

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



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

Johns Hopkins University

2013

Edited by

Brenda G. Thomas, Marsha D. Greenfeld, Emily K. Parker, and Darcy J. Hutchins

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at Johns Hopkins University**

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for the photographs of school, family, and community partnership activities in *Promising Partnership Practices 2013*.

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INTRODUCTION

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES 2013

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.,

Director

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

Members of NNPS know that developing excellent partnership programs is a *process*, not an event. From one year to the next, well-planned and well-implemented partnership programs engage more and different families in ways that support student success in school. Of course, creative events are one way to grow a program.

In this issue of *Promising Partnership Practices 2013*, readers will see many different kinds of “events” that are planned, implemented, and assessed to learn if and how they (a) help create a more welcoming school climate; (b) address needs that parents identify so that they can help their children at home; and (c) focus on state and district standards and school goals for improving student learning and behavior. Events, then, are an inevitable part of the *process* of program development.

Recently, education writers have commented on the need to “re-imagine” the school day to ensure that time in school is engaging, effective, and—yes—fun for students. They call for schools that increase the number of students who like school, stay in school, and graduate from high school with plans for college or careers. Most writers forget, however, that good schools also are engaging, effective, and—yes—fun for teachers, families, and other partners in education.

Members of NNPS know this very well. In this collection, many activities use art, music, and theater to enrich and enliven students’ work and family engagement. Also, see the use of new and common technologies to reach and engage all families, including English Language Learners. See how students’ poetry and stories are spotlighted, how supermarkets work with schools and families to improve students’ math skills, how good deeds improve communities, and how school gardens improve students’ knowledge and the environment. In NNPS, schools, districts, states, and organizations not only imagine creative, inspiring, and inclusive schools, they also implement family and community engagement activities that aim to contribute—joyfully—to the success of every student.

What’s in this Book?

The activities in this book come *from* members of NNPS *for* members and for others who use the NNPS website to strengthen their partnership programs. From about 150 submissions, the editors of *Promising Partnership Practices 2013* selected 94 activities from 76 schools, 15 districts, 2 organizations, and 1 state department of education. The contributors are from economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities in 16 states in all parts of the country. There are basic, advanced, creative, and surprising goal-linked activities in every section of this book.

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

FOUR TABLES OF CONTENTS (TOC)

help readers strengthen their partnership programs.

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

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

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

4. CONTRIBUTORS. This Table of Contents shows you where the contributors to this book are located. Activities developed in one community (urban, suburban, or rural) may be adapted to meet conditions and interests in other locations.

ON THE WEB. *Promising Partnership Practices 2013* will be posted on the NNPS website—www.partnershipschools.org—in the section **Success Stories**. Also see the Order Form for additional print copies.

NNPS SAMPLERS. NNPS *SAMPLERS* provide a shortcut for reviewing ten good activities from prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices*. They will help your school meet particular partnership goals in **reading, writing, math, science, health, the arts, homework, attendance, behavior, career awareness/postsecondary planning, transitions to new schools, involving fathers, and for improving partnership programs in preschools, middle schools, and high schools.** Each *Sampler* includes a one-page summary of results of research on the featured topic. Follow the links to *Samplers* from the NNPS homepage and see an Order Form for printed copies of *Samplers* for easy distribution.

MEMBERS ONLY. The **MEMBERS ONLY** section of the website reinforces the fact that membership in NNPS has special benefits. The code gives members access to over 1000 family and community engagement activities in all prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices*, from 1998 to 2012. Members Only also have access to all *Samplers*.

The **Members Only** code for 2013-14 for selected sections of the NNPS website is **memNNPS14**.

Active members of NNPS who evaluated their programs using the UPDATE survey and renewed membership with NNPS for 2013-14 will be reminded about these codes in NNPS monthly E-Briefs.

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

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

For more information, visit **www.partnershipschools.org**.

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



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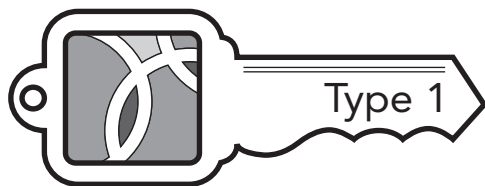
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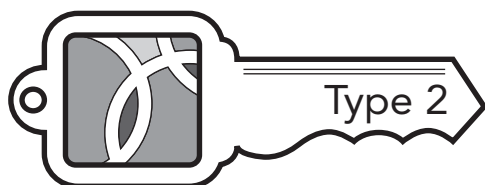
Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships



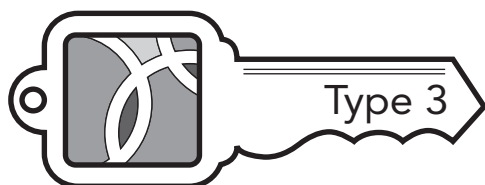
Parenting

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



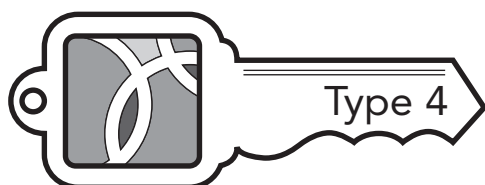
Communicating

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



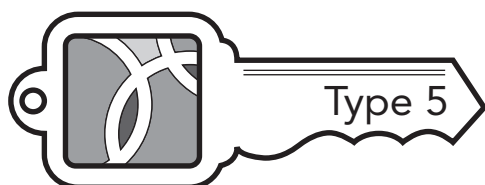
Volunteering

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



Learning at Home

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



Decision Making

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



Collaborating with the Community

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

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1

ACADEMIC GOALS



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

BOOKS AND BASKETBALL FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT

**LEE CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL
BISHOPVILLE, SC**

The Lee Central Middle School community loves basketball. To take advantage of this passion, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) used the sport as a draw for its Family Literature Night.

At the event, nearly 100 attendees played a friendly game of Books and Basketball. Family teams gathered on the basketball court and competed to answer trivia questions about popular children's literature. When a team answered correctly, a player earned the chance to win extra points by making a free-throw basket. It was a great way to let the families' enthusiasm for basketball spill over into excitement about reading.

The basketball game was just one part of an evening devoted to literacy and community. Family Literacy Night also featured a spaghetti dinner donated by a local restaurant and small group literacy sessions. While the families enjoyed the meal, the ATP educated them about the reading exams their students would be taking and shared student reading goals. They also distributed fun reading-related door prizes: book baskets and reading night lights.

After dinner, the families broke into small groups according to student grade levels and learned reading strategies from teachers that they could reinforce at home. They also received folders containing activities they could use at home to help their children improve reading skills.

Next, every student—including those who could not attend the Family Reading Night—received a book of his or her own at an appropriate reading level. The books, which had been collected by parent volunteers, community

businesses, and faith-based organizations, provided students with interesting at-home reading material and a sense of ownership over their reading skills.

Books and Basketball Family Literacy Night wasn't the only way that the school encouraged reading at home. The ATP also asked the school staff to distribute weekly literacy tips via the school's telephone communications system. These automated calls served as regular reminders to parents to take time to help their children improve their reading skills.

Finally, the principal fostered additional appreciation for books among the student body by founding a reading club. She met with students twice a month and students shared the number of books they had read along with intriguing facts about them.

Students relished the personal attention. "Thanks for starting the Principal's Reading Club," one sixth-grader said. "Now I have a reading partner."

Altogether, the initiative cost \$776. Funding was provided by a grant from the Frances Marion University Center of Excellence.

The ATP's efforts to encourage reading at home were a slam dunk. Teachers reported that their students read and wrote more, and that test scores improved.

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CAUGHT YOU READING

**WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 4

More than 150 students at Whittier Elementary School were caught in the act—of reading, that is. For one week, teachers volunteered to telephone students at home in the evening to ask if they were reading. If the students answered, “Yes,” and could name the title of the book and summarize its content, they were rewarded with a free book of their choice.

Students delighted in being recognized for their responsible homework behavior, and enjoyed having a connection with teachers outside the school day. “As students told me about the books they were reading, I could hear the excitement in their voices at being able to share,” said a teacher.

The idea for Caught You Reading came from an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) discussion of ways to motivate students to improve their reading skills. The ATP decided to ask students to read from 6:30 to 7 p.m. every night for a week. Students whose parents had signed a permission slip were chosen at random to receive calls from teachers during that time.

The next day at school, the names of the students who were caught reading were announced over the PA system. Winners were invited to the office to select a book.

The school’s literacy vertical team successfully applied for a grant from the local teachers union to purchase new books that were used as prizes. The school librarian also contacted the Reading Foundation, which was happy to make a contribution of books for students.

For some students, the book they chose was the first they had ever owned. “I enjoyed watching the kids decide which book they would

take home,” said a visitor. “As the students came in and saw the great assortment of books to choose from, they said ‘Wow!’”

Students were so eager to participate that they were crestfallen when they missed a call from a teacher. One parent called the office to apologize for not being home the previous evening. “We had to hurry out on an errand and my child even took the book with them in the car,” the parent said. “Could you please call again tonight?”

Last year, the team of 45 volunteer teachers contacted 165 students. In future years, they hope to contact even more.

Caught You Reading fully engaged the school community, from families to teachers to nonprofit partners to students. The program demonstrated that a friendly conversation with a teacher, public recognition, and a free book all help motivate students to read.

The Whittier team hopes that other schools will take a page from their book and try this activity with their families!

READING

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COMMUNITY READ-A-THON

CARVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

At Carver Elementary School, parents have long enjoyed visiting classrooms to read aloud to students. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) built on this interest to fuel a larger event: Community Read-A-Thon.

Families, teachers, and local volunteers gathered at a community center to read together and share literacy tips. The activity was designed to boost excitement about reading and to help students improve their reading skills.

The ATP began planning early. First, they worked with other school organizations to choose a date and location for the event. They scheduled the Read-A-Thon immediately preceding a school concert, which also was held at the community center, to ensure a high rate of participation.

Next, they sent out letters asking for volunteer readers and donations of books and food. The response was overwhelming. Nearly 20 community members volunteered to read stories at the event, including several middle school and high school students. Many parents and teachers donated books and refreshments. An \$850 grant from the Frances Marion University Center of Excellence enabled the ATP to supplement the donations with books purchased from the Scholastic store.

The event was publicized via newsletters, e-mails, announcements at school events, and social media updates.

On the night of the Read-A-Thon, students, families, teachers, and community members arrived to read together. Upon signing in, families received handouts containing reading strategies and reading logs, as well as graphic organizers in which to keep them.

Presenters modeled teaching strategies for parents, and volunteers read with small groups of students.

At the end of the event, students were invited to select books to add to their personal at-home libraries. Students who could not attend the Read-A-Thon were included, too. They received books through the school's food backpack program.

The event was well-received. Parents were happy to learn new ways to enrich their reading experiences with their children, and community volunteers asked to be involved again next year. Teachers were glad to encourage their students to read at home, and looked forward to seeing their students' improved reading skills in the classroom.

While the Read-A-Thon succeeded in strengthening the partnership between the school, families, and community, and getting students excited about reading, the ATP at Carver already had some improvements in mind. To make this type of event even more fun, they recommend that schools consider providing dinner, door prizes, and a greater variety of activities.

In some places, a celebration of reading will attract more participants at the school than at a community center. In other places, a convenient community center is a great place to support activities for improving students' reading skills.

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FABULOUS FAMILY FRIDAYS

**AMISTAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 4

On the second Friday of every month, families and school staff gather at Amistad Elementary School for a night of fun and education. While their children participate in activities in the gym, parents meet with the principal and teachers to learn how to support their students' learning. This past year, Fabulous Family Fridays drew 70 parents, 120 students, and 24 teachers and administrators.

Initially, the sessions for parents focused on building a sense of community. The classroom filled with chatter and laughter as parents and teachers played icebreakers such as People Bingo to get to know one another. Once a comfortable and safe environment was established, teachers asked parents what they hoped to learn at Fabulous Family Fridays. The parents agreed that their top priority was to better understand how to help their students at home with reading.

The school staff members were happy to help families meet this goal. Teachers began by sharing strategies with parents on how to help students improve reading fluency. They modeled fluency strategies for every grade level, and warned parents about potential pitfalls. Parents also learned about the appropriate rhythm, volume, and pace students should exhibit when reading aloud.

At the next session, teachers explained how to coach students on reading comprehension. They encouraged parents to ask students questions related to character development, setting, predictions, inferences, and cause and effect.

The meetings were conducted in English and Spanish so that all parents could understand the information. Parents were also encouraged to actively participate in the question-and-answer session that concluded every gathering.

Parents were pleased with the strategies they learned. "Now I know what to do when my kindergarten student comes home with those little books," one parent said.

"Coming here to learn has really helped me know how to help my kids at home so they can do better in reading," another added.

Improved reading skills were not the only benefit for students. Teachers noticed that after parents were more engaged in the school community, their children's classroom behavior improved. Teachers also reported having warmer relationships with the families of their students.

Fabulous Family Fridays could not have occurred without the collaborative work of the Action Team for Partnerships, school staff, family members, and students. The school counselor and secretaries distributed invitations to the families, and students helped encourage their parents' attendance by delivering reminder stickers before the event. The principal and teachers contributed by facilitating each meeting, and parents provided feedback about what they wanted to learn.

The program's costs were minimal. Title I funds covered the printed materials and refreshments.

The meetings created a strong partnership between school staff and families, and equipped parents with strategies to help their children learn at home. In other words, Fabulous Family Fridays lived up to their name.

READING

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FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT: UNDER THE BIG TOP

PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, children of all ages...step right up to learn how Prairie Elementary School introduced students to the joy of literacy by putting on a three-ring circus.

Twice a year, a local bookstore sponsors a themed book fair fundraiser at the school. Last fall, the School, Family, and Community Partnership (SFCP) team asked if it could partner with the book fair and host a Family Literacy Night on the same evening.

The result? A crowd of more than 250 students, parents, teachers, and community members gathered at the school to shop for books and participate in circus-related literacy activities.

The evening started with a pizza dinner sold by a fifth-grade Girl Scout troop. Families browsed the book fair and visited activity stations set up in the gym and in the learning resource center. "There were so many choices," parents enthused.

In the first circus ring, older students used a video tutorial to teach children to juggle balls, handkerchiefs, plates, and Lunastix. In the next ring, the school's music teacher led a game of circus charades. Students listened to different animal noises and acted out the animal they thought made the noise for others to guess.

In the third ring, children used crayons and pencils to draw circus storybook covers. Special crayons were provided for children with multi-needs.

"There was something for everyone to do," teachers noted.

More fun was found under the Big Top (on the gym's stage.) There, students received blank books in which a single sentence about a

circus was printed. The students were encouraged to add another sentence, and, then, pass the book to the person on their left to create a progressive story. Circus vocabulary words were laminated and spread across the table to give students many good ideas.

Families also enjoyed having their faces painted and watching a balloon artist. The school hired these artists at \$200 for the night.

Other costs included paper products (\$75), decorations (\$50), fake tattoos (\$75) and the story booklets (\$150.) Altogether, the event cost \$725. The Baraboo Circus World Museum in Wisconsin donated tickets for a raffle.

The success of the event was due in large part to advance promotion. The SFCP team sent home two invitations: one three weeks before the event, and another ten days before the event. They also asked families to RSVP.

Another great strategy to generate excitement? A three-dimensional art exhibit featuring circus characters displayed at the school entrance.

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FAMILY LITERACY TRIVIA NIGHT

**HENDERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
ST. CHARLES, MO**

Type 1

Games are a popular way to make learning fun. Henderson Elementary School combined a literacy initiative with a trivia game format to engage and interest students, parents, and teachers. Dozens had fun playing ten rounds of children’s literature trivia. “My child hasn’t stopped talking about it,” said one parent.

The idea came from the school’s literacy coach, who wanted to increase students’ excitement about reading. Family Literacy Trivia Night succeeded by bringing families and school staff together to enjoy sharing facts about their favorite books.

At this event, the school’s literacy committee divided attendees into groups of eight, and seated them at round tables. The tables were covered with butcher paper tablecloths. Children were given crayons and encouraged to illustrate the tablecloths with drawings related to their favorite books. Every table also was supplied with a packet containing answer sheets, pencils, and door prize tickets. A team of judges (teachers) sat at the front of the room.

Members of the literacy committee had spent about a half day creating 100 PowerPoint slides—ten slides for each round of the game. The slides featured book cover images, questions about well-known children’s books, authors, and characters. The committee made sure to include questions about books from a variety of reading levels so that students of all ages could participate. Questions were in multiple-choice format—similar to questions on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*—and were presented on a big screen.

No time was wasted during the event. While the judges graded each round, the literacy

committee showed and discussed slides with useful reading tips. Each team was given a list of literacy-related conversation starters so that they could discuss books while they waited for the next round.

At the end of the evening, the team with the most points and the team with the best-decorated table cloth received books and stuffed animals. Every student participant also went home with a free book. The prizes were funded by a \$360 donation from the school’s PTO.

The literacy committee worked hard to generate buzz about the event in advance. They sent home two flyers and included announcements about the event in the school’s e-mail newsletter. Parents were reminded about the event at parent-teacher conferences and posters advertising the evening were placed around the school. Most fun of all, a teacher with a voice similar to that of a beloved children’s book character made announcements about the event over the school’s PA system.

The planners’ efforts were rewarded. The evening ended with a chorus of, “This is so much fun, let’s do it again!”

READING

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FLYING FAR WITH FLUENCY

ELOY INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
ELOY, AZ

When students practice reading aloud at home with a parent, they achieve fluency faster. Last year, this fact inspired a new literacy activity at Eloy Intermediate School: Flying Far With Fluency. For two weeks, over 300 students completed read-aloud exercises each night with a parent or family partner. At the end of the period, the class with the greatest level of participation was rewarded with an ice cream party.

The school Family Involvement Action Team (FIAT) collaborated with teachers and the Reading Intervention Specialist to develop the program and materials. Together, they created read-aloud pages with interesting content customized by grade level. Each packet contained a timer, graph, and ten high-interest, grade-specific, short 5-minute reading passages: one for each school night. The passages were excerpted from chapter books that students enjoy reading so that the read aloud would be fun.

Next, the FIAT held a kick-off meeting to show families how to use the packets. To ensure high attendance, the FIAT sent out three invitations and provided a friendly dinner. Students helped to encourage their families to come. Each student whose family attended received a bracelet featuring an eagle—the school mascot.

For the next two weeks, students and their families used the read-aloud passages every night. Students read that day's passage aloud twice while parents recorded the number of words read per minute on a graph. Students aimed to increase the number of words they could read per minute by the end of two weeks.

"There was quick evidence of enthusiasm for the practice not only with the students but also with the parents," said the principal. "It provided an opportunity for parents and their children to increase their love for reading in a

family environment."

"I like it when my mom sees that I didn't miss a single word," said a student. "I feel happy that my mom watches me."

Each day, students submitted their reading graphs to their teachers. The FIAT then recorded each class's participation on a display at the school's entrance using airplane icons to show how classrooms of students were flying far with fluency. This competitive element was a key component of the program. Students loved monitoring their class's progress. "The kids would visit it each day to see where their class airplane was in relation to the others," said a teacher. "Kids could be heard telling other kids 'make sure you do it tomorrow' so that their class could pull ahead one or two spots."

At the end of the first week, 80% of the students had participated. These students received a silver necklace and a blue eagle charm. Staff met with students who had not participated and found ways for them to get involved. In some cases, students met with teachers during lunchtime or after school to complete the read-alouds. The extra efforts boosted participation to 95% in the second week. At that point, all participants received a gold eagle charm. The jewelry incentives and the reading timers cost \$2,500.

By providing appealing reading passages, clear instructions and tools for parents, and a competitive component, the FIAT ensured that Flying Far With Fluency not only got off the ground, but soared. Teachers reported students improved their reading skills, increased interest in chapter books, and that over 300 families became engaged with students in reading.

