and on parent feedback, the SFCP designed a follow-up session of workshops in April, many of which were run by the panelists from the first meeting. Workshop titles included *Practical Ideas to Improve Student Learning*, *Helping Seniors Transition into College*, and *The Nurtured Heart Approach to Help Students Reach Their Academic Potential*. Parents could attend three of the eight 40-minute workshops that were offered.

The broad variety of perspectives—proved to be a boon to parents' and teachers' understanding of the reasons for, and solutions to, academic underachievement. By calling on many experts in their community, Naperville Central's SFCP was better able to ensure that those who brought the toughest questions received the answers that fit their situation best.

BEHAVIOR

*Keren Cinzio
SFCP Chair
fourwilldo@aol.com*

EVENING ADVISEMENT

NORTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL WARNER ROBINS, GEORGIA

Northside High School saved two days of instructional time, involved parents in their children's academic decisions, and helped students stay on the path to graduation through their Evening Advisement program. This was a time for parents, teachers, and students to come together to discuss student progress and chart the students' next steps toward a diploma.

Evening Advisement took place over three evenings mid-way through the second semester, and involved great coordination in setting up 1,500 appointments, notifying parents of their appointments, organizing materials for teachers, and ensuring that the process ran smoothly on the appointment nights. The family involvement coordinator was a key player, especially in scheduling the 1,500 appointments.

But all the work paid off. This spring nearly 1,100 parents—72 percent of the targeted population—attended meetings, and the responses on an exit survey were overwhelmingly positive and encouraging.

"I have never felt so informed. Thanks," said the parent of a ninth-grader.

"This is GREAT. Please continue having this . . . good job, NHS," added another parent.

To achieve such a good turnout, the school and its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) started early to notify students and parents, and to publicize the meetings. Students first heard about registration meetings during the fall semester. Letters, with appointment times, went to parents in February, giving them plenty of notice. Parents also received reminder phone calls from teachers, and an announcement ran on the school marquee for about a month before the meetings.

The advisement sessions provided an opportunity for parents and students to plan and schedule courses for the 2009-10 school year. An academic advisor met with each family to review the student's permanent record, test scores, and courses needed for a high school diploma. Then,

together, they chose required and elective courses and sequences for the next year, and entered the courses into the registration system, which generated a report. The academic advisor also addressed other topics, such as discipline and extracurricular activities.

The ATP was involved all along the way, with planning, training staff members, and securing supplies for the meetings and food for teachers' meals on advisement nights.

The impetus for this program was the previous registration process, which took two full school days. Parents' feedback indicated that they wanted to be more involved with their teens in the decision-making process. The Evening Advisement also contributes to the overall school and district goal of having every student graduate.

Noelle Respert
Family & Community Involvement Coordinator
noelle.respert@hcbe.net

SHMACK / FASHION MARKETING PARTNERSHIP

**TALLWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Type 6

The fashion marketing partnership at Tallwood High School is a model collaboration. Since the fall of 2007, students in fashion marketing have been offered some upfront looks at the clothing industry by Todd Askins, the owner and founder of Shmack Clothing, a Virginia-based firm. Selecting and borrowing garments for their annual student fashion show, taking warehouse tours, and designing T-shirts for a design contest, the students have worked closely with Askins to deepen their understanding of what is involved in the fashion biz.

Askins, in turn, has tapped the students for constructive feedback on marketing, branding and design, and an inside track to his target market's thoughts on what he sells. "We are very pleased with the students' creative ability and hope to continue to work with . . . the fashion program for years to come," he said.

That would seem to be all right with the Tallwood Career and Technical Education (CTE) program that has about 80 students each year. As a CTE program, Fashion Marketing aims to provide students with skills to move successfully to postsecondary education or employment. Career exploration and preparation, internships, job shadowing opportunities, and leadership development are essential. The opportunities Shmack afforded the students greatly enhanced their classroom work.

The partnership began with the fall 2007 student fashion show—a requirement of the Advanced Fashion Marketing class. Students borrowed clothing from Askins' new lines. He and other employees helped the students put together their outfits and "the look" for the show. After that, Askins spoke to students about his high school years, the ups and down of his youth, the creative force behind his brand and key marketing decisions.

The partnership blossomed, with visits back and forth between school and Shmack offices.

Shmack's graphic designer worked with the students to develop a custom-designed, limited-edition Tallwood Fashion Shmack T-shirt, a marketing tool for the Tallwood program. With their \$14 purchases, the students paid for the production of the T-shirts.

The fashion show and design competition continued this school year, with Askins and members of his staff even more involved. The show was videotaped for airing on local television. "The word of mouth advertising generated from both the fashion show and the T-shirts ultimately led to the growth of the Fashion Marketing program," said the teacher who was instrumental in creating the partnership.

"Designing the T-shirts and [participating in] other promotional events have brought our class together to make such a strong team," said a student. "Other students see this partnership and not only want to join the class, but get more involved in school."

Others have noticed. The district superintendent and Virginia Beach Partnership Advisory Board recognized Shmack and Tallwood for their work together.

Rave reviews all around.

COLLEGE AND CAREERS

ELLSWORTH RUNS!

ELLSWORTH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

The Ellsworth School Improvement Plan for the 2008–09 school year included a new social-emotional goal designed to help students set a concrete foundation on which to build good decision-making skills. With this goal in mind, the school implemented the Soaring with Virtues program, which identified a set of positive character traits that corresponded to each letter of the alphabet. The emphasis of this program was to get the students to think with their heads, feel with their hearts, and be willing to extend their hands to others.

One of the key components of the program was to provide a framework in which to teach students how to respect others as well as themselves. Every student at Ellsworth was given the option to submit an Ellsworth Eagles Fitness Pledge at the beginning of the year. Those who signed on vowed that they would make a daily effort to be active, avoid unhealthy foods, and get a good night's sleep. To give students an opportunity to fulfill the physical activity element of this pledge, the school established an intramural running club, dubbed Ellsworth Runs!

The Ellsworth team for Student, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) applied for and was awarded a \$4,500 grant from Saucony's Run for Good™ program to start and maintain the running program for its first year (2007–08). After the initial success, the Ellsworth Home and School Board awarded the running club another \$3,000 from its "wish-list" fund to continue the Ellsworth Runs! program into its second year. Furthermore, each student participant contributed an additional \$10 per semester to help pay for T-shirts and race entry fees.

Three teachers and two parents worked together to organize the program twice during the year: a fall session, with five practices; and a spring session, with ten. At each 45-minute practice meeting, students engaged in stretches, various games and activities, and a run around

the neighborhood. On days of inclement weather, practices were moved into the gym.

Students accomplished this with one objective in mind: to train for a race that was scheduled at the end of each eight-week session. Of Ellsworth's 280 students, over 120 participated in some or all of the practices and over 60 students entered the race events.

The fall session concluded with a cross-country-style race in a local park, during which Ellsworth students raced against one another and against students from a neighboring school. At the end of the spring session, the same students were invited to run in two high-profile events: a one-mile Fun Run sponsored by Naperville Community Outreach (NCO) and the Jeanine Nicarico Run for Reading 5K. The SFCP picked up and distributed the students' race packets, so that each Ellsworth runner had his or her own race number, a chip to record time, and an official T-shirt.

The SFCP Chair stressed the importance of organization and facilitation. The SFCP (action team) organized all of the program materials and recruited parent volunteers. Coordinating sign-up information from students and parents was a challenge that required centralized organization of the program. The Chair also highlighted the importance of teacher participation in Ellsworth Runs! and credits their direct involvement in the program with its popularity among students. In addition to the involved parents—some of whom volunteered their time and others who led by example in joining their students in the Fitness Pledge—the teachers, as role models, helped keep Ellsworth's student body at the head of the pack.

Jenna Lahey
SFCP Chair
jennatlahey@aol.com

FAMILY FOOD FRIDAYS

CESAR TARRANT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAMPTON CITY, VIRGINIA

A good practice got better this year at Cesar Tarrant Elementary. The year-old Family Food Fridays program added a dimension and reached more families in need of food.

With the help of a local food bank, the school offered Food Backpacks for Kids every Friday, packing enough nutritious food for one child for the weekend. Because the school could accommodate only 50 students through this program, though many more applied, it started the second phase, a U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Distribution Site at the school. Once a month, also on Fridays, families with limited incomes could pick up food at the school.

About 60 adults and 110 children used the two federally-funded programs.

Cesar Tarrant is a Title I school with many students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. In addition, many children are from single-parent homes or are being raised by grandparents who need assistance. “I found a growing number of parents who came into the Parent Resource Center for support in the form of food,” said the parent involvement facilitator.

The school made some changes in the backpack program this year, requiring parents to pick up the food at school, rather than just sending it home with students. This encouraged the parents to build a relationship with the school and with the parent involvement facilitator, who would check with parents to see if they had other needs.

“The Food Friday program helps the community by providing food to feed families when food becomes short at the end of the month,” said a parent. “It also allows parents to communicate with other parents in the school and get to know them. Sometimes I meet neighbors that I didn’t know before.”

The food distribution program is a community effort. The food bank approached the school about undertaking the weekly backpack program,

and later about becoming a food distribution site. A faith-based school partner shared the work of the distribution program, with a Sunday school class picking up and packing the food.

Families who used the program often volunteered to distribute the non-perishable food items from noon to 5 p.m. on the third Friday of the month. Neighborhood leaders publicized the food programs, as well as rideshare opportunities for those who did not have their own transportation.

“Giving food to families provided a sense of belonging and trust in the school environment as well as helping students academically because we were meeting a physical need,” said the parent liaison. The practice also encouraged proper nutrition, consistent eating habits, and family meal times. Food Fridays had an important impact every day of the week.

Kristy McGlaughlin
Parent Involvement Facilitator
kmcglaughlin@sbo.hampton.k12.va.us

OPEN GYM

OCONTO FALLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OCONTO FALLS, WISCONSIN

It's tough for a kid to stay active during the bitterly cold winter months in Wisconsin. Then again, there are many children for whom indoor activities are more appealing, even in warmer weather.

At Oconto Falls Elementary, the administration, in tandem with the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), demonstrated its belief in the importance of students' physical well-being by instituting the Open Gym program. Twice a month, in 75-minute sessions, the school's gym was opened for a series of age-appropriate after-school activities and games.

The school principal, reported the ATP, proved to be instrumental in the program's success. After scheduling all the Open Gym afternoons for the school year, he recruited volunteers from the school's parents and staff to help with activities. He also personally supervised many of the sessions. Students were willing to help clean up after Open Gym closed for the day.

Initially, the ATP planned to include all students from grades K–5 in the same Open Gym. The principal booked the events from 3:15 to 4:30 p.m., and sent home permission slips for each of the sessions. After school, any student with a signed permission slip went to the gym, where they had time to eat a snack brought from home. In the meantime, volunteers set up the necessary equipment for that day's activity.

Before sending the students to play, organizers took roll call by grade. The principal or another adult volunteer explained the rules for that day's games—usually three or four per session. Depending on the turnout, students sometimes split up into two groups playing two games. Eventually, the overwhelming response required the ATP to split Open Gym into two distinct sessions.

At 4:30, students returned equipment to its proper places. Because parents were required to enter the gym to pick up their children, they

were able to witness their children's activity while getting a chance to network with the school staff and other parents.

In addition to promoting a healthy daily routine for students, and encouraging a number of parents and teachers to volunteer their time toward realizing this goal, the benefits of Open Gym manifested themselves in another tangible way. The ATP successfully acquired a \$5,000 grant from a large national company for a climbing wall, to be installed over the summer. That will encourage students to reach new heights in next year's Open Gym program.

Type 3

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Louise Powers
Reading Specialist, Title I Coordinator
loupower@ocontofalls.k12.wi.us

SCHOOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM

NORTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

LAYTON, UTAH

Better Safe Than Sorry is the motto at Northridge High School. At the suggestion of a parent two years ago, the school embarked on an extensive project of emergency preparedness that included establishing a School Emergency Response Team.

With trained personnel, established procedures, emergency equipment and supplies, and practice drills, the 1,850-student high school is prepared for fire, earthquake, situations that require lock down, and other disasters.

Building a security system for the school required hard work and coordination over two school years. The school administration decided that safety and preparedness for emergencies is a valuable part of learning. Vibrant Career and Technical Education curricula became home to the safety program in the classroom.

The medical services class, using the American Red Cross Emergency Response curriculum, updated the existing safety procedures in the school. These students also researched existing emergency plans and helped create a school-wide preparedness plan and after-school program in safety training. The health science teacher agreed to teach a class that would provide emergency response certification for students and CPR certification and first aid training for faculty members.

A committee of parents, teachers, students, and a school administrator identified funding sources and collected information. The parent who suggested the undertaking contacted the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program, and learned about Teen CERT training and how it could be modified for Northridge. The local chapter of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) took part and the resident police officer lent his support.

The health science teacher and her students presented scenarios at a regular faculty meeting to emphasize the need for the project. Working

with the assistant principal, the students created a policy and procedures flip chart for each staff member. They also prepared a concise booklet, *What to do in Case of a Medical Emergency*.

During advisory periods, students learned about proper procedures for emergencies, and had a chance to practice them during required fire drills. Areas of concern identified during the drills will be addressed next school year.

Other facets of the program include:

- » *A partnership with the Start-A-Heart Foundation to acquire a defibrillator for the school and to train faculty and staff in its use.*
- » *Emergency supplies and survival items for each of the 140 classrooms. Each bucket contains items that would sustain a class of 30 students for eight hours.*

Financing the \$1,400 project was a challenge, but students and other committee members secured grants and also received donations of survival supplies from local merchants and organizations.

“This is a good thing for our school,” said one student. “We have basic supplies in every room. I was trained in emergency response and Teen CERT. I feel more confident and less afraid. If a bad situation happens, I will know what to do.”

Kristen Davidson
Career and Technical Education Coordinator
kdavidson@dsdmail.net

UN NIÑO, UNA COMUNIDAD

HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

Following a recent increase in gang-related activity in the Kennewick community, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Kennewick Middle School, took the initiative to better inform parents about gang culture. The circumstances presented unique cultural and societal challenges for those who planned and carried out the Un Niño, Una Comunidad (One Child, One Community) presentation on gang awareness. Even in the planning process itself, this practice lived up to its name, bringing together Kennewick families, schools, police, and clergy.

Earlier this year, the Kennewick Police Department's lead gang detective had expressed the need to reach out to the city's Latino families, as a majority of the children attracted to the gang lifestyle in the area were Latino. In response, another city employee suggested teaming up with St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

When this same detective was approached by Highlands' vice principal about holding a presentation on preventing gang affiliation and behavior for the school's families, he passed the idea along. The vice principal quickly recognized the advantages of holding the event at a local church. "Many of our Latino families," she reports, "put a lot of faith in the Church and respect its guidance." School and police organizers saw this as an opportunity to alleviate cultural practices and legal concerns that make some Latino parents reluctant to get involved.

St. Joseph's agreed to assist, offering use of its multipurpose room and A/V equipment, as well as promoting the event to its congregation. To further create a welcoming environment, the ATP decided to hold the presentation in Spanish and to provide free childcare and refreshments.

The ATP also did much of the publicity, sending invitations to Spanish-speaking families in all four of the district's ATP schools, posting fliers, and placing a Public Service Announcement

with local Spanish radio stations and newspapers.

The Kennewick detective who gave the presentation was also able to relate to the families culturally. Dressed in plainclothes, the detective gave a dynamic talk about gang culture and gang signs, how to prevent youth involvement in gangs, and how to help children who may already be caught up in gang life. The presentation combined the police department's knowledge about local gangs with information from the Department of Justice's Parent Guide for Gangs.

As a result of the community's combined efforts, the 200 attendees actively participated with many questions for the school staff, police, and priest.

Due to the extensive sharing of community resources, expenses for the event were minimal, limited to the cost of the refreshments. In addition to planning repeat presentations at other area churches, the ATP at Highlands Middle School is looking into holding a version of Un Niño, Una Comunidad for its English-speaking parents.

Alyssa St. Hilaire
Vice Principal
Alyssa.sthilaire@ksd.org

CELEBRATION OF NATIONS

**SAEGER MIDDLE SCHOOL
ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI**

Type 4

All the pomp of a parade and the organization of an international expo go into the preparations for Saeger Middle School's annual Celebration of Nations, an event during which students, teachers, parents, and the community come together to celebrate the variety of backgrounds represented by Saeger's 6th, 7th, and 8th graders and their families. Celebration showcases the hard work and learning of all the children enrolled at Saeger Middle, while promoting the school's multicultural efforts—raising awareness, appreciation, and respect for a poly-ethnic worldview.

At Saeger, students engage with other cultures via a number of academic offerings. The school curriculum includes options for French, Spanish, and World Language courses. Additionally, Saeger hosts an English as a Second Language (ESL) program for middle school students. Non-ESL students are actively involved in cross-curricular activities that enhance their own learning and that assist the progress of the ESL students.

As involvement between these two student groups developed, they expressed a desire to expand the fruits of these interactions to a wider audience, hoping to involve the entire Saeger community. In conjunction with the school Culture Club, a team formed to make this celebration of nationalities into the Celebration of Nations.

Since then, the Celebration of Nations event has been held every year, alternating between fall and spring. This year, the night kicked off when a column of ESL students paraded into the gym, each bearing the flag of a different nation represented at Saeger. Each greeted the audience, one by one, in his or her native language. After the students marched out of the gym, attendees were treated to performances by members of the local community college, the wider community, and Saeger's own students and parents.

Irish clog dancers skipped across the parquet

of the gym floor; an African storyteller—with the help of his drums—wrapped the audience up in a tale; a troupe of Hawaiian belly dancers captured everyone's attention; various students sang in various languages. "They all amaze," wrote a participant at the event.

Following the multicultural variety show, attendees explored other areas of the school where students, parents, and teachers had prepared cultural exhibitions. The French teacher and students prepared crêpes in one area. Mexican cuisine donated by local restaurants was served in another. Homemade wonders including baklava and Indian rice—prepared by parent volunteers—were available in a third.

Student-designed posters and displays about countries from which they descended or studied in school were on show in the halls. Other display tables in the cafeteria featured coins, clothing, photos, dress, souvenirs and other cultural objects donated by students, families, teachers, and community members. Students proudly demonstrated for others how to play traditional games or fashion various crafts, ranging from Los Ojos de Dios (God's Eyes) to origami cranes. Others demonstrated a Tae Kwon Do routine, prompting at least one student to express, "Wow! I want to be a black belt!"

A \$3.00 entry fee helped support the continued practice. This funding was supplemented by donations from the community and the school PTSO. The team modifies the event from year to year based on comments from a debriefing session, ensuring that every culture—and every school partner—at Saeger continues to have a voice in the Celebration.

Brian Schick
Principal

brian.schick@fhsdschools.org

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

CINCO DE MAYO FIESTA

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

Previously uninvolved parents at Park Middle School showed just how enthusiastic they could be about partnering with the school, given the right opportunity. That opportunity came when the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) invited its Spanish-speaking parents to help plan a celebration for Cinco de Mayo.

Assessment data highlighted a significant achievement gap at Park: too few students in the English Language Learners (ELL) program passed the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Furthermore, while Latino students made up more than half the enrollment, Latino parents rarely attended school functions. Referring to research showing that Latino parents cite "family" as a top priority, school improvement team members decided to make an increase in parental involvement one of its goals.

The Cinco de Mayo celebration showed ATP members how healthy parent partnerships can flourish on their own, given a framework in which to do so. Originally, the school's Staff Unity Committee, which planned to hold a salsa-making competition among staff members for Cinco de Mayo, decided to extend the invitation to the school's Spanish-speaking parents. At the initial planning sessions, the parents came up with the idea of expanding the contest to a full-blown fiesta, a decision the ATP embraced.

From there, the parents took control of planning the celebration. Administrators and parent involvement co-chairs and coordinators facilitated the weekly meetings, conducted primarily in Spanish with teachers on hand as interpreters for those who spoke only English. Bilingual parents and teachers directly contacted other Spanish-speaking parents to encourage them to attend subsequent meetings. Word-of-mouth proved to be another important factor in involving the Latino community.