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HOMESTEAD SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL'S 2013 POETRY SLAM

**HOMESTEAD SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
HOMESTEAD, FL**

Type 2

Last February, the Homestead Senior High School auditorium was filled with shouting, whistling, and snapping as 25 students took to the stage to share spoken word poems of their own creation. A few students performed motivational poems about “growing up and being respectable men.” Others rapped and sang about parents, school, love, and current events. All of them received a standing ovation at the end of the show.

The poetry slam was an excellent way for students to develop their creative writing skills and gain public speaking experience. It also helped foster a warm, accepting environment in the school. The students bravely offered emotion-packed performances to a supportive, nonjudgmental audience of over 80 parents, 40 members of the community, 30 school staff, and 25 student performers.

Audience members raved about the performances. “Last night was an unforgettable night,” said one attendee. “Never have I seen such pride, passion, and power from Homestead. Our students are remarkable and to see them challenge themselves and strive to be better, not just as writers and performers, but as people too, was truly inspiring.”

The idea for the event came from the school’s administrators, City Year Team, School Transformation Facilitator, and Communities in Schools Site Coordinator. Their goals were to empower a diverse group of students to share their talents with parents and the community and to increase connections of the school, families, and community.

Producing the event was also a collaborative effort. School staff advertised the event via posters, flyers, and automated phone

calls. They also made sure that local businesses received invitations to the event.

City Year Corps members recruited student-poets to perform at the event, and organized rehearsals for them. At the rehearsals, they explained to students that they expected them to use appropriate language in their poems and to dress respectfully. The City Year Corps members also emceed the poetry slam, and raffled off prizes during intermission. The prizes included gift cards, books, and tee shirts.

Teachers, too, were instrumental in making the Poetry Slam a success. They advised students on drafts of their poems in advance. Many of them attended the show to support their students, and a few even got up on stage to perform their own poems.

The event cost very little to produce. The school hired a School Resource Officer to provide security, and paid \$70 for pizza, drinks, and ice. Parents volunteered to sell the food before, during, and after the show, and the proceeds were given to the school’s Poetry Club.

Thanks to the rousing performances at the poetry slam, the new student club is sure to enjoy lots of interest!

Homestead Senior High School is a Talent Development-Diplomas Now school and a member of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University.

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READING

HOW CAN ELL PARENTS HELP CHILDREN READ AT HOME?

**WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Reading at home is critical for students to strengthen their literacy skills. But for many immigrant parents who do not speak English, helping their children with reading and homework is a challenge. At Westgate Elementary School, parents wanted to know: “How can I help my children if I do not read English myself?”

Because the school serves a large population of Burmese immigrant families, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) sought ways to enable families to help their children learn to read despite the language barrier. The ATP researched reading strategies for non-English speakers and shared them with the Westgate families at an event with the help of translators.

Through their research, the team found a useful method for English Language Learner (ELL) parents to conduct a three-step reading process to help their children read. First, families discussed the pictures in a story. Next, students read the text of the story aloud. Finally, students retold the story to a parent in their native language.

The ATP invited families who spoke either Burmese or Karen (a language of some from Burma/Myanmar and Thailand) to a workshop to teach them this strategy. Because many of the families did not drive, the ATP rented a school bus for \$65 to transport parents and students to and from the school.

Upon arrival, the families were greeted by the school’s ELL teacher and a para-educator. Staff members assisted families to sign in and directed them to different classrooms according to their native language.

In each classroom, teachers presented and modeled the three-step strategy with help from translators. They also distributed reading

calendars to the families so that they could track the number of minutes students read at home each day. Parents were invited them to ask questions.

Previously, the school librarian had selected many picture books that students could select to take home. After the workshop, the families reconvened in the library where the children selected a picture book and parents were able to practice the steps they had just learned about reading with their children. Staff members circulated to help students choose appropriate books and to support parents.

At the end of the event, students were invited to choose a book donated by the Reading Foundation to add to their personal libraries.

The families gained new skills and a better understanding of the importance of reading at home. They were grateful for the school’s support. “Parents repeatedly shook our hands and hugged us saying ‘Thank you for helping’ in broken English,” the ATP chair recalled.

The practice benefited teachers, too. One teacher said that the event allowed her a glimpse into the Burmese community and she felt honored to have participated.

The practice demonstrated that with some guidance, families who do not speak English can provide crucial educational support to their children. The event also was an excellent way to meet the needs of a specific population.

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LOUISIANA LANGUAGE ARTS LAGNIAPPE

VINTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VINTON, LA

Type 4

READING

Want to know the state bird of Louisiana? Or facts about the state's food industry? Just ask a student from Vinton Elementary School. Last year, each classroom conducted its own extensive research on a topic related to the state. Led by their teachers, the students compiled their findings into a publication called *The Book of Louisiana Lagniappe*. Note that *lagniappe* is a Cajun French word that refers to a small gift given by a merchant for good measure – “a little something extra.”

The book was distributed to 110 of the students and 130 of their parents at the school's Title I English Language Arts (ELA) evening showcase. Later, the students practiced their literacy skills and gained even more knowledge of Louisiana by reading the book at home with their families.

The Vinton Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned the program to boost students' scores on state ELA and social studies tests. They chose to focus on Louisiana because many of the questions on the tests are related to the state's culture and history.

From facts about the brown pelican to information about foods like crawfish and gumbo, the classes researched a wide variety of Louisiana topics. In addition to the book pages, each class also produced PowerPoint slides featuring their research. At the evening ELA showcase, the students stood on stage with the principal to present the slides to an audience of teachers, families, and community members. The presentation was an opportunity for the students to practice their public speaking skills and to receive recognition for their hard work.

In addition to the presentations, attendees enjoyed delicious Louisiana jambalaya. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) provided ingredients for the jambalaya. Cookies and cold

drinks also were available. The refreshments cost \$200.

While the participants ate and socialized, they also listened to Cajun tunes performed by a local band. The entire evening was a wonderful celebration of Louisiana culture. Teachers proclaimed it the best ELA event the school had ever hosted.

At the end of the event, every student received a *lagniappe*: a copy of *The Book of Louisiana Lagniappe*, which cost \$300 to print. As the authors of the book, the students proudly autographed each other's copies. Teachers encouraged parents to read the books with their students at home so that students could practice their reading skills and learn about topics that other classes had researched. These efforts paid off: students reported that when they took the state test later in the year, there were several questions related to topics they had learned about from the book.

The ATP recommends that schools interested in planning similar events make sure to publicize them in a variety of ways to ensure high attendance. To promote this event, Vinton students made announcements on the daily school news broadcast, sent invitations to families and local community businesses two weeks in advance, and notified the local TV station and local newspapers.

The Louisiana Lagniappe ELA event brought the whole community together to learn about and celebrate their culture. It was a great way to help students develop research, reading, and writing skills while also taking pride in their state.

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PARENT UNIVERSITY

CLINTON MIDDLE SCHOOL LOS ANGELES, CA

School isn't just for children. At a day-long Saturday workshop at Clinton Middle School last spring, parents were invited into the classroom to learn, too. This Parent University was uniquely designed to guide parents and students in ways to improve reading and literacy skills over the summer.

The school decided to focus on improving literacy because about a third of its students are English Language Learners. Many others come from Latino families where English is not the first language spoken at home.

Parent University, which was the result of a brainstorming session of teachers, coordinators, parents, and representatives from education nonprofits, was divided into four parts. First, two teachers read a story aloud to model important strategies for the students and parents. As they read, they asked attendees to predict what would happen next and to reflect on how the story related to their personal experiences. The demonstration showed parents how to actively engage their children when reading aloud with them. The teachers also explained how reading aloud enables children to improve reading and speaking skills, which help them score well on state exams.

"I learned that it is very important that I read with my son," one parent said. "I also learned how to help my son read without becoming frustrated."

Next, a teacher led a session about building vocabulary. Families received Spanish/English dictionaries and calendars for the summer months with daily vocabulary words written in English and Spanish. Students and parents were encouraged to work together to look up the definitions of the daily words and to try using the words in sentences.

The third session focused on how to understand students' reading levels. A literacy

coach explained an easy way to know if a book was too easy or too challenging for a student: the Five Finger Rule. Parents were shown how to ask students to raise a finger for every word they did not know on the page of a story. If a student does not raise any fingers, the book is too easy; if they raise four or five fingers, the book is likely too difficult. The literacy coach also distributed summer reading lists with books at various reading levels.

The last workshop session was devoted to sharing community resources. Facilitators distributed bus and train schedules, maps, and information on public library hours and programs.

The four workshop sessions were followed up by an art project. Volunteers from Warner Brothers helped families paint murals in designated places on the campus and to make gifts for eighth-graders who would soon be graduating from the school and moving on to high school.

Finally, participants gathered for a picnic lunch and a raffle. Winners received books, Frisbees, and tickets to area museums. All students selected a book to add to their personal library. The lunch, prizes, and books cost \$760.

The reading strategies and books brought home from Parent University were designed for summer fun and literary adventures.

Clinton Middle School is a Diplomas Now school and a member of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins

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PICNIC WITH PARENTS

COLLEGE OAKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 3

On a warm spring afternoon, anyone passing by College Oaks Elementary School would have seen a happy sight: 170 students and 148 of their family members reading stories and enjoying a picnic lunch together.

“What a great way to get kids interested in books,” one parent commented. “I had several children come over and want me to read our book to them. Food was good and the children had a great time.”

The hour-long literary picnic was evidence that the school lives up to its slogan: “At College Oaks Elementary, We Read, Read, Read.” The event was designed to encourage families to read together and to help the school meet its goal of 75% student proficiency on the state literacy exam.

Families learned about the picnic two weeks in advance. The school sent home flyers, and student volunteers stood in front of the school in the morning wearing sandwich boards to advertise the event.

Parents were asked to bring a blanket and a book to school, and were invited to purchase tickets for a picnic lunch. The lunches cost \$6 apiece and included hot sausages, chips, cookies, and soft drinks.

The picnic was a community effort: all of the food except the sausages was donated by local businesses so that the ticket proceeds could go toward a new playground. Nearby grocery stores contributed gift cards, which were used to purchase buns, chips, and charcoal. Coca-Cola donated drinks and cups, McDonald’s offered barbecue sauce, a deli gave mustard packets, a

restaurant supplied napkins, and a local bakery provided cookies. Thanks to these contributions, the school spent only \$187 on other items.

On the day of the picnic, parent and community volunteers woke early to cook and assemble the lunches. They arrived by 7:30 am to light the charcoal, and barbecued sausages all morning. All 300 lunches were sold.

The cafeteria served bagged lunches to the students before the picnic (82% of the students at the school receive free or reduced lunch.) The students ate these lunches in their classrooms before the event. Parents suggested that next year, students be allowed to eat these lunches outdoors during the picnic. At noon, students met their families near the playground and the Picnic with Parents began.

“I loved it when all the families came,” a kindergarten student said. “We read my favorite book, *Sofia the First*.”

Students whose families did not attend were able to participate. They either joined friends’ families or stayed as a group as a teacher’s “family.”

College Oaks recommends that other schools interested in planning a Picnic with Parents begin planning early. It is important to emphasize to students and parents that the purpose of the event is story time, not playtime.

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READING

PRIME TIME FAMILY READING TIME

**M. J. KAUFMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Providing parents with at-home reading strategies is a great way to help children improve their literacy skills. But finding an effective way to share these tips requires organization and creativity. *PRIME TIME Family Reading Time*—a reading, discussion, and storytelling series based on illustrated children’s books—offers both. That’s why the staff at M. J. Kaufman Elementary were excited to receive a grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH) to implement the award-winning program at their school.

To kick off the project, teachers identified 25 families with 35 students who could benefit from literacy coaching, and invited them to gather at the school on Monday nights for six weeks. Parents came with their children to eat dinner, listen to a story, and learn reading techniques that they could reproduce with their children at home.

High school volunteers served the meals, which were donated by local businesses, in the school cafeteria. The school created a display featuring the names of all of the businesses who had contributed to show their appreciation.

After dinner, families headed to the library to meet with a storyteller (a preschool director) and a scholar (a local professor.) The storyteller and scholar modeled how to help children read a story by asking them developmentally appropriate questions throughout the story experience.

Next, each family received three books, which they were assigned to follow the modeled techniques, enjoy at home, and be ready to discuss the following week.

The 35 students of the selected parents in the program looked forward to spending 90 minutes of quality time with their families every

week. They enjoyed practicing the skills they learned in between the sessions.

“My son loves this program,” said a parent. “He wants to read the three new books on Monday night when we get home!”

Parents liked learning how to support their children’s education at home, and appreciated the chance to talk with teachers, administrators, and other families in a relaxed setting. Weekly phone calls and reminders from their students helped parents remember to attend each week.

“I love story time,” one student said. “The storyteller makes reading fun!”

The *PRIME TIME Family Reading Time* program brought school staff and community members together to support families and children who needed extra academic help. The school’s first reactions were very positive, as the strategies were doable and enjoyable. Teachers reported that students were improving their reading fluency and were spending more quality time reading with their family partners at the Monday sessions at school and at home throughout the week.

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RAPPERS RAP - A NIGHT OF POETRY AND GIVING

**PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 6

Last holiday season, the Park Middle School community enjoyed an evening of poetry and giving. The event enabled students to perform raps and poems of their own creation while also providing families with an opportunity to serve the community by gift-wrapping books for foster children.

The idea was suggested at an October meeting of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). A local Target store had given the middle school \$500 to purchase books. The ATP decided to donate the 160 books they purchased to charity, and recruited students, families, and community members to spend an evening gift-wrapping the books. They added a literacy component to the event by inviting local rap artist, Jordin Chaney, to inspire students to perform their own raps while everyone worked.

“How delightful it was to see parents, students, and community members celebrate the written word!” exclaimed the school’s literacy coach. “All who came had the opportunity to experience the joys of the season.”

The event provided a fun and relaxed way for 125 students, 85 parents, and 20 teachers to embrace literacy and strengthen their community. This was, indeed, a collaborative effort.

School administrators and other staff generated buzz about the event via flyers, website announcements, press releases, and YouTube videos. The school’s literacy coach taught students in the after-school program how to write poetry, including raps. The day before the event, ATP members rented outdoor heaters and shopped for cookies, cocoa, napkins, cups, and gift wrap. These supplies cost just over \$240.

On the night of the program, 20 eighth-grade student leaders came to school early to help set up. They arranged gift-wrapping stations and refreshments inside, and organized an area for poetry performances in the courtyard. The rented heaters kept the audience warm despite the chilly weather. Throughout the event, teachers mingled with families and helped supervise progress.

The students were thrilled to meet Mr. Chaney, a successful performer with a background similar to their own. The feeling was mutual. After the event, Mr. Chaney, who donated his time, posted on his Facebook profile that he had “just spent a beautiful evening of poetry with Park Middle School students!”

Rappers Wrap was a great way to package lessons in literacy, leadership, and giving in one special evening. The program motivated students to develop their writing and performance skills and taught them the value of community service. It helped parents recognize and celebrate many students’ talents. It helped a community charity bring books to children whose families could not afford them. That’s a wrap!

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READING

READING ROOM MAKEOVER

BRADLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COLUMBIA, SC

There's nothing better than curling up with a good book in a comfortable, cozy space. To enable many of its 400+ students to enjoy this experience on a regular basis, Bradley Elementary School forged partnerships with community businesses to transform a classroom into a special Reading Room. A new reading room, they agreed, would improve student literacy by providing an appealing place for students to practice their reading skills with volunteer tutors.

The idea for a reading room came out of a School Advisory Council brainstorming session, with ideas and actions from the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and community members. The Council submitted a proposal for the project to the Chamber of Commerce Leadership Class of 2013, which consists of local leaders from more than 50 businesses. The Leadership Class agreed to provide funding and met with school administrators twice a month to make the reading room a reality.

Together, the Leadership Class and the school administrators selected new furniture, books, and materials for a student art mural. The Leadership Class also secured in-kind donations from other local businesses, such as several reading nooks, tables, desks, chairs, rugs, fabrics, bookcases, and room dividers. In all, the school received \$6,000 worth of materials to makeover the room where students may read alone or work in a comfortable nook with a volunteer tutor.

Once the furniture and supplies were obtained, volunteers and the school custodial staff came in on weekends and during spring break to set up the space. When the project was complete, school administrators, teachers, and the Leadership Class distributed flyers to parents and students to increase awareness of

the new resource. They also collaborated to host a ribbon-cutting ceremony, inviting newspaper reporters and volunteers to join the celebration.

Now, the Reading Room is frequently used by teachers, students, and volunteer tutors. "What a beautiful space for children to read," said a tutor. "As an adult, I would love to stay here."

"My students love this space," a teacher added. "They love seeing their artwork as part of the learning environment. Years from now, when they return to visit Bradley, hopefully they can see the memories they left behind."

Bradley Elementary School isn't finished with its Reading Room. The makeover "opened the door to several new partnerships for our school," the school's program coordinator said. One of the new partnerships is with Home Depot, which has offered to work with the school to create an outdoor reading garden during the summer of 2013. Indeed, the sky is the limit for school improvements that are planned and completed with community support.

As the ATP and School Council look ahead, they will monitor the impact of the Reading Room on students' improvements in reading attitudes and test scores.

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THE WHEELS ON THE BUS—LIBRARY LITERACY NIGHT

**ROBERT FROST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 6

The Pasco Public Library is packed with wonderful books and free enrichment activities, but not all families at Robert Frost Elementary School were aware of this resource. To introduce them to this locale for learning, a fifth-grade teacher partnered with the library staff to organize two Family Literacy Nights – one in the fall and one in the spring.

The events also were designed to support the school’s goal of improving students’ scores on the state reading achievement test. The teachers knew the research that showed that more students read for fun and read with their families, the better prepared they will be for these tests.

At the fall Family Literacy Night, more than 200 students and family members were transported by bus from the school to the library. Using *The Wheels on the Bus* as a theme song, this project design helped families who did not have easy access to transportation to the public library.

Upon arrival, students and family members were they were greeted by children’s library specialists and Spanish translators, and split into two groups. While the first group listened to a storyteller, the second group took a tour of the library. They learned about all of the library’s offerings, from free family entertainment to easy access to books, magazines, research materials, Internet, and employment resources. Then, the groups switched agendas.

Both groups also received library cards that they applied for prior to the event, and others—children and adults—applied that evening. By the end of the evening, the library had issued 80 new cards.

Even the trip home was a good time. On the way back to the school, staff distributed free books, refreshments, and prizes to the families.

At the spring Family Literacy Night, the wheels on the bus turned ’round again. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and the library staff reminded families about the available resources and encouraged them to visit the library and continue reading at home.

This time, activities included a scavenger hunt at the library. The visitors had to find the check-out counter, identify a resource librarian, create an account on the computer, and borrow a children’s book.

Families who successfully completed the scavenger hunt were entered in a drawing for a large basket of new books. Approximately 150 families attended and participated.

“I liked it!” said a parent. “It was very interesting and fun for my daughter to go back to the library again.”

Both the fall and spring events cost about \$250. Bus transportation to and from the library accounted for the majority of the expense.

The Family Literacy Nights at the public library enabled families to explore the library’s services while also enjoying quality time together. The carefully-structured activities strengthened the relationship between the library, school, and community to begin a new chapter of partnership.

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READING

WILLY WONKA'S FAMILY LITERACY NIGHT

D'IPPOLITO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VINELAND, NJ

On a Friday evening in February, D'Ippolito Elementary School celebrated *Read Across America* by transforming the school into the Wonderful World of Willy Wonka. This family literacy night, inspired by Roald Dahl's famed *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, featured a series of educational, enjoyable, and edible literacy activity stations. The evening was designed to encourage families to read together at home and to increase volunteerism at the school. It also was linked to a major school goal to boost students' Language Arts Literacy scores by 5%, compared to the prior year's scores.

Upon arrival at the school, 675 guests were greeted by staff members dressed like Oompa Loompas. The lobby was decorated with a flowing chocolate pool, giant candy canes, and knee-high mushrooms frosted with vanilla icing. Participants ate samples of Lickable Wallpaper and signed a contract agreeing to abide by the rules of Willy Wonka's factory. Then, they proceeded to a Mike Teavee-themed TV dinner buffet served by teachers in western costumes.

After dinner, families lined up for a series of activities led by teachers and parents. They learned about the science of bubbles at the Fizzy Lifting Bubble Show. They strengthened their vocabularies by playing Violet Beauregarde's Blueberry Bingo. Augustus Gloop's Edible Sand Art was another fun stop. There, children were asked to read a set of directions to complete a Pixy Stix sand art project. At Charlie's Chocolate Factory, participants listened to a non-fiction story about the history of chocolate and enjoyed chocolate fondue. Creativity was as abundant as skill-building and treats.

At the end of the circuit of stations was Veruca Salt's Good Egg/Bad Egg activity. Children used their critical thinking skills to analyze the differences between the film and literary versions of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. All students

had read the book and seen the movie in their classes prior to the evening. Outside the school was a related Egg Hunt, with good eggs that contained small treats.

Before leaving the factory, every child visited the school library to view a PowerPoint presentation about Roald Dahl's life. After the Author Study, they selected a free book donated by the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO.) The event cost \$3,256 to produce and was funded by a grant from the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA.)

D'Ippolito Elementary School is known for its elaborate and successful family events. "No one else does things like this school does," exclaimed a parent. "I can't believe how you pull this off!"

Willy Wonka's Family Literacy Night was a joint effort. Teachers wrote the grant application and made decorations, served dinner, and cleaned up. A local clothing shop donated costumes, a sign store provided set backdrops, and the police department attended as part of their community outreach program. Older students volunteered their time. A group of high school students created a video documentary of the evening. Several middle-schoolers assisted younger children with the activities.

Families and community members were invited to the event via golden ticket invitations. It sounded like so much fun that we hope to find one in our next Wonka bar.

Talk about bringing a book to life! This literacy night not only made wonderful memories, but inspired many students and families to enter the magical world of reading together.

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FAMILY MATH NIGHT

**LEE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL
BISHOPVILLE, SC**

Type 4

When faced with the challenge of helping at least 35% of its students pass the End-of Course (EOC) Algebra 1 Benchmark Assessment, the partnership Action Team at Lee Central High School combined food-for-thought about math with food for dinner for students and parents at a Family Math Night.

Lee Central faces an important math challenge every year: Help more students pass the important Algebra 1 test than in the prior year. The only high school in the area, Lee Central serves a typically-underserved population of students and families—96% of the students’ families live below the poverty line. Busy parents are hard to engage, but Lee’s educators knew that families could be important partners in encouraging high school students to do their homework and study for tests. They combined a spaghetti dinner, door prizes, and a focus on Algebra 1 at a goal-oriented Family Math Night for parents and students. Funding came from a partnership grant from Francis Marion University.

Information about Family Math Night was posted on the school’s website and distributed via flyers and announcements at local churches. At the event, 98 students, 35 parents, and 4 staff members gathered in the school cafeteria. While the families enjoyed the meal, which was donated by local partners, an administrator gave an overview of the Algebra 1 EOC exam and offered suggestions about how parents could help their teens prepare and study for the test at home. The administrator also recruited volunteers who were expert in math to work with students on math skills during and after school.

After the meal, staff distributed folders to each family containing study strategies and sample activities, including an interactive CD that explained how to do particular skills. The families then separated into groups and rotated through a variety of math activity stations. At

each station, students showed their parents how they were mastering a specific skill that would be on the Algebra 1 EOC exam. Students and parents were encouraged use the resources they received to study for the exam at home. Throughout the evening, teachers held individual mini-conferences with parents and students about next needed steps for success in math.

“The CD was very helpful,” one parent said. “I used it to create quizzes so that I will know what my child needs help with. I also used the website to help him with his weaknesses.”

To keep the lessons fresh in families’ minds, the Action Team worked with school staff to use the school’s automated telephone system to distribute test-taking tips and strategies to all families on a weekly basis, not only those who attended the Family Math Night. They also scheduled monthly follow-up family math sessions at two local churches.

To improve this practice, Lee Central is considering involving more churches and local businesses in the Algebra EOC campaign. They also want to find ways for families who do not have computers at home to borrow them so that they can use the math study resources.

Teachers believe that Family Math Night was an effective way to mobilize support from many families and the community to help more students focus on important math learning goals. Algebra 1 is a “must pass” subject for students to proceed successful through high school and on to postsecondary education. The school is monitoring the student pass rate from the first quarter benchmark test to the third quarter, and from one year to the next.

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MATH

FIESTA-VAL OF MATH

ROWENA CHESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Rowena Chess Elementary School students proved that a grocery store can be a great place to practice math skills. More than 200 students and 100 family partners, plus 40 teachers and school staff, and 40 community members gathered at Fiesta Foods, a local store, to plan a family taco dinner.

The event was developed by the school staff, the public affairs department, Fiesta Foods, and the schools PEAK partners. The school's business partners with Peak Education is an organization that helps promising students from low-income families become successful in school and in life. Peak Education provided funding for the evening and Fiesta Foods donated some supplies and prizes.

At Fiesta Foods, students and parents visited stations in each department of the store. They observed and learned from the store staff, and discussed brands, quantities, weights, and prices in developing the cost of a taco dinner and trimmings for their own families. The students used activity sheets to sum prices as they navigated the store.

This activity wasn't all work. The students also cracked a piñata full of candy and sampled delicious food from the store while they shopped and checked prices. After they finished the project, they showed appreciation for the store's generosity by treating staff and customers to a performance. The students sang, played marimba and guitar, and gave folkloric dancing demonstrations.

The Fiesta-Val of Math was an opportunity for students to apply math skills learned in school to a real-life challenge. The event also enabled school staff, families, and community partners to positively interact with students and support their education.

"This activity was an excellent way to think outside the box and create a new learning activity in a new environment for children," said a teacher.

Students not only learned academic skills, but also the importance of giving back to their community. The students saw math-in-action and enjoyed entertaining their families, teachers, and the store staff and customers with their talents.

This event was a real success. In reflecting on its components, the Action Team for Partnerships and school staff encouraged other schools who are considering similar practices to offer plenty of door prizes and activities for younger siblings.

They also emphasized the importance of strong and advanced publicity. Rowena Chess Elementary promoted the event by placing an ad in the district newsletter, sending home flyers, and making daily intercom announcements so that students would share the message of this math fiesta with a parent or other adult family partner.

The mission of Rowena Chess Elementary is to work together to develop today's child and tomorrow's leader. Collaborating with parents and community partners to equip students with practical skills at the Fiesta-Val of Math was one creative way to meet this mission.

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IT'S ALL IN THE GAME

**EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 4

Students at Emerson Elementary School gave new meaning to the term “mathlete” last year by playing sports to practice their math skills. From basketball to golf, 250 students participated in a number of games at the school’s Family Math Night while also showing off their addition, subtraction, and division abilities. Families cheered them on with pride.

The event was sponsored by the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), which hoped that an event with an athletic twist would draw more fathers to the school. The ATP also wanted to provide students with a way to apply their math skills outside the classroom.

“We felt that students and their families would benefit from seeing math activities that were fun and exciting in sports-related situations,” the ATP co-chair explained.

She and the other ATP members hoped that the families would enjoy the games so much that they would continue playing them on their own at home.

The ATP advertised this family math night via flyers and posters printed with the slogan “It’s all in the game at Emerson Elementary.” The activity was posted on the school’s Reader Board. ATP members also recruited teachers and community members to help organize and supervise the many sports-math activities.

Teachers assisted by generating at least two challenging activities that required students to use and practice skills at their specific grade levels. The games included Music Memory Training Camp, Decimal Dash, Number Golf, and Basketball Dribble. Students marked the games they completed on a bookmark check list.

“We really enjoyed watching our kids having fun while still learning about math,” said one of the 75 parents who attended.

Thirty community members also joined the fun. Several of them, including the schools PEAK business partners, set up concession stands. The students received “fake money” so that they could use math to calculate how much they owed if they “purchased” refreshments and how much change they should receive.

The local Dust Devils baseball team mascot was on hand, providing a fun photo opportunity for the families.

At the end of the evening, administrators distributed cookies and raffled off \$200 worth of math games, sports activities, and sports memorabilia that had been donated by many in the school and community. These included signed photos and books by Hope Solo, the double gold medalist soccer player from nearby Richland, WA. The ATP and principal thanked each family for coming as they left the building.

“It was great seeing so many students and parents together competing in math challenges,” said a staff member.

By the conclusion of the sports focused math night, it was clear that the ATP’s calculations had paid off. The practice enabled families, teachers, and community members to celebrate academic skills and physical fitness in one fun evening.

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MATH

JUMP INTO MATH WITH PURPOSE

SUNSET VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

Every year, Sunset View Elementary partners with the American Heart Association to host a popular Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser. This year, the school's newly formed Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to jump on the bandwagon by adding a math enrichment component to the popular activity.

The ATP wanted to engage more and different families in the school and enable them to do more at home to help their children strengthen their math skills. The ATP agreed that adding an academic element to an already-well-attended event would be the perfect solution.

The team began by examining the school's results by grade level on a math test required by the district. They identified specific skills at each grade level that needed improvement, such as sequencing numbers from 0 to 20, counting money, and measurement conversions. Next, they worked with the school's math teachers to develop a dozen jump rope games that children could play to practice these skills.

The Jump Into Math With Purpose event was scheduled to take place in the evening, immediately after the Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser. All students and their families were invited via emails and flyers. The ATP also made a special effort to reach out to fifty families that had not previously been involved much with the school. They asked teachers to provide lists of students who could especially benefit if they attended the event with a parent. The ATP made sure that these students' families received personal phone calls and even home visits to invite them to Jump Into Math with Purpose. Their efforts were successful—150 students and 75 parents attended, including over one-fourth of the targeted families.

Families were welcomed to the school by an ATP parent, the school custodian, and the principal. "The fact that there was a parent, the custodian, and the principal standing side-by-side greeting families was unique and cool," one parent commented. "People noticed that."

This welcome committee gave each student a passport, which provided the locations, descriptions, and difficulty levels of all twelve math-jump rope games. A teacher supervised each station and initialed participants' passports. After playing at least four games, students could trade their passports for free jump ropes. There also was an Estimation Jar for each grade level that aimed to help students think mathematically and win a prize.

Parents looked on with pride as their children showed off their math skills. "My kids had a blast," one said. "I liked how you did the activities for each age group."

The event cost \$500. It was a valuable way to positively engage families with the school, help students strengthen their math skills, and support physical fitness.

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MATH NIGHT AT PIGGLY WIGGLY

**BURTON-PACK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC**

Type 6

On one evening last fall, more than 100 students from Burton-Pack Elementary School and 45 of their parents met for a math lesson at an unexpected place—a local grocery store. The Piggly Wiggly turned out to be the perfect location for teachers and students to show parents how addition, subtraction, and division skills are useful outside the classroom. This is one part of a complex plan to help more than 65% of students to score at least 80% on quarterly benchmark exams and state math achievement tests.

A member of the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) introduced this idea as an interesting and active way for students to see that math skills can be applied on a daily basis for real-world and really important reasons. The ATP, math teachers, and manager of the nearest Piggly Wiggly collaborated to plan an evening scavenger hunt at the store.

They sent home fliers to invite families to the event, and scheduled it in the evening so that parents employed during the school day could attend. At the Piggly Wiggly, each family received a bright pink scavenger hunt worksheet with a list of several math-related questions. There were two different worksheets: one for grades K-2 and one for grades 3-5.

The families then walked around the store from the produce section to the frozen food aisle. They used math to estimate how many apples were on display, to determine how many cups of milk a gallon contained, and to answer many other interesting questions. For example, students and parents in K-2 had to find 3 sizes of containers of ice cream and 2 geometric shapes of ice cream containers. In Aisle 5 they looked for the number of ounces in breakfast cereal. They figured the change they would get from \$3 if they bought a toy in Aisle 6.

In grades 3-5, students figured the number of packages of cheese needed to fill a recipe requiring 10 cups of the product. They compared calories in cups of juice. They also had to complete a plan and budget for a healthy dinner for their own family with a budget of \$20.

About 30 teachers were located at the end of each aisle of the store to help students and parents who needed help reading the questions or completing the math work for their grade levels.

Parents appreciated this clever activities. One parent commented that she enjoyed “walking through the aisles with my child to help her find the items and talk about math problems.”

Math Night at Piggly Wiggly was a special time for students, too. When asked what the most enjoyable part of the evening was, one student replied that it was “working together with my father.”

Children explored the store, used math, and talked with a family partner about the use of math at school and in the adult world. One teacher commented, “[Children] had the chance to learn about ounces, servings, shapes, and money.”

The Piggly Wiggly was a great community partner. The grocery store was happy to have the chance to support local education efforts while also filling its aisles with potential customers. They showed their enthusiasm by donating door prizes at the end of the evening.

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MATH

ANN REID DUCKLINGS RECYCLE

ANN REID EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER NAPERVILLE, IL

Leave it to Ann Reid Early Childhood Center, a silver LEED certified school, to come up with an idea worth recycling. (LEED certifies schools that are “healthy” and “green,” based on acoustics, mold prevention, and other environmental qualities that are healthy for students and teachers.) When teachers realized just how many empty milk cartons were thrown into the trash after the students’ daily snack, they decided it was time to teach their three- to five-year-olds about reducing waste. They sought advice on how to do so from their nearest School and Community Assistance for Recycling & Composting (SCARCE) office. Soon after, the Duckling Recycling program was born.

Today, the school’s 400 students recycle not only milk cartons (they collected 12,000 last year), but also CDs/DVDs, books, holiday lights, gym shoes, drink pouches, and crayons. Each month, the school focuses on a different item. Collection bins are set up in the school lobby so that families can easily see them upon entering.

Recycled items are given to a variety of organizations. For example, the empty drink pouches are given to TerraCycle, a company that converts them into tote bags, pencil cases, and plastic lumber. The used crayon remnants are delivered to a local crayon melting center, where they are formed into new crayons.

One of the school’s most successful initiatives is its food collection program. The school was able to donate more than 500 pounds of food to Loaves and Fishes.

Parents are updated about the efforts via regular newsletters sent home in English and Spanish. The newsletters cost \$500 to print, and were necessary because many parents at the school do not have access to e-mail.

Teachers have found creative ways to incorporate the recycling program into daily lessons for its preschool students. Last year,

students learned about colors by sorting used crayons, practiced their math skills by counting milk cartons, and exercised creativity by making bird feeders out of cardboard toilet paper rolls and maracas from paper towel rolls.

“It was amazing that my daughter could make a colorful beautiful bird feeder out of recycled items, since she just turned four,” one parent exclaimed.

This past spring, the school introduced a new concept: composting. A team from North Central College helped the school acquire a \$2,000 grant from Lowe’s to build a compost garden on the school grounds.

Ann Reid’s recycling program has earned recognition from the local press. An article in *Positively Naperville* praised the school’s “commitment to teaching sustainability and environmental awareness to our youngest citizens and setting a pattern of life-long advocacy for a better world.”

Ann Reid has also been honored as the first early childhood center in Illinois to earn an Earth Flag from SCARCE. The school celebrated this accomplishment by inviting students, parents, and community members to an Earth Day gathering. At the lunchtime event, attendees watched a photo slide show of the students recycling. Students sang their 3-R song on strategies to reduce, reuse, and recycle many things. Ann Reid is helping students build a better world one little duckling at a time.

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EARTH DAY HURRAY!

**DOLBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Type 3

Last spring, an Earth Day event at Dolby Elementary School led to months of science enrichment, lessons in responsibility, and lots of fun. Nearly 500 students spent the holiday planting flower boxes around the campus. Throughout the rest of the semester, they continued to care for the plants, gaining science skills and environmental stewardship values in the process.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) spearheaded the project. After several families suggested that it would be nice for the school to provide flower boxes for students in all grades to care for, the ATP applied for a \$500 grant from the Lake Charles Junior League to turn the idea into a reality. The Junior League members were so supportive of the plan that they not only provided funding for the school garden, but also offered to help weed it.

After receiving the grant, the ATP asked the school's Watch Dog Dads, a volunteer group, to construct the flower boxes. The dads and father figures were happy to oblige, and built enough boxes for every student to plant his or her own flower.

Next, the ATP invited the school community to come together to plant the flower boxes on Earth Day. They promoted the opportunity via newsletters, e-mails, a posting on the school website, and an announcement on the school marquee. On Earth Day, students, parents, teachers, and community members collaborated on and completed the project from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

As the children worked, teachers taught them math lessons by asking them to calculate the perimeter and area of the flower boxes, and related math skills. They also explained the importance of plants in the environment.

Once the flower boxes had been planted, students received one more science lesson. Guided by teachers and the Watch Dog Dads, the children built solar ovens out of donated pizza boxes and used them to cook delicious s'mores. It was the first time many of the students had ever prepared the gooey treat.

After Earth Day, the students continued to care for and take pride in the flower boxes. "They are using the 'put first things first' habit of checking on their flower and the box before going to play," explained the school principal. "It is amazing to watch the students go and name the specific flowers that they planted. When visitors come to their class, they want to show them their class flower box."

The flower boxes even made rainy days more bearable. Students didn't mind staying inside during recess when they knew that the rain would enable their plants to thrive.

The school found several ways to "bloom." Earth day enabled community groups and families to come together with students and teachers to improve the campus. And, students learned a great deal about science and personal responsibility. Three cheers for Dolby Elementary School's Earth Day—Hurray! Hurray! Hurray!

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SCIENCE

SCIENCE FAMILY NIGHT

DEQUINCY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
DEQUINCY, LA

Students and families at DeQuincy Elementary School were inspired to reach for the stars at Science Family Night last year. The evening featured a special STARLAB planetarium presentation as well as a number of science activity stations staffed by teachers and local community members. The fun and learning did not end when the event was over. Families also received kits containing supplies and clear instructions to conduct more science experiments at home.

Science Family Night was designed to help the school meet its goal of increasing student achievement in science and math on state tests. More than 200 students and 75 parents gathered at the school to conduct science experiments together in a positive, stress-free environment. The event generated excitement about science, and provided students with materials and motivation to continue developing their skills at home.

Community members and teachers joined forces to produce Science Family Night. Every teacher and a dozen representatives from a 4-H club and the local police department set up science activity stations throughout the school hallways. Families rotated through the stations every ten to 15 minutes. The most popular activities included creating homemade Gak (slime) by mixing glue, Borax, and water, and experimenting with glow-in-the-dark paint.

“It’s great to be able to bring our children to something that is both fun and educational,” said one parent.

After completing the science activities, families watched a STARLAB planetarium presentation run by one of the science teachers.

STARLAB is a portable planetarium projection system that enables viewers to study the night sky while indoors. “We had fun in the STARLAB learning about the different constellations,” a parent exclaimed. The STARLAB portion of the evening was so popular that DeQuincy recommends that other schools that use the system allot plenty of time for its use.

Although it was a logistical challenge to ensure that every family had the chance to visit all of the stations and view the STARLAB presentation, it was worth all of the effort.

Best of all, to sustain students’ and parents’ interests in learning more about science, teachers distributed packets containing supplies and directions for 14 experiments. They hoped that the kits would encourage students to work with a family partner on science experiments at home. Materials for kits and for the evening activities cost \$500.

Science Family Night sparked everyone’s interest in learning about science while also increasing community engagement with the school. Furthermore, many students experienced science as fun to do through study and experiments at school and at home.

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A SLICE OF SUCCESS!

**EDISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 4

A group of second grade teachers at Edison Elementary School served up a great idea: a series of three family workshops designed to help parents support learning at home. They called it the Slice of Student Success Series. The goal of the series was to increase student achievement in math and reading while strengthening relationships between parents and teachers.

The workshops took place in the school library for an hour immediately after school to accommodate parents' busy schedules. Each session focused on a different topic—homework, math, and reading—and involved a fun activity that could be replicated at home.