As meeting attendance increased, parents

brainstormed ideas for activities, food, entertainment, decorations, and prizes. Plans grew more splendid, incorporating a royal court and battle re-enactment. Students contributed their ideas as well. Parents split into teams to coordinate individual activities. The co-chairs reported that some parents even came in during the school day to work on the hand-made decorations.

Money and materials came from several sources. These included the school's budget for parent involvement, donations from community and business partners, ATP members, and school staff. One business donated a mini-laptop, which was used as the grand prize in a raffle, with the winner drawn randomly from the drop box of completed evaluation sheets, available in both Spanish and English.

The ATP attributes the success of the event to the parents' overwhelming initiative and involvement. When it was clear that the ATP had only a support role and that parents were responsible for the planning, "the event began to take on a life of its own."

Vikki Dolman
Literacy Coach / NNPS Co-Chair
vikki.dolman@ksd.org

Dave Elkins
Math Coach / NNPS Co-Chair
dave.elkins@ksd.org

CONNECTING FAMILIES TO COMMUNITIES

BOLLMAN BRIDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JESSUP, MARYLAND

Staff, students and families at Bollman Bridge Elementary School learned firsthand the meaning of “It Takes a Village to Raise a Child.” In their case, however, it took a community and many of its resources to help 25 families from Burma relocate and acclimate to their new homes in Maryland.

The English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at the school (in which about 30 Burmese students enrolled last fall) spearheaded the effort to meet these families’ needs – from winter clothes to jobs to getting comfortable with the American educational system. Countless people volunteered their time and talents, and donated material goods, taught English classes, worked as interpreters, and stepped in wherever needed to help the families.

The concentration of resources came together in the six-week program, Connecting Families to Communities, designed to acquaint the families with their new surroundings. Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement provided the structure to introduce parents to school customs, safety regulations, report cards, and parent-teacher conferences, among other facets of daily life.

The ESOL team, the speech language pathologist and the reading specialist decided to include a literacy night that supported the research showing that children literate in their native language will transfer that knowledge to English. They planned activities that promoted oral language development, reading readiness, and storytelling.

The staff used a big book version of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle to illustrate how parents might use the drawings to talk with their children about the book in their native language. Teachers role played with the children and encouraged parents to speak about experiences that would add to the children’s background knowledge and make predictions about the theme of the book. Interpreters volunteered their services at each workshop.

There was an evaluation after each session, and adults were given surveys before and after the session, asking if they knew how to conduct specific communications, such as calling the school to leave a message and knowing the names of their children’s teachers. “The surveys indicated mastery of the program’s objectives,” said one organizer. “In addition, the students’ reading and math scores increased.”

Among the other outreach activities:

- » *The school offered English classes in partnership with Howard Community College, with instructors meeting adults at the elementary school twice a week for 16 weeks.*
- » *Grace Church held a clothing drive and volunteers assisted families in finding new wardrobes, especially winter clothing.*
- » *The Parent Teacher Association provided new blankets for the families.*
- » *The Foreign-born Internationals Referral Network, Laurel Multi-Service Center, and the International Rescue Committee assisted families with employment and housing.*

With role models all around them, the Burmese families were encouraged to participate in another American custom—volunteering at their school. Children and adults who did so seemed to feel more comfortable in this new environment.

*Kerry Foy
Parent Liaison
Kerry_Foy@hcpss.org*

*Laurel Conran
ESOL Team Leader
Laurel_Conran@hcpss.org*

GET TO KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR NIGHT

HOWE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN

With most of its students living within a two-mile radius of the school, Howe Elementary is truly a neighborhood school. What its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) discovered, however, was that student connections to, and within, the neighborhood were almost non-existent. Many people did not know their neighbors and many families were unaware that their neighbors had children at the same school.

The team realized a valuable resource was not being tapped. It also realized it would be wise to “start small” to get people acquainted. Get To Know Your Neighbor Night was designed to highlight and celebrate the neighborhood’s diversity and bring people together for dinner and activities.

Despite biting cold, about 50 parents and 100 students turned out for the event. The team literally mapped the way for families to meet one another. The city planning department supplied a large map of the area within the school boundaries. When families arrived, one parent volunteer located their addresses on the map and assigned them to tables with those who lived near them. Staff members circulated during dinner and helped spark conversation, if necessary.

After dinner, representatives from some of the different ethnic groups in the neighborhood presented activities. The Latino Club from a nearby high school made piñatas and played games with the families. A Hmong dance troop demonstrated native dances, and members of the American Indian community showed families how to make corn husk dolls. The evening closed with cake and conversation in the cafeteria.

“Conversations extended into the parking lot and it is our hope that new friendships were made,” said an ATP member. Another hope is “that this helps cut down truancy rates at school as people will be able to use their neighbors as resources for child care and carpooling to and

from school.”

The large map remains prominently posted at the school with Xs marking the homes of families that attended the get-acquainted event. It will be used at other events so Howe can continue to build relationships among its families and create a safer neighborhood. Teachers are also using the map to teach students map reading skills and geography, and acquaint them with neighborhood highlights.

The event cost about \$400, though dinner was donated by a local organization and the activities were subsidized by the presenting organizations. The Howe Neighborhood Family Resource Center contributed the remaining funds.

The ATP is happy with the outcomes, and hopes to schedule getting-to-know-you nights at the beginning and middle of next school year. “Our goal is that every family knows at least one neighbor they can go to for help if needed. We aren’t there yet,” said a team member.

Kelly Karls
AmeriCorps VISTA Program Coordinator
kkarls@greenbay.k12.wi.us

GLOBAL MEDIA LITERACY PROJECT

ROBERTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WAYNE, PENNSYLVANIA

Type 6

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

Roberts Elementary has the good fortune of being close to the city of Philadelphia, a city with a wealth of colleges and universities. It is a testament to the hard work of the Roberts Partnership Team that the school has well-established relationships with many of these institutions, including Cabrini College, Eastern University, Villanova University, West Chester University, Drexel University, and the University of Pittsburgh.

The school-university partnerships have borne strong collaborative activities for students at Roberts, who benefit both academically and socially from the opportunity to interact one-on-one with undergraduate- and graduate-level interns, student teachers, and student observers in the school environment. College students have made an impact in nearly every department at Roberts, including regular and special education, art, library, physical education, reading remediation, and speech therapy services.

One university relationship in particular illustrates just how unique an opportunity this sort of partnership can provide. Students in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades at Roberts were part of a year-long, three-school partnership practice in concert with Temple University and the University of Kuwait. Working directly with a team of students from Temple's Media Literacy Lab, students learned about cultural stereotyping, did research about countries in the Middle East, and surveyed their family members about cultural stereotypes in both the Middle East and the United States.

Temple University contacted members of the school's Partnership Team about the Global Media Literacy Project after reading about a previous tech-centric practice, ROB TV, in *Promising Partnership Practices 2007*. Inspired by *Three Cups of Tea*, a book by Greg Mortenson, the team planned a project that would deepen students' understanding of other cultures and dispel

preconceptions about the Middle East, in particular, by creating a direct, interpersonal connection with real people who live there.

With the assistance of the media literacy team at Temple, the kids at Roberts corresponded with Kuwaiti college students—their Pen Pals—via Wikispaces. Students shared digital videos about their daily lives, both at home and in the classroom. Teachers were invited to prepare their own activities for each classroom's wiki page, encouraging students to work together to develop content for their site. The third graders, for example, did a research project about their rights and responsibilities to promote peace at home and at school, both as citizens of the U.S. and of the world.

"We believe that students become better writers by having the opportunity to write for authentic purposes," reports the principal.

These authentic purposes have been high-profile from the beginning, and continue to receive a staggering amount of attention at the local, national, and international level.

The Media Literacy Lab at Temple funded the entire practice through a grant from the United Nations. Students presented their completed projects at a public School Board meeting which was televised on the Viking Channel, the district's local TV access outlet. They were also invited to participate in a Pennsylvania Technology Showcase in Harrisburg this May. From there, the project will be presented to an international conference in Istanbul, to the Pennsylvania School Board Association, and the International Association of English Teachers. Anyone interested in seeing the students' work can find it online at <http://globalmediaproject.wikispaces.org/>.

Sharon Kuznick
Principal
skuznick@umasd.org

HARAMBEE

ROOSEVELT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

For the last two years at Roosevelt Elementary, the Partnership Action Team has fostered the growth of a collaborative council for African American families. At each meeting, staff members partner with families to encourage them to use their strengths to resolve issues relevant to the well-being of their children.

Dubbed Harambee Family Nights—from a Swahili word that translates to “all pull together”—this series serves the overall goal of engaging, connecting, and supporting families in promoting the health, safety, and success of their children. The group works to create a more culturally responsive environment within the school community for African American families and thereby support higher student achievement. It also provides a structure in which the school can share information with parents about the Responsive Classroom model, provide guidance for improving their children’s vocabulary and numeration skills, and discuss discipline.

Self-guidance is an important tenet of the Harambee group. Organizers work to support all participants in defining their own outcomes and indicators of success. Parents determine the main topic for each Harambee through group consensus and are invited to assist with the planning. They are also encouraged to partake in other activities to bridge existing cultural gaps at the school.

Before Harambee, African American parent participation was low compared to other cultural groups at Roosevelt. The Harambee Family Nights aimed to support parents, not only to increase their participation, but also to encourage a stronger parent voice overall. Inspired by a previous collaboration with Family & Children’s Service in 2007–08, when school officials used the Family Project Model to design a framework for involving Latino parents, organizers put together the Harambee program in hopes of increasing the involvement of African American parents.

A Roosevelt parent and staff member attended The Family Project training and decided that the model’s guiding principles fit with the school’s own improvement goals. Next, these two collaborated with members of the school’s Partnership Action Team to brainstorm ideas for what the new group would look like and how it would function. The planners made sure to share the ideas that went into creating Harambee with the parents who attended the group’s first meeting.

To enable more families to attend, the Parent Coordinator handled the ordering and pick-up of nutritional meals served at the event, coordinated taxi service for families without transportation, and selected staff to provide childcare on-site. Teachers were present at Harambee nights and they interacted informally with families over dinner after the discussions. Furthermore, the principal’s personal participation and openness in sharing his own cultural experiences, were cited as sources of Harambee’s success.

Roosevelt’s Parent Educator highlights the importance of involving target families from the very beginning of the planning process. “Once parents got to know each other and school staff, and observed that the Harambee Family Nights were really about listening and responding to them, they started to open up.”

Between the 2007–08 and 2008–09 school years, African American parents’ attendance at their children’s fall and spring conferences increased by 25% for each event. By utilizing a model that intentionally builds strong networks and partnerships based on mutual respect and understanding, the team hopes to continue to strengthen this important connection between the home and the school.

Christine Cardinal
Parent Educator
christine.cardinal@spps.org

HMONG NEW YEAR AND HMONG STUDIES SHOWCASE

PHALEN LAKE HMONG STUDIES MAGNET SCHOOL ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Type 2

For the 2008–09 school year, the Saint Paul School District designated Phalen Lake as the district’s first-ever Hmong Studies Magnet school. The choice was predicated on Phalen Lake’s existing Core Knowledge, Spanish Culture, and Hmong Culture classes, as well as the school’s wealth of programs serving families that were new to the United States. The transition made it all the more necessary for Phalen Lake to effectively communicate its efforts to maintain and celebrate the diversity of its student population, and to demonstrate the quality of the school’s redesigned curriculum to parents.

For the past several years, Phalen Lake has hosted a Hmong New Year celebration, featuring food and performances from students in its Hmong Culture classes. Another established practice, the Core Knowledge Showcase events, gave students an opportunity to show family members what they had been learning. The Family Involvement Committee at Phalen Lake integrated these two existing practices—and expanded them—when it introduced the first Hmong New Year and Hmong Studies Showcase.

The Showcase gave all of the school’s teachers the charge to get students to collaborate with one another on performance pieces related to Hmong Migration, which was the school-wide curriculum theme for the fall. Teachers assisted students in the production of skits, dances, poems, songs, and musical performances that highlighted their Hmong Studies knowledge. Each grade level contributed the following to the Showcase:

- » *K: a song about the Hmong in China;*
- » *1st: a song about the Hmong in Laos;*
- » *2nd: a dance about life in Laos;*
- » *3rd: a poem about the Vietnam War;*
- » *4th: a skit entitled “Escaping Laos”;*
- » *5th: a skit entitled “Refugee Camp”;*
- » *6th: dances and a poem about Hmong life in the U.S.*

The Family Involvement Committee also invited a number of cultural experts from the local Hmong community to share their musical talents. The Showcase, lasting just under an hour, was capped with a Hmong New Year song, which was sung by all the student performers. Anticipating a large turnout and hoping to accommodate parents’ various work schedules, the organizers held the Hmong Studies Showcase portion twice: once during the school day and once at a more comprehensive evening event.

At the evening celebration, parents were greeted by the principal in Hmong and English and treated to a brief slideshow before the Showcase began. After the student performances, families were invited to eat dinner served by the school staff. They participated in traditional Hmong games and activities in the gym. Families also were given the opportunity to have their photo taken before a Hmong backdrop (created by parent volunteers) with traditional Hmong props and clothing.

The school’s family involvement liaison advised other Action Teams for Partnerships to “be mindful of the value of being inclusive in any kind of cultural event at your school. Although the focus may be on one particular group of students, there are many meaningful ways to engage and educate school families of other cultures.”

This spirit of inclusivity paid off. Over 700 attended the Hmong New Year and Hmong Studies Showcase—more than double the number of people at the previous year’s event. Phalen Lake parents, both Hmong and non-, were able to witness firsthand how cultures are respectfully celebrated at the school, as well as how a cross-cultural education enriches every student.

Mary Sellers
Home School Liaison / Family Involvement
mary.sellers@spps.org

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

MULTICULTURAL MATH-LITERACY NIGHT

SHELTON PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

China was the setting for this year's Multicultural Math-Literacy Night at Shelton Park Elementary. Students and their families enjoyed the sights, sounds, and tastes of the far-away land as they worked to build the students' mathematics and literacy skills.

The focal point of the event was an engaging tale, *Grandfather Tang's Story*, around which the school's mathematics and literacy coaches built the event to show families and community members different learning strategies using literature and practical math activities. This second annual cross-cultural evening helped Shelton Park to meet a lofty goal: "By June of each academic year, 100 percent of students will increase their skills in reading, writing, and math equivalent to at least one year's academic growth."

This goal is made more challenging because the school serves a large military population, meaning that there is high student mobility. Teachers and administrators are regularly familiarizing new students and their families with the curriculum and school goals.

The multicultural night began with a general introduction to China and its history and a tasting of egg rolls, rice, and fortune cookies. Adults and children then went to assigned classrooms where the literacy activity began with a reading of *Grandfather Tang's Story* and an activity using question cubes that promoted discussion of the story. Participants were also able to take a "brain break," a fun activity used to give students a few minutes away from the hard work of learning.

Using a tangram, a Chinese puzzle consisting of seven flat shapes, families worked to recreate characters from the story as part of the mathematics activity. The families of children in kindergarten through second grade identified and compared shapes; the group with older children discussed angles, fractions and congruency.

"I had fun learning with the kids," said one of the parents who attended. "Can't wait until next

year," added another.

The school staff and administrators saw many benefits to the event, too. Parents had an opportunity to learn more about classroom practices and new learning strategies, and also were able to share questions and concerns. Teachers and administrators welcomed another positive way to open communication with families. The children seemed to enjoy showing parents and guardians what they had learned.

The year before, the action team struggled with parents who signed up for multicultural night, but did not attend. To avoid that this year, the team gave a copy of the *Grandfather Tang* book to those families that pre-registered and attended. The action team is planning to do two similar activities next year—one in fall and another in spring—as Shelton Park continues to creatively work toward academic achievement for all of its students.

Judith Middleton
Kindergarten Teacher
jtmiddle@vbschools.com

VIEWING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF BECKY-DAVID

**BECKY-DAVID ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI**

Type 2

Passports in hand, students and families got a local dose of international travel at the Becky-David Elementary first-ever Cultural Awareness Family Night, which centered on the theme Viewing the World through the Eyes of Becky-David. As they passed from station to station—representing the different cultural backgrounds that can be found among Becky-David families—they received stamps indicating a new understanding of the ethnic tapestry making up the student body.

More than 20 languages and dialects are spoken in the homes of Becky-David students. The event was an inviting way to make all families feel more inclined to become involved with the school, with a better understanding of what they can offer. In addition to facilitating increased dialogue, the Parent Involvement Team also envisioned the event as an opportunity for families to interact.

Parents and community members were invited to participate in displays based on their own heritage or cultural identity, demonstrating ethnic stories, crafts, dances, music, art, costumes, cuisine, customs and traditions. Those interested in participating indicated which culture they wished to represent and what they would bring. The Parent Involvement Team then organized this information in a computer database.

Before the event, students worked on the signs and flags identifying the stations. Each station also had a world map showing the location of the country or culture represented. Also, a computer or TV screen at each display played a slideshow, arranged by library staff, of images of each culture's people and landscapes.

Teachers had the opportunity to integrate classroom activities into the event. One first-grade class, for example, provided a Living Museum of Famous Black Americans. Students in the Gifted Education program created informational posters for the hallways.

Families were asked to contribute in many ways. Students took home an informational flyer—in multiple languages—that asked parents, grandparents, and other caregivers to participate, and provided a registration slip for those interested in doing so. In conjunction with family night, organizers sent home a second flyer that advertised the *Becky-David Cultural Cookbook*, asking families to contribute recipes.

The first 100 students to fill their passports at the event received an Attendance Bag containing the cookbook of Becky-David family recipes, as well as pencils, bookmarks, and other small items representing various cultures. At next year's event, the team plans to require students to answer questions on their passports—with information from the booths.

With so many families pitching in resources, the cost to the school was only \$500, paid with Parent Involvement Team funds allocated by the district.

"This had to be one of my most favorite events that I have attended at the school," said one parent. "The display booths were 'hands on' for the children to see, touch, and taste [so that] they really got a feel of another culture."

Maria Digrispino
Assistant Principal
maria.digrispino@fhdschools.org

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PROGRAM

MACDONOUGH SCHOOL MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

Turning tears into smiles was the goal of the Kindergarten Transition Program at Macdonough School. By all accounts, the extensive series of events preparing youngsters for kindergarten was a rousing success.

Not only were there a lot of smiles—from parents and children—on the first day of school, but also there were better-prepared students, families comfortable with their new school, and teachers who had a smoother start to the year.

“Being able to bring my daughter to school so many times to meet new friends and new teachers has made the transition go so smoothly,” said an obviously pleased parent.

The Kindergarten Transition Program at Macdonough is a series of events that began in spring and continued until the first day of school in September. The events included:

- » *Parent/Caregiver Tour: Small group tours of the school with stops for conversation at the library, cafeteria, and other key areas.*
- » *Kindergarten Arts and Crafts: The first of several activity visits, when the children meet the arts teacher, hear a story, and do a project.*
- » *Kindergarten Music and Movement: Another activity visit when the children meet the music teacher, enjoy some music and a snack.*
- » *Kindergarten Read-Aloud: Children visit the library, meet the staff, and receive a book to take home.*
- » *Raising Readers Program: A six-week summer program to help families promote literacy at home and ensure that literature is part of their child’s experience.*
- » *Back to School Bash: Kindergarten students receive their school T-shirts at the annual get-together just before school starts.*

The program doesn’t end there. Just before school opens, parents and caregivers are invited to individual parent-teacher conferences to address questions and concerns about school and to review routines.

On the first day of school, parents drop off their youngsters in classrooms and then enjoy a breakfast in the school cafeteria. After that, parents, students, and staff attend the First Day assembly in the school gymnasium, where the newest members of the school community are officially welcomed.

It’s no wonder one youngster was quick to say, “This is MY school,” after such a whirlwind of get-acquainted activities.

Family and youngsters can attend all or some of the activities, though the staff observed that the families that participate in most or all of the events seemed to handle the first day easily. Some of the later activities were better attended because word of mouth promoted the program. About 80 parents and 40 children participated.