At the first workshop on homework, teachers explained how homework should be part of students' routines and that students need a quiet workspace in which to complete it. They discussed homework as a way for students to practice and master skills, and how this work is the students' responsibility. Homework also is part of students' report card grades. All along, parents asked their questions about homework.

Students were guided to transform unused pizza boxes donated by local restaurants into homework kits. They decorated the kits using markers and stickers, and filled them with useful supplies, such as crayons, pencils, numbers charts, and more.

The next workshop focused on math, and featured an overview of district math standards for each grade level. Teachers explained that, along with all of the new math approaches, it is still the case that students need to become fluent in math facts. Many math questions were asked and answered.

Families and students were given gallon-sized plastic bags containing math games, and taught how to play them at the workshop and at home.

At the third workshop, parents received tips on how to help their children improve their reading skills. Teachers demonstrated ways that parents could ask students questions to help them share what they were reading. In this way, parents could see whether and how well students were comprehending fiction and non-fiction reading material. Teachers distributed handouts to the parents with many ideas that they could use at home with all kinds of books and stories that their children were reading.

"Now I know what to do when I read with my child," thanked one parent.

The families also made origami bookmarks and each student was given a book donated by the Reading Foundation to bring home. Ice cream bars made the session even sweeter.

The workshop series cost \$100 to implement. It was attended by 70 students and their parents.

Any way you slice it, the practice was a success. The workshops equipped parents with good information and with tools and strategies to support their children's learning at home. All of the interactions enhanced positive and purposeful connections of parents, students, and teachers.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

BUILD-A-BEAT FAMILY NIGHT

**RUTH LIVINGSTONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

When a student at Ruth Livingston Elementary School won \$500 in a district Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) essay contest, the school applied the award to implement the student’s good idea. The money was used to host a music-themed gathering called Build-A-Beat Family Night.

More than 300 people attended the event, which was scheduled an hour before the school’s fifth-grade band concert. Attendees made instruments, wrote raps, and performed karaoke. They also were inspired by Wake Up Nation—a young adult band that sings about rising above hate. The members of Wake Up Nation were happy to volunteer their time.

The goal of Build-A-Beat Family Night was to provide a supportive environment for families to learn how to compose and perform rap songs. Students loved the chance to develop their creative writing skills with support from their families. They were also thrilled to gain experience performing for a crowd.

“I can’t believe how brave I was to get on stage and sing!” said one student.

After signing in, participants admired a display board featuring the award-winning student’s essay. Families were given a brochure and survey for their reactions to the event. These were used as the basis for a prize raffle at the end of the night.

Next, everyone made instruments from recycled materials. They created drums out of empty cans set aside by the cafeteria staff and maracas out of plastic eggs and macaroni. Rainsticks were constructed using empty paper towel rolls saved by the school custodians. Rice, duct tape, recycled paper, material, and rubber bands were used to fill and complete the instruments.

The instruments were put to use in the cafeteria, where the band, Wake Up Nation, encouraged the families to play their instruments along as the band sang.

After performing, the band members helped students and adults to write their own songs and raps. Several families performed their songs on stage.

Other families opted for karaoke. The school used two karaoke CDs with kid-friendly lyrics. They arranged a sign-up table so that the DJ knew who wanted to sing.

All families enjoyed the evening. “This event was so much fun,” said a parent. “I love seeing my kids take pride in their school!” Her comment was echoed in the surveys that were collected, which represented every grade level.

The fifth grade band concert followed the Build-A-Beat activities. It was a perfect way to end a very musical evening.

The planning committee, which included the award-winning student, was pleased with the purpose, turnout, and results. Build-A-Beat Family Night provided creative, fun, and educational entertainment for the entire school community.

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Type 3

OTHER SUBJECTS

CURRICULUM NIGHTS

**ST. ANDREWS MIDDLE SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC**

Type 4

When a survey indicated that parents of students at St. Andrews Middle School wanted to better understand what their children were learning in class, the school responded by sponsoring a series of four Curriculum Nights. The evening sessions were designed to improve student achievement by engaging parents and community members in the educational process.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) began planning the Curriculum Nights by asking parents for specifics: What did parents want to learn more about? What times would be convenient for parents to attend the workshops?

Parents offered input. Furthermore, parents who were already closely involved with school activities (such as sponsors and boosters of the orchestra or cheerleading team) agreed to reach out to parents who were, presently, less active to invite them to participate.

The students were tasked with engaging their parents. If their parents attended Curriculum Nights, students received 100 extra-credit points.

The personal recruitment efforts, combined with automated phone calls and e-mail announcements, resulted in excellent attendance. Each Curriculum Night drew at least 200 parents and 100 students. To make the sessions especially convenient to attend, local community members brought food so that families did not have to think about cooking dinner on workshop evenings.

The workshops focused on important by subject matter. There was a Math Night, Social Studies Night, Science & Technology Night, and Family Literacy Night. At each event, families were given an overview of content area standards.

Then, they were invited to participate in hands-on activities related to the topic. Teachers also distributed lists of test dates, educational websites, and test-taking strategies.

Students enjoyed sharing their work in the different subjects with their parents. They also led parents on guided tours of classrooms and the media center. A highlight of the Curriculum Nights was an exhibit of science fair projects.

"Yeah! My momma got to see that I won the science fair!" exclaimed one student. "I like this!"

The Curriculum Nights earned rave reviews from others as well. "This was great!" one parent said. "It appeared that all the parents really enjoyed themselves. Great job!" Of course, Curriculum Nights were planned after asking parents what they wanted to know more about. This was a good way to respond to parents' needs and ensure their satisfaction with the workshops.

Curriculum Nights required no extra extra funds to implement. When the series concluded, the ATP sent a survey to parents for their feedback. School staff noted better student behavior in class after so many parents came to learn more about the school curriculum. They also analyzed students' class grades and test scores later in the semester to determine if classroom teaching and workshops for parents combined to improve students' test scores for the year. Finally, the school showcased Curriculum Nights by sharing a photo-story on the district's televised program.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

FAMILY FRIENDLY TRIMESTER GOALS

**EASTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

At-home reading and math practice is essential to student success. But many parents are unsure of how to help their children at home. To equip parents with the skills and supplies necessary to academically support their students, 21 teachers at Eastgate Elementary School launched Family Friendly Trimester Goals.

The teachers began by working in grade-level teams to identify the Common Core State Standards that students were not meeting. Then, they used this information to write academic goals and activities in parent-friendly language so that parents could understand exactly what their students needed to practice and learn. Because about 70% of the school's parents are native Spanish speakers, the teachers also translated the goals into Spanish. The goals were printed clearly on cards for easy distribution.

Next, the teachers used donations from the community to prepare related educational toolkits for parents. The kits included resources such as flashcards and bookmarks printed with reading strategies. The kits cost \$2,500.

Three times a year—at an open house and at fall and spring conferences—the teachers distributed the goal cards and toolkits to parents along with tracking sheets. The teachers explained the goals and modeled how to use the educational tools. They also asked parents to work with their students every night, and to use the tracking sheets to monitor their progress. In all, 872 parents received training, toolkits, and positive encouragement to help their children do their best in meeting the standards.

The parents appreciated the information and resources. “I like that we know what [our children] are supposed to know and we are able to

help them be prepared for what they are supposed to do at school,” one commented.

Teachers observed results. Setting goals each trimester inspired students to be more motivated in class. Working with their parents on math and reading skills at home enabled students to improve their performance in the classroom.

“I do Minute Math with my first graders,” one teacher reported. “The children who have used the flash cards consistently are some of the top students.”

It is clear that when lessons from school are reinforced at home, students benefit. Through the trimester training and toolkits, teachers and parents at Eastgate effectively aligned their efforts with parents' reinforcement of student learning. Several hundred students were encouraged to practice and improve reading and math skills at home. In the process, parents increased their confidence about working with their children. The Family Friendly Trimester Goals built a stronger school, family, and community partnership program at Eastgate.

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FRESHMAN STUDENT LEADERSHIP FAMILY NIGHT

**EMMETT O'BRIEN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
ANSONIA, CT**

Type 2

A goal in the school improvement plan at Emmett O'Brien Technical High School was to increase the percentage of students who felt that their accomplishments were recognized and appreciated. The school believes that student achievement is enhanced when youngsters develop character traits that lead to remarkable accomplishments.

To meet this goal, the high school requires all students to take a Freshman Leadership Course. Students are challenged to design and conduct a major event. Two years ago, the result was Student Leadership Family Night—an occasion so popular that it was repeated again this year. Students organized the event—a showcase of student leadership and learning—from beginning to end. They worked in committees to create content, decorate the school, and prepare refreshments. Every student completed a questionnaire, reflecting on the nature and results of their participation, collaboration, and leadership.

Each student was allowed to bring one family member, with others added if space permitted. At the event, 121 guests assembled at the school. They were ushered to the cafeteria where they examined colorful displays of student work. One goal for the evening was to give family members time to see how hard students were working in all of their courses, and to appreciate examples of excellent student work.

Then, family members sat at tables decorated with placemats, origami favors, and wood centerpieces hand-crafted by the students in shop class. They dined on meatballs, salad, and desserts that a dozen culinary students had helped prepare in advance.

Entertainment for the evening included a student-made video, student speeches about leadership, and an awards ceremony. The video showed all students in the class creatively

communicating motivational messages through body language, signs, and writing (but no sound). The speeches consisted of personal reflections students had written throughout the leadership course. During the awards ceremony, the freshmen were recognized for various achievements.

The family members and staff in attendance were moved by the experience. "The pride they felt after the event was evident," one teacher reflected. Students gained not only event-planning experience and leadership skills, but also increased self-confidence.

"That was the most beautiful, memorable event I have ever attended in all my years as a teacher," one guest raved.

"I could not believe these were freshman students!" exclaimed another. "Their participation and workmanship were excellent."

The dinner and its trimmings cost \$500 to produce. In the future, the school will consider expanding the practice by asking students to request contributions from the community. They also may add a musical performance and invite members of the media.

The success of Student Leadership Family Night demonstrated that a high school course for freshmen on Student Leadership was a worthy requirement. Students as young as 14 and 15 years old were able to learn and apply leadership skills and conduct an amazing event. In so doing, they strengthened confidence, built character, and everyone in the community benefited.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

LITERACY FUN FEST

KNAPP ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RACINE, WI

I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream? Not at Knapp Elementary School. At Knapp, children earn ice cream in a more mature way—by practicing reading and math skills.

For years, the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at Knapp Elementary School has kicked off the summer with an ice cream social for students, families and school staff. Last year, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) collaborated with the public library to add an academic component to the event: a Literacy Fun Fest. Before enjoying ice cream, attendees visited a series of stations to learn about summer programs at the library and to play math and reading games.

The activities aimed to encourage students to continue working on their academic skills over the summer. Teachers hoped this would result in improved performance in class and on tests in the fall. The Literacy Fun Fest also strengthened an academic partnership between families, the school, and the library.

Families gathered for the after-school event. There were five topical, informative stations, each staffed by two adults. Students were given tickets and received stamps at each station to show that they had gathered information and participated in a learning game or activity. Three stamps earned them an ice cream treat.

"Offering ice cream as an incentive got students really excited about the games," said a staff member.

At the first station, representatives from the public library shared information about summer programs and the library's bookmobile. They distributed bookmarks with the library and

bookmobile schedules for easy reference. They also provided library card registration forms for those who needed them.

"[The library] isn't utilized by many of our students' parents," a teacher noted. "I hope their presence at the Literacy Fun Fest will begin to change that. Kids need to read more over the summer."

Other stations were each hosted by two volunteer teachers, who guided students in fun math and literacy games. The stations were organized by grade level so that all students would be challenged.

Families also enjoyed face painting and music provided by a DJ. Those without a sweet tooth could buy popcorn and water for \$0.50 apiece.

The well-attended event cost \$200. The principal was on hand to assist the crowd and teachers mingled with parents. The Literacy Fun Fest impacted nearly 500 students and their families.

The Literacy Fun Fest and Ice Cream Social enabled the community to come together to learn about local educational resources and strategies. It was a sweet reminder to families that learning should continue throughout the summer.

Tom Bagnall
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MONET FAMILY AND COMMUNITY GARDENING DAY

**APALACHEE TAPESTRY MAGNET SCHOOL
OF THE ARTS - TALLAHASSEE, FL**

Type 3

Students at Apalachee Tapestry Magnet School of the Arts enjoyed learning about French Impressionist painter Claude Monet in their classrooms, but struggled to relate to his love for his garden. As city-dwellers, many students had never planted seeds, harvested vegetables, or weeded flower beds. What did Monet mean, they wondered, when he said “Flowers, I must have flowers, always, and always”?

It took creating a garden of their own for these students to understand the power of plants to nurture the soul. Now, the school’s elaborate garden, called the Monet Friendship Garden, is a source of pride for the students and for the community. It also is an excellent educational tool.

Students, families, school staff, and community members work together to maintain the garden. Every year, the school hosts the Monet Family and Community Gardening Day. At this Saturday event, students, families, school staff, and community members spend several hours working in the garden. They plant flowers, vegetables, and shrubberies. They check to see that the garden’s birdhouses, murals, fish pond, friendship fence, and stepping stones are well-maintained.

The Monet Family and Community Gardening Day is publicized via flyers, announcements on the school’s website, newsletters, and the school television network. Local businesses and parents donate some of the plants and other materials. School funds cover the rest at an annual cost of about \$300. High school students and Master Gardeners volunteer to direct the families’ efforts. Everyone involved enjoys working together to beautify the school grounds.

While the Monet Family and Community Gardening Day occurs just once a year, the garden

is regularly tended and is incorporated into art, science, and nutrition lessons for students. Teachers hold reading classes in the garden, and students develop writing skills by keeping journals in which they track their favorite plants and growth patterns. The garden also provides an opportunity for community service. Students donate some of the vegetables that they grow to a local homeless shelter.

“The Monet Friendship Garden has been a powerful tool in motivating and educating our students,” noted one staff member. “The process of educating through gardening has helped us to develop children who are not simply more environmentally aware but ... who have the skills, knowledge, and inclination to make well-informed decisions.”

The students “enjoy learning about and working in the soil, and watching fruits and vegetables grow,” said another staff member. “My spirit is lifted when I see their curiosity and joy about the wonders of nature.”

The school hopes that continuing to use the garden as an educational tool will help students to improve their skills in core disciplines, toward the goal that at least 80% of them are proficient in reading and math.

Already, the garden has enabled the school and its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to meet another crucial goal—growing family-school engagement.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

OUR MINDFUL SCHOOL

HIGHLANDS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Managing impulsivity. Striving for Accuracy. Listening with Understanding and Empathy. Thinking Independently. Persisting. These and other Habits of Mind (HOM) are invaluable life skills. Highlands Elementary’s mission is to be a school where students understand and exercise thinking and learning. To encourage staff, students, and families to put HOM skills into practice, the school’s partnership team worked with a community theater group to host an educational and enjoyable family evening.

Our Mindful School began with separate sessions for parents and students. Parents were welcomed by the principal and provided an overview of HOM. The parents were divided into smaller groups according to their children’s grade level. Teachers met with these groups to explain how HOM skills were taught in the classroom with “anchor lessons” and to suggest ways that parents could encourage these behaviors. Learning about HOM gave parents insight into their students’ education, and provided them with a new vocabulary and several strategies to reinforce HOM with their children at home.

Meanwhile, the drama teacher and teen alumni from the school helped grade-level groups of students plan skits that demonstrated particular HOM behaviors. Students worked in groups of 10 to 15 to create five-minute performances.

Forty-five minutes later, the participants reconvened so that students could share their skits with their parents. After each presentation, parents were asked to “name the HOM” that the skit was intended to illustrate. The school counselor videotaped the skits for future use.

Students enjoyed performing for the audience, and gained self-confidence from the experience. By writing and presenting the skits,

the students activated their creative skills, and gained a deeper understanding of HOM traits. These insightful habits-of-mind have been shown to assist in the development of children’s self-directed learning and complex thinking.

Parents found the evening entertaining as well as educational, and praised its format. “The program was very informative and flowed very well,” said one.

“The evening really opened my mind to HOM!” added another.

The practice cost \$325, provided by the Home and School Association that often collaborates with the School, Family, Community Partnership team. Thanks to plenty of advance publicity, from e-mails to flyers to RSVP forms, it was well-attended. Approximately 100 students and parents participated.

The teen alumni enjoyed working with the students, and were surprised by how well they recalled the HOM principles from their own elementary school days. Their strong memories were a testament to the power of HOM. Those who participated in the Our Mindful School are likely to continue learning and living with the HOM for years to come. Bravo!

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

REYNAUD'S GOT TALENT

REYNAUD MIDDLE SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 3

Last year, Reynaud Middle School put a new spin on the talent show tradition by using a reality TV show format—*America's Got Talent*. Students sang and danced before an audience of their peers, families, and community members, and received feedback from a panel of four judges: a professional couple who had attended the middle school, a local radio DJ, and a professional Zydeco singer, dancer, and producer. The event, called Reynaud's Got Talent, gave students an opportunity to share their many skills and talents in a supportive community environment.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) shared the responsibility of organizing the event. They began by announcing the opportunity to students and distributing entry forms and rules.

Next, they hosted multiple rehearsals for participants. ATP members met with students to coach them. They ensured that all acts and costumes were in good taste and appropriate for the performance.

ATP members also contacted local professionals to serve on a judging panel, arranged audio-visual equipment, and found a professional photographer to take pictures of the performances. Parents who were not on the ATP helped their children practice at home and prepare costumes. Others attended as audience.

Children sang, danced, and demonstrated other talents. Two students who had won gold medals in a private ballroom dancing competition closed the show. Reynaud's Got Talent was not a competition, as every student received a participation ribbon. Having a panel of judges gave each participant or group some positive feedback for their real and growing talents.

The show was just as entertaining as the television version that inspired it. "I think we should have another one in two weeks," a seventh-grade student enthused.

"I was happy to see such a great turnout of parents and students," said the principal, who proposed the idea. Sixty students, 25 parents, 10 teachers, and 7 community members attended.

The activity cost just \$25, which covered song download expenses and participation ribbons. In fact, the show helped the school raise money for the Student Award Account. An administrator sold tickets at the door for \$1 apiece.

Reynaud's Got Talent was a happy way to bring students, families, teachers, and the community together to celebrate students' creative talents. It enabled students who may not have received praise for academic accomplishments to be cheered for their singing, dancing, and other abilities. The activity provided a fun way for community members to engage with and support the school.

OTHER SUBJECTS

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REVIEW OF MONTHLY FIELD TRIPS

RENAISSANCE AT RAND MIDDLE SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NJ

Few things get students as excited as the prospect of a field trip. Trips are a valuable way to bring classroom assignments into the real world.

At Renaissance at Rand Middle School, students enjoy many field trips. Their classes take an average of ten trips per year, to museums, concerts, dramas, science camp, historic places, and so on. Given the frequency of excursions, the students' parents suggested reviewing the field trips to ensure that they were valuable experiences that related to students' grade-level curricula.

In response, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) designed a field trip review protocol for teachers at each grade level. Teachers were asked to document how each planned field trip was relevant to the curriculum, and to detail the preparation and follow-up activities they would conduct in class and with students. They were also asked to note the cost and travel times associated with each trip. Next, the ATP reviewed the field trip sheets and met with the teachers by grade level to discuss them.

The field trip review meetings brought parents and teachers together to consider how to best implement field trips to make them effective learning tools for students. The discussions resulted in identifying best practices across grade levels. For example, now for every field trip, teachers must provide parent chaperones handouts in advance that explain the itinerary, directions, and concepts to emphasize in their interactions with students. These handouts enable chaperones to be better prepared to work with students and to answer their questions.

Thanks to the evaluation meetings, teachers have improved field trip preparations and follow-up activities. Students appreciate

knowing how the field trips relate to their classroom lessons. "I really like how we prepare for the trips and learn what they are about beforehand," a seventh-grader said. "For example, we watched a video example of *La Traviata* before attending the opera at the Met. We also got a printed screenplay of 'Romeo and Juliet' before watching the play. This makes the field trips much more enjoyable."

The school principal approved of the field trip review practice. To show her support, she assembled the faculty to communicate her expectations about field trips. To make clear that she expected all field trips to be highly educational and relevant, she asked staff to plan trips as "field research." She also facilitated a discussion about best practices so that teachers could share their experiences and ideas.

"Field research is an integral part of our school's philosophy," she said. "We use it to extend our students' learning experiences beyond the school building and into the greater community. Having a clear way of evaluating each field research experience has allowed us to improve students' learning in all content areas."

The evaluation meetings resulted in making the school's field research trips higher quality experiences for all involved—teachers, parents, parent chaperones, and students. Fasten your seat belts, everyone!

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RISING TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS: PARENT RESOURCE NIGHT

**EAST MIDVALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
MIDVALE, UT**

Type 4

When teachers at East Midvale Elementary suggested that parents help their children with academic skills at home, they found that parents were eager to do so, but weren't sure how. Parents said that when they tried to help their children with homework, their efforts often led to conflict and frustration. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided it was time to give parents a better way to study with their students—games.

The ATP researched ideas for effective academic games by reading online blogs and the web site *teacherspayteachers.com*. They selected and developed specific games that linked to standards and skills that students were required to master. They also identified which students needed extra help to practices and learn specific reading and math skills.

They purchased materials from supply stores such as dice and tokens, and asked a local store to donate paper bags. School staff used the materials to assemble games. They placed them in individual paper bags to create nearly 300 portable game kits. Each game kit was geared for a specific grade level and contained games designed to enhance a student's needed skills. The materials cost about \$500, and labor brought the total to just over \$850.

To determine who received the game kits, the ATP asked teachers to list ten students who could benefit from playing math and reading games at home with their families. Then, at parent-teacher conferences, teachers directed these students' parents to a Parents Resource Night gathering in the library. ATP and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members greeted the parents and demonstrated how to use each game with their child at home.

"The families were given everything they needed to implement the activities," a teacher said. "The night was fantastic!"

Before going home, parents also browsed a display of five iPads showing academic apps. Parents explored how to use technology to help their students.

The game kits were a hit with parents and students alike. They reported that this was a positive way to reinforce lessons at home. "It was nice to get the games. We play them at home with my little brother and sometimes with my older sisters," a fifth grader said.

The night for parent-teacher conferences proved to be an ideal time to schedule Parent Resource Night. A large number of parents were already at the school. After talking with parents about their child's progress, teachers easily directed those selected to go next to the resource room for academic games.

The ATP aims to learn to learn if, how often, and how well the games and activities were used at home. They also will monitor the targeted students' math and reading scores to see if extra help at school and at home affected students' reading and math scores.

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OTHER SUBJECTS

STEM NIGHT

BARBE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

It's not often that you'll find doctors, wetlands experts, chemists, and engineers gathered at an elementary school. This was the case one evening at Barbe Elementary School, when 40 community members visited to educate students, families, and teachers about science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

STEM Night was inspired by an examination of the school's test scores. The data revealed that math and science were a challenge for many students, so the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) set out to create a motivating activity devoted to these subjects. They invited community members with STEM expertise to the school to share information with students and families.

The ATP began preparing early. They started by contacting local universities, businesses, city government offices, and medical professionals to find experts for the event. When they heard the idea, the community experts were eager to participate.

Next, the ATP publicized STEM Night using phone calls, announcements in the local newspaper, website postings, and flyers. They asked families to submit anonymous medical questions so that the guest doctors could address them at the event.

On STEM Night, 150 students, 100 parents, and 50 teachers arrived to enjoy fascinating presentations and demonstrations provided by 40 community members. They heard from a wetlands expert who discussed environmental issues; a nutritionist who talked about portion sizes and demonstrated how to make a healthy snack; and chemical, electrical, and civil engineers who gave presentations about their careers.

One of the most popular events evening was the hour-long Ask the Doctors session. A panel of local physicians sat on stage and answered the anonymous questions that families had submitted about topics such as childhood obesity and ADHD.

"The Ask the Doctors segment should be an activity held at [every school in the district] because it was so beneficial and so needed," said one audience member.

Other highlights of the evening included science activities and math games. There were plenty of activities for students at every grade level. Students learned about science by making ice cream in plastic bags, combining acetone and Styrofoam, and trying various other experiments at supervised stations. They also practiced their math skills by sorting Skittles and M&Ms and playing addition and subtraction bingo.

"I really enjoyed the interaction between the students and the parents," said one teacher.

Combining community STEM experts with students, families, and teachers turned out to be an experiment well worth repeating. Attendees learned new math and science facts, and students were inspired to achieve in school to one day pursue STEM jobs of their own.

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2

NON-ACADEMIC GOALS



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

AIM: ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT MATTERS

**VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

The number one key to success, it is often said, is showing up. So, when the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Vista Elementary School noticed that student attendance was a real challenge for 36 families, the team members decided to partner with the families to generate solutions. They called the initiative AIM, or Attendance Improvement Matters.

The ATP started by running a truancy report to determine which students were in danger of facing serious legal consequences for chronic absenteeism. Next, they invited these students and their families to come to the school for dinner and small group discussions of how they could work together to improve student attendance. Every family received a handmade invitation and a personal phone call.

To encourage as many families as possible to attend, the ATP arranged childcare, transportation, and interpreters. The ATP also incentivized attendance by telling families that if they came to the event, they would receive packages of goods donated by community organizations and local businesses. Thanks to these efforts, 12 of the students and 21 of their parents came.

The evening began with a presentation by the principal about the importance of attendance. He discussed the legal, academic, and emotional consequences of not attending school, and shared a student-narrated slide show about what students miss when they are absent.

Next, the families signed compacts agreeing to make student attendance a priority. The parents agreed to partner with teachers and ATP members to create individual 12-week action plans for their children to improve attendance. In the action plan, the families set a goal for their child's attendance, identified the challenges they faced in helping students get to school every day

on time, how they might work to resolve the challenges, and how educators at the school also would help resolve the challenges. The process facilitated open communication and mutual understanding, and was valuable for all involved.

"Having the parents come in and working with them one-on-one made me really understand their situations better," noted a teacher. "I had no idea of some of the barriers they are faced with!"

"I feel such a connection with the family I worked with," said an ATP member. "They seemed really appreciative!"

After completing the agreements and action plans, the families, teachers, and ATP members ate dinner together. The Attendance Improvement Matters (AIM) initiative didn't end there. After the initial meeting, ATP members called the families they had worked with to check in regularly and to report student progress. At the end of the year, the families were invited to an awards ceremony honoring those who had met their action plan goals. Half met their individual targets, but every family who participated had a student with improved attendance.

The AIM program cost \$75 to organize, funded by the PTO. The benefits AIM yielded were invaluable. Administrators and teachers gained insight into families' challenges, and the families better understood the importance of attendance. Best of all, students received more opportunities to learn and enjoyed more positive classroom interactions with their teachers and peers.

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Type 1

BEHAVIOR

BOYS LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

**WESTERN HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

W*e are the leaders of Western Hills. We exhibit character in our actions as we serve to eliminate bullying and promote good behavior and excellence in the classroom. We are unified in our efforts to be great.*

This is the mission statement of the Boys Leadership Program at Western Hills Elementary. It was launched to encourage fourth- and fifth-grade boys to improve their classroom behavior and academic achievement.

The program resulted from a partnership between a parent, the principal, and teachers. The principal, who had successfully established a similar program at her previous school, proposed the idea. A father of a female student at the school volunteered to lead hour-long sessions during the school day every other week. Teachers selected 35 students for the program based on their potential leadership skills, ability to behave outside of the classroom, and their need to improve homework completion and achievement test scores. The teachers adjusted their lesson plans so that the boys could afford to miss an hour of classroom instruction for the leadership sessions.

The Boys Leadership Program sessions consisted of a variety of activities designed to help the 35 boys grow as students and as leaders. The program's watch-words were based on C.A.U.S.E., which stood for character, action, unity, service, and excellence. For example, the parent facilitator gave the boys at-home writing assignments and challenged them to perform random acts of kindness, courtesy, and leadership at home, in the classroom, and on campus during lunch and recess. They had to write or report on these activities.

The facilitator also collaborated with an instructor from the Discovery Museum for enrichment activities in science. For two months, the museum

instructor led the students through a series of fun science experiments.

A \$200 grant from the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) afforded the group lunches, supplies, and end-of-year awards.

The practice was successful from the start. "You could literally see the change in some of the young men," said one parent. "Their confidence grew from having to speak in front of their peers and their sense of responsibility was elevated by the constant requests from the instructor for reports from their teachers about their behavior." The teachers monitored students' writing skills and reported that the periodic writing assignments helped many of the boys to improve their written work.

"I think this is a very good program for the young boys here at Western Hills and should be something that is implemented in other schools," agreed another parent. "Someone who takes an interest in these boys now would curb many discipline problems that would arise later on."

The boys were especially enthusiastic about the practice. "I loved Boys Leadership this year," one student wrote. "It gave me a chance to make the school a better place with my friends. This program made a difference in the school. It's been an honor being in the program."

Western Hills Elementary recommends the practice to other schools, and suggests that other schools consider recruiting multiple parent volunteers to share the workload to make the program even easier to implement.

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Type 6

BEHAVIOR

BUILDING A HERO SCHOOL

CHURCH HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHURCH HILL, MD

From Batman to The Incredibles, children love superheroes. At Church Hill Elementary School, school staff capitalized on this fascination by creating a hero-themed field day devoted to character education.

On Building A Hero School Day, 320 students and their families gathered with school staff and community members to play games and learn how to recognize heroic characteristics in everyday people. The day-long event promoted a positive school-community relationship and inspired all participants to try their best to act with honor, compassion, and integrity.

A team of teachers chose the hero theme to discourage bullying and promote an atmosphere of respect, responsibility, and safety. They spread the word about the event weeks in advance via the school website, newsletter, and Facebook. They also sent 20 letters to local and state agencies seeking real-life heroes to give presentations to students and families at the event.

Dozens of community members responded to the request. Firefighters, police officers, wounded veterans, a Special Olympics medalist, and others agreed to join the field day.

“The hero presenting on underwater rescues is doing an amazing job,” said one parent at the event. “The students love talking with him and are asking great questions about scuba diving.”

“I got to speak with the hero who was a female veteran,” a grandparent added. “She fought for special exemption on her height to get into the military. Kids really enjoyed listening to her talk.”

In between hero presentations, students rotated through a variety of outdoor games set up by the physical education teacher. The games

were given hero-related names, such as Superman Obstacle, Villain-Roundup, Kryptonite Toss, and Bat Escape.

Later in the afternoon, students gathered for an assembly about heroes and to watch the fourth grade take on staff in a game of Freedom Ball. Finally, students returned to their classrooms to enjoy frozen treats and watch a hero-themed movie. The total cost of the day was \$400.

Teachers prepared students for the event with a variety of lessons. Students discussed characteristics of heroes in their classes and wrote about heroes they knew personally. Their stories and illustrations were posted on bulletin boards outside the classrooms for all to see. The students also chose superheroes to represent their classes, and designed t-shirts related to their superheroes to wear to the field day.

In the days leading up to the event, teachers generated excitement in a number of other ways. A teacher posing as the Riddler challenged classes to solve riddles together each morning. Other teachers left signs around the school hinting at visits from famous superheroes. Classes returned from lunch to find bats from Batman in their classrooms and Superman insignia hanging on their doors.

The activities, games, and presentations from this year’s field clearly enabled Church Hill Elementary School Community to develop its own superpowers: strong character and partnership.

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CHAMPS: CHALLENGES HAVE A MILLION POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

**MAIN STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CITY, SC**

Type 1

Anger is an inevitable emotion, but those who learn to effectively manage their reactions tend to be more successful in life. To teach students this valuable skill, Main Street Elementary School started a program called CHAMPS—Challenges Have a Million Possible Solutions. CHAMPS shows students how to think before they react. It also aims to inform students’ families about how to reinforce principles of emotional regulation at home. In just one year, the initiative dramatically reduced discipline referrals at the school and boosted students’ test scores. Thanks to CHAMPS, students, families, and teachers now enjoy more peaceful relationships.

CHAMPS was launched at the beginning of the school year, when the school’s behavior interventionist asked teachers to send him a list of students prone to emotional outbursts. The behavior interventionist spoke with the students, and evaluated whether participation in CHAMPS would be beneficial. He selected 100 students to join with permission from their parents.

The students met eight times throughout the year for special CHAMPS sessions. At these gatherings, facilitators used role-playing strategies to teach students how to communicate their feelings in a respectful, assertive way without hurting others. Students learned how to identify emotional triggers, and experimented with cognitive restructuring techniques. For example, rather than thinking, “This is awful. Everything is ruined,” students were encouraged to reframe the situation in a more positive way, such as, “It is understandable that I am upset, but it is not the end of the world and getting angry is not going to fix the problem.” Facilitators also shared simple relaxation tips with the students, such as breathing techniques and the use of relaxing imagery to calm down in stressful situations.

The students were paired on a weekly basis with high school mentors. These mentors helped to reinforce the CHAMPS practices by helping students strengthen their problem solving abilities and act less impulsively.

CHAMPS was not just for students. Parents learned about CHAMPS as part of the school’s Parent Academy program. Facilitators showed parents how to identify signals that their children were becoming angry and how to effectively navigate difficult conversations.

By the end of the year, it was clear that CHAMPS had made a powerful impact. Discipline referrals had dropped 70%, from 183 to 54. Teachers noted that their classrooms were calmer, and parents reported more harmonious family dynamics at home. Students noticed their improved grades. The reduction in classroom disruptions made it easier for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The school celebrated these results at the end of the year. At the gathering, both students and parents who participated in CHAMPS gave testimonials about how the program had given them tools to become more emotionally mature and more successful in school.

As CHAMPS grows, the school plans to solicit ideas from parents about factors contributing to children’s disruptive behaviors at school. Then, all stakeholders will be engaged in the program from the start.

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BEHAVIOR

DRAMA

JOHN P. THOMAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COLUMBIA, SC

At John P. Thomas Elementary School is serves mainly African American students, with 96% eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Picture this scenario: 32 students were in court. On trial? The Big Bad Wolf was accused of eating three little pigs. The student actors, after rehearsing well, were putting on a free, professional-quality play for an audience of their peers, families, and teachers.

Over 160 attended the performance, and were greatly entertained. “I must truly say that in my 15 years of being in the educational field, I have never witnessed anything of this caliber at the elementary level!” the school’s assistant principal raved. “It was refreshing to see our children in action and excited about what they were doing.”

The elementary school’s theater arts program was developed to create a safe, creative environment where students could express themselves without fear of ridicule or judgment. It began with a conversation between the Communities In Schools (CIS) site coordinator and the school principal. Soon, fourth- and fifth-grade students received flyers inviting them to audition for roles in a school play.

Parents had to be committed, too. In addition to signing a permission slip for students to try out for the play, parents had to agree to provide transportation home after twice-a-week after school rehearsals.

Students responded enthusiastically, and the CIS Coordinator and a teacher cast the roles. Those who received parts in the play, called “The Trial of the Big Bad Wolf,” agreed to stay after school for two hours on Mondays and Fridays to rehearse. Other students were backstage “stars” who built sets, painted scenery, served as managers and stage hands, and as ushers for the performance.

Students learned much more than acting skills. Rehearsing for the play also helped them to practice memorization, improve reading comprehension, and build important social skills. Teachers reported that students in the program attended school more often and were more self confident about themselves and their work.

Parents were strong supporters of the drama program. They helped their children study for their roles, assisted with costumes, and occasionally provided snacks for rehearsals. They also wrote positive messages for their students, which were published in the program and distributed at the performance.

Community members pitched in as well. They donated costumes, supplied snacks, and helped build the set. Many of them attended the performance of the play to cheer on the students.

The program cost \$1,000 to produce, and was funded by CIS, community partners, and the school itself. Some good lessons were learned. For example, snacks at rehearsals helped students concentrate better after school. Transportation should be arranged so that all students are eligible to participate, including those whose parents are not able to leave work early to pick them up after rehearsals.

The actors, supporters, and the school’s drama program deserves a hearty round of applause for encouraging students to develop their acting talent and for shining a spotlight on their achievements.

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FAMILY DIGITAL SUMMIT

**VINAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
MIDDLETOWN, CT**

Type 2

Technology can be an excellent learning and communication tool, but with great power comes great responsibility. To help parents and students stay savvy and safe online, Vinal Technical High School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers hosted a series of five in-depth digital workshops. The evening workshops focused on a range of topics: accessing student records online, using digital photography, managing privacy settings on social media sites, dealing with cyber bullying, and understanding the state assessment test.

Over 20 students worked with teachers to plan and present two of the five workshops. For the PowerSchool workshop, one student helped design and deliver a PowerPoint presentation to parents on how to access student grades and assignments online. Another student translated this information for Spanish speakers. The workshop was held in the school's computer lab so that participants could immediately apply what they had learned. The student presenters gained leadership skills and public speaking experience. Parents learned new ways to stay informed about their student's progress.

For the Digital Photography session, a group of students worked with the school's Information Technology teacher to show parents how to create online invitations featuring digital photos. Attendees left with new skills and with a better understanding of the types of technology their teens used at school.

The school's Cyber Bullying workshop was co-led by a representative from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The ADL representative helped tailor a presentation to meet the students' and families' needs. The content covered what cyber bullying is, how to

prevent it, and what steps to take if someone is victimized. "I understand now by 'liking' a comment made, I can be adding to someone being bullied," said one student. Parents gained insight into the prevalence of cyber bullying and how to support their children should it occur.

A teacher created the Internet Safety workshop as a follow-up. Parents and students collaborated in small groups to learn how to keep information safe on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. From photo tagging to security settings, participants discussed how to maintain privacy in the online world.

Department heads led one session to educate parents on the demands of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). "One thing I didn't know...was the amount of writing that went into the reading portion," noted one parent. Another was surprised by the amount of material covered in a short time frame on the test. Parents also learned strategies to help their students prepare for the test.

The Digital Family Summit workshops were originally requested by parents and students in response to school surveys. The Active Family Engagement Team publicized the events with letters, e-mails, phone calls, and an announcement posted on the school website.

At Vinal Technical, students come from nearly 30 surrounding towns, some more than 20 miles away. So a bus was provided for families who needed transportation. More than 30 parents attended and refreshments were served. Expenses for the five workshops totaled \$800 and were funded by the district central office through the Family Engagement Program.

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BEHAVIOR

FINDING KIND

**JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
NAPERVILLE, IL**

Mean girls have long strutted many junior high hallways. As one male student at Jefferson Junior High School observed, “Girls can be so mean to each other just to make themselves feel better and be liked, when really they just need to be kind to each other.”

To promote acceptance and increase awareness about girl-to-girl bullying, the junior high’s School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team screened a documentary called *Finding Kind* for staff, parents, and students. The documentary cost \$500 to show three times within a limited time period. After showing the documentary twice to staff to gather ideas and feedback, the SFCP offered a third evening showing for families.

Teachers distributed flyers about the event to the school’s 900 students and e-mailed invitations to parents. The SFCP team and teachers emphasized that the evening was about encouraging *kindness* rather than simply preventing female bullying—as the goal at the school is to inspire positive attitudes and good relationships among students, teachers, and families.

Attendees came to the school gymnasium and were encouraged to bring blankets to make the bleacher seats comfortable. The SFCP team members, school staff, and student council representatives greeted 50 parents and distributed refreshments.

Before the film, attendees were asked to consider several questions. After the film, they signed Kind Pledge Cards, describing how they would unite in kindness. Students were encouraged to think of ways to show kindness, and to write an apology to someone for something unkind they had said or done. All attendees evaluated the film and discussion.

The film made an impact. “Wow,” said one parent. “That movie was so powerful. I could totally relate. Wish I had brought our high school daughter to see it.”

The project didn’t stop there. The junior high continued the positive momentum by having teachers tap the Patriot Plus program to recognize and reward students for acts of kindness.