The program cost approximately \$10 per child, with local businesses donating money and materials and the school’s parent-teacher organization making a major contribution.

“The practice is here to stay,” Macdonough’s principal declared. Perhaps a Smiley Face will become its mascot.

Brian Schick
Principal
brian.schick@fhsdschools.org

LITTLE COYOTE KINDERBAGS

WILKINSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WILLISTON, NORTH DAKOTA

With the help of the Williston Public Schools, Wilkinson Elementary welcomed its kindergarten students in a special way that helped parents, too, feel more comfortable when their youngsters went off to school.

Each child received a nylon backpack filled with storybooks, a get-ready-for-kindergarten CD, word games, and other summer activities for parents and children. The little coyote on the bag inspired the project's name: Little Coyote Kinderbags.

Each family attending the Spring Kindergarten Open House received a coyote bag. Families who did not attend could pick up a bag at the school, and those who registered their children after the open house received the bag then. More than 180 students received bags.

Many community organizations and the North Dakota Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) put together information on community resources for parents that was also tucked into the bags. Instructions explained how to do the activities and how to use all of the materials in the kinder bags.

This acquainted parents with the kindergarten curriculum and ideas for spending quality time with their youngsters in activities that would prepare them for school. The bags and activities actually answered a need that parents had expressed. They wanted to know: What could they do at home during the summer before kindergarten to foster their children's success?

The bag also contained a stamped, addressed postcard for parents to send back with their reactions and opinions. About half of the parents did so, and "those responses were overwhelmingly positive," said school officials.

"Thank you. My child loved all of the activities," remarked one parent.

Wilkinson's principal was enthusiastic, as well: "It was so enjoyable to see the delight on

the children's faces when they received the bags." Teachers reported that many of the youngsters carried the bags as backpacks throughout the school year.

The bags cost about \$10 per student, with the ND PIRC using its Title I parent involvement funds to finance the project. The school district paid for the staff time to put the bags together and distribute them.

The school intends to continue the practice, updating and enhancing the activities and parent information each year.

Type 4

TRANSITIONS

Pamela Lambert
Title I Programs Coordinator
Pam.Lambert@sendit.nodak.edu

SATURDAY SCHOOL

FRANCIS HOWELL EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

When you are only 3, 4, or 5 years old, going to school on Saturday can be fun. After all, that's what big kids do the rest of the week.

Saturday School, a project of the Early Childhood Family Resource Center and the Parents as Teachers organization, is a transition program for youngsters who will be going to school soon themselves. Held at all 10 elementary schools in St. Charles during January and February, the program drew more than 730 families who accompanied nearly 800 youngsters to Saturday School.

Saturday School lasts two hours and includes a bus ride, separate sessions for children and parents and, of course, a snack. The youngsters go to their kindergarten classrooms to do activities with a parent educator. The parents, meanwhile, meet a kindergarten teacher, learn about school routines and expectations, hear about school and bus safety, and pick up tips for preparing their children for kindergarten. The school principal and president of the Parent Teacher Organizations at the various schools also talk with parents.

Families report that their children are more comfortable when it comes time to go to school because they have already been there and had a good time. Children can attend Saturday School more than one year.

The adults are more comfortable, too: "I now have a good understanding of how my child's day will be structured in kindergarten," commented a parent.

"It was my fifth year in a row and I would not miss it," said another parent. "Saturday School is a great program."

The early childhood center prepares the lesson plans and supplies for children's activities, including a book and literacy activity, math manipulatives, writing materials, puzzles and play dough. The Parents as Teachers members organize the dates and times for the sessions.

The success of the program, however, depends on even wider community support—kindergarten teachers and elementary school administrators participate, middle and high school students volunteer, bus service employees work, and community organizations pick up some of the expenses.

Saturday School is indeed a large undertaking, but one that pays off in getting youngsters ready for school and eager to learn.

Janet Longenecker
Early Childhood Coordinator
janet.longenecker@fhdschools.org

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.

ADOPT-A-TEAM

FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

Team work makes Francis Howell Middle School a friendlier place, where all staff members know they are appreciated. That is the result of the Adopt-A-Team practice, which is really a team of parents adopting a team of staff members to show their appreciation with goodies and good wishes throughout the school year.

Every school employee—custodians, librarians, nurse, cafeteria workers, aides, as well as teachers and administrators—belongs to one of six teams. These staff teams were matched with six parent teams organized to recognize and thank staff members from time to time. Staff members received birthday cards, candy treats, holiday gifts, messages of congratulations, and thank you notes.

“The goodies were the appreciation and pat on the back that I needed on those rough days,” said one teacher.

“I had surprises and kindnesses coming every now and then and it meant a lot to me,” said another. “I truly appreciated the goodies and goodwill that accompanied them.”

The 77 parents who volunteered as team members bought the gifts and wrote the notes and cards themselves. Team leaders contacted their colleagues to request donations and remind team members about special occasions. The team leaders were also responsible for seeing that all staff members were included and recognized.

Adopt-A-Team was the creation, last September, of the school’s Parent Involvement Team, also known as the PIT Crew, as a way to give parents an opportunity to support the school staff and to promote the school climate goals. A crew member became the Adopt-A-Team Coordinator and recruited six volunteers as team leaders. This group then invited all parents to participate at the back-to-school open house and through ENEWS bulletins.

The PIT Crew developed the idea while trying to find ways to involve more parents in the middle

school, especially working parents who may not have the time to volunteer regularly. This activity allowed them to “plug into” the school from varied locations, without large investments of time.

To help the parent teams, the PIT Crew asked all school staff members to fill out profiles that asked about their favorites—colors, chocolate, authors, and music—their hobbies and how they would prefer to be acknowledged. Some staff members were reluctant to complete these forms—shying from the idea of recognition. But with a little encouragement from the PIT Crew, they all finally did so, and were glad they did.

The PIT Crew is already working to make next year’s Adopt-A-Team more effective, developing a master calendar of recognition opportunities and establishing better communication with the office staff so that the parent teams can acknowledge unexpected events in a timely manner. The crew also hopes to recruit more parent volunteers and offer them more opportunities for participation. No chance for team spirit to lag at Howell Middle.

Brian Schick
Principal
brian.schick@fhdschools.org

ATP COMMITTEES

BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS ACADEMY OF MILWAUKEE MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Type 5

When the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at the Business and Economics Academy of Milwaukee attracted 30 parents to its monthly meetings, the team knew it had a good thing going, and that it wanted to keep going. The team knew it needed to involve all interested parents in meaningful ways. After brainstorming ideas about how to do this, the ATP, working with the school staff and AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers decided the answer was: committees. More specifically, committees could work on topics and projects of special interest to the participating parents and the school.

The result was the formation of four committees, each focusing on a different type of family involvement and on needs of the school and its students:

- » *Fatherhood*
- » *Diversity and Special Student Needs*
- » *Tips for Learning at Home*
- » *Community Outreach.*

Each committee of parents, teachers and students elected a chairperson and developed a committee-portion of a One-Year Action Plan within the first two months. At each monthly ATP meeting, the committees had time to meet and also to report to the greater group about its activities. “Though each committee is at a different stage, all committees reviewed and updated their action plans and are making progress toward their goals,” said an AmeriCorps volunteer working at the school.

For instance, the Tips for Learning at Home Committee produced two tip sheets that it published in the parent newsletter and distributed at parent-teacher conference. The Outreach Committee planned a major cleanup of the nearby Butterfly Park for June and is applying to the city to use a plot of land for a community garden. The Fatherhood Committee is planning summer activities, such as a bike ride, for students and

their fathers or father figures. The Special Needs Committee planned several projects, including establishing a support group for parents.

A smaller, fifth committee, the Dance Team Committee, created a girls’ dance team and is working on a step team for boys. The girls’ team performed as part of the school’s Black History Month celebrations in February.

ATP parent members contributed hundreds of volunteer hours in classrooms and on field trips this year. The team also held monthly parent workshops and two well-attended family math and science nights.

“The committees help structure parent involvement so that parents are working actively on something . . . to improve student achievement, and it gets them really active and engaged in a positive way,” said the school’s social worker. The principal had high praise for the ATP. “It’s the first parent group I’ve ever worked with that has talked about academics,” he said.

The new committee structure has been so effective that the ATP plans to continue and strengthen it, giving these committees a larger role in planning school events, taking over some of the responsibilities shouldered by school staff and AmeriCorps volunteers.

Brendan Gants
AmeriCorps VISTA
b.gants@parentspluswi.org

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

CONTINUOUS GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

KENNEDY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

LISLE, ILLINOIS

With a high-functioning School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team that has been in place at Kennedy Junior High for nine years, SFCP members turned their recent focus to ensuring the team's sustainability and relevance in an evolving school environment. Hoping to establish a solid process that would determine whether the team was making continuous improvement to the school's partnership climate while serving the needs of excellent teaching and learning, the SFCP looked to strengthen its level of collaboration within the school by bringing the Building Leadership Team (BLT) to the planning table. As a result, the SFCP's processes were fundamentally changed.

Over the last two years, SFCP members regularly reviewed their work and the structure of their organization, asking themselves whether or not the activities they were implementing—and the goals they targeted with these practices—supported the School Improvement Plan (SIP). At the beginning and the end of the school year, the principal, SFCP co-chairs, and committee chairs would meet to plan for next year's activities. Through continued self-evaluation, they found that to maintain an ascending trend of improvement, they would need to engage a greater number of staff in the process.

Previously, the team developed its activities in consultation with staff members who were involved with the SFCP on a case-by-case basis, depending on the specific activity. This worked well, but the process was largely driven by parent leaders. Since parents tend to be more mobile than staff, the team was interested in strengthening the on-going involvement of teachers in order to ensure the long-term stability of the school's partnership program.

Furthermore, while evaluation showed that SFCP work was increasingly authentic to SIP targets, the team continually faced the challenge of developing building-wide support for each

activity that was designed. The team reasoned that, if they could foster the necessary support or ownership of everyone at school during the design phase, they would be able to sustain staff support over a number of years.

The principal and the SFCP agreed that the direct input of the BLT would support the team's continued improvement. The principal engaged the BLT's teachers, administrators, and non-certified building staff to develop and brainstorm topics that they felt would present family and community involvement activities that were deeply aligned with academic goals.

At this point in the process, the SFCP co-chairs were invited to participate with the BLT on cultivating authentic partnership work. The initial discussion centered on targeted communications that could impact parent involvement for learning at home.

The resulting two-year plan to involve parents and community with the school to support academic vocabulary improvement for students is mutually-owned and collaboratively led by parents and staff. By coming together, parents, teachers, and administrators ensure the stability of the SFCP framework, even as some parents leave the school each year when their students graduate.

Because of the nature of the restructuring and the long-term vision of this practice, the effect of revamping the process for creating activities that increase student achievement cannot be measured until the next school year. When it comes to determining and addressing the sustainability of the team, the SFCP co-chair advises keeping an open mind to develop trust between parents, teachers, and community members.

Lisa Kolick
Parent Co-Chair, SFCP
learn5k@comcast.net

ELEMENTARY CHRISTMAS SHOP

BELL CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

BELL CITY, LOUISIANA

As the holiday season approached, students of Bell City Elementary got a chance to get into the giving spirit—during the school day in the comfort of their own building.

Many students in rural Bell City have limited access to stores where they can buy gifts. To help these children, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), working with the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), brought the stores (or at least the merchandise) to the school for their first-ever Elementary Christmas Shop.

While Christmas music played in the background, parents, high school students, and other members of the community volunteered to help students select and purchase gifts. Others worked as cashiers, writing out receipts for every purchase. As a bonus, students were motivated to use their math skills when adding up their totals and budgeting their cash!

The art department drew signs and posters to decorate the room. Space was set aside for gift wrapping and all the wrapping materials were donated. Organizers staggered the schedule so for multiple classes: one group would enter while others were checking out or wrapping their gifts. The shop operated for three consecutive mornings in December, so that every student who wanted to participate had an opportunity to bring something home to put under the tree.

Parents received a flyer with the details of the activity, encouraging them to send their students with money for gifts on the days the shop was open. The items were all affordable, ranging in price from \$1 to \$5, and were suitable for adults and children, male and female. Items included bath soaps, toys, and tools.

In addition to volunteering at the event, parents and committee members went out every evening to buy items to stock the shop, then priced and sorted them. While organizers were initially worried about overstocking the shop, the opposite turned out to be the case. “We ran out

of inventory each evening,” said the ATP school representative. Based on this year’s experience, the ATP plans to adjust its estimates for next year.

The program earned the \$800 of PTO funds invested to buy the items. In fact, the event technically turned into a PTO fundraiser. The team suggests planning well in advance for the event, shopping early in the year, looking for sales, and storing the items until they are needed.

The students responded enthusiastically. Some visited the shop every day. Naturally, the family members, friends, and—yes—teachers who received gifts from the students were pleased with this practice as well.

Note: This process could work in diverse communities that celebrate various winter holidays, or to assist students in rural areas for Mother’s Day or Father’s Day.

Gina Murphy
ATP Representative / Elementary Counselor
gina.murphy@cpsb.org

FALL MOVIE NIGHT

PARKSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LA VALE, MARYLAND

In the age of DVD Home Delivery and On-Demand Cable Packages, watching a movie, more often than not, happens in private before a small, glowing screen. For the students and families of Parkside Elementary, however, when it comes to enjoying a little bit of cinema, there's no place like school.

So went the Parkside PTA's annual Fall Movie Night, which welcomed the season—and welcomed families to the school cafeteria to watch *The Wizard of Oz*. The PTA sponsored the event as a fundraiser for several years. When a kindergarten teacher was asked to be the new chairperson, she wanted to add some features.

In addition to raising funds for other PTA events and activities, the event also promoted family involvement. Specifically, the School Improvement Team set a goal of having at least 45 percent of all adult family members attend school activities. The new chairperson also found ways to incorporate academics, the arts, and school-wide behavioral expectations into the activity.

"Movie night," said the principal, "seemed to provide a good opportunity to revamp an existing activity to attain those goals."

Indeed, the event even stretched into classrooms. Teachers received a list of voluntary, take-home activities tied into the Oz theme. Choices included reading the original text (abridged or un-) or another L. Frank Baum book; grade-appropriate math worksheets (which, for upper-graders, were designed in the Maryland School Assessment format); science experiments or research projects based on events in the movie; social studies reports on Kansas; and activities in costume design.

One fourth-grader who read the original Oz responded enthusiastically, "If I finish two chapters tonight, I will be able to finish the book before movie night! . . . [Did] you know that Dorothy's slippers are really silver?"

She—like every other student who complet-

ed an exercise—had her name printed on a yellow brick that was displayed in the front hall. More than one-third of the student body completed such exercises. Each received a coupon for a free bag of popcorn.

One Parkside grandparent who runs a hot dog concession set up Professor Marvel's Hot Dog Stand and donated the profits to the PTA. Other parents who ran a catering business donated Toto Chow and Yellow Brick Krispie Treats to the Emerald City Confections booth.

The chairperson, dressed as Dorothy, kicked off the evening by announcing a team scarecrow-making exercise. After an hour of creative straw-stuffing, the participants set up their creations along the school's circular drive.

This practice clearly demonstrates how an established program can be retooled into a multi-purpose partnership powerhouse. Fall Movie Night helped Parkside students set off down a golden path, not to see the wizard, but toward academic and social success.

Patti Stevenson
Principal
patti.stevenson@acps.k12.md.us

FAMILY CAMPOUT

MARENGO RANCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GALT, CALIFORNIA

Type 3

Families camping out behind the school? It was an idea that school officials at Marengo Ranch Elementary had been considering for years. The time never seemed right, until last September. “With the downturn in the economy, our school wanted to focus on free or low-cost family-friendly entertainment that helped families network with others in their community,” said the principal.

The idea and the timing turned out to be a winning combination.

About 100 adults and 120 students pitched tents on a weekend night in September, gathered around campfires for songs and s’mores, watched a movie projected on a sheet, did crafts, and generally had a great time under the stars. Families could bring their own food for dinner and snacks or buy some items there. The school supplied the makings for the s’mores, as well as breakfast before everyone broke camp.

“I don’t want to go home,” said one student, attesting to the success of the campout.

The school’s Action Team is made up of three groups that work together and separately to govern the school and meet the needs of its families—the Parent Teacher Association, School Site Council, and the school administration. Members of the three groups were involved in making the campout a success.

The action team sent home a flier, requesting families to RSVP and offer items they might have, such as an extra tent or a guitar, that were needed. A few volunteers matched up the “haves” with the “needs.”

Once people began arriving, everyone was very willing to help and share equipment. The fathers seemed to have a particularly good time, feeling more comfortable at the campout than at some other school events. The community chipped in with sporting equipment and supplies. The fire and police departments checked on everyone’s safety and local elected officials supported

the effort.

In addition to providing low-cost entertainment, the campout was intended to strengthen the bonds among students, their families, and the school. That certainly seemed to be accomplished by the good time everyone reported having. Students had an opportunity to interact with staff in a relaxed atmosphere and adults renewed friendships and met families they did not know before.

“When is the next campout?” was a frequent question, both in informal evaluation polls at the campout and during a debriefing of action team members. The action team can answer that: Next year—and some new activities will be planned, so meet you at the campsite!

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Terry Metzger
Principal
tmetzger@galt.k12.ca.us

FAMILY TRIVIA NIGHT

DANIEL BOONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WENTZVILLE, MISSOURI

Grown-ups and children alike jumped out of their seats to answer trivia questions and celebrate their correct answers during the first-ever Family Trivia Night held at Daniel Boone Elementary. The participants' enthusiasm, both during and after the occasion, ensured that the trivia contest will reappear on the school's event calendar.

"We had a really good time because we won, and we were happy to be there with our families," said one student. "Everybody was cheering the entire time . . . It was fun answering questions with other families and seeing how smart everyone was."

After reviewing previous editions of *Promising Partnership Practices*, the improvement team decided that a trivia night would be a good practice to implement at Daniel Boone. The Parent Involvement Team created the event not only to celebrate and reinforce the school's curriculum, but also to bring families together. Furthermore, the event provided a novel way to support the school's attendance, behavior and climate goals by encouraging teamwork and participation.

The evening consisted of four rounds of trivia questions, which ranged in difficulty from kindergarten to fifth grade levels, and consisted of categories inspired, for example, by the science, art, music, and math curricula. Since the questions were drawn from what the students were studying in school, they held an advantage when it came time to answer them.

The activity also gave parents an opportunity to discover what their children were learning and to discuss it with them. In fact, the students themselves contributed questions to be read with those written by the teachers. Other games were played between rounds of trivia questions. Altogether, though, the experience amounted to a celebration of family involvement.

The improvement team provided popcorn and beverages. Families were invited to bring

their own snacks, which many did. Participating families were asked to register in advance, which helped organizers to seat two or three families at each table as trivia teams.

Each family at the winning table won a "game night basket," filled with entertaining activities for home. In addition, students won prizes for individual games. Some of the prizes had been donated by area businesses and other members of the community.

"The greatest thing about this event was seeing families working together with their children to answer the questions," said one administrator. "Students and parents were jumping out of their chairs with excitement as the emcees read the answers."

About 75 parents attended the event. More than 60 faculty and staff members worked as judges and greeters. They also enjoyed the opportunity to meet new families and to spend time with those they already knew. The trivia night also brought out about 25 other members of the wider Daniel Boone community.

The Francis Howell School District paid for the event with parent involvement funds, so organizers were able to hold the event free of charge for families.

"I have been at Daniel Boone for many years and this is the first time I have seen the premiere of an event go so well and have such a positive effect," said a school administrative assistant. That positive reaction—a shared one, which appeared on many evaluations—encouraged the involvement team to begin promoting next year's trivia night at the back-to-school open house.

Kirsteen James
Assistant Principal
Kirsteen.james@fhsdschools.org

GOOD NEWS POSTCARDS

ROBERT FROST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

Bills, pizza coupons, credit card offers, more bills, and . . . recognition of a job well done. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Robert Frost Elementary managed to brighten up families' mailboxes this year, and they did it with nothing more than a big stack of blue and yellow postcards and a staff of teachers with good news to share.

A core ATP goal—fostering positive student recognition—inspired the Good News Postcards this year. After the principal stressed the importance of establishing efficient and positive teacher-to-parent communication, the team's Positive Student Recognition committee decided that mailed postcards would provide a tangible affirmation of every student's good qualities.

And indeed, at year's end, every student had received at least one Good News Postcard. The ATP organized the practice to recognize the accomplishments of all students. At the outset, all teachers received a letter from the ATP detailing the practice. The letter informed them that they would receive a sheet of mailing labels for their class and, once a week, a postcard on which to write a positive comment about one of their students.

After signing and affixing the mailing label, teachers returned the postcards to the ATP for mailing. This ensured that organizers could help teachers keep track of which students had received a postcard and which ones had not.

The cards were designed with school spirit, with a bright yellow cougar paw print on a blue background, the Robert Frost mascot and colors. Next to the paw print, the text announces: "Good News!" And: "¡Buenas Noticias!" And: "

!" Corresponding to the three languages spoken by families at Robert Frost—English, Spanish, and Russian, respectively—the multilingual text sends its own message: that Robert Frost celebrates the diversity of its population.

Teachers highlighted students' academ-

ic achievements, good behavior, effort, and all-around improvements in the classroom. The ATP encouraged teachers to be short and sweet, and specific: "Susie did a great job today in helping a friend with reading," or, "Juan was a good friend today and invited someone to be part of his group."

What makes the Good News Postcards unique is that the practice was not publicized. Rather, the element of surprise made receiving the card all the more special. The ATP was delighted to learn that word of the Good News Postcards spread quickly.

ATP co-chairpersons report that the practice has received nothing but good feedback. One parent said, "My son put his postcard in a picture frame and takes it out to show it off when company comes over." By bringing to light the good qualities of their students, teachers are also encouraging students to proudly let that same light shine.

Angie Meiners
ATP Co-Chair

Laura Rudeen
ATP Co-Chair
lrudeen@psd1.org

Mary Ann Parra
ATP Positive Student Recognition Chair
mparra@psd1.org

INNOVATIVE HIGH SCHOOL ORGANIZATION DESIGN

NAPERVILLE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

The School/Family/Community Partnership (SFCP) at Naperville North High School wanted to continue the momentum it has built over the last dozen years. It also wanted to increase the number of people involved in the partnership and find a way to sustain projects from year-to-year, despite the natural turnover of parents and faculty.

All those wants led to the creation of the High School Organizational Design (HSOD), a new structure to help the partnership support its school improvement goals and sustain itself while empowering more parents, students, staff members and administrators.

“By leveraging the talents and resources of the school community and maximizing communications through linked organizations, we gain additional efficiencies and cost reductions,” said an SFCP co-chairperson.

Two administrators and two to four parents lead the SFCP. The parent leaders are linked to the Home & School association. Historically, the parent leaders and the administrators identified initiatives to support academic, non-academic and to ensure a welcoming climate for partnerships. The parent leaders assumed responsibility for the projects and enlisted other volunteers. Students were hardly ever involved.

This year, to broaden participation, the SFCP created HSOD, which uses multiple action teams and shifts the leadership and accountability of these teams from parents to faculty members. The teams are made up of faculty, parents, students and community members. Each team has a single goal for the school year. The project may span several years, but it is broken down into year-long steps.

Three action teams operated in 2008-09:

- » *Student advisory: To design an advisory program that supports four-year adult-student mentor relationships.*
- » *Student internships: To build relation-*

ships and opportunities with community businesses and professional organizations to increase student learning through real-world experiences.

- » *Facility tours: To create a welcoming climate for prospective students and their families through school tours.*

The SFCP saw an increase in the number of participants this year, as well as the number and quality of programs and the amount and quality of products developed. The Participation Satisfaction Survey also signaled success for the new organization. “I believe it gave our two students a chance to have their voices heard and to provide input in the decision-making process with adults,” said an action team leader.

“I have to say that I felt very satisfied with the results. Progress was made through distributive leadership . . . They are building very powerful systems that will last a long time,” said the principal.

As HSOD evolves, the leadership team hopes to engage more students, identify more parent leaders to work closely with faculty members and review each year’s work and continue to build upon the strong foundation.

Robyn O’Halloran
SFCP Co-Chair
ohcrew@comcast.net

LANCER LEDGER

LINCOLN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Type 2

When the strength of parent-to-school partnerships rests on effective communication, it's not always necessary to implement a brand-new strategy to improve the dialogue. The team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) at Lincoln Junior High realized that one such avenue was already in place, the school's newsletter, the *Lancer Ledger*.

The newsletter had its problems. Parents at Lincoln felt that the existing Ledger needed to improve to provide more useful information. The SFCP saw this as a great opportunity to bolster parent awareness of, and interest in, all of the goings-on at Lincoln.

The SFCP began by redesigning the newsletter to be more colorful and eye-catching, giving the publication a recognizable *Lancer* identity. Team members decided that the newsletter would take on a lighter tone, highlighting student accomplishments in both the classroom and the community. By making the articles shorter, the team made it possible to expand newsletter coverage to more academic areas, departments, and clubs.

The new *Lancer Ledger* involved more school contributors. Everyone was invited to submit photos, which were collected on a "collage" page in each issue. Furthermore, every grade level was split into three teams, with each one having its own section of coverage in the *Ledger*. Academic departments also had their own sections. Administrators and other staff wrote regular columns in their areas of expertise—including conduct, curriculum, and counseling—and made their articles both informative and fun to read. Last, every issue ended with an entertaining Final Thought.

The newsletter also provided parents with information about upcoming school events, thereby supporting other partnership practices that the school implements. An electronic edition of the *Ledger* (with photos removed for students'

safety) appeared on the school's web site. Parents were reminded to keep an eye out for the new *Ledger* with an e-mail bulletin. The hard copies were distributed to teachers' mailboxes and sent home with each student.

To ensure a consistent product, team members drafted a How To that outlined the paper's style and content guidelines. Reporters were frequently reminded, via e-mail, of pending deadlines. As submissions arrived, team members edited them and dropped them into the newsletter's template. After final approval by the principal, the document was sent to the printer. The school ran 1,100 copies of each issue at a cost of \$150, with funds for the newsletter in the Home and School Association Budget.

The re-designed and re-prioritized newsletter has received compliments at the school and district levels. More important, the SFCP co-chairs reported that parent feedback has been overwhelmingly positive—better with each issue. Other staff members are asking how they, too, can have their voices represented in the *Lancer Ledger*.

Theresa Tinker
Parent Co-Chair, SFCP
tltinker55@hotmail.com

Debbie Montrose
Parent Co-Chair, SFCP
dmontrose@wowway.com

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

MY DAY WITH “DAD!”

**JOHN B. CARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
HAMPTON, VIRGINIA**

Building on the successes of the school’s *Promising Partnership Practice* published last year, Cary Elementary invited dads, stepdads, granddads, uncles, brothers, and other male guardians and role models involved in students’ lives to its day-long, triple-header My Day with Dad! celebration. By marking the important role that these men play in children’s lives, the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) also wished to encourage them to participate in, and even help to plan, other activities in the school building.

By providing multiple opportunities during the day for fathers and father-figures to comfortably and casually interact with their children, school staff, and each other, the school proved its commitment to welcoming all families to join in the education process. Based on consultation with Cary “Dads,” the team extended the event times and decided on activities that would most interest the participants.

The day kicked off with the Doughnuts with Dad breakfast activity at 7:15 AM. For half an hour, dads were invited to join their kids in the cafeteria. The tables were packed with doughnuts, fruit, yogurt, and juice. As guests filled the room, the principal and parent involvement coordinator walked around to introduce themselves, answer questions, and converse with the visitors. The principal made a brief welcome speech that emphasized the importance of the dads’ and father figures’ involvement, and thanked them for coming. The guests were welcome to eat, talk, and laugh together with their kids and one another for as long as their schedules allowed.

The other two activities were held after school. At 3:30 PM, a new group of students and dads or father figures—including some who had also participated in Doughnuts with Dad earlier—were treated to snacks and activities during the Building Buddy portion of the day. Participants worked together using ping pong balls, marbles,

balloons, tubes, crayons, and other materials to create and test their own games. As the hour progressed, guests rotated around the room to pick out materials and to see other groups’ results. There was a friendly spirit of competition to keep things going.

Finally, My Day with Dad! was capped off with a reading-centered program at 5:30 PM. Once again, some dads and father figures who had been to the other activities returned for this one—some for the third time. After a dinner of pizza, salad, and dessert, the men and the children were separated from one another into two groups.

Each group read the same book with the guidance of the Hampton Public Library’s *Motheread/Fatheread* program. The men’s group received expert advice on how to relate books to real life experiences in the home, while the children prepared a craft related to the story. Finally, the groups reconvened to discuss the book, and the dads were able to put what they had just learned into guided practice. They discussed the story and worked with their children to create a Memory Book.

If anything captures the positive impact of each of the My Day with Dad! events, it’s the way in which the day’s last activity closed. At the end of the night, each family brought home two books—the one that they had each read individually and the one that they made from their experiences together.

Betsy Taylor
Parent Involvement Facilitator
bbtaylor@sbo.hampton.k12.va.us

PARENT CHAT AND CHEWS

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Introducing families to the school's new headmaster was the impetus for the first Chat and Chew at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. Held in September, this was a particularly important get-acquainted session as Dr. Larry Taub is the first deaf headmaster the school has had in its 150 years.

That get-together was so successful, with the headmaster talking about his vision for the school, that the staff decided to schedule two more, focusing on topics of interest to the families. The second Chat and Chew, in December, looked at the transition of high school students to post-secondary education or work.

The subject of the third event was family dynamics and the importance of communication in families with at least one deaf member. These two events featured panels of experts and at least 45 minutes for questions.

Each evening, the school's alumni organization sponsored a family dinner. After the meal, the children went to nearby classrooms for supervised activities. The parents and staff stayed behind to chat, listen, and learn. About 75 parents and caregivers attended the programs with about 35 teachers and administrators on hand.

"This was a good practice to build partnerships with families and community members," said the school's family liaison. "We used some presenters from off campus who could bring a different perspective to the program. This also provided us an opportunity to network with other professionals who work with deaf children."

The School for the Deaf serves 230 students from birth through 21 years of age.

The three events cost about \$1,000; the school drew on its own funds, and received contributions from the alumni association and the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP).

Two Chat and Chews are already scheduled for next fall, with a third one likely to be on the calendar in the spring.

The success of these programs can be attributed at least in part to the discussion topics. "Choose topics that the parents are truly interested in," one of the organizers advised, "rather than topics that you, as professionals, think parents should be interested in."

Type 2

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

*Tina Pakis
Family Liaison
tpakis@psd.org*

PARENT EDUCATION NIGHT

ROOSEVELT MIDDLE SCHOOL BLAINE, MINNESOTA

Roosevelt Middle School turned the tables just a bit with Parent Education Night. The October event brought adults to school for an evening of instruction—about their middle-schoolers and about how to be better at-home supporters.

The Roosevelt Middle School Parent Partnership Team planned the event following the success of a similar program the previous school year, and in response to parents' requests for more information on important middle-school topics. To build on the previous event, the team launched an ambitious publicity campaign, beginning with the summer parent newsletter. Following fliers and web site announcements, the principal recorded two informational calls to parents—one a week before the event and another the day of the event.

The evening began with a keynote address for all attendees on Students' Study Skills and Organization. Three break-out sessions followed this presentation. Each 30-minute session was presented three times so that all of the parents could attend all of the sessions.

The topics of the breakouts were:

- » *“Communicating with your School” by principal Greg Blodgett*
- » *“Electronic Resources” by teacher Cindy Bennington*
- » *“Understanding the Developmental Changes in Your Middle School Student” by former school counselor Rich Mack.*

Over 50 parents attended the education night and those who completed the evaluation survey rated the sessions as highly practical and useful. “As a parent new to the school, it is great to hear all the ways that the school is communicating with parents,” said one participant.” The electronic resources are excellent,” added another.

In addition to making the Roosevelt parents a little smarter, the program was intended to help

the students achieve, too. Their parents gained information about how to assist with school work. They learned about all of the available curricular resources online. Parents became important role models, as well, because the students realized their parents considered school important enough to spend time there themselves—when they did not *have* to.

Parent volunteers were key to the success of the program. They welcomed other parents, handed out materials, served refreshments, collected evaluations, and generally saw that the event ran smoothly.

Roosevelt hopes to continue these parents-at-school nights. The team plans to make future meetings a little more hands-on with Internet connections and computers available, so parents can receive first-hand experience with the school's electronic resources.

Greg Blodgett
Principal
Greg.Blodgett@anoka.k12.mn.us

PIZZA FOR PAPAS

**EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WASHINGTON**

Type 3

If anyone doubts that fathers and other male role models can be persuaded to accompany their sons and daughters to a school event with little more than some basketballs and a few stacks of hot pizza, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Emerson Elementary has a message for them: Try it.

One evening in March, for about an hour, students were encouraged to bring a significant male figure in their lives to the school gym. Having recently completed a P.E. unit on basketball, they brought their “Papas” to school to show off their newfound skills. After everyone worked up an appetite, pizzas were delivered to the school—enough for all 200 of the students and fathers that attended Emerson’s Pizzas for Papas night. The activity demonstrated how far a simple, inspired idea can go to create new family partnerships.

At the door, the principal and vice-principal were on hand to personally greet the invitees as they arrived. Students introduced their guests before continuing to the gym, where the basketballs started flying. While teachers and other volunteers were on hand to explain activities as needed, the focus was on the students. They personally demonstrated what they had learned in P.E.—and explained to the dads how the skill helped them.

After the demonstration, the children and fathers played specific games together. Teachers walked around the gym to meet the fathers of students they had in their classrooms. For many fathers and teachers, this event served as the first point of contact between the two. Event organizers credit the informal, relaxed atmosphere for the Papas’ willingness to chat and ask questions, both of the teachers and of the other parents.

“More reserved fathers were challenged to participate with their child as they observed how other fathers interacted with their own,” wrote the ATP Co-Chair.

A number of the teachers had their students create personal invitations for their fathers and father-figures to complement the flyers they brought home, making their guests feel all the more welcome in the school building.

The vice-principal took a head count and ordered the pizzas once the dads had all entered. After the food arrived, pizza and drinks were served. While everyone ate, the principal welcomed the crowd and spoke about the importance of a father’s involvement in their children’s education, as well as their importance to the school itself. The principal then mingled with the families, speaking individually with visitors and answering questions.

The ATP Co-Chair reported that the practice “was a definite hit . . . Students came to school the next day talking about how much fun they had with their dads.” Dads had the opportunity to make new friends and run into old ones. The only problem the organizers faced was a higher-than-expected turnout. They recommended and plan to implement RSVP cards for future events. They also are considering how to capture the father figures’ interest and involvement earlier in the year.

“There was an obvious feeling in the room that fathers were proud to be there,” she wrote. No doubt, after spending some quality time with their children at Pizza for Papas, they continued to be both proud and involved.

*Renea Hanshew
ATP Co-Chair
rhanshew@psd1.org*

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

SCHOOL-FRIENDLY BUSINESS PROGRAM

FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

The “community” arm of school, family, and community partnerships frequently involves collaborating with businesses and organizations that provide resources, services, and volunteers to help students achieve academic goals. The School-Friendly Business Program serves as a great example of a unique collaborative exercise that rewarded community businesses for providing good and responsive services to students and families, and for supported school goals and school schedules.

The specific goal that Francis Howell Middle School’s Parent Improvement Team, or PIT Crew, had in mind for this practice was to improve student attendance. In particular, the PIT Crew set its sights on decreasing the number of excused absences usually associated with a student’s need to meet an appointment with a professional, often a doctor, dentist, or orthodontist.

Via the school’s daily ENEWS bulletin and through the monthly *Crusader* newsletter, parents at Francis Howell were asked to identify professional offices that offered “school-friendly hours,” by staying open for business before and after school and on the weekends. If more parents knew about which offices were school-friendly, reasoned the PIT crew, then they could help the school meet an important goal: a 96% average daily attendance rate for the year.

Before identifying school-friendly businesses, the PIT Crew had already made an effort to better include local businesses in the school community. Two parent members of the team drafted letters to businesses within the school’s geographical area and included a calendar of the school’s events and half-days.

“Often families will stop for ice cream, coffee, or other special treats after school concerts, plays, or other events,” says the PIT Co-Chair. The letters were designed to open the lines of communication, and enable nearby restaurants, for example, to prepare for crowds of students

and their families.

The letters were not mailed, but were delivered personally to business managers or owners. “When our PIT Crew members delivered letters, calendars, and signs, they found the business manager or owner to be very appreciative,” writes the PIT Co-Chair. “Making that personal contact will help us build even stronger partnerships in the future.”

As another part of the project, parents nominated area offices that had accommodating non-school hours. Sixteen were officially designated “School-Friendly Businesses.” PIT Crew members personally delivered laminated signs to these offices that read, “We’re a School-Friendly Business: Francis Howell Middle School Students Come Here!” Parents were encouraged to look for the signs and to thank any business that displayed them.

The School-Friendly Businesses were also listed in the ENEWS bulletin, the *Crusader*, the school’s online MySchool newsletter, and on the PIT Crew webpage.

The cost to implement the program? All together, the PIT Crew spent \$12 on plastic suction cups.

The PIT Co-Chair stresses the importance of making it clear that it is not the school, itself, that endorses the School-Friendly Businesses. When they published the list, they made clear that it was the school’s appreciative parents who nominated the establishments. By clarifying the school’s goal for good attendance, the parents and educators hope that other businesses will revise their schedules to follow suit.

Laurie Holder
Co-Chair, Parent Involvement Team
Bholder72@aol.com

SOUPER BOWL OF CARING

SPOONER MIDDLE SCHOOL

SPOONER, WISCONSIN

Souper Bowl of Caring was a super community service project for Spooner and Washburn County, with huge contributions by the students and staff of the Spooner School District. Part of a national campaign held the week before the NFL Super Bowl, Spooner's project benefitted three area non-profits that work to alleviate hunger and poverty.

The Souper Bowl featured three events: a food drive led by the students at Spooner Middle School; a "chili feed" for the community; and a silent auction. Students and teachers from all the schools contributed time, talent, money and silent auction items. In all, the week-long event raised more than \$4,000 and netted more than 1,000 food items for the Washburn County Food Pantry.

The other two recipients of the largess were Albans Table, which provides monthly dinners at the Episcopal church, and a school garden project, that teaches children about nutrition and growing their own food. The food pantry and the church Table were particularly pleased to receive the Souper Bowl proceeds, as they had experienced an increase in people seeking their services as the recession deepened.

AmeriCorps volunteers prepared the chili for the Saturday lunch with food donated by local merchants. Teachers baked cornbread, cookies, and other dessert items to go with the chili. There was no admission fee, but attendees were asked to bring a non-perishable food item to donate.

The silent auction featured more than 50 baskets of food, gift certificates, and other merchandise, as well as some unusual items, such as ceramic bowls made by student artists and Wisconsin and United States flags. Admission to the silent auction was a non-perishable food item.

In addition to their contributions, the schools embraced the Souper Bowl as a teachable moment. Students researched hunger and poverty in their

community and around the world. The students used what they learned to raise awareness about hunger and poverty—making posters to promote the project and placemats for the chili feed.

The students also learned valuable lessons about serving their community from parents, teachers, business owners, and others who contributed to the event. "The students learned that poverty and hunger aren't just in Third World countries, but rather it could be your next door neighbor," said one organizer.

This is the second year Spooner participated in the Souper Bowl of Caring, and the school district intends to do its part to continue the participation.

Type 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Michelle Traxel
AmeriCorps VISTA
traxelm@spooner.k12.wi.us

STARTING A PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

PORTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MESA, ARIZONA

The parents at Porter Elementary School have a place of their own, now that the school has opened a Parent Resource Center. With furnishings and decorations donated by a local furniture store, the center is an inviting stop-off spot for parents and other family members looking for information, resources, or support.