Although *Finding Kind* focused on girl-to-girl bullying, the SFCP wanted to make sure that the anti-bullying message addressed boys, as well. The Student Council accomplished this by producing its own *Finding Kind* documentary on increasing acts of kindness and preventing bullying. This film was shown to the student body during supervised study periods. The documentary showed how acts of kindness could make a difference in the school’s environment and in students’ lives.

Through the community film screening, the student council video, and positive reinforcement from teachers, the SFCP at Jefferson Junior High School helped students and families see that while it is important to get good grades, it also is important to be a good and kind person.

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Type 1

BEHAVIOR

HOMework HELP AND PARENT PARTNERS

**FRANCES HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL
ST. CHARLES, MO**

Type 4

Completing homework is easier when there are teachers at your apartment complex ready to help you as soon as you get off the school bus. This was the rationale behind an on-site tutoring program developed by the Parent Involvement Team at Francis Howell Middle School.

When the school's principal informed the partnership team that a group of middle schoolers were in danger of failing due to poor attendance, behavioral issues, and sub-par grades, team members sprang into action. They set up an after school tutoring program at the apartment complex where 26 of the underperforming students lived.

The team procured funds from the school district to pay for tutors and snacks. Tutors, including teachers, retired teachers, and para-educators cost \$8,000 and snacks cost \$500 for the year. Next, they reached out to the students' parents with phone calls, e-mails, and flyers to invite them to an informational meeting about the on-site tutoring program and its importance for their children's success in school. The meeting was held on a Saturday at the apartment complex clubhouse to make it convenient for the parents to attend.

Although some parents initially resisted the idea of a tutoring program, they became supportive once they understood its purpose was not to punish their children, but to help them attend school, complete homework, pass their classes, and move on to the next grade level.

Seventeen of the targeted children participated. Twice a week, a school administrator met them after school at their bus stop and escorted them to the apartment complex clubhouse. At the clubhouse, they enjoyed a snack and then quickly got to work for the next couple of hours. Everything students needed to

to learn key skills and complete their homework was provided, from skilled tutors to laptops and iPads. There was never a question about what help the students needed. Their classroom teachers were in close communication with the tutors about all homework assignments.

The program was measurably effective. In just the first few months, teachers reported a 30% reduction in homework being turned in late by the participating students. More than 90% of them received passing grades for the quarter.

To continue the parent partnership, school staff scheduled a follow-up meeting about the program. Parents reported that they were pleased with the positive results and their children's accomplishments.

"I am a working single mom and not home in the evening," one said. "This is a huge help to know my kids are doing their homework in a safe environment and it's done when I get home at night."

"Thank you so much for reaching out to our children and families and helping us," another added.

Homework Help and Parent Partners is an example a partnership approach that enabled teachers, parents, and the community to help students who were at risk of failing to take steps toward success in school.

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BEHAVIOR

TIMROD PEARLS

**TIMROD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

When tasked with finding a way to improve their school's climate and decrease behavioral referrals to the office, Timrod Elementary School came up with a jewel of an idea: Pearls Club for girls. The female counterpart to the school's successful Red Tie Club for boys, the Pearls Club aimed to increase girls' confidence by incentivizing good behavior and providing role models that would encourage them to do their best in school.

Every girl in the fifth and sixth grade was invited to join the club via verbal invitations from their teachers and letters and phone calls to their parents. About half participated—23 students met with several teachers every Thursday for an hour after school. At these meetings, the girls learned about good manners, honesty, responsibility, determination, and good decision-making. They practiced these principles by role-playing and completing community service projects, such as making Valentine's Day cards for children at a nearby hospital. They were also encouraged to demonstrate leadership and positive character traits at school and at home.

The highlight of the Pearl Club meetings were appearances by guest speakers—high-achieving women from the community who spoke with the girls about their careers. Guests included a CEO, youth minister, attorney, and others. "It was really cool to meet so many wonderful women who have really gone out there and done their thing," said one student. "I hope to be like them."

Parents also were involved in the Pearl Club. They maintained log books to monitor the girls' behavior at home, noting examples of ways in which the girls exhibited good character. The girls shared these examples with pride at each meeting. Girls who returned the log books had

their names placed in a drawing to receive Wal-Mart gift cards.

Families were delighted with the positive changes they observed in their girls' behavior. "I've seen my daughter grow this year in the Pearls Club," one parent said. "She cares more about what I think. We talk more about stuff, and I love that she thinks about her future now."

At the end of the year, the school hosted a celebration dinner for the girls' Pearls Club, the boys' Red Tie Club, and all of the students' families. They called it the Red & White Dinner. The meal for over 150 attendees was provided at a discount by a local restaurant, and 15 school staff members donated baked goods for dessert. The girls, dressed for the event, received pearl pendant necklaces and were praised by a state senator. The next day, an article about the event appeared in the local newspaper.

The total cost of the Pearls Club was about \$500. This included the dinner, thank you cards for guest speakers, and the necklaces. The school funded the club with award money it had received from NNPS as well as a grant from the Frances Marion Center of Excellence.

In the end, the Pearls Club exceeded the school's goals. Members improved their behavior at school and at home, gained ideas of potential careers they may follow, and many excelled academically. Members of the Pearls Club were ready to move on to the middle grades.

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Type 6

BEHAVIOR

BRING YOUR PARENTS TO SCHOOL DAY

**W. F. KAYNOR TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
WATERBURY, CT**

Type 2

Every April, millions of parents bring their children to the workplace for Take Your Son or Daughter to Work Day. Last year, W. F. Kaynor Technical High School—a demographically diverse school of over 700 students—turned the tables on that design. To encourage parents to become more actively engaged in their teen’s education and to communicate in a positive way with school teachers and staff, the team invited students to Bring Your Parents to School Day.

Ninety parents, who were invited via letters and phone calls, gathered at the school at 8 a.m. They were greeted by students and Family Engagement Committee (FEC) members, who offered them coffee and pastries and gave them information about upcoming events.

Next, parents were escorted to their child’s classroom. Each of the teachers of the high school’s 12 technology trades had planned an agenda for the morning. The shops include electrical, drafting and design, manufacturing, hairdressing/barbering, fashion, merchandising, plumbing and heating, automotive, culinary, carpentry, and other technologies.

“It is our responsibility as educators to continually build upon promising practices to promote connections within the Kaynor community of parents, students, and teachers,” a teacher explained.

Parents worked alongside their children on a variety of projects. In the process, they gained insight into the skills their students were developing and a better understanding of their students’ education.

“I could not believe how much education has changed since I was in school,” one parent said. “Students are part of the teaching and learning environment versus the direct instruction approach when I was in school.”

All of the students were pleased that so many parents were able to attend. They saw that the parents were interested in and appreciative of the technical education that students received at the school. “I was important enough for [my Dad] to come,” shared one student.

Teachers enjoyed meeting the parents in the welcoming setting. After having positive interactions with parents on Bring Your Parents to School Day, they said, future conversations with them would be easier. Teachers also noticed that, after the family event, students seemed more connected to the school.

The FEC recommends that schools that host similar events pair students who do not have parents in attendance with those who do. That way, all students feel included. They also suggest scheduling additional sessions outside regular school hours for working parents who cannot take time off during the day.

The program cost \$100 and was funded by donations from the school staff.

Just as experiencing a parent’s workplace for a day can be eye-opening for a child, accompanying children to school can be make a big impact on parents. Bring Your Parents to School Day strengthened the bond between students, parents, and school staff. This relatively simple activity opened the door for more positive parent-teacher-student communications for the rest of the year.

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS

FAMILY BEAUTY DAY AND SCHOOL-TO-CAREER ASSEMBLY

H. H. ELLIS TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL DANIELSON, CT

Job-hunting is not easy these days for high school graduates, but H. H. Ellis Technical High School excels at preparing its trade students to enter the workforce. Last year, the school implemented two partnership practices to help its students successfully transition to life after high school—a family beauty day and an assembly to prepare students to move from school-to-career.

At Family Beauty Day, 18 students in the hairdressing program shared their skills with family members, while also learning how to provide customer service. Students invited family members to join them in the classroom. The visitors were served refreshments and offered various spa treatments. Family members were happy to accept. They commented on the students' maturity and professionalism.

The practice, which cost \$35, helped students show off their talents and build closer relationships with their families in the school environment. "I loved working on my mom and spending time with her," said a student.

Another group of students at the school developed and executed a plan for workplace readiness that combined a school-to-career assembly, job fair, and in-school employment agency. The students created this combination of activities as part of a competition sponsored by a local community college and manufacturing institute. The community partners gave teams of high school students \$1,000 to find ways to improve their schools and gave an award to the team with the best plan.

The three components of the workplace readiness event took place in the school's gym. At the school-to-career assembly, local professionals spoke to students about how they could apply the

skills they learned in school to the workplace. The speakers were inspiring and teachers were impressed by the serious attention by the students in the audience.

The nearby job fair consisted of several booths staffed by community businesses. Students were invited to submit their resumes and portfolios to the business representatives, and to speak to them about employment prospects. "The event provided students access to discuss real world expectations with local employers," a teacher commented.

Finally, students visited an in-school employment agency. This place was set up for students to browse job postings online and get application information.

More than 500 students attended the School-to-Career Assembly and related activities. The Ellis Tech team earned the first place prize in the community competition. "The students on the competition team were so professional and helpful throughout the duration of the project!" said the school librarian.

Both Family Beauty Day and the School-to-Career Assembly showcased students' skills and gave them exposure to post-high school career options. These practices also proved that when given school, family, and community support, high school students are exceptionally capable of organizing outstanding activities.

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PANTHER COLLEGE AND CAREER EXPO

LAKE CITY HIGH SCHOOL

LAKE CITY, SC

Type 6

More than 500 students at Lake City High School were introduced to new post-graduate possibilities at the Panther College and Career Expo. The event at the rural school was designed for 10th through 12th grade students to explore college and employment opportunities, thereby motivating them to work hard in school and to graduate from high school on time. The staff also hoped that the practice would help reduce the number of students who were suspended or expelled from at the school.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) received \$700 from the Center of Excellence at Frances Marion University to implement the idea. ATP and other school leaders worked closely with the career counselor from the district's Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Center. Together, the partners identified more than 40 local colleges and businesses to invite to the event, and sent them letters and registration forms. They followed up with each of invited programs via phone and e-mail to encourage their participation in the Panther College and Career Expo.

Next, the organizers invited students and parents to the Expo via announcements on the school website and in local newspapers. The Expo was scheduled during the school day, and individual classes were guided to rotate through the exhibits in 55-minute shifts.

Upon arriving at the Expo, attendees were given custom-printed note pads and bags. The note pads enabled them to record what they learned, and the bags made it easy for them to carry the materials they received from the various colleges and businesses.

The room buzzed with energy as the students chatted in serious conversations with

the college and career representatives and collected information from the exhibits. "I liked how I got to talk to the people about what I want to do," explained a student.

"Most of the colleges had great career choices," a parent added.

After the Expo, school staff invited students to provide feedback on their experiences. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive. Now, the school is considering offering the event annually.

If they do, they will take the students' suggestions into account. In the future, students said, they would like the Expo to be scheduled later in the day to allow more parents to attend. Students also suggested that the Expo include even more colleges and potential employers. Finally, they recommended that the colleges and businesses create interesting and informative PowerPoint presentations to share their information with students and parents at the event.

The Panther College and Career Expo showed the students that if they work hard and graduate from high school, they will have many options for postsecondary education and training for a career. In just one day, community partners gave students hope and motivation, boosting school morale in the process.

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS

RED LINE HIGH SCHOOL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

EDMONDSON-WESTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL BALTIMORE, MD

A handful of students at Edmondson-Westside High School spent the summer learning about new careers, thanks to an innovative initiative called the Red Line High School Internship Program. The program was started by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA), which was eager to promote student involvement in the construction of a new light rail system in downtown Baltimore. They selected 18 students from three local Baltimore high schools to spend six weeks assisting engineering companies with the project.

When the MTA contacted the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Edmondson-Westside High School about the internship program, the ATP was pleased to offer their support. The internship program aligned perfectly with the ATP's goals of increasing community engagement and helping to prepare students for the work world. The ATP worked with school staff to promote the opportunity to students and parents, and organized a group of mentors to help interested students prepare their applications.

After an interview, six students from Edmondson-Westside were selected to participate in the program. For the six-week internship, the students worked for six hours per day for \$10 per hour. Their wages were provided by the MTA and one of the partner engineering companies.

The interns learned what it was like to work in a professional environment by attending meetings, visiting project sites, and interacting with planners and engineers on a daily basis. They also visited a variety of MTA facilities and assisted the MTA with several community outreach projects, from distributing informational flyers and surveys to answering local citizens' questions about the Red Line project.

Throughout the program, the interns were mentored by MTA employees, engineering staff, and by students from Morgan State University.

"The staff is looking forward to working with the students again," said the CEO of one of the engineering companies. "[We] appreciated their positive attitude about learning about a new experience."

In addition to learning about the development of the Red Line, the interns gained a better understanding of local and national government and became excited about attending college. Highlights of the program included a trip to Capitol Hill, where interns saw the offices of Maryland congressmen, and a tour of Morgan State University.

At the end of the summer, the interns shared what they had learned at a closing ceremony attended by more than 100 people. They developed a PowerPoint presentation to share, and practiced their public speaking skills in advance. Each participant was awarded a certificate.

The internship program was a positive experience for all involved. The construction of the Red Line light rail project will continue for several years, giving more students a chance to get on track with their college and career plans.

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STRESSED OUT CHILL OUT: TIPS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

**MIAMI CAROL CITY SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
MIAMI GARDENS, FL**

Type 6

Dealing with test anxiety, practicing effective study skills, and managing time are common challenges for many high school students. The same issues were identified as reasons that many first-year college students fail courses and drop out of higher education. Therefore, they are important to resolve to prepare students to succeed at the high school level and in postsecondary education.

When students at Miami Carol City Senior High School asked for assistance with these issues, the school was eager to work with them. Soon, 200 students found themselves learning how to relieve test anxiety by doodling with art therapists and practicing poses with yoga teachers. Thanks to organization and time management tips from other experts, they also gained tips on how to prevent stress in the first place.

The art, yoga, and study skills sessions were hosted at the school by Diplomas Now, a nonprofit partner that helps schools support students so that more will graduate on time. In partnership with NNPS, DN and the community planned three hour-long workshops during lunchtime at the high school followed by related after school activities. The sessions for Stressed Out Chill Out were publicized via flyers, sign-up sheets, phone calls, and PA system announcements. Lunch was provided to encourage student attendance. The food and drinks cost about \$200, funded by another of the school's partners—Communities in Schools.

Students responded to the lunchtime workshops with enthusiasm. At the first session, they learned different techniques for addressing test anxiety. They were invited to meet after school with art therapists from U-Doodle, a nonprofit that aims to build communities through art. These professionals worked with students in

small groups to teach them how drawing can be an effective stress reliever during testing.

The next day, the lunch workshop focused on teaching students how to prioritize schoolwork so that they manage time effectively. Students learned how to organize their assignments according to deadlines and importance.

“Students were able to see how time management and good study habits could relieve stress and help them better prepare for test time,” one staff member commented.

On the third day, students dove deeper into the topic of time management. They were asked to consider their *wants* versus their *needs*, and to think about how to best allocate their time to make sure that their needs—particularly school-related needs such as completing homework, studying for tests are met. After school, they were joined by a nonprofit called The Yoga Gangsters, a group that works to address stress and anger through yoga. The yoga teachers set up mats and music, and taught students about the benefits of practicing yoga.

“I had never done yoga before,” one student said. “It was relaxing and helped me clear my mind.”

The lunchtime and after school workshops were a great way to equip students with both the emotional and practical skills needed to succeed in school. The students enjoyed working with community partners to learn how to use art and yoga to prepare their minds to tackle academic skills.

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

SUPER SOCCER DADS

**HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

At Hawthorne Elementary School, many students come from diversely structured families with one parent at home, usually mom. To encourage fathers and father figures to be involved in students' lives and to promote education, health, and safety, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) hosted a soccer game and community event for dads, students, and families. The idea for the gathering, called Super Soccer Dads, was borrowed and adapted from the ATP at a nearby school, Amistad Elementary.

Hawthorne's ATP spread the word about Super Soccer Dads by distributing flyers, adding information to the school calendar, and asking teachers to promote the activity in their classrooms. On the day of the game, students received stickers printed with the start time as a final reminder.

Three soccer fields were set up for the occasion. The Dads Teams played the Students Teams grouped by grade level (K-1, 2-3, and 4-5.) To ensure there were enough players on the Dads Teams, the ATP invited local firefighters to join the fun. The firefighters also brought a fire truck and ambulance to the field to increase awareness about community safety and sports safety.

Families, teachers, and community members cheered the players from the sidelines, while socializing and enjoying hot dogs and drinks provided by a local church. Over 100 students, 179 parents, 15 community members, and a dozen teachers and administrators participated.

Half-time was packed with enrichment activities provided by school staff and community partners. The principal gathered the fathers and father figures to talk about Love and Logic parenting strategies. His presentation aimed to

enlist the dads' help in preventing bullying and promoting positive student behavior at school. This included recruiting volunteers for the school, but also encouraging all of the important males in students' lives to reinforce messages of the importance of education, good school work, good behavior, and the rejection of bullying.

Nearby, local librarians promoted the library's summer reading program and facilitated library card registration. Students helped them recruit new library members. The class who garnered the most library card sign-ups was rewarded with a pizza party.

Representatives from a local pharmacy were also on hand. They answered parents' questions and shared information about children's health issues.

By the end of the game, everyone was a winner. Many parents met other parents that they did not know before. Many dads, father figures, and moms felt welcome by the teachers and more aware of community resources.

For just \$250, the event fostered a sense of team spirit among families, educators, and community members alike, and taught attendees the importance of physical, emotional, intellectual, and community health. Well-played, Hawthorne!

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BRIDGING CULTURES: ENGAGING LATINO FAMILIES

**PATTERSON PARK PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL
BALTIMORE, MD**

Type 1

Once a week, a group of Latino mothers gathers at Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS). They discuss topics in Spanish with a facilitator, teach each other to knit and make piñatas, and plan family field trips and holiday celebrations. “It is a place where relationships and friendships are created and you can receive support,” one participant explained.

The group began seven years ago, when it became clear that there was a need for the school’s growing Latino population to be supported and engaged with each other, at school, and in the community. The group provides a confidential discussion forum where participants can feel safe and proud of their home cultures. The women also learn about community resources and become more involved with the PreK-8 school.

A bilingual, bicultural parent leads the group. Her role is important. She must understand the perspectives of the participants, but also offer knowledge and resources that will help the parents support their children’s success at PPPCS. She has to lead discussions, interact sensitively with all group members, and ensure that the sessions are positive and productive.

At the beginning of the year, the leader asks participants what they would like to learn and discuss. She, then, prepares presentations on the suggested topics and invites community agencies and individuals to share their expertise with the group throughout the year. At regular intervals, participants are given surveys to assess their reactions to the group and the invited presentations, and ways to improve the group’s work and interactions. They also are asked how much they have learned and how comfortable they are in the school and community.

Results indicate that Bridging Cultures has been a mainstay of the participants’ lives.

“It has helped me overcome depression and to learn new positive things, as well as get along better with my family,” said one member of the group.

Participants take field trips to Washington, D.C. and to Baltimore parks, restaurants, and the farmers market. The field trips are funded by the sale of crafts that they make together. The group also plans school-wide celebrations of Mexican and Central American Independence Day, Day of the Dead, and Day of the Children. The celebrations enable the members to share their culture with all students.

“It’s helped me to not forget the things of our countries and also to learn ... about this country,” one participant said.

Funding for the activity came from community grants and from school funds, mainly for refreshments and craft supplies. To date, 46 mothers have been involved. New members are recruited via flyers, postcards, phone blasts, orientation sessions, and word of mouth.