The school hired a person who speaks English and Spanish to staff the Center, which is just across from the school's main office. Its location makes the center visible and accessible to parents. The growing population of Spanish-speaking families at Porter finds the Center particularly welcoming. It gives them a starting place for building relationships with their children's school and a spot to begin their volunteer efforts, while being assured that someone at school speaks their language.

"The Parent Resource Center has been one of the best additions to our school. If I ever have a problem or concern or I just want to communicate with a parent who doesn't speak English, I now have a place to go for help immediately," said an obviously satisfied parent visitor.

Porter's administrators developed the Resource Center after attending the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) 2008 Conference and by working with the Arizona Parent Involvement Resource Center (PIRC). The center cost about \$17,000 to implement, with funds provided by Title I and other grants and donations.

The School Improvement Advisor Team meets monthly to analyze what is working, and what could be improved upon at the Center and with other parent involvement projects. The team keeps sign-in logs to track parent participation, and documents all parent contacts with the school. The team also conducts a school- and district-wide survey to guide its interactions with families. The district survey showed that the school is doing a lot right—97 percent of those

answering the survey gave the school an A or a B on "positive involvement and satisfaction." This was the highest score ever for Porter.

The school saw other good results: better attendance at parent-teacher conferences and students' completing homework more frequently. "Students became more motivated and actively engaged as their parents did the same. Our school's open house showed the highest attendance in the past 10 years," said the principal.

Inclusion plays a big part in the school's parent involvement efforts and in the Resource Center with families from every ethnic group at the school represented on its parent advisory groups.

Next year Porter will try to increase the Center's positive impact by publicizing the available services more widely, finding more ways for families to partner with teachers, and increasing the business community's involvement.

Tony LaMantia
Principal
tlamanti@mpsaz.org

SWEETHEART DANCE

BEARDSLEY SCHOOL BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

The Beardsley School seemed to support the Mary Poppins philosophy of parental involvement: “A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down.”

At the elementary school, it wasn't sugar, but a Sweetheart Dance, a spirited family night that school officials hoped would make parents more likely to return to school for more serious matters, such as parent-teacher conferences and mathematics and literacy nights.

The sixth-grade teachers organized the dance, but students, other teachers, and community businesses pitched in to make the dance a night to remember for all students in grades pre-K to 6 and their families. Students wrote letters to the businesses asking for donations, made follow-up calls to the businesses, set up, decorated the gym and cleaned up—in addition to attending the dance, of course.

Teachers took photos of families, helped serve the food, oversaw decorations, and picked up the prizes that were awarded at the dance. The administrators also served food and worked on the flier to advertise the dance. Teachers and students worked together to raise the \$300 that the dance cost.

The evening featured dinner, dancing to the music of a DJ before and after dinner, and a raffle. Families could also have their photos taken during the dance. Adults and students were encouraged to dress up for this special occasion. Drawing for the raffle prizes took place just before the dance ended. Most prizes were donated by local merchants and organizations. The students and their families also socialized with the teachers and administrators.

“This was the most fun I've ever had in school,” said a student.

That was the idea—to have fun, and to show parents that the school is a welcoming place, and that their children enjoy having them there. About 40 parents and other caregivers attended

the event, along with 60 students. “The students look great all dressed up,” observed the principal.

The Beardsley faculty and staff waged a vigorous publicity campaign to attract parents. They sent home fliers on multiple occasions, and made daily announcements and phone calls. Students made posters that hung in the school hallways.

The school plans to try the Sweetheart Dance again, with more personal invitations and perhaps a poetry corner to attract more families. School officials definitely want to make it a night to remember.

Type 3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Amy Marshall
Principal
amarshall@bridgeportedu.net

THANKSGIVING FAMILY FUN NIGHT

KOSCIUSZKO MONTESSORI SCHOOL MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

School officials at Kosciuszko Montessori, seeking to boost the flow of family input into the school's decision-making processes, found an effective means of encouraging parents' help: Ask for it.

Of course, asking a family member to fill out a survey—in this case, a detailed Parent Climate Survey for Milwaukee Public Schools—may not by itself suffice to make that parent feel involved with his/her child's education. At Kosciuszko, where many students' primary household language is Spanish and eligibility for free or reduced-price is 92 percent, organizers reported that many families were hesitant to give their opinions.

The language differences, in particular, were one of the strongest barriers to involvement, leaving many parents without an understanding of how to initiate contacts with the school. Because not all staff members spoke Spanish, many families felt isolated from the school and from the teachers.

Members of the PTO, with the AmeriCorps volunteer's assistance, took the initiative and planned a Family Fun Night in November with a Thanksgiving theme. The event served a number of important purposes. First, it encouraged parents to become more familiar with the school, its various functions, and its staff. It also provided a good way to survey parents for their views and interests.

The evening began with a potluck dinner provided by the parents, demonstrating to them, specifically and clearly, how easy it can be to contribute to school events. To the staff, it also showed how willing parents were to assist, if the school made clear and friendly requests. Once the families were present, it was easy to get them to fill out the parent survey.

The potluck dinner proved to be its own reward, illustrating both a service that the parent could provide and, at the same time, giving them

an incentive to do so. Parents also had an opportunity to enter a raffle (for various gift cards) by filling out the climate survey. After that, they joined the potluck, at which the principal and a parent from the PTO welcomed everyone.

Other activities at the Family Fun Night included craft workshops and traditional Mexican dance instruction in the gym. Students were directly involved as well, creating (with teachers' assistance) the centerpieces for the potluck dinner tables.

PTO members established the agenda and set up the gym and cafeteria, as well as arranged for the dance instructor. Local businesses donated additional food, drinks, craft materials, decorations, and the raffle prizes. The event did not cost the school any money.

The benefits were bi-directional. The Thanksgiving Fund Night increased the parents' readiness to interact with the school and convinced the staff that the students' families were willing and able to contribute to school improvement efforts. Who benefitted from these changes most? The students, of course.

*Kimberly Yoder
AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer
k.yoder@parentspluswi.org*

TURN OFF THE TV WEEK

STEEPLE RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

For a full week in April, students and families at Steeple Run Elementary learned a thing or two about what life is like outside “the box.”

Getting anyone to shut off their televisions for a week is no small task. So the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) presented families with a litany of alternatives for all that “screen time.” The week’s itinerary was sent home in students’ backpacks well in advance so that families could make time to participate in various events.

The most persuasive use of all that extra time, naturally, is for fun. With this in mind, organizers powered up Turn Off the TV Week on a Friday, holding a family Bunco night in the school’s gym. While the dice flew and teams competed for prizes, families got a chance to get to know one another a little better.

From there, the anti-TV events were mostly home-based, allowing parents to work these activities into their evening routines in whatever way fit best.

On one night, students took home a math game appropriate to their grade. In addition to boosting math skills, the games were a good way for students to interact with their families, friends, and neighbors. Fit for Fun night promoted physical well-being, encouraging students to play outside or, if they were able to attend, participate in intramural sports after school. The school also held a fundraising night at a local Chuck E. Cheese, with a portion of proceeds going to the school’s Home and School Association.

But the most rewarding activities, perhaps, were those that pushed children to reapply some of that TV-time toward their communities—both locally and globally.

Organizers scheduled a letter-writing campaign, during which students were encouraged to write to military personnel, severely ill children, and elderly persons. “I hope the soldier that gets my letter really likes it,” said a second

grader. “They work so hard for us. It’s nice to do something for them.”

At last, Turn Off the TV Week ended where it began: on a Friday night, back in the school’s gym. This time, students and parents took time to directly help those who needed it most.

For students in grades K–2, the ATP partnered with a local food pantry to have Steeple Run students prepare “birthday bags” for disadvantaged youths in their community. Each bag included a cake mix, frosting, plates, and napkins. Every student decorated his or her bag, giving it a personal touch. Students in grades 3–5 assembled hand-packed meals for hungry children around the world through the Feed My Starving Children organization.

To get an idea of the event’s success, you can count the number of participants at each event—none of which cost the school a single penny—or the letters written, or the meals delivered. However, the students’ impact on their communities—and vice-versa—remains impossible to measure.

Karen Currier
Principal
(630) 420-6385

VIP: VOLUNTEERS & INVOLVED PARENTS

MAYA ANGELOU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

As the last school year progressed, parents at Maya Angelou Elementary spent more and more of their time at a new social networking site. Were the parents frittering away their free time? Not so. The teachers encouraged them to participate. What was that social networking site? The school's cafeteria.

For two hours every Wednesday morning, a group of volunteers and involved parents—or VIPs—took up scissors, tape, markers, and glue; fell into position behind staplers and laminating machines; and dropped completed craft projects into bins for teachers to use in their classroom lessons. They also enjoyed the opportunity to get to know one another a little better, building parent-to-parent relationships that would have been difficult to form otherwise.

The VIPs also became better acquainted with the teachers at Maya Angelou in the process. Through the VIP program, teachers left the basic materials and instructions for preparing resources they hoped to use with their students. By delegating responsibility for these items to the parent volunteers, teachers were able to focus attention on instruction. As an additional benefit, parents had the opportunity to interact with their children's educators more informally while gaining a deeper respect for the amount of time the teachers spend preparing for their classes.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Maya Angelou instituted the VIP program as a simple way for parents to be directly involved with the school, and at times that fit their schedule. In addition to the weekly Wednesday morning sessions, the ATP also held an evening VIP session on the first Tuesday of every month. Parents with young children were able to bring them to the morning VIP meetings, and the open cafeteria gave these children a place to play that was out of the way of the volunteers' work but still allowed for supervision. Some of the afternoon kindergarten students even read to the

volunteers while they worked.

The ATP Climate of Partnerships Committee, which includes both parents and teachers, was responsible for publicizing the event to parents and teachers, as well as ensuring the availability of necessary supplies, which cost the team about \$120. Subsequently, teachers left projects to be completed by VIPs in a bin in the teachers' lounge. Most were finished by the end of each session, with incomplete projects returned to teachers or held over for the next VIP meeting.

Getting the word out about the monthly first-Tuesday evening meetings proved to be more of a challenge. Because the event was held early in the month, it was easy to miss on the school calendar. The ATP partnered with the school's PTO and used their e-mail list to remind parents of the program, which proved to be an effective strategy.

"Having the VIP program . . . saved countless hours of prep work," writes a teacher. "We have been able to rely on their help and support on a consistent basis and appreciate all the time they spend wanting to help make our jobs easier."

Students benefited from the VIPs' work, too, and not only from the materials they produced. The children of VIPs gained a sense of pride knowing that they had a family member who worked hard at the school, which encourages the students to do the same.

Ashley Chubb and Janice Matthews
ATP Co-Chairs
achubb@psd1.org

W.T. COOKE'S POLAR EXPRESS

**W.T. COOKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Families in the Virginia Beach community around W. T. Cooke Elementary were treated to the opportunity of a lifetime this past Christmas—a free ride on the Polar Express.

Yes—that *Polar Express*.

The ever-popular holiday children's book by Chris van Allsburg inspired a festive evening at Cooke, pulling together school and community resources to bring the story alive for more than 300 students and their families. Some of these families, reports one teacher, might not have been able to enjoy such a holiday celebration without the help of Cooke's "elves."

"A large part of our population at Cooke is homeless or live on small incomes . . . The event gave all families a stress-free evening of fellowship and food," she writes.

Families found the school transformed, as if by magic. Life-sized holiday figures decorated the building and soft lighting made the dining area seem less like the cafeteria and more like a fancy restaurant. Volunteers greeted the families. Once they were seated, other helpers served dinner.

The night was only beginning. The evening's Conductor—the school's reading specialist, in disguise—arrived to read *The Polar Express* to the assembled guests. Because the look and feel of the book are such integral parts of the experience, the illustrations were projected onto a screen so that everyone could enjoy them. At the point in the story when Santa gives the first gift to the book's young protagonist, Cooke's own Conductor added a special touch by producing a silver bell for all the children to see.

Anticipation mounted as, after the story, volunteers began handing out "train tickets." Outside, the Polar Express—in this case, school buses decorated with lights and garland—waited to take the guests to Virginia Beach's Lights at the Beach event, an annual holiday display at the ocean. As everybody hopped on the "train," other conductors punched their tickets while holiday

songs and carols played.

The school chose a date and bought the Lights at the Beach tickets in advance to avoid congestion at the event. Cooke's neediest families were contacted first. Response was enormous, requiring organizers to split the evening into two seatings.

Support was tremendous as administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and community volunteers assisted everyone before, during, and after the event. With school partners providing reduced prices on essentials, expenses totaled \$2,000, paid with Title I and Parent Involvement funds, as well as a donation from the Virginia Beach Jaycees.

The generosity paid off in many ways. Before leaving, every child received a gift bag, containing a candy cane, hot chocolate mix, and—straight from the North Pole—one tiny silver bell.

Type 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Kim Guevara
Early Childhood Special Education Teacher
Kim-Susan.Guevara@vbschools.com

4

DISTRICT, ORGANIZATION, & STATE LEADERSHIP



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

A FAMILY CULTURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT LANSDALE, PENNSYLVANIA

In the North Penn School District, a district in which 71 distinct languages are spoken, the need to establish school-to-parent communication across cultures is an everyday challenge. In 2006, the district superintendent identified the need to engage all families as a “missing link” between the Effective Schools structure already in place and the next level of student achievement. The district formed engagement teams in each of its 18 buildings. As a result, a sense of family-friendliness took hold in the district.

District leaders sought, then, to include this same variety of parent voices in the decision-making process at the district level. The Parent/Community Involvement subcommittee of the district’s Closing the Achievement Gap Committee resolved “to develop a Family Cultural Advisory Council” that would partner with these district leaders. This council would endeavor to further the district’s goals of total family inclusion and outreach.

Following approval by the achievement gap committee and the K–12 Administrative Leadership Team, all principals, as well as community leaders and other contacts, were asked to identify potential parent leaders who represented the region’s diverse cultures. More than 50 families were sent invitations. Those who did not immediately respond received follow-up phone calls. In the end, 22 parents attended the first meeting of the Family Cultural Advisory Council. So did the district’s superintendent, assistant superintendent, manager of quality/research/program assessment, family/communication engagement specialist, and other administrators.

To make the event easier for parents to attend, the district provided babysitting (with the help of high school students) and food. The meeting opened with a “getting to know you” ice-breaker. Afterward, parents heard presentations on student achievement data and the connection between family engagement and achievement.

Parents were asked to respond to a pair of prompts. First: In what ways can adults who have impact on the lives of their children better support their academic performance? Second: What can be done to better engage and communicate with all parents, to involve them more actively in their children’s success? The parents brainstormed in groups and their ideas were summarized and shared with all participants.

To close the meeting, the group discussed next steps and agreed that e-mail would be the best means to share and add new suggestions to the brainstorming activity. E-mail also would be used to set up the next meeting at which attendees would set priorities among the suggestions and put together an implementable plan.

Participants also filled out evaluation forms at the end of the meeting. District organizers plan to review this material before planning the next meeting, and to distribute new evaluations after every meeting. The goal is to hold three or four sessions of the advisory council per year. RSVPs for the next session are already arriving.

Linda Abram
Family and Community Engagement Specialist
abramla@npenn.org

A FOUNDATION FOR PARENT/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT WAUSAU, WISCONSIN

O.N.E. isn't a lonely number in Wausau. It actually signifies a vast number of people working together to make their schools better. O.N.E. stands for Our Network for Education, a work in progress that will build and sustain a volunteer program for the district's 21 schools.

O.N.E. is set to make its official debut in the fall of the 2009-10 school year at four elementary schools. The network will invite parents, community members, businesses, and organizations to be active participants in the district's educational process through volunteer opportunities. Using web-based software for volunteer management, the district will be able to display volunteer opportunities online. The software will allow individuals to fill out a volunteer profile and sign up to volunteer online.

The profile is one of several orientation materials the district is working on. In addition, the district has a volunteer handbook, a guidebook for school staff members who work with volunteers, and an instruction sheet for the web-based system. The Board of Education also established a policy for school volunteers, drawing on similar policies and practices from school districts across Wisconsin.

The district is receiving a federal grant to pay for a part-time Volunteer and Community Involvement Coordinator, who will start in fall 2009. The district has already received approval to enlist an AmeriCorps volunteer to staff the program during its second year. The software and materials for O.N.E. cost \$10,000.

After introducing the practice in four schools, the district will gradually expand to the other elementaries and then to middle, charter, and high schools. When it is rolled out completely, O.N.E. will provide continuity for volunteer efforts across the district, establish policies and procedures that support and enable positive involvement activities, and catalog and publicize parent and community opportunities and accom-

plishments.

"While there are a number of ways to measure community support, having a vital community volunteer program has to be one of the key indicators of success," said a district administrator. "That's why implementing a comprehensive parent and community volunteer program is so crucial to the continuing success of the Wausau School District, its schools and its students."

Many partners are working to make O.N.E. a sturdy and long-standing structure. An AmeriCorps volunteer researched best practices throughout Wisconsin for the development of Wausau's plans. AmeriCorps supervisors oversaw the development process. A Volunteer Framework Advisory Committee, made up of administrators, parents, parent partnership coordinators, and a representative of the human resources department directed the planning and development processes. The partnership coordinators in Title I schools are serving as liaisons with the district office, and have been trained on the volunteer management software and the O.N.E. program.

With dedicated coordination and great expectations undergirding it, O.N.E. aims to make Wausau the No. 1 volunteer network in Wisconsin.

Roxane Hagedorn
AmeriCorps VISTA
rhagedor@ausau.k12.wi.us

BACK TO SCHOOL BLITZ

THOMAS COUNTY SCHOOLS THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA

A number of schools and districts around the country provide the families they serve with some sort of event near the beginning of the school year. Often, these events have names that ring of invitation and guidance. Orientation. Open House. Welcome Back.

Due to the dizzying number of services provided at the revamped back-to-school event held every year in Thomas County, Georgia, the traditional titles simply fail to fully encompass the scope of the event. Two years ago, when the county decided to grow its yearly expo—held exclusively for its Title I schools—into an event that would reach every family in every school, the name had to change, too.

They didn't call it a comeback; instead, they called it a Blitz.

Pulling inspiration from the “playbook” of a neighboring school district that held a similar event, Thomas County Schools leaders met with parent coordinators from that district to develop their own plan. In this way, the sharing of information helped to bring the Back to School Blitz into existence. Collaborative leadership turned that concept into a success.

Schools in Thomas County fall under overlapping supervision of the county's and the city's school system. In order to ensure that responsibility for the event wasn't the exclusive domain of either one of the two systems, organizers tapped the Thomas County Family Connection Director and the Hands On Thomas County Director to spearhead the event. These directors held a planning meeting that included representatives from both systems who were responsible for involving school personnel and for publicizing the Blitz to families.

Since the primary goal was the expansion of the event to all district families, the new Back to School Blitz would require the overwhelming support of the community. Because of the planners' extensive outreach to local businesses

and agencies, over 30 organizations partnered with the district for the event, including Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, YMCA, Southwest Georgia Technical College, and a range of local churches, medical providers, private tutoring providers, and after-school programs.

“The results were tremendous,” wrote the district's Title I/Special Projects Director. After an extensive advertising blitz—and there's no better word for the publicity campaign, which included press releases to and interviews with the local media, flyers at individual schools' open house events, and a large banner displayed in the center of town—hundreds were lined up outside the meeting area at the technical college, waiting for the doors to open.

Inside the large, air-conditioned room, school and district administrators provided information about nutrition, transportation, nursing, testing, special education, technology, and more. A hospital provided health screenings; a local dentist and optometrist volunteered their services as well. Other community providers hosted information tables about their services. Finally, a local church group distributed free school supplies that were donated by local businesses and sorted by YMCA volunteers. The supplies were free for all families, provided that they filled out and returned an evaluation form about their Blitz experience.

With the continued support of the community, which has enabled the Back to School Blitz to be held at no cost to either of the school systems, and based on parent feedback from the previous two years, planners report that the third Back to School Blitz—bigger, better, faster—is ready to roll.

Kathy Keown
Director, Title I / Special Projects
kkeown@rose.net

CELEBRATING OUR STARS

HAMPTON CITY SCHOOLS

HAMPTON, VIRGINIA

In 2008, the Title I Parent Involvement Program of Hampton City Schools (HCS) introduced its first division-wide event to recognize the exceptional contributions of parents, volunteers, and community partners in all its Title I schools. In celebrating these Title I Promoters of Excellence, the Parent Involvement Program shows appreciation to those who voluntarily invest their time and resources in the Title I school community. In doing so, the program hopes to keep encouraging these and other school partners to be Stars in the education of all HCS students.

Planning for the second year's round of awards began in January 2009. Then, the Promoter of Excellence Planning Committee met monthly. At each session, the team worked to secure and review nominations for Excellence Awards, to plan the award event (including theme, entertainment, and catering), and to coordinate the work of individual school action teams.

The committee developed a nomination packet that explained the purpose of the award and instructed each school in how to select nominees. Any parent, guardian, volunteer, or community partner at a Title I School was eligible. Any Title I administrator, teacher, staff member, or school organization representative could submit a nomination that outlined that partner's outstanding contribution. Nominators were asked to provide specific examples that best showed the partner's success in helping to achieve quality educational outcomes for Title I students.

Next, each school's own award panel—consisting of the school's parent involvement facilitator, principal, and one teacher, administrator, or support staff member—collected and reviewed these forms. From its pool of nominees, each school was asked to recommend three recipients for the division-wide selection panel to consider. The nomination process was completed

by the end of March.

Parent Involvement Program coordinators held the award event in early May, before the schools had their volunteer appreciation events. They selected the date to avoid conflict with any other district and school events, so that those who received awards would receive recognition from both. This also gave schools the opportunity to showcase their award winners at their own events, as well as to emphasize how important their contributions were to increasing student achievement.

The district team invited school board, district leadership team, and city council members to the awards night. They stressed the importance of ensuring that the highest-level district and political leaders participate in recognizing successful partnerships with families and the community that support the district's continuing educational goals.

Chanda Epps
Title I Coordinator
cepps@sbo.hampton.k12.va.us

COMPUTER REDEPLOYMENT PROGRAM

NAPERVILLE COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 203 NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

Every year, Naperville School District 203 retires some of its older computers. Usually, these were sold to a liquidator for fair market value. In 2008, a pair of innovative community business partners—partners who sit on an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at one of the district’s junior high schools—realized that they could capture more value from the old systems both in terms of financial assets and educational opportunities.

Approximately 3% of the district’s student population does not have access to a computer at home. This represents a serious disadvantage in an educational climate where more and more assignments are to be prepared, researched, and submitted electronically. Furthermore, these students do not have easy access to the wealth of college-planning and related resources that are available online.

In order to repurpose the district’s retired computers for these students to use, the machines needed to be refurbished. However, the cost to hire a company to provide this service was unreasonable. In conjunction with the Naperville Technology Group (NTG), the business partners created a program in which tech-savvy students could volunteer to provide this service. With this, the district’s Computer Redeployment Program (CRP) was born.

In June 2008, fourteen students contributed to the first phase of the project. With the guidance of NTG professionals, the students processed 700 computers in the first week alone, checking them into inventory and assessing their condition. They went on to refurbish 450 notebook computers in good condition in just seven days, sometimes working on as many as five machines at a time.

Over 230 of these notebooks were distributed to students who needed them at two Naperville high schools and five junior high schools. Later in the school year, in November, another 200 of the

computers were sold inexpensively to parents and other community members during an event at Naperville Central High School, raising \$58,000 for the Naperville Education Foundation.

As word about the program reached other district families, demand arose for another 75 of the notebooks for students that did not have access at home. As a result, the CRP initiated a new project phase, hiring students from high school technology classes as paid interns. Twelve students, selected on teacher recommendations, worked to refurbish the remaining notebooks that had required more advanced repair. Working at two of NTG’s member IT firms, with educators and business owners acting as advisors and mentors, the student interns not only provided a useful community service for other students in their district, but also gained career-building, hands-on tech training from local experts.

Capitalizing on public and private partnerships so crucial to Naperville’s success, this project has received enormous publicity, with additional offers of assistance coming in from other businesses and educational institutions. The CRP continues to find opportunities for students to participate, learn, and develop their skills. This has paved the way for other businesses and non-profits to step forward and give students the chance to hone talents in web and print design, marketing, and social media areas, all of which can be used to improve CRP outreach when the next batch of district computers are retired.

“The entire community,” wrote the Naperville Director of Community Relations, “is becoming the CRP team.”

Nina Menis
Director of Community Relations
nmenis@naperville203.org

DEVELOPING A DISTRICT ACTION TEAM

HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS COLUMBIA, MARYLAND

Organized under its Department of Student, Family, and Community Services, the Howard County Public School District manages its own Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at the district level. This “DATP” wrapped up its third year of operation. The three-year development of the team demonstrates the challenges and rewards that accompany promoting partnerships among district leaders.

“I’ve always felt that a district level ATP was needed to support the six types of involvement throughout our school system,” wrote the Family and Community Outreach Coordinator, who also functions as the ATP Facilitator. “We have 19 school members of NNPS, but the district was not as completely aligned with the concepts and framework as the schools are . . .” She believed that a District Action Team for Partnerships could energize and reinforce the schools by showing that the central office was aligned with the same concept of teamwork that the Partnership Schools have used for years.

In June 2006, a comprehensive report on School, Family, and Community was presented to the Howard County Board of Education along with a leadership action plan. The time to form the District ATP seemed right, says the Outreach Coordinator. With her director’s support, she sent out an e-mail to colleagues announcing the practice.

To accommodate the busy schedules of the invitees, meetings convened quarterly for 90 minutes in the midday hours on Fridays. In addition to leaders from the district’s various areas of service, the master list also included parent and bilingual liaisons as representatives, as well as service coordinators from community learning centers and early childhood programs.

The first year’s agenda was largely related to the ATP itself, focusing on questions of membership and division of ATP work into committees. Eventually, two subcommittees formed: Data

Collection began the process of identifying, developing, and aligning data and data resources on partnerships. The Professional Development committee began to establish priorities and identify content, audiences, and locations where district and school colleagues needed information on new directions for developing research-based partnership programs. Each meeting highlighted information and news about NNPS or the Howard County Partnership Schools. NNPS tools continued to guide the development of the team from the beginning to the end of the first year, when the Team completed a process assessment.

The second year began with increased representation from other service areas and fully functioning subcommittees. Feedback from an early survey of elementary school administrators helped guide the DATP’s family-focused professional development choices. Each meeting’s agenda continued to begin with national and state highlights and news about programs at the county’s Partnership Schools. This was followed by powerful networking time, during which representatives reported on family involvement activities and community outreach in their respective areas. Finally, the meetings focused on a designated topic of interest for all parties.

This year’s membership reflected 98% of the district’s service areas and 100% of the curriculum, instruction, and technology sectors. DATP members were able to highlight their own successes, including an NNPS Partnership District Award. The last quarterly meeting resulted in the team’s involvement in a showcase of Partnership School successes at the district’s Summer Institute for School Improvement.

Jean West Lewis
Family and Community Outreach Specialist
jean_lewis@hcpss.org

EXTENDING THE PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

BALTIMORE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS TOWSON, MARYLAND

When parents queue up to talk to teachers about their sons and daughters' performance in the classroom, parent-teacher conferences can have their limitations. On one hand, this kind of direct communication is at the core of school and family partnerships. On the other hand, these appointments are often time-bound and, by necessity, conversations end after 15 or 20 minutes. How could these collaborations be extended, wondered the Parent Support Services (PSS) office of Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), while continuing to ensure that teachers had enough time to meet with all parents?

The PSS stepped in at one BCPS school, Berkshire Elementary, to provide parents with resources the group had developed that showed how to reinforce concepts and skills of the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) at home. If these resources could be distributed to parents in such a way that the information they received was tailored specifically to their children, and given to them with enough explanation to be properly applied at home, the PSS reasoned that students' individual needs could be more successfully addressed.

The extended sessions proceeded, at first, in the traditional way. During a parent-teacher conference, the teacher, parent, and student developed an action plan that identified skills or concepts that needed enrichment, the next steps needed, and who would be responsible for those steps. Teachers also shared samples of the student's work to illustrate some of these points. Then, near the end of the appointment, the teacher, who had been familiarized in advance with the available take-home resources, provided the parent with a checklist of documents to pick up at a centrally located resource table.

At Berkshire, the school administration resolved to set this table up in the gym, and agreed to staff the table with the school principal,

resource teacher, counselor, and several special educators. These professionals gave parents the materials that the teachers had prescribed on the checklists. Next, the staffers reviewed the materials with the parents, discussing the best ways to use them at home.

Before leaving the resource area, parents were also encouraged to visit another table, where PSS partnered with school officials to provide a mini-workshop called Games for Gaining. There, parents were shown several games promoting student achievement that could be played at home using household items. At the last stop, parents completed an evaluation sheet.

By the end of the evening, more than 100 parents met with 30 teachers, administrators, and staff with multiple points of interaction. The resources enriched and extended the usual parent-teacher conference. In addition to discussing the child's strengths and needs, each parent left the conference night with tools and materials to support and help their child in specific ways.

Susan Hahn
Parent Services Representative
shahn2@bcps.org

FAMILY FINANCIAL EDUCATION NIGHT

**FRESNO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT / COMMUNITY AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NETWORK
FRESNO, CALIFORNIA**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

The nation's credit crunch and economic recession provided a teachable moment for families in the Fresno Unified School District. With almost everyone's attention turning to job stability, rising expenses, and other economic worries, the district's Department of Community and Family Engagement Network (CFEN) saw an opportunity to offer financial education sessions to help families not only manage their finances more effectively but also connect to their children's mathematics lessons.

CFEN sponsored four financial education nights, repeating the presentation in different neighborhood resource centers and schools. Central Valley Financial Initiative, an area business collaborative, co-sponsored the program, which featured dinner, two workshops, two group sessions, children's mathematics activities, and a raffle. Several area banks and the United Way of Fresno County provided funds for the nights, which cost about \$500 each.

The first workshop, Financial Education, provided know-how and tools to help move families into the financial mainstream. This included tips for opening bank accounts, promoting savings, budgeting, using credit wisely, and building a credit history. The second workshop, Math Literacy, focused on making families aware of the mathematics standards for each grade level and providing strategies for helping children master math concepts at home.

"Financial literacy is important and is necessary to ensure financial stability for the families of our children," said one of the organizers.

During the workshops, there were activities for children in the cafeteria. Those in kindergarten and first grade worked with a teacher to read stories involving mathematics. Older youngsters moved through interactive math stations, tackling problems in small groups. "I enjoyed interacting with the students and could actually see them having fun engaging in mathematics

problem-solving techniques," said one mathematics coach.

To reach as many families as possible, the network printed flyers in several languages and hired interpreters for the workshops. The schools also sent automated phone messages in the languages represented at the school.

More than 50 parents and other family members attended the four programs, with almost as many students in attendance. About 95 percent of the attendees agreed that they had received useful information, both on family finances and mathematics education. CFEN organizers used Turning Point Evaluations, a tool that gave them immediate feedback.

In addition to helping families, the financial nights also offered an opportunity for the community organizations to become involved in the school and for businesses to share their knowledge and attract customers. The partners agreed the program met many individual needs, while strengthening the community and the school.

Brendel Jackson
Manager
brendel.jackson@fresnounified.org

GLOW & GROW

MIDDLETOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

For the Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) of Middletown Public Schools, district-level partnership coordinators know the importance of recognizing a year of work well-done. The coordinators also understand the benefits of cross-fertilizing ideas from school to school to help ATPs overcome their own challenges by sharing ideas and solutions. Articulating this process required a catchy title. The creative Middletown leaders had that covered, too.

The annual Glow & Grow Year-End Celebration for Partnerships gave school partnership and action teams the chance to celebrate their successes—that was the Glow—and to address new strategies that can be put into practice next academic year—and that was the Grow.

A number of goals were addressed by the annual wrap-up. Most immediately, the Celebration inspired Action Team members' passion, dedication, and support for partnership work and initiatives. Plus, the event enabled the Action Teams to disseminate their best practices and resources, giving successful ATPs a moment in the spotlight and motivating those at other schools to try some new initiatives.

The Grow & Glow event was booked at the beginning of the school year. District coordinators referred to it frequently in discussions with ATP Co-Chairs and members. Three months before the event, ATP leaders received a reminder to consider what they would share with others. Then, a month before, the District Partnership Coordinator sent out registration forms. ATPs were asked to register with at least a principal or assistant principal, two staff members, and two parents.

The registered teams played active roles in both aspects of the celebration. Not only were they participants and learners, but also presenters. Based on the information from the ATPs that registered, the district leaders for partnerships organized the event agenda for the ATP

presentations. This year's agenda included:

- » *An opening KSA-Plus Communications Partnership quiz, entitled "Is Your School Open to Partnerships with Parents?"*
- » *A School Compact Panel, during which three Middletown school teams discussed the process of creating a school compact, as well as talking about how they engaged students, parents, and staff in this process.*
- » *Individual ATP presentations on structure and performance evaluation.*
- » *Other presentations where ATPs highlighted some of their best practices.*
- » *A presentation by a community leader about resources available to ATPs that can be used to encourage families to become more engaged as advocates for their children's education.*
- » *The Jumping Hurdles and SFCP Action Team Checklist activities from the NNPS's School, Family, and Community Partnerships handbook.*
- » *Finally, reminders of upcoming important NNPS- and SFCP-related dates.*

In addition to the schedule of presentations, ATPs also shared best practices at a Resource Table. The District Partnership Coordinator advised others to tie in traditions that are fun and valuable. The Grow & Glow theme showed up in several ways, from the event flyers to the "Dirt Cake" that is always served at the celebration. As a result, wrote one district leader, "Everyone's enthusiasm and pride in this project shines through."

Donna Marino
Parent Resource Coordinator
marinod@mps1.org

HOWELL-A-PALOOZA

**FRANCIS HOWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI**

What's in a name? Quite a bit of excitement when the district-wide student showcase and all-around school celebration is called the Howell-A-Palooza.

A “lollapalooza” is, by definition, a “wonderful thing.” And that seems to be an apt definition for Francis Howell School District’s adaptation. It, too, was a wonderful thing—drawing at least 5,000 people to a community-wide event that showcased student work, promoted community resources, strengthened school-community bonds, and gave everyone a good time and a good feeling about their schools.

Not even clogged roads and hour-long traffic backups quelled the enthusiasm. The Howell-A-Palooza was the first time the district had attempted a community-wide event. The district encompasses several communities over 150 square miles and serves more than 17,500 students in K-12, plus almost 5,000 youngsters in pre-K. The district’s focus on parent involvement has been sharpened over the last three years with the formation of a Parent Involvement Action Team in each school.

The work of these teams brought the district Howell-A-Palooza in September 2008. The event offered an array of activities for all ages:

- » *Stadium performances by three high school bands, and cheerleaders.*
- » *Elementary, middle and high school choirs performing in the auditorium.*
- » *School showcases displaying students’ work from 23 schools.*
- » *More than 100 booths featuring community organizations, the military, a blood drive, and voter registration information.*
- » *School-age children’s outside events, including activities such as Magic House, Young Rembrandts and Mad Science.*
- » *A special area in the gym for young children and their families, with parent*

educators providing developmentally appropriate activities and information.

All of these activities were free. Only a “Taste of Howell” charged admission. Organized by the DECA Club as a fundraiser, this tasting featured culinary specialties from 25 area restaurants.

Even though the crowds were large and some people arrived late because of traffic, the response was tremendous. “There was no prouder moment than the event I witnessed last night,” said a parent. “From the elderly to the tiny tots, everyone saw what great things are being done in our district, and how we are united to serve the needs of our students,” said a parent volunteer.

A widespread publicity campaign contributed to the event’s success. There were posters throughout the community, pens and notepads announcing Howell-A-Palooza, newspaper stories, web sites, and even elementary school children wearing stickers that read, “Bring me to the Howell-A-Palooza.” No wonder Howell-A-Palooza became a household name around St. Charles.

The great response—2,000 cars parked—means the Howell-A-Palooza won’t be a one-time extravaganza. For the next three years, however, the event will be regional—held at a different high school each year, concentrating on the schools and community activities in that area of the district. Four years out, it will be a district-wide celebration again.

Mary Jo Griffin
Director, Parent Involvement
maryjo.griffin@fhsdschools.org

INTER-DISTRICT COFFEE COLLABORATION

KENNEWICK & PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICTS

KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON & PASCO, WASHINGTON

Call it, if you will, a meta-partnership. Call it an advance toward a more intimately networked, cross-regional, collaborative model of educational leadership. Or, call it what it appears to be: morning coffee.

Since October of last year, district-level facilitators for the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) in neighboring Kennewick and Pasco, Washington—each a part of the “Tri-Cities” community—have held monthly meetings to share ideas and strategies related to the work they do for and with the ATPs in their respective schools. In addition to discussing the challenges faced by individual ATPs, these district representatives brainstorm for unique and collective solutions and means to improve ATP programs in both Kennewick and Pasco.

The monthly meetings serve as an object-lesson of the kinds of partnership practices that can arise organically and collaboratively. The Parent Involvement Coordinator for Kennewick School District joined Pasco’s Partnership Coordinators for an NNPS web conference, and again, at an ATP Basics Training session.

Over the past few years, Pasco developed and strengthened successful NNPS programming experiences. Its neighbor, Kennewick, was a new NNPS member. After time for mutual questions and answers, the Kennewick District Coordinator for ATPs and the two Coordinators from Pasco agreed to meet periodically to share ideas and resources.

In time, these meetings took on their current form—a regular, informal monthly meeting at a coffee shop, where each comes prepared with questions and ideas to bounce off the others. At the end of every meeting, the participants agree on the time and place for the next meeting, alternating between locations in Kennewick and Pasco.

Fruitful collaborations thus far include sharing questions for the district facilitators to

ask at their individual ATP Chair Chats; pulling together resources for a video presentation for trainings and retreats in both districts; meeting with an NNPS national facilitator for Pasco’s End of Year Celebration (EOYC) in April; and cross-fertilizing ideas from each district’s computer classes for parents, held in both English and Spanish.

Costs for such a collaborative exercise are negligible. Finding a time to meet proved to be an issue at first, so meetings are held at 7 A.M. The facilitators stress the importance of maintaining confidentiality at these meetings so that as many ideas as possible can be communicated.

Concepts from these informal inter-district meetings trickle down as contributions to ATP Chair Cluster meetings. In the future, district facilitators hope to include their supervisors at one coffee collaboration a year.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Jessica Wallace
Parent Partnership / Pre-K Outreach
jwallace@psd1.org

Lorraine Landon
Parent Education Center Coordinator
llandon@psd1.org

Sarah Del Toro
Parent Involvement Coordinator
sarah.deltoro@ksd.org

LEARNING STANDARDS FOR FAMILIES

ST. PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

Setting district-wide criteria for academic achievement is an important step in making sure students receive a consistent education in each of a district's schools. Teachers and administrators in the St. Paul Public Schools understood these standards. When it came to communicating them to parents, however, the message often got lost in translation—or suffered from a lack of translation altogether.

To bridge this gap, some teachers began investing their own time and resources to create such materials, which then had to be translated into languages other than English because of the array of languages spoken in the homes of St. Paul's students.

The district's Offices of Academics, Accountability, and Community Relations learned of the need for consistent, easily intelligible standards for families and school staffs. In response, they adapted some of the already-made teacher materials into the *Learning Standards for Families* booklets.

Available in English, Hmong, Spanish, and Somali, the booklets give examples of what a student learns in each grade (pre-K–6th), and what families can do to reinforce students' literacy, math, and science skills at home. After looking at similar materials from other districts, officials decided to keep the materials simple and concise, though eye-catching.

The booklets help to meet a number of parent involvement goals: to provide common points of reference in teacher conferences and school academic nights; to clearly define parental roles in supporting the academic standards; and to promote consistency across schools and programs in supporting the standardized curriculum and in easing transitions for transient students. In addition to providing for multiple native languages, *Learning Standards'* authors and editors went to great lengths to identify practices that all families could use at home, even with little formal

education, training, or few resources.