As a result of these interactions, the parents who participate are better able to support their children academically. They are more apt to attend parent-teacher-student conferences at the high school. These are, indeed, parent leaders at the school who can help others in their communities to gain confidence about becoming more engaged in their students’ education.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

HAWTHORNE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT UNIVERSITY

HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SEATTLE, WA

At Hawthorne Elementary School, about one third of the students are English Language Learners (ELL) who speak little or no English at home. Many of their parents are unemployed due to lack of English-speaking skills, or are employed in very low-paying jobs. Teachers knew that in order to support their children academically, these parents needed to learn English so that they could find better jobs. Learning English not only would make them more employable, but also would enable them to communicate with their children’s teachers and to encourage their children to do their work in school and complete homework.

To help parents learn English, the school’s Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) reached out to Seattle Community College, which agreed to offer free ESL classes to parents twice a week. The partnership team advertised this opportunity to parents using flyers and automated phone calls translated in multiple languages. They also posted announcements about the classes on the school website and Facebook. Parents signed up quickly, filling the 25-student class to capacity. In this way, the Family Engagement University program was born.

The classes were very effective. “The English classes are helping me to be able to communicate and understand other people,” said one parent. “I can also help my son with his homework. I really want to learn English.”

A few weeks after classes started, the school’s ELL leader noticed that parents in the program had initiated more conversations with school staff. She explained, “In the past, they would have first approached a translator, now they were feeling more confident about their communication skills and were developing better relationships with their children’s teachers.”

Children of the participants talked about how their parents went to class every week. They learned from their parents’ example that education is a lifelong endeavor. Teachers reported that these children seemed more motivated in class about their own studies.

The program cost \$1,600 to run and was funded by the Hawthorne Parent Teacher Association. While the ESL classes were free, the ATP hired someone to provide childcare while class was in session. Finding funds for supervising about a dozen young children twice a week was the program’s biggest challenge, and determined the number of participants admitted to the classes. It may be that with one paid supervisor, high school students might volunteer or earn service learning credits by assisting this program. Or, a co-op system might be designed in which the participating parents skip a class on a rotating schedule to work in the childcare room.

At Hawthorne, the Family Engagement University has a waiting list of interested parents. This is a good problem. The program is a great example of how a partnership school can tailor its plans to meet specific needs of its students’ families. This service translates directly to help parents feel more confident about supporting themselves and their children.

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LANGUAGE/CULTURE-BASED FAMILY WORKSHOPS

**DEARBORN PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SEATTLE, WA**

Type 5

How does a school in the most diverse zip code in the country communicate effectively with all parents? For Dearborn Park Elementary School, which serves more than 350 students from a variety of backgrounds, the answer was to invite groups of parents to informational dinners according to their native languages and cultures.

The school Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed the series of workshops three years ago in response to requests from families. The families wanted to receive academic information at the beginning of the year in their native languages in order to best support their children throughout the year. The school offered separate workshops by language and by culture. African-American parents also have their own workshop as well. The ATP wanted to strengthen parents' skills and willingness to be leaders on school committees and to guide their own children's academic success in school.

"It was very informative as a new parent coming from a different school district," said one parent, who attended a workshop in Tagalog. "It helped with the smooth transition." Workshops also are available in Somali, Oromo/Amharic, Vietnamese, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), and Spanish.

As part of its comprehensive full-year program of family and community engagement, the school devotes Monday evenings in September and October to the workshops. They publicize the meetings by including information in first-day-of-school packets and by posting announcements in the school newsletter, on the school website, and on a neighborhood blog. They also set up automated phone call reminders in different languages.

On workshop evenings, local middle and high school student volunteers arrive to help set

up the cafeteria for babysitting services. Families are introduced to the principal, teachers, and school support staff, with English Language Learner (ELL) staff on hand to translate. On occasion, local cultural community organizations also attend to make announcements and share resources.

At each workshop, parents gain basic information such as how to sign in when they visit the school and where to pick up and drop off their children. They also learn about their rights and responsibilities, how to get involved in school activities, and how to contact staff. Finally, they are invited to sign up for parent-teacher conferences.

Parents have responded enthusiastically: 133 attended the various workshops this past year. Furthermore, the school's PTA grew by 20%. Since the workshops began, teachers have noted that students from these families seem more comfortable about asking questions in class.

Highlights of the workshop include distribution of free children's books and translated copies of the district's literacy, math, and science toolkits. Each event culminates in a dinner, where families have the chance to meet each other and talk informally with teachers, staff, and other parents. The meal is the main cost of the workshops at about \$50-\$100 per session.

Language/Culture-Based Family Workshops not only are an effective way to communicate the school's procedures and academic, behavioral, and social expectations, but also are a great opportunity to foster a sense of community.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

NO FAMILY LEFT BEHIND: ELL TRANSLATION STATION

**DELMAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

When teachers at Delmae Elementary School need to communicate with parents who speak limited English, they don't get frustrated. Instead, they stop at the school's new English Language Learner (ELL) Translation Station to find the right words.

The ELL Translation Station is located in a private area at the school featuring a laptop. Translation software on the laptop facilitates interactions between school staff and parents who speak languages as diverse as Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Gujarati, Wolof, and Urdu.

"The ELL Translation Station is a wonderful tool for our school," an ELL teacher said. "Although nothing compares to actual one-on-one communication in our native languages, the Translation Station is a bridge across the communication gap when meeting with limited English proficient parents."

Teachers say that the ELL Translation Station is especially useful during parent-teacher conferences. "Having this resource so that I can sit down with a non-English speaking parent and really communicate what is going on so they can be active in the decision-making is paramount to that child's success," explained a fourth-grade teacher.

The ELL Translation Station is not just for special meetings. Families are given unlimited access to the ELL Translation Station, and are invited to use it as often as they like. So far, 80 parents and 44 students have used the technology.

The ELL Translation Station also comes in handy when teachers need to translate written documents to send home with ELL students. When these students bring home information

about school services or events in their parents' native language, parents are much more likely read the messages and engage with the school.

The laptop and software cost \$960, which was funded by a grant from the Center of Excellence at Frances Marion University. The school also supplied the Translation Station with paper, pens, and access to a printer.

Going forward, the school intends to increase the use of the ELL Translation Station by offering demonstrations to parents. They hope that the station will continue to strengthen parent engagement by enabling educators to communicate information to all families about academic issues, behavioral expectations, and school functions. In turn, the increased communications between school and home should help more students improve their grades and other indicators of success in school.

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PARENT DIVERSITY PRESENTATIONS

RANCH VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Type 1

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

Show-and-tell has long been a favorite elementary school activity. Recently, Ranch View Elementary School took a fresh approach to the classic practice. The school, which has a large percentage of students of East Indian and Asian descent, partnered with parents to launch a multicultural presentation series to celebrate diversity.

Each week, a different parent came to the school to talk about his or her culture. Presenters gave 20 minute talks on language, customs, holidays, festivals, food, and other topics to groups of 20 to 25 students in grades K-5. They were encouraged to make their presentations appealing to students by sharing photos; PowerPoint slides on geography, weather, and climate; native costumes; artifacts and objects; games; and by teaching a few phrases in the native language. They also had to leave time for students to ask questions.

Sixteen parents participated. They represented a wide range of countries including Bulgaria, China, Guatemala, India, Korea, Nigeria, Lithuania, Palestine, and Poland.

Students raved about the presentations. "It was fun to see the different foods and the way kids learn in Palestine," said one.

Parent presenters enjoyed the sessions as much as the students. One parent said, "I very much appreciated the opportunity to talk with the students and share the wonders of Korean culture with them."

The success of the series was due in part to preparation. First, all parents of the school's 530 students received surveys with questions about their cultures of origin. They were also asked for ideas about how the school could improve student awareness, acceptance, and appreciation of diversity.

Those who responded to the survey were invited to give presentations at the school, and provided with specific instructions about the presentation format. Next, the school distributed a schedule of the presentations to students. The presentations were promoted via newsletters, e-mails, and flyers.

Students benefited by meeting their classmates' parents and learning fun new facts about different cultures. The presentations facilitated positive interactions between parents and students and promoted global awareness.

The students also honed their critical thinking skills by asking questions and providing presenters with feedback. After each presentation, students filled out feedback forms. They listed what they had learned from the presentation, and offered suggestions for improvement. These forms were collected and shared with the parent presenters in meetings. As a result, the parents learned from the experience, too.

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FRESHMAN EXPLORATORY FAIR

HOWELL CHENEY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL MANCHESTER, CT

Choosing a trade to study is no easy task for new freshmen at Howell Cheney Technical High School. The school is attended by diverse students from 26 “sending towns” who elect to specialize in a particular trade. They choose from Automotive, Carpentry, Computer Drafting and Design, Electrical, HVAC, Information Systems, Manufacturing, Media, Welding/Metal Fabrication, and Business.

To involve parents in this important decision, the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) invited them to an exploratory fair. More than 70 parents of new students attended the event, where they learned about their teens’ education options by viewing informational exhibits and chatting with teachers and current students.

The Freshman Exploratory Fair eased the transition for new students by encouraging parents to take an active interest in what they will study. By learning about the various programs and specializations, parents became better-equipped to advise their students about their options and decisions.

The fair was scheduled early in the fall, before the deadline for freshmen to choose a trade to study in greater depth. Due to this timing, preparation for the fair began the previous spring. The school asked the district family engagement coordinator to plan activities for the attendees, and teachers designed displays for their trades, and selected student leaders to conduct demonstrations. Students and staff in the school’s Culinary Program agreed to prepare breakfast.

Once September arrived, the school publicized the fair by sending out e-mails and flyers. The day before the fair, teachers and the student leaders arranged the trade displays and

practiced their presentations. At the fair, these students welcomed parents at the door. They wore red blazers to identify themselves as guides and advocates.

Parents gathered in the cafeteria, where they enjoyed breakfast and listened to presentations by the principal, assistant principal, and the district family engagement coordinator. Next, the student leaders escorted them to the fair, where they were invited to explore the displays and ask questions.

“Having the students take the lead and be the main hosts was amazing,” an administrator cheered. It reduced the number of staff necessary, and gave the students the opportunity to share their experience and receive recognition for their hard work. Parent attendees were impressed by their poise, knowledge, and enthusiasm.

The fair cost \$180 to run, and lasted for an hour and 15 minutes. Parents left feeling excited to talk with their freshmen about what they had learned, and the student leaders and staff left feeling proud of their part in this orientation. The Freshman Exploratory Fair helped to create a warm, supportive environment at the school, and set an excellent precedent for parent involvement of the incoming freshmen.

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HUSKIE K-9 MENTORING PROGRAM

**NAPERVILLE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL
NAPERVILLE, IL**

Type 5

Lunch period can seem awfully long when you're sitting alone. But this is just one of several challenges faced by students who transfer to a new school mid-year. Transfer students must adjust to a new building, enter a new set of classes, find new friends, and join a new school culture. Two juniors at Naperville North High School understood this very well—both had been transfer students, themselves, at one point. Two parents also saw the need to create a more welcoming environment for new families to the school and district. Students, parents, teachers, and the partnership team (SFCP) collaborated to start a mentoring program.

Now, when students transfer to Naperville North High School, they have friends before their first day of class. When new students register at the school, they receive a questionnaire asking about their interests and background. This questionnaire is used to pair them with a Huskie K-9 Companion—a current student who has applied to act as a mentor to new students. By design, the peer mentor has the same lunch schedule as the transfer student so that new students never have to sit alone at lunch.

“It was so great to help the students, especially at lunch when they didn't have anyone to sit with,” said one mentor.

The peer mentors aren't just lunch buddies. They also undergo a training session to understand their other responsibilities. These include helping new students find their classes, introducing them to school activities, and addressing their questions and concerns.

“It was so nice to have someone who I could ask questions and not look bad because I asked a dumb question,” a new student observed.

The student mentors report that they enjoy this role. In fact, so many have applied to the program that there are now more mentors than new students. More than 125 students at the school are involved. This is a good problem, as more and different mentors mean better “matches” with the new students who enter.

In some cases, new students are also new English speakers. An English Language Learner (ELL) teacher at the school offers additional support for these students through the program.

Parents of new students are given a warm welcome, too. These parents also fill out a questionnaire when their student registers, and are invited to chat by phone about the school with a parent mentor. Seventy-five parents have participated in the program.

The K-9 Companion program got off to a successful start with an effective awareness campaign. The program was promoted in the school's weekly e-newsletter, and teachers were encouraged to nominate students whom they felt would make good mentors. The program begins and ends with pizza parties. These occasions are the program's only cost.

Although the program is inexpensive, it yields large dividends. As one staff member pointed out, “If a student is comfortable in their environment, they are more likely to become a positive and productive part of that environment.” It's not complicated—makes perfect sense!

TRANSITIONS

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MILITARY FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

NORTHRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL LAYTON, UT

It is common knowledge that children of military families move often. It is less well-known how to help these students adjust when they enroll at a new school. Northridge High School, which has more than 150 students from military families, decided to work with their local military base to figure out how to help ease the transition. The base leaders, school leaders, and partnership team developed and implemented the Military Family Support Program.

The Military Family Support Program used a multipronged strategy to help students from military families feel more comfortable at their new school. The first step was to educate the school administrators, teachers, and counselors about life on a military base so that they could better understand their students. Hill Air Force Base (HAFB) invited the school staff to tour the compound, from the commissary to the child care center to the youth center. The staff learned many military terms and gained insight about day-to-day operations on the base, which helped them to communicate more easily with the military families and students.

The hosts at HAFB also took the time to brief the school staff about the effects of frequent transfer on children in military families. They offered suggestions for ways to help the students assimilate into a new environment. As a result of the discussion that followed, school leaders appointed one of the guidance counselors as the school's liaison for students from military families. This counselor was responsible for visiting the base to facilitate the registration process and for creating a customized orientation program for the students and families.

Upon moving to the military base, families received an information packet with a letter of welcome from the school principal and

information about the school and surrounding community. The counselor also invited students and their families to seek his guidance throughout the course of the school year.

A key part of the Military Family Support Program involved recognizing students with a month-long appreciation program. Last November, the school asked the students from military families to provide photos and biographical sketches of parents who were deployed outside the U.S. They posted these photos and sketches on a wall near the counseling office so that all of the school staff, students, and visitors could see them. They also invited students to a special luncheon to thank them for the support they gave to their parents in the military.

Teachers agree that the program, which cost \$300 to implement, has equipped them to work more effectively with students in military families. The teachers report improved communications with these students and fewer behavioral issues.

The school's principal has also been pleased with the program. "This program is amazing!" the principal said. "We are connected and work well with our military partners. Any serious issue is addressed immediately."

Students from military families also have commented on the school's efforts to make them feel at home. "This program is better than other places," one said. "We feel like we are welcome and teachers know how to help us."

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READ WITH MRS. RED READING HOOD

**SANDY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SANDY, UT**

Type 1

Little Red Riding Hood is all grown up at Sandy Elementary School. Instead of fighting a big bad wolf, she's promoting reading to youngsters. Every month, Mrs. Red Reading Hood (also known as the School Community Coordinator) visits the school to read stories and make crafts with preschool-aged children and their parents. The events are a fun way to encourage reading readiness with preschool children and to enable families to develop a positive relationship with the school their children will soon attend.

The school began by inviting families of current students who had a preschool-aged sibling child to come to work with Mrs. Red Reading Hood. Parents enjoyed the activity so much that they spread the word to their friends and neighbors. Soon, the sessions were drawing as many as 30 young students and 50 parents.

"My kids love coming," said a parent. "They benefit from being with others enjoying books." Other parents agreed, adding that the program gave their children a chance to become familiar with the elementary school and to develop social readiness skills by interacting with others.

Every month, Mrs. Red Reading Hood, dressed in a red cape with hood, red skirt, and red shoes, greeted the families at the entrance to the school and gave them stickers and nametags. The families signed in at the office and made their way to the school library, where they listened to music and explored an array of picture books. Parents read to their children while they waited for the session to begin.

Mrs. Red Reading Hood started by leading the group in a stretching exercise and then read an award-winning picture book. She demonstrated how to engage young children in

reading comprehension activities that parents could easily replicate at home. The activities involved flash cards, sequencing sheets, color matching games, and other exercises.

Families were then invited to complete a craft together, which allowed the children to practice drawing and cutting skills. The crafts included balloon turkeys, calendars, cotton ball snowmen, and Mother's Day flowers. The supplies cost about \$50 per session.

After the craft, families sang a song and read one more story together. Then, the children each received a picture book to take home. "The free books are a huge hit," the School Community Coordinator said. The practice is especially helpful for families who otherwise could not afford to buy books for children to have at home.

Reading with Mrs. Red Reading Hood is a way to smooth the transition to kindergarten for dozens of children and their parents. The participants looked forward to the gatherings, which not only provided important reading readiness lessons, but also an opportunity to socialize in a calm, warm environment. Parents, children, and teachers developed rapport with one another and made new friends.

Thanks to this practice, when September rolls around, the children who participated—and their parents—will be excited about and ready for the transition to kindergarten.

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TRANSITIONS

THE CHIAWANA OPEN

CHIAWANA HIGH SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Last fall, Chiawana High School became an academic one-stop shop. Knowing that busy parents could not easily attend multiple single-purpose meetings, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and leaders combined a variety of activities in one lively and efficient evening meeting. At the Chiawana Open, participants met teachers, chatted with more than two dozen college and military recruiters, joined breakout sessions about keeping students safe from drugs and alcohol, viewed exhibits of student work, toured the school, and more. Parents also could set up an individual parent-teacher-student conference if they chose to do so.

The new twist on an Open House was successful in boosting community engagement and parental involvement. Parents received several invitations to attend. First, the school enclosed a letter about the event in a summer registration mailing. Then, the principal sent a more formal invitation, including a handy Save the Date magnet donated by a local dentist's office. Staff also called students' homes and handed out flyers in the mornings to parents who dropped their students off at school. More than 370 parents came.

Parents were offered free transportation to the Chiawana Open. Upon arrival, they were greeted by welcome signs in 14 languages made by the students. The signs reflected the fact that 69% of the 2,200 students have diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

Parents were able to choose activities at their own pace. For example, they could visit booths set up by organizations such as the Migrant & Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, order graduation materials from Josten's, learn how to use new technologies to access their student's records online, and admire examples of students' good work. Interpreters were available

for those who did not speak English.

The parents appreciated the warm reception. "I had more parents sign in with me last night than the last three years combined," said one teacher. "They had so many wonderful things to say about our format this year."

Student involvement was instrumental from beginning to end. Students submitted and voted on a name for the event, proposed ideas in planning meetings, distributed flyers, served as babysitters in the childcare area, and were tour guides. Members of student clubs, from the chess club to the floral club, gave demonstrations throughout the evening.

"I had so much fun showing parents around our school," one student said. "I think we made them feel at home." More than 200 students attended.

Teachers and staff also enjoyed this Open House. About 125 of them gathered for dinner at the school prior to the scheduled activities. Then, they headed to the gymnasium to meet and greet visitors. Some said they preferred this format to conducting parent-teacher conferences in individual classrooms, which felt isolating.

Throughout the evening, participants enjoyed refreshments provided by community business partners, and entered their names for door prizes. The event cost about \$2,000, including the dinner for teachers, transportation for parents, and miscellaneous decorations.

Everyone agreed that the Chiawana Open was a real step forward in the design of the traditional fall Open House.

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WELCOMING ACTIVITIES FOR NEW FAMILIES

STEEPLE RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

Type 5

Steeply Run Elementary School has always tried to create a welcoming environment for everyone connected to the school, but it became especially important last year. As a result of redistricting, the school suddenly gained 150 students and their families. To help smooth the transition for new families, current students, parents, and teachers collaborated to plan a variety of Welcoming Activities for New Families.

Organizers invited new families to tour the school a few days before the school year began. After the principal greeted new families, parents and students who had been trained as tour guides showed them around the school. Teachers from every grade level were at classroom doors to greet the families as they passed.

“I loved showing the school to the new kids,” said one student tour guide.

At the end of the tour, the families socialized while enjoying cookies and bottles of water. They left armed with maps of the school and copies of the New Family Survival Guide—a booklet of helpful tips and information.