The booklets also represent a collaborative effort across district offices. Curriculum and content experts in the Office of Academics plainly summarized the standards and linked them to potential home activities. The Office of Accountability provided content, editing, funding, and distribution support, as well as soliciting parent feedback through the Title I Parent Involvement Group. Finally, the Office of Community Relations managed the ordering and distribution to all elementary, pre-K, and early childhood education programs.

Schools and programs provide the books to families at the beginning of the school term, as well as to those who enroll students throughout the school year. District leaders made the discussion of these materials a priority in all communications with parents.

The \$100,000 investment in this project—mainly from Title I funds—directly benefited about 20,000 students in the district. For the program's second year, the district will expand *Learning Standards* through 12th grade with a focus on monitoring and keeping students child on track through high school graduation.

Learning Standards is available online at http://title1.spps.org/Learning_Standards.

Joe Munnich
Family and Community Involvement Coordinator
joe.munnich@spps.org

PARENT EDUCATION FROM BIRTH TO FIVE YEARS

FRANCIS HOWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT, EARLY CHILDHOOD ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

For years, the Early Childhood programs available in the Francis Howell School District meant that local parents did not have to look far for resources that would help their children flourish when they entered the K–12 school system. Serving as the point of first contact with the district for over 5,000 children and their families each year, the Parent Education Program establishes a strong connection between home and school, initiating relationships with families that turn into community partnerships that are built to last.

Parent Education is a multi-pronged approach that fosters child development from birth to the first day of school. Visits from district parent educators facilitate the first direct connections in which parents receive research-based developmental information from the Parents as Teachers Birth to Three Curriculum. The program provides tools that parents need to stimulate their children’s development in the crucial early years, and the opportunity to discuss these issues with a trained early childhood education professional.

Another important component of the Parent Education program involves regular parent-to-parent meetings. Parents have the opportunity to share their awareness of and access to information and support structures that increase their children’s readiness for school. This structure also allows for screenings of overall development, language, hearing, and vision. By identifying potential developmental issues prior to school entry, families can seek out the resources to facilitate their children’s transitions into kindergarten with further evaluations and referrals.

The components of the Parent Education program connect families to community resources for their children. Meetings may take place in the home and at the three Early Childhood Family Education Centers in the district.

This program began over 24 years ago with 40 participating families. It was based on a state-

wide initiative for parent education and early detection of learning issues. The Francis Howell program grew in its own way. Children below school age were offered entry into a program that was based on their strengths rather than deficits. “The highly motivated came [to us] first,” wrote the Director, “but as time went on all parents wanted to partner for the services that benefited their children.” This year, Parent Education served over 3,700 families—or more than 4,300 children—with its numerous practices.

Now, the program is so well-known in the community that the district rarely needs to recruit formally. Community meetings and wellness fairs provide visibility for the Early Childhood and Parent Education resources, with churches, medical providers, and local businesses collaborating to bring more families into the program. Simple word-of-mouth among parents has also proven to be invaluable.

Early Childhood tracks the graduates of its programs as they move into kindergarten. The data have contributed to national and state studies on the effectiveness of early childhood education services. These studies found that students whose families participated in the Parent Education program were significantly more advanced than comparison groups in language development, problem solving, coping skills, and forming positive relationships with adults.

Parents shape the Early Childhood programming by evaluating the practices and by serving on the school improvement teams at the Early Childhood Family Education Centers. They are more confident about being actively involved school partners as their children advance through the educational system.

Mary Jo Griffin
Director, Early Childhood / Parent Involvement
maryjo.griffin@fhdschools.org

PARENT INSTITUTE TEAM

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

The Parent Involvement Office of the Little Rock School District (LRSD) TEAMed up with families at two separate, comprehensive training events this school year held in October and March. Their primary message was clear and strong: Together, Everyone Achieves More. The Parent Institute series brings together resources from the district and the broader Little Rock community that cover a range of areas of interest, providing parents, teachers, and the community with information designed to help students reach important goals.

The interactive presentations and workshops at the day-long events deal with literacy, math, science, social studies, homework, study skills, safety, communication, college and careers, tutoring and mentoring, home-to-school partnerships, and an array of special needs and interests. Furthermore, the Parent Institute places extra emphasis on family health, nutrition, and fitness.

To enable the whole family to attend the event, childcare was available for ages 3–11, and workshops designed exclusively for teens were offered. The event was advertised in English and Spanish, and translators were on-site to assist families as needed. A number of other perks encouraged families to join the TEAM: organizers provided a continental breakfast and lunch to all participants; everyone who attended received an educational item; and door prizes were awarded throughout the day.

At the beginning of the Parent Institute event, Little Rock students opened the first session with a series of performances that showcased their creative work. Members of student clubs and organizations got into the act as well, volunteering their time as greeters, runners, workshop facilitators, and childcare providers.

The Parent Institute practice came into being as the result of Collaborative Action Team training, guided by an evaluation from the Southeast

Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). The Director of Federal Programs, LRSD Parent Coordinator, Parent Institute Committee, school Parent Facilitators, and a number of volunteers contributed their time by sitting on planning committees and by providing logistical assistance in concert with the host school.

The advertising campaigns were just as comprehensive as the training events. In addition to the flyers disseminated to families through each school's Parent Facilitators, the information was broadcast on the LRSD TV Access station, the LRSD main and Parent Involvement Office homepages, the Edline system, and local radio/TV/print media outlets. The Little Rock PTA Council highlighted the event at their meetings and in their newsletter.

The total cost of the workshop was \$5,000 in Title I and Coordinated School Health funds.

Participants completed surveys at the end of the Parent Institute TEAM days. These surveys solicited feedback from family members about student testing, workshops attended, health, and overall opinions about the event. The LRSD Parent Involvement Office will use these evaluations as they continue to guide the TEAM's evolution in 2009–10.

Kaye Rainey
Parent Involvement Coordinator
kaye.rainey@lrzd.org

SUMMER STORYTIME IN THE PARK

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF RHINELANDER RHINELANDER, WISCONSIN

Often, NNPS schools and school districts go out of their way to foster a better climate for partnerships among staff, family members, and the community. In Rhineland, Wisconsin, it was the climate itself—in particular, the city’s pleasantly mild summer months—that opened up an opportunity for all three parties to come together for the sake of promoting youth literacy.

The advantages of the Rhineland School District’s Summer Storytime in the Park program were both numerous and plain to see. In fact, one of the program’s best aspects was, quite literally, its plain-sightedness. Twice a week, for the month of July, volunteers read stories to children and parents in the public parks of Rhineland. This way, even though students may be on summer break, their reading skills don’t end up taking a vacation too.

Summer Storytime took place at a handful of city parks, making it more convenient for families to attend by coming into their own neighborhoods. Not only did the Summer Storytime practice make itself easily accessible, it also got children and families out of the house to enjoy stories. “No children are too young or too old to enjoy a good story under a tree in a park,” wrote a VISTA leader who spearheaded the event.

The frequency of the readings also made it easier for more parents to attend the events with their children: one reading was held on Tuesday mornings and another on Thursday afternoons. In fact, the district required that parents join their young readers at the park. “Families of any type are welcome to attend as often or as little as they want,” wrote the VISTA leader, “and they are able to come and go as they desire.” Planners also were careful not to create conflicts with the public library’s summer programming.

Parents gained from the experience as the volunteers demonstrated reading activities that parents can conduct at home. To bolster these

efforts, every reading ended with the distribution of free children’s books to each family—new and gently used books acquired by an earlier book donation drive—along with some supplementary resources from the National Institute for Literacy. In the spring, the district’s VISTA leader and a high school English class put together a DVD on which they model good reading and share tips for parents. Families received a copy of this DVD, among the other Summer Storytime parent resources.

Organizing the volunteers to read required a fair amount of effort, but it was not difficult to recruit them. They all were either employees of the local Wal-Mart or Rhineland district staff. Together with the donated resources, this meant that Summer Storytime in the Park required no additional funding to implement.

The VISTA leader reminded other potential Storytime planners to keep in mind that the weather can be a challenge. That is, it can rain. At some parks, organizers were able to find a covered location to hold the reading, but some events needed to be cancelled. “Since there were ten scheduled reading times during the month of July,” she reports, “one or two cancellations still left plenty of sunny days to read on.”

And in the comfort of the park grass, sprawled out on blankets in the sun—blankets that were also donated by the community—indeed, the volunteers, students, and families read on and on.

Casey Gauthier
VISTA Leader
casey.gauthier@dpi.wi.gov

SUPERINTENDENT'S PARENT ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

Most parents have had moments when they wanted to tell their school superintendent what was on their minds—pay a compliment, ask a question, or express a concern. Parents in the Philadelphia Public Schools received just such an opportunity through a series of monthly Superintendent's Parent Roundtable Discussions.

More than 3,000 parents and other adults attended the sessions held each month from November to June at the district office and at schools in different regions of the district. The discussions also served as a get-acquainted activity for Arlene Ackerman, who became superintendent at the end of the 2007–08 school year.

The district's Parent Engagement Office took the lead, recruiting parents, coordinating childcare, and lining up facilitators from various district offices, such as budget, assessment and special education leaders. Each two-hour event included dinner, prepared and served by students from the district's culinary arts division. The district also provided transportation and childcare.

Each discussion addressed several topics—safety, truancy, testing, parental involvement—with a different topic at each table. Parents chose the topic of greatest interest to them. Interpreters were available for those who did not speak English fluently. “We asked parents to select the three most important items from their discussion,” said one of the organizers. Then a parent representative from each table presented the suggestions to the superintendent. The ideas and recommendations from some roundtables were also posted on the district's web site.

The most common concern expressed was that principals were not welcoming and that they needed to improve the information for and interactions with parents. The superintendent responded to this and other concerns by assigning a staff person to each issue. The staffer was expected to follow up with the parents and then

report on actions taken to the superintendent.

The discussions not only gave parents an opportunity to speak to the superintendent, but also sparked some initiatives. Parents requested and received a parent and community resource center, a school-based parent ombudsman to help families navigate school concerns, and the establishment of a parent university, which opened in the spring with courses leading to an associate's degree.

Response to the roundtables was extremely positive. “Our superintendent really understands what parents need,” said one parent. “Our new superintendent is like President Obama for the district,” added another.

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

*Quibila A. Divine, director
Parent Engagement Office
qadivine@philasd.org*

THE MILLION FATHER MARCH

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, LOCAL DISTRICT 8 LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

This year, 24 schools in L.A.'s Local District 8 bought into a family involvement practice that had been and was being done at other schools—and they made it their own. That, after all, was the point: to join forces and make a strong statement.

District 8 schools asked fathers and other male guardians to take their places in a nationwide, unified cadre of men who demonstrated proudly their commitment to their children's education. These schools asked district dads and father figures to do one thing: Bring their children to school.

On Monday, September 8, 2009, this was how the male role models of more than 1,000 District 8 students added their number to the Million Father March.

Following a study, district leaders realized that fathers, as a group, had little direct engagement with the schools. Leaders correlated this lack of male participation with a lack of achievement among many of the district's African American and Latino boys.

"It is not until secondary school that most boys begin to have male teachers as educational role models," wrote the district's parent ombudsperson. Seeking to increase the male presence in their schools, parent involvement facilitators looked to a practice that started in Chicago Public Schools years ago—fathers brought their children—boys and girls—to school on the first day.

When the idea was presented to the Administrative Leadership Team, members voiced concern about implementing the practice on the first day of school. The planning team then decided to participate in the Million Father March on the first Monday of the school year. They also designated the day Augustus Hawkins Day after a local congressman who acted as a founder of federal school improvement funding.

All schools received an informational packet about the MFM that included a memo from the

superintendent encouraging participation. The packets contained detailed information about how to organize and promote the events. Interested principals presented the program at staff meetings and each school that was interested appointed a coordinator.

On that Monday, schools invited the participating fathers into the building, where they were met by school board members, school administrators, and staff members who thanked them for their involvement. District leaders suggested that schools provide refreshments, information, and certificates of appreciation, as well as giving the fathers information about how to support their children through all levels of school.

Organizers stressed the importance of tailoring the national activity to district culture and to school specifics. They also suggested providing a framework, while encouraging each school to enhance its own event. The result was a successful program that allowed participants to feel their increasing role in something greater—a national movement—but also in something smaller—a bond to their children.

Juanita Coleman-Merritt
Parent Ombudsperson
juanita.coleman@lausd.net

THE READING BUS

VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

For many students in communities across the country, the bus is what brings you to school. For preschool-age children in Virginia Beach, the bus brings school to you.

Brightly colored and covered from front to back with images of young children playing and reading on a sandy, sunny shoreline, the Reading Bus makes its rounds through the city three days a week. The bus makes each stop at recreation centers, housing communities, and schools at the same time every other week—a schedule easy for parents to remember. Calendars are posted at the sites, as well as in local libraries, in schools, and on the internet.

The bus makes inroads with children who have not yet entered, or are just entering, the Virginia Beach school system, targeting youngsters aged 2–5 throughout the community. Parents get on the bus with their children, sign in, and participate in hands-on reading activities onboard. As a result, the children are exposed to literacy in fun and engaging ways, while parents learn how to boost their children’s early reading skills at home.

During a typical 45-minute bus stop, families engage in play time, story time, and a craft activity, led by the bus’s staff of retired teachers. The reading activities take various forms, including music, puzzles, and puppetry, thereby helping to develop language, motor, and social skills. After the lesson ends, families are given a board book to take home. They also receive educational information about topics such as kindergarten registration procedures and public services available to the community.

This year, running the Reading Bus involved participation from a variety of Virginia Beach district staff, including transportation, media, technology, and instructional services divisions. The district has managed the Reading Bus program for years, but renovated it recently, updating program components and commissioning a new

bus tailored to its educational purpose.

The one-time cost of the \$230,000 bus was a large initial investment of Title I funds, but expenses to maintain it are small. Additional materials and supplies needed to run the program year-round cost about \$20,000. The staff of four retired teachers is paid for their service, but the district Title I coordinator reports that the Reading Bus also could be run with volunteers.

The return from the district’s investment is impressive: the Reading Bus reached nearly 1,300 families this year. Organizers plan to continue evaluating attendance at each site, adjusting the route as necessary every six months. The Reading Bus will also stop at local festivals and other special events across the city. The district plans to keep the wheels on the bus rolling for years to come.

Janet Smallwood
Title I Coordinator
JanetMSmallwood@VBSchools.com

THREE TOOLS FOR ATP CHAIRS

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT PASCO, WASHINGTON

A secret of success among the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) schools of the Pasco School District seems to be “staying on message.” Due to the high degree of ATP organization at the district level, Pasco continues to be a leading model for fostering school, family, and community partnerships.

This year, among many things that district leaders accomplished in addition to facilitating all of its schools’ teams, was the implementation of a number of tools that encouraged ATP development in Pasco schools. These directly involved school ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs in different ways, but one might call the resulting materials “for Chairs, by Chairs.” The three tools were an ATP Chairperson Self-Evaluation, an ATP Parent Job Description, and an ATP Chairperson Video.

Concerned about team burn-out, the two district coordinators for partnerships sought to ensure that individual ATP leaders were sharing responsibilities with Co-Chairpersons and with team members. With the district’s Executive Director of Instruction and Achievement, the coordinators conceived of a self-evaluation form that chairpersons could use to assess how well they were delegating team responsibilities.

After drafting the questions (using NNPS’ *Handbook for Action* as a resource), the coordinators distributed the evaluation at an ATP Chairperson Cluster meeting. The leaders were asked to complete the form, but not to share their answers—rather, just to internalize the results. Coordinators shared the self-evaluation questions with school principals, so that they could use it as a conversation point with the team chairpersons.

At a later cluster meeting, the district coordinators asked for input on another topic. Previously, district organizers had asked APT Chairs to help develop a job description that outlined the responsibilities and expected contributions of various ATP roles (e.g., scribe, time-keeper). This time, the Chairs were split into groups to brain-

storm their ideas about an ATP parent-member’s job description. Specifically, the district coordinators wanted the team leaders to address questions about the expected level of parents’ commitment, qualifications, requirements, and ATP training.

The responses were compiled into a document, which was given back to the Chairs at the next meeting. Chairpersons were encouraged to use the information as a tool for recruiting and retaining parents as members of the ATP. If parents know the roles they will be asked to fill on a school’s ATP, they will be better able to decide if they will be a good fit for the tasks.

Finally, to underscore the accomplishments of ATP chairpersons, the district coordinators commissioned a short video to show at their ATP/PEAK! End-of-Year Celebration. With assistance from a coordinator in the neighboring Kennewick School District, they recruited videographers to shoot and edit a film in which Pasco ATP Chairpersons shared what they loved about working with their ATP, along with some advice for new leaders.

By highlighting their positive experiences, they helped create a new tool that coordinators plan to use at upcoming trainings, as well as for recruitment. The video is available on the Pasco School District’s web site, <http://www.psd1.org>.

Lorraine Landon
Parent Education Center Coordinator
llandon@psd1.org

Jessica Wallace
Parent Partnership Coordinator
jwallace@psd1.org

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUCCESS

NORTH PENN SCHOOL DISTRICT LANSDALE, PENNSYLVANIA

With both leadership and direct facilitation from the district level, specific solutions to one school's challenges can translate into district-wide strategies. One such example came in the fall of 2008, when North Penn High School—one of the North Penn School District's 18 schools—did not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks for academic achievement among the school's African American subgroup.

Following the August 2008 Data Retreat, the Home School Correlate Team, the Family Engagement Subcommittee, and the Gap Committee worked with school leadership and staff to design a set of strategies targeting the achievement gap between the school's 250 African American students and the rest of the school's 3,300 students.

With support from the district's Closing the Achievement Gap Committee, the school's correlate teams began to brainstorm ways to motivate students and engage parents. In addition, district staff and a member of the school team contacted with the Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium of the University of Pennsylvania, which had implemented similar programs in neighboring districts.

Following the planning stages, the high school held a Fishbowl Forum in December, attended by African American students, parents, high school faculty, and district administrators. First students, then parents, held frank and open conversations about their experiences, while faculty and administrators listened. Next, the school conducted a student survey to determine areas of concern and challenges that students faced in the school and with learning.

As a result of these conversations, two groups formed: the African American Parent Network for family members and the African American Awareness Club (or Triple AC) for students.

The parent group met regularly through the

year and recently attended a parent leadership program. Likewise, students increasingly participated in the Triple AC meetings with greater interest. The group met regularly, providing students with an open forum to discuss the importance of school, positive attitudes and behaviors, dress, planning for the future, goal-setting, and understanding the implications of various life choices.

"[Triple AC] gives you inspiration in life to do better," wrote one student, "not just in academics but in other things like applying for a job or college. It pushes you to do better. It gives you a support system."

A program in March called Cultural Proficiency: A Positive Approach to Diversity showcased the district's efforts to close achievement gaps and engaged over 400 attending family, staff, and community members in a dialogue about cultural competency. In addition, the district developed a Family Cultural Advisory Council to further its overall commitment to engaging parent voices from all cultures.

The myriad successes of the North Penn High School programs—in student performance on benchmark tests, in students' behavior and attitudes toward school, in participation rates of students and parents at meetings and events, and in sensitivity and outreach from school staff—provide a model for engagement that the district can adapt and implement in any of its schools to work to close achievement gaps and to meet the needs of students and families.

*Linda Abram
Family and Community Engagement Specialist
abramla@npenn.org*

FATHER FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS

CUYAHOGA COUNTY UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN CLEVELAND, OHIO

Getting more fathers involved in their young children's education was the focus for the year at the Universal Pre-Kindergarten initiative. This goal started simply with a desire to increase the participation of fathers and other male role models in the 24 pre-kindergarten sites in Cuyahoga County.

The project moved quickly from a list of tips for creating a father-friendly environment to a resource manual and a November workshop on the same topic. When the manual, *Creating a Father-Friendly Environment in the Early Childhood Setting*, was completed and distributed, the program's engagement coordinator urged its two dozen sites to assess their situations and host events to encourage the men in children's lives to come to school.

Some sites hesitated at first to plan such programs because they did not think the fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and others would participate. But after brainstorming creative ways to attract these family members, the sites' administrators planned a variety of events. Such activities included Donuts with Dudes, Bring Your Dad to School Day, and Read To Me, Daddy, as well as community-run programs, such as one conducted by the local children's museum.

When the myriad events were over, about 300 fathers and other caregivers had attended. Some youngsters learned things with their fathers, some played, others completed art projects, and still others shared meals. The most beneficial aspect of this initiative was not what they did, but the fact that children spent quality time with a male role model.

At least one youngster captured that sentiment: "I am so excited!" he said. "My grandpa is coming to school today."

The program offered the adults benefits, too. They learned new ways to interact with their children, enjoyed non-threatening activities at school, and saw first-hand what their children

were learning. School staff seized the moment to present volunteer opportunities for those who wanted to get—and stay—involved.

Each pre-kindergarten site that completed an assessment of father-friendly practices and made a corrective action plan, in addition to hosting an event, was deemed a Father-Friendly Site. They received a poster proudly proclaiming, "Here, Fathers Count. We Have a Father-Friendly Program."

The father-friendly initiative was an outgrowth of the work the parent coordinator did with all sites, assisting them in implementing the Family Engagement Model from NNPS. This was the second year for the sites to implement the model. Members of the Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) from the sites worked on this initiative. The group also worked with the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Steering Committee and the Cuyahoga County Fatherhood Initiative, which provided financial support, as well as ideas for increasing fathers' involvement in the lives of their young children.

Catherine Thomas
Family Engagement Coordinator
catherine.thomas@starting-point.org

MD PIRC PARENTING MATTERS REGIONAL CONFERENCES

**MARYLAND STATE PARENTAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTER
BETHESDA, MARYLAND**

The Maryland State Parental Information and Resource Center (MD PIRC) is a leading federally-funded statewide organization designed to help parents and educators address issues related to family engagement. In order to strengthen and sustain existing partnerships at all levels, the MD PIRC organized two free Parenting Matters Regional Conferences this year, specifically targeted to low-income, racially and ethnically diverse parents in Western and Southern Maryland.

The conferences were the result of collaboration among the parents, school staff, community members, faith-based organizations, students, public officials, and agencies represented in the MD PIRC's four Regional Special Advisory Committees. The diverse membership of these committees permits the MD PIRC to directly and indirectly provide extensive outreach to districts, schools, and families about parenting, student learning, advocacy, communication between home and school, and community partnerships, and about developing comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Attracting families to both Parenting Matters conferences was, in itself, emblematic of the advantages of collaboration on multiple levels. A representative for the MD PIRC wrote, "We did not rely on a single method of communication, but rather focused on existing relationships of trust and community networks to get the word out . . . Flyers and e-mail are not going to get the targeted families to participate." The MD PIRC activated district- and school-based networks, as well as faith-based partners, to disseminate the necessary information to families in both English and Spanish.

At the conferences, a range of workshop topics were offered to attending families, including Navigating the Public School System, Helping Your Child with Homework, Advocating for Your Child, and Internet Safety and Cyber-Bullying.

Several workshops, such as the one on internet safety, were designed to be attended by both parents and their children (12 and older).

Organizers also included options for younger children. Licensed childcare providers were on hand to lead children up to age 5 in engaging activities. In addition, kids aged 6–12 had the opportunity to take part in the MD PIRC's Youth Track program, offered in partnership with The Engaged University from the University of Maryland, College Park. Youth Track provided these children with enrichment in art and music, and guided conversations and peer mentoring on issues relevant to students today.

Childcare was only one of the solutions that organizers provided for common problems that would have prevented families from attending. The MD PIRC also worked with school districts to provide parents with bus transportation and carpool arrangements to the regional conferences. In order to ensure language accessibility, some workshops were held in Spanish, and other sessions featured interpreters. Although the conferences were day-long, organizers accommodated busy parents' schedules by offering half-day attendance options as well.

The \$4,588 investment—provided mostly by the MD PIRC funds, Title I funds, and various business partners—enabled the MD PIRC to reach out to 478 families who attended the two conferences. By monitoring event action plans and timelines, studying participant and presenter evaluations, and assessing anecdotal accounts, the MD PIRC staff—with the assistance of an external evaluator—will continue to embark on the process of strengthening its many outreach networks.

Susan Shaffer
Executive Director
sshaffer@maec.org

NNPS ROUNDTABLE

ARIZONA STATE PARENT INFORMATION RESOURCE CENTER GILBERT, ARIZONA

The Arizona State Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) functions as a mentor and technical assistance resource for schools that are implementing the NNPS model for school, family, and community partnerships. The PIRC has become increasingly aware of the many challenges faced by schools that are making such a schematic shift.

In response, the Arizona PIRC created a leadership activity that addresses several challenges: cementing school-wide commitment, making consistent efforts to reach all families, and drafting and executing a quality Action Plan for Partnerships linked to learning. Although it is important that a school overcome all these obstacles, PIRC staff understood that it was the last of these challenges that required special attention from the organization.

Seeking to provide Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) throughout the state with the necessary skills and information to design their own Action Plan and Action Steps—an enhancement of the Action Plan format wherein teams detail how they will put activities into practice—the PIRC decided to supplement its existing end-of-year recognition workshop with a venue for NNPS schools to reflect on the work they do.

By giving the NNPS teams an opportunity to review their progress, the organization wanted to encourage the teams to reflect on the purpose of parent involvement at their schools in relation to increasing student achievement. Furthermore, the PIRC understood the benefit of providing these budding NNPS schools with a chance to network on their shared struggles and successes.

“We have found that our schools greatly benefit from setting aside time solely dedicated to discussing the progress of their efforts,” writes the PIRC Director.

By giving their event a Round Table format, the PIRC facilitated info-sharing among partnership schools, while also allowing time for these

schools to complete the necessary re-writes to their 2009–10 Action Plans for Partnerships and their NNPS End-of-Year School UPDATE evaluations of their work for the 08-09 school year.

At the roundtable, a PowerPoint presentation covered various aspects of the NNPS process, the work necessary for success, and the purposes and benefits of fostering good partnerships. In addition, the presenter focused on the core beliefs to be incorporated into the school culture if the school is to succeed in its partnership role. The presentation featured five activities that allowed attendees to participate in the workshop and assess the accomplishments and goals of their respective teams.

With the presenter’s guidance, team members worked together on a Climate of Partnerships checklist; discussed the steps each school has taken to engage its families; named their team; created a mission statement to bolster their ownership of their work; completed an Action Plan Assessment; talked about the challenges the team faced in implementing school-wide change; and dedicated some time to re-writing and improving the Action Plan for Partnerships for 09-10 and reviewing Action Team members’ roles.

“All in all,” the director reported, “the leadership activity provided the opportunity to assess, reflect, review, and rewrite new plans for the upcoming school year.”

Jenni Brasington
Director, Arizona State PIRC
jenni@azpirc.com

PARENT TALK

HAMILTON COUNTY FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST COUNCIL CINCINNATI, OHIO

Faced with the question of how best to get parents and teachers in the same room at the same time, organizers in the Cincinnati community of Norwood found a solution as innovative as it was simple: meet in the families' own living rooms.

A staff survey found that many Norwood teachers reported that their own educational agendas differed from those of parents. Members of the Family and Children First Council (FCF) hypothesized that it was not the agendas of teachers and parents that were misaligned. Rather, it was likely that the two groups were expressing the same goals in different terms. The council saw the need to increase communication between teachers and families and, thus, to reconcile their goals in common language and expectations. The question: How can we get this message to everyone?

The necessary resources were available in the Norwood community in the form of a local cable access channel. FCF began producing *Parent Talk*, a TV show featuring neighborhood parents, along with education and health professionals, to discuss developmental, academic, and social issues related to children and teens. In addition to aligning educational expectations, *Parent Talk* also linked friendly faces with the names of educational, health, and social service providers in the community.

The 30-minute program was replayed six times a week to ensure that its target audience could catch the episode. Additional recordings were placed in the local library and every teacher received his/her own copy of each episode.

FCF contracted with a local service provider to handle the interviews. The cable access crew provided the equipment and did all the taping and editing. In addition to advertising the program on the Norwood Schools web site and in various church bulletins, the providers also created a *Parent Talk* Fridge Sheet. The Fridge Sheet

offered activities and inspiration related to the show. Parents could even earn prizes by answering questions about *Parent Talk* episodes on the Fridge Sheet and returning them to the school.

FCF's budget funded the \$3,000 for the service provider. The interviewees and cable access crew gave their time and talents gratis. Organizers advised others to have patience and to take time to plan carefully. The editing process, especially, took more time than initially expected.

General feedback was positive, empirically confirmed by the most recent staff survey, in which teachers reported an improvement in educational goal-sharing with parents.

Connecting the show with take-home information was an advantage and encouraged parents to engage with the show. FCF hopes to further encourage viewer interaction by implementing a *Parent Talk* web site.

Deb Robison
Family and Children First Coordinator
Robison.D@norwoodschoools.org

SUMMER INSTITUTE 2009

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FLORENCE, SOUTH CAROLINA

The Francis Marion University Center of Excellence (COE) to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty held its second annual Summer Institute in June 2009. Hosted on the Francis Marion campus, the COE Summer Institute is a day-long event designed to provide all participants with practical, research-based information about the needs and abilities of low-income children. The agenda for this year's program included an opening welcome address and panel discussion, talks from two other keynote speakers, and over 25 workshop sessions.

Workshop sessions—all dubbed with a “How 2” theme in honor of the program's second year—focused on six major areas of interest that were identified by the Center of be critical to the achievement of children of poverty. These were:

- » *Culture of Poverty*
- » *Language and Literacy*
- » *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*
- » *The Classroom Community*
- » *Curriculum Design, Instructional Strategies, and Assessment*
- » *Teachers as Learners, Leaders, and Advocates*

The Summer Institute 2009 attendees included undergraduate and graduate students in education, as well as area teachers and school administrators. A primary goal of the COE's organizers was to equip these college students and educators with professional development training and skills that they require to work not only with children, but also with families and community resource providers.

Attendance at the Summer Institute provided the opportunity to attend a local training event that exposed participants to expert speakers they might not be otherwise able to hear at no cost to themselves or their sending schools. Furthermore, teachers received professional develop-

ment recertification and/or early childhood SC Department of Social Services credits for attending the event.

Planning for the second COE Summer Institute began after the organization's Spring Workshop ended in January. Organizers of the event chose a date and secured the necessary FMU facilities at that time. Shortly thereafter, the COE acquired its keynote speakers and published a Call for Proposals for workshop presentations, targeting faculty at FMU and other SC colleges, public school educators, and past presenters. Proposals were accepted based on their relevance to the COE's work and the six Teaching Standards listed above.

A number of the sessions offered at the Summer Institute were focused on building school, family, and community partnerships, including workshops about implementing activities featured in previous editions of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

Funded by SC Commission on Higher Education, SC School Improvement, and SC Department of Education grants, this year's Summer Institute cost approximately \$6,500 to implement. Based on this year's success—with well over 250 participants attending—COE organizers are considering expanding Summer Institute 2010 to a two-day schedule, in order to give more local teachers and Action Teams the chance to share their best practices.

Markey Bee
Associate Director / NNPS SFC Liaison
mbee@fmarion.edu

VIP: VERY INVOLVED PARENTS WORKSHOP SERIES

LITERACY, INC.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Serving districts in all five boroughs of the New York City, Literacy, Inc. (LINC) helps parents and community leaders to coordinate resources to encourage literacy success in young children. Keeping in mind that fruitful parent participation occurs at multiple levels, LINC program organizers established a series of four workshops to train parent leaders who would be working at the top in their communities.

Dubbed VIP: Very Involved Parents, the primary goal of the workshops was to equip parents with the tools and information that they would need to establish out-of-class reading time or to run existing literacy programs and events in their own neighborhoods. These VIPs would also be able to organize other parents to foster the growth of these programs. LINC Coordinators identified a core group of parents who already assisted them in these communities and were ready to do more.

LINC recruited the VIPs by working with parent coordinators in the schools and community-based organizations. These coordinators accompanied the parents to LINC's Manhattan offices for the series. To further encourage participation, parents who attended at least three of the VIP workshops received a special commendation from a City Councilman's office.

The four workshops, developed with these parents' needs in mind, proceeded step-by-step: The first meeting focused on ways in which parents could be agents of change in their communities. The leaders presented scenarios about parent behaviors to break down pre-existing mindsets that parents have about one another. In addition, they also discussed how to get involved in their communities and their children's schools, to be more aware of what was happening and where assistance was needed to support and advance children's literacy learning.

At the second workshop, parents were shown different ways that they could foster a literacy-

rich environment for their children, including literacy games that they could play with them as they shopped, traveled, or did housework.

The third part of the VIP series continued the discussion of encouraging literacy in the home. Examples included children's day-to-day involvement in the household—matching socks to make a pair, setting the table, and so on—and how to use opportunities for reading and conversation at home to help children succeed in school.

The last workshop outlined how parents could canvass their communities to discover and activate resources for creating or supporting literacy programs in their own communities.

"I was called for a substitute assignment but realized that the value of being a VIP representative was more important. My work with LINC will help me do better in all I do," wrote one of the VIPs. Nearly 50 parents were directly reached by the VIP program, which cost LINC approximately \$1,200 to implement. A number of new programs have arisen from the work of VIPs, including "lobby readings," as well as reading events at parks and restaurants.

Debora Mulrain
Program Director
dmulrain@lincnyc.org

ATPs FROM A TO Z

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
MADISON, WISCONSIN

To foster the creation and sustainability of Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) in districts and schools across the state, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) made an extensive effort to “spell out” the specific structure, function, and goals of an ATP. In doing so, they demonstrated how a little state-level support and organization of partnership practices can go a long way to realize these goals at the local level.

The state’s approach to promoting partnerships was multi-pronged. In addition to continuing to offer basic ATP training, new strategies included:

- » *Providing better “trainer training” for those who would run the already-implemented Fundamentals of Family Involvement regional workshops.*
- » *Training VISTA members in the ATP process, providing them with follow-up webinars, and contributing articles on forming and supporting ATPs to the monthly VISTA newsletter and the DPI website.*
- » *Offering a one-hour workshop at the annual Parent Leadership Conference, as a follow-up for those who had received training in the Action Team process.*
- » *Developing a network for ATP leaders to share their challenges and successes.*

Before putting these new procedures into action, the DPI received feedback from some sites that were struggling to implement the Action Team process. Some requested extra support in understanding the framework, while others asked how current teams and committees could be retro-fitted for the ATP structure.

With these requests in mind, in addition to the ideas listed above, the DPI drafted a short assessment tool called “Is Your Group a Partnership Action Team?” The handout consisted

of nine Yes-or-No questions related to group membership, involvement, and practices. The questions were followed by a key, so that existing groups could determine how to merge or restructure themselves into school ATPs.

As well as being posted on the DPI Community Learning and Partnerships website (available at <http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/>), the questionnaire was distributed to the attendees of a workshop entitled “What IS this thing called ‘The Action Team’?”

At the workshop, the Director of Community Learning and Partnerships led over 100 new and veteran ATP practitioners in an opportunity for interactive learning and dialogue. These participants later reported that they learned a number of useful new strategies for involving families in students’ academic achievement.

Said one attendee, “New to me is the concept of parents and teachers truly working together to help meet the needs of children academically—it only makes sense!”

The DPI team will continue development of its web-based toolkit, as well. By utilizing a variety of traditional and new media to reach VISTAs and ATP members and support partnerships throughout Wisconsin, the team continues to be a trailblazer in Action Team leadership from the state level.

Jane Grinde
Director, Community Learning and Partnerships
jane.grinde@dpi.state.wi.gov

PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERSHIPS / FAMILY FAIR

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
JEFFERSON CITY, MISSOURI

If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, then the Practical Parenting Partnerships (PPP) at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Second Education must truly be flattered by the activities of Lincoln Elementary School in Benton County, Missouri. The school modeled its first Family Fair on the successful Family Festival that has been sponsored by the statewide PPP initiative for 13 years.

“With assistance from PPP and many volunteers, Lincoln conducted an award-winning event with attention to detail—breakout sessions, parent information, carnival, food and fun for all involved,” said the PPP director. The same organization gave Lincoln its Founder’s Award in April for “the most innovative, successful parent involvement idea.” One of the prizes, in addition to cash and a trophy, was to have the practice submitted to NNPS for consideration in the 2009 edition of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

The day-long fair featured activities and programs for everyone in the family. For the adults, there were information sessions, addressing discipline, children’s internet access, helping children with homework, and understanding attention deficit disorder. A “mad scientist” performed science experiments for adults and children, and the “Poison Ivy Lady” taught about poisons through her “toxicology trivia” game. There was a reading carnival for the youngsters, more than 25 booths and exhibits, and the Boy Scouts’ concession stand. Adults who attended three of the breakout sessions were eligible for the grand prize drawing.

Lincoln invited all county residents, reaching out to parents, grandparents, childcare providers, and teachers from other schools. One of the more innovative publicity strategies was placemats made by Lincoln students and distributed to area restaurants for their tables.

More than 185 parents and 100 students—more than one-third of the student body—partic-

ipated in the event.

Not only was the fair a great opportunity for families to have fun together, but also a chance for adults and children to learn about many of the services in the community. The fair also attracted parents and community members who had not attended other school activities.

The community was a big partner in the fair, with businesses and organizations donating goods and services. High school students volunteered to provide childcare and other services. With teachers, custodians, secretaries, and school administrators volunteering as well, it was a tremendous school, family, and community effort.

“Some community members expressed surprise that a small school could create such a big event,” said one of the organizers.

Janet Shepard
Director, Practical Parenting Partnerships
pppctr@pppctr.org

STATE ACTION TEAM FOR PARTNERSHIPS

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

In order to serve as a role model for a partnership-based approach that the California State Educational Agency (SEA) plans to encourage districts and schools to implement, the SEA piloted its own Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) this year—at the state level.

Based on an idea that SEA representatives learned at a NNPS Leadership Development Conference, the agency began this practice with the goal in mind that the State ATP would, in turn, develop a state-wide Action Plan for Partnerships (APP). Leaders also aimed to use the State ATP to secure a wide range of input and ideas for the development of the SEA's State Leadership Plan for Partnerships.

The roles assumed in the State ATP are analogues of those assumed by the members' school-based ATPs and district-level teams. The individual roles were based on the nature of the organization that each member represented. The targeted groups included major leaders from school, family, and community partnership organizations from across California such as: the State PTA; the federally-funded Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRCs) and Regional Equity Assistance Center; the San Diego State University Research Foundation; the California Alliance for School, Family, and Community Partnerships; district partnership leaders; and various non-profit organizations.

By the time of the April 2008 NNPS District Leadership Institute, the state's two PIRCs and the SEA had drafted a concept paper for partnerships that these groups could conduct together. At the NNPS Institute, the group took time to meet and discuss ways to amplify the original PIRC/SEA plan.

After returning from the conference, one of the PIRCs and the Regional Equity Assistance Center began to work on the next draft of the document. The difficulties of collaborating on this document via conference calls inspired the

implementation of new meeting-software that will streamline future group efforts.

The State ATP shared the resulting draft of the APP at a meeting of the Family Area Network (FAN) Board, an informal advisory group of the SEA. Since then, the State ATP became a subcommittee of the FAN Board, and continues to convene at FAN Board meetings. During this year, the ATP presented a final draft of the APP to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and asked for his support for the partnership initiatives presented in it. This step is pending.

Each of the entities involved in the ATP came to the partnership to carry out its own individual charge in the context of a common effort. In this sense, the State ATP accords with the NNPS' Theoretical Model: Overlapping Spheres of Influence in Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning by overlapping areas of responsibility among members to form a cohesive partnership unit.

"A lesson learned in the process was to actively involve the Comprehensive Center, parent leaders, the faith-based community, and parent advocates in the formative stages of the development of the State APP," wrote the state's Education Programs Consultant. The membership of the State ATP will be expanded next year to better represent the state's diverse populations that all are interested in improving and developing district and school programs of family and community involvement.

Carol Dickson
Education Programs Consultant
CDickson@cde.ca.gov