The tours were one way to ease new students’ anxieties and enable families to connect with teachers and with each other. Thirty teachers, 250 students, and 100 parents attended.

In early October, new families gathered again for a Meet and Mingle. Parents met each other and chatted over coffee and baked goods provided by the parent-run Hospitality Committee, while their children played games in the gym. The principal and assistant principal gave a PowerPoint presentation in which they addressed questions and concerns raised in surveys that had been sent to families in advance. The Home and School president followed up with

advice about many ways families could engage with the school.

Finally, the school social worker provided a list of books about dealing with change and making new friends. One of the books was *The World According to Humphrey*, by Betty Birney—about a hamster who was a new member of Room 26 at school. Every family received a copy so that students, parents, and teachers could participate in an All School Read. Students discussed the book in class and with their families, and were encouraged to relate it to their own lives. The books were provided by a grant from the Naperville Education Foundation.

School shirts featuring inspirational words about the school that students had brainstormed also fostered a sense of community and belonging. Every staff member and all 550 students received one. The shirts cost \$2,500.

From school tours to school shirts, the welcoming activities strengthened current parents’ capacities to serve as school leaders and helped 150 new families feel welcome. “These events really helped to ease our transition to Steeple Run,” a new parent said.

Because the events were so well-received, the partnership team and others at Steeple Run will conduct welcoming activities every year. After all, there always are some new students and parents entering the school. Networking and good information build strong connections and a sense of belonging for new and returning students, teachers, and families who come back to school.

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TRANSITIONS

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.

COMMUNICATION IN A NEW GENERATION

J.P. McCASKEY EAST HIGH SCHOOL LANCASTER, PA

At J.P. McCaskey East High School, paper is on its way out. E-mail, Facebook, and Twitter are definitely IN. The school decided to go digital last year, when students informed staff that the best way to communicate with them and their families was electronically. “The students will tell you what is working and what helps,” the school’s community education liaison pointed out. Now, the teachers, administrators, and staff regularly use e-mail and social media to stay connected.

McCaskey East is a Title I high school, serves a diverse student body of about 3000 students mainly Latino and African American students. The new method of sharing news is cost-effective and has enabled the school to meet its goal of increasing school-home communications.

Teachers and administrators keep families updated about projects and events by posting messages and photos on Facebook and Twitter. Students and families, as well as alumni and community members, can respond to the posts with likes, questions, and comments. They can also reshare the posts on their own Facebook and Twitter feeds to spread news to even more people.

The school uses e-mail to keep families in the loop about current happenings. They send an update to parents every Friday afternoon.

For families who are not yet familiar with e-mail and social media or who do not have easy access to new technologies, the school uses other communication strategies. To reach these families, the school distributes flyers, makes announcements at school-wide events, and prints the school’s Twitter handle on administrators’ business cards. The school is planning to offer

technology training to interested parents. The Community Education Liaison, Action Team members, other school staff and the students, themselves, may be able to help many parents conquer techo-phobias.

The community has responded well to the new communication practice. The school’s Facebook page received an average of 4,000 views per week. The team estimates that 1,500 students, 75 teachers, 35 community members, and 500 parents have benefited from the online communications.

“Thanks for always sharing with us,” one parent said.

The team and staff at J.P. McCaskey East High School will continue to seek student and parent feedback to find ways to build community by improving communication.

“I feel it is extremely important to stay connected and with the times,” the community education liaison said. “Days of paper and folders to communicate are falling behind. We need to stay current to provide opportunities, information, and outreach – by any and every means necessary.”

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EAGLE EXPO

**EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL
JANESVILLE, WI**

Type 6

From a youth sports league to a forensics club to a job center, Edison Middle School and its community partners have important educational enrichment opportunities for students and their families. To increase awareness of the wealth of resources, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) collaborated with an AmeriCorps volunteer to coordinate an evening showcase—Eagle Expo. More than 300 students, parents, teachers, and community members gathered at the school for two hours to learn about the school and local organizations.

The planners promoted the Eagle Expo by posting flyers at local businesses and churches and by submitting advertisements to newsletters, the school website, and the local gazette. Students and families from neighboring elementary and middle schools in the district were also invited to attend.

The ATP further encouraged participation by organizing a raffle and offering free sub sandwiches to the first 150 people to arrive. The sandwiches were donated by Jimmy John's, and other food items including bananas, apples, and bottled water were supplied by local grocery stores. Attendees who brought a canned good to the Expo to donate to the local Food Bank received a raffle ticket and a chance to win a new swing set or an Android tablet.

The Edison community appreciated the ATP's outreach efforts. "You did a great job getting this out to the people," said one local resident.

Upon arrival at the expo, participants explored booths of several dozen exhibitors. There was something for everyone. Families learned about summer youth programs offered by the Boys and Girls Club, the Salvation Army, and the YMCA. Students met representatives from local scout troops and a youth orchestra. Older

teens chatted with recruiters from nearby technical colleges. Parents collected information about the public library, Head Start, the performing arts center, a food bank, a literacy organization, a nutrition nonprofit, and other important groups.

Contacting all of these organizations, the ATP said, required significant preparation time. They began planning Eagle Expo more than a month in advance, and tracked exhibitors using a spreadsheet. They targeted organizations that they thought offered valuable information and would appeal to students and their families.

The Expo was effective in increasing family and community engagement, and earned praise from exhibitors, attendees, and school administrators, alike. "I think the Expo reflected well on you and Edison and my son enjoyed being part of the engineering exhibit," said a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) member.

Parents of fifth-graders who will attend Edison Middle School in the fall found the Expo particularly valuable. The resource fair gave them the opportunity to see the school and become familiar with its extracurricular offerings, from the jazz band to the creative authors club.

The Expo cost nothing but time to produce, and was an excellent way to identify the school's welcoming climate and strengthen the Edison Middle School community.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

EDGEMONT PULSE: OUR SURVEY, OUR SAY

EDGEMONT MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MONTCLAIR, NJ

When the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Edgemont Montessori Elementary School wanted to know parents' thoughts about the school's climate, communication, programs and activities, it asked them. All of them.

To give every family a voice in the school's development, the ATP distributed a 60-question survey called the Edgemont Pulse. The 85% response rate provided evidence of the families' interest in the school and excellent information. Pizza with the Principal was organized to discuss the survey results and their implications. This meeting brought the school community closer together by showing families that their opinions were valued.

The ATP used questions from a survey developed by researchers at the Harvard School of Education on vital aspects of family and school relationships. They added customized questions of their own that specifically related to Edgemont and to their growing program of school, family, and community partnerships.

The school principal introduced the survey at the school's largest community event—a fundraising breakfast and book fair. She emphasized her desire to hear from every family. At the meeting, audience members started the process by filling out the survey online using school laptops.

Families who did not attend the event had several other opportunities to take the survey over the next three weeks. They could complete the survey online, by phone, or in person. They received several reminders to make sure everyone knew that their opinions mattered. Translated versions of the survey were also available.

To increase the survey response rate, the ATP called and e-mailed parents who had not submitted surveys. The team also brought laptops and hard copies of the surveys to parent-teacher conferences and to a church where many students attended tutoring sessions.

As an extra incentive, everyone surveyed was entered in a raffle to win a dinner (worth \$70) at a local restaurant. The hard copies of the survey cost \$40 to print and advertising materials, such as signs, cost another \$40. The ATP estimated that Pizza with the Principal and related materials about the survey results cost about \$150, bringing the total cost of the practice to about \$300. Funding came from the PTA, in-kind donations, and other school sources.

The survey enabled the school to better understand areas in which it was excelling and areas in which it could improve. It also helped families understand that the school was a welcoming environment, interested in everyone's views, with a culture of community engagement.

"This approach to a survey illustrated the impact direct outreach can have on families who traditionally haven't engaged in school," said one community member. "The phone calls, e-mails, and personal invitations showed the principal and action team's commitment to learning *from* their family community."

The school's action team looks forward to continuing to engage its families and community by sharing survey results and putting the results into action steps to continue to strengthen the school.

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FIND OUT WHY PARTNERSHIPS MATTER EVENT

**NAPER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
NAPERVILLE, IL**

Type 2

Quick! What does SFCP stand for? Before attending a workshop called Find Out Why Partnerships Matter, many parents at Naper Elementary School did not know that acronym. After the event, all 40 attendees understood the words and mission for partnership program development at Naper and all schools in the Naperville district.

SFCP stands for the School, Family and Community Partnerships team of parents, teachers, and administrators who work together to engage all parents in ways that support student learning and success in school. SFCP works in cooperation with the Home and School Association (like a PTA/PTO) that also contributes to the school's partnership program development. Each group has a different agenda focusing on student learning and school climate, respectively.

The evening meeting was a collaborative effort of the Naper SFCP team and the District 203 Core Team for Partnerships. When the SFCP team realized they needed help increasing awareness about their work and recruiting new parents for the team, they asked the district-level Core Team to give a presentation at the school. The Core Team was happy to oblige, and agreed to facilitate a 45-minute overview and discussion. The SFCP and the Core Team met in advance to ensure that the agenda was tailored to the needs of the school.

The SFCP team was particularly eager to engage parents who had not previously been active in the school. To accomplish this, they invited members of the Home and School Board to the presentation and asked them to bring friends interested in volunteering. They also distributed flyers, placed announcements in the monthly school newsletter, and sent e-mail invitations.

At the workshop, the Core Team's presentation involved a PowerPoint by several speakers and information for attendees—pamphlets, pens, and bookmarks. The SFCP also provided handouts detailing current SFCP projects at the school and the many ways that parents may volunteer. For the next hour, these leaders shared the framework of partnerships and mission of the school to continue strengthening the program of family and community engagement with the attendees.

The information resonated. "This is the kind of work that's so important on so many different levels—at home, at school, out in the world. It makes me want to help you and your committee!" explained one parent.

"The stats and outline of the framework were all new to me and so interesting," added another.

The parents were so enthusiastic about what they had learned that several asked to join the SFCP. Two offered to chair a new program called the Naper School Newcomers Group, which will help welcome new students and their families to the community.

This activity proved that reaching out to engage parents in creative ways is a great way to build active SFCP teams. Once parents understand why partnerships matter, and are given specific ways to contribute to the school community, many are eager to take leadership roles.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

FISH FRY FUNDRAISER AND SOCIAL HOUR

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF PHILADELPHIA, PA

Parents of students at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf were eager to attend the American Society for Deaf Children conference. However, with 85% of the school's students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, it was difficult for many families to find the means. But the families were determined. They met with the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and proposed a tasty way to raise money this year to support attendance at the conference: a community fish fry and social hour.

A family member of one of the students had cooked at numerous fish fries in the past and was happy to offer his expertise on behalf of the project. "What we regularly find is that there is a lot of experience among family members that we are unaware of," said the school's family liaison. "We just have to ask."

The ATP liked the idea, and worked with the families to plan and conduct the Fish Fry. Together they set a date, reserved the community room in their school, and printed tickets. Families who wanted to attend the national conference were given tickets to sell to the community. The ATP kept track of how many tickets each family sold, how many hours they worked, and how much food they donated to the event. They used this information to calculate how much of the proceeds to use to finance each family's trip. The ATP saved the money for each family in a special account.

The Fish Fry was advertised via the school's website, flyers, newsletters, and announcements at school board meetings. The campaign was effective: 60 community members, 40 parents, 25 school staff, and 20 students came to enjoy the meal. In fact, the cooks had to work hard to keep up with the demand. Everyone agreed that the food was terrific.

Although the fried fish was delicious, what made the event special was the sense of camaraderie it created. Parents and teachers donated side dishes and desserts and pitched in to run the buffet line. They enjoyed chatting while they worked. "It is always fun for parents to see one another and catch up," one parent said.

Students contributed to the event, too. Several volunteered to babysit younger children.

"The group worked together well toward a common goal," the school's family liaison said. "We have learned through the last several years that when we work together, everyone gets more out of it than just the money."

In the past, other fund raisers helped PSD families attend the ASDC conference. This part of the school's partnership program focuses on increasing parent knowledge and leadership. The Fish Fry raised \$1,200, making it possible for the families involved to attend the ASDC conference. Joining the conference proved to be worth all the work. There, participants updated parenting strategies and gained information about recent technology advancements in programs for the deaf. They were able to share new information with other families.

Kudos to the families and ATP at Pennsylvania School for the Deaf for cooking up a fundraiser that both strengthened their community and enabled parents to further their education.

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FRIDAYS WITH THE PRINCIPAL

CAPTAIN GRAY EARLY LEARNING CENTER PASCO, WA

Type 2

At Captain Gray Early Learning Center, a kindergarten-only school, educators have just one year to connect with parents. That also means one year to help parents connect to a school about their children’s education.

To make the most of this time, the school’s principal and counselor hosted six Fridays with the Principal morning informational sessions for families early in the fall. Each family attended one 90-minute session to learn about the school’s procedures, the curriculum, and the importance of engaging in their child’s education.

“I personally loved it and learned a lot,” said one parent. “I liked the tips I received. The most important thing I learned is to stay involved in my child’s things at school.”

Parents were invited to separate sessions according to their native language, since several families spoke Russian or Spanish. They received information about the meetings in their students’ weekly communication envelopes. Those who responded also received reminder phone calls from the school counselor. More than 100 parents attended a Friday with the Principal.

At each meeting, parents signed in and brought their preschool-aged children in the Children’s Center, where they were supervised by a teacher. In the Parent Education Center, the parents enjoyed donuts and juice, and introduced themselves to each other in an icebreaker exercise.

Next, the principal and the school counselor presented information about attendance, communication, academic standards, strategies to support learning at home, and opportunities for parental involvement. Parents were invited ask questions or add comments at any point. At the end of the session, they received several handouts detailing at-home educational

strategies that they could implement to ensure their students met kindergarten trimester academic benchmarks.

Fridays with the Principal cost \$400 to implement. The meetings were met with great enthusiasm from the families.

“For me, this was very useful,” said a parent. “This is the first time I have had a child in kindergarten. I learned a lot about how to support my child with his work.”

The sessions eased parents’ anxieties about their children starting school. The information gave them access to many good ideas, from parenting skills to school policies to volunteer opportunities.

The staff at Captain Gray Early Learning Center hope that the knowledge parents gained will encourage them to support their children not only in kindergarten, but also through all of the school years ahead—to on-time high school graduation. By engaging parents when their children are in kindergarten, positive school and family partnerships may grow and last for many years.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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GRANDPARENTS DAY PROMOTES READING

**GILLIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Grandparents are important figures in many children’s lives, but the resources and support they may offer often go untapped. To show appreciation for grandparents and to encourage their involvement in students’ education, Gillis Elementary School invited more than 1,000 of these seniors to the school to eat lunch and browse a book fair with their grandchildren.

Grandparents Day Promotes Reading took place over several days so that students in each grade could plan separate celebrations with their grandparents. Some students invited grandparents to their classrooms to see their academic projects and artwork. Others planned presentations for the grandparents and served them dessert in class. All of them escorted their visitors to the book fair to explore the shelves together.

Because the grandparents paid for their own lunches and made many purchases at the book fair, the literacy event also helped Gillis Elementary School raise \$4,000. The school used the money to purchase new library books.

Grandparents were delighted to be included in this way. They clearly enjoyed spending time with their grandchildren and to support the school’s literacy efforts.

“My grandchildren are my life,” said one.

“I love coming to spend this special time with my grandchild,” added another.

The students also enjoyed the experience, and were on their best behavior. Those who had grandparents present and those who “borrowed” grandparents for the day learned more about the importance of honoring their elders and showing appreciation for the important people in their lives.

Even students who didn’t have grandparents at school had a good time. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators sat with these students at lunch so that they also received quality attention.

Gillis Elementary School recommends that other schools plan Grandparents Day activities well in advance to accommodate grandparents’ busy schedules. It also was important to ask families to RSVP to know how many people to expect.

Welcoming grandparents to the school created a warm, happy atmosphere at Gillis. The excellent turnout demonstrated just how eager these family members were to be a part of their grandchildren’s lives and to support their education. Connecting Grandparents Day Promotes Reading with a book fair made this event a best-seller.

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Type 3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

MONDAY MORNING COFFEE HOUR

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SEATTLE, WA

Type 2

A case of the Monday blues? Not at the Monday Morning Coffee Hour at Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, where families and educators kick off the week with a friendly, informal meeting. Every Monday morning, the school invites parents to stop by, have coffee and snacks, meet each other, and talk with school staff, including the principal and home school coordinator.

The school is diverse, with 47% African-American, 37% Pacific Islander, and 12% Latino children attending. Parents are invited to the coffee hours with their cultural groups to encourage open discussions of issues specific to their communities. Translators also are present to facilitate easy communication. In the past year, more than 100 parents attended meetings of Latino, Filipino, Vietnamese, Samoan, Ethiopian, and other families.

The parents look forward to the meetings, and have remarked on the warm and comfortable atmosphere the school offers. “It is so welcoming here,” said one.

School partnership team members and staff worked hard to create this sense of openness and community. They started by making sure that all families were aware of the meetings by posting flyers and sending information home with students. Next, they invited the principal to stop by each meeting to greet parents to make them feel welcome. The home school coordinator led each meeting, ensuring that all participants adhered to an agreed-upon code of conduct. Parents were asked to avoid sensitive topics, such as religion and politics. Everyone was asked to give others a chance to talk and to respect differences of opinions.

Preparing a clear agenda that included parents specific interests helped each group to

focus. At each meeting, the facilitator distributed a list of thirteen questions, ranging from “What kind of information do you want to hear from the school?” to “Do you have any ideas to make the school a better place?” The parents shared their ideas to improve the relationship between the school and its community. They appreciated being asked for their questions, ideas, and opinions.

School staff members enjoy the meetings as much as the parents. “This is a great way to link your families,” one staff member said approvingly. The meetings allow educators to better understand families’ needs and to earn their trust. They agreed that it is best to be proactive about addressing parents’ concerns.

After the morning coffee hours, families are invited to stay for the school-wide Monday assembly. Including parents in the students’ assemblies enables them to feel even more included by the school community. Even better, they catch a glimpse of their child’s school life.

Monday Morning Coffee Hour adds a jolt of energy to the school-family partnership at the elementary school. It is a feasible and excellent strategy for brewing a proactive, positive sense of community.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

OYE NIGHTS

OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Listen up—Oye, as they say in Spanish—to learn about a new practice at Ochoa Middle School. Three times a year, the school community, which is 95% Hispanic, gathers to honor Ochoa Youth Excelling (OYE). The evening showcases students’ academic success, sports participation, and musical talents, and helps strengthen students’ motivation to do their very best.

Last year, OYE Nights were organized by the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and scheduled to coincide with honor roll notifications and the completion of sports seasons. Student honorees were personally invited to the events by their teachers and coaches, and families received automated calls to remind them to attend. Information also was posted on the school’s electronic reader board and reminders were included in morning announcements. As a result of this outreach, more than 200 students, 78 parents, and 30 school staff attended.

At OYE, students and their families were greeted by ATP members. Students lined up in groups while their families found seats in the audience. As an emcee announced their names and accomplishments, the students walked across the stage and shook hands with the principal or other administrator and teachers.

Students’ peers and families watched with pride and applauded. “José made honor roll last quarter,” said one parent. “Now, he knows he can do it.” The students received certificates documenting their achievements, which cost \$150 to print, and each evening ended on a high note—a performance by the school band, jazz band, or choir.

Photos of the students taken at the event were posted on the school website for all to see.

Planners aim to involve the school yearbook committee by asking student members to take OYE photos.

OYE Nights ran smoothly, though organizers are working to solve a minor hitch—shyness. Several students were hesitant to stand in front of a large group of people and were reluctant to invite their parents. Scheduling the automated phone call reminders helped their families learn about their child’s success and that they were invited to OYE Night. Going forward, the school plans to schedule OYE on the annual school calendar so that parents can “save the date” and plan to attend.

OYE Nights enhanced students’ self-confidence and helped to build a sense of community. “Recognition for success creates pride in students as well as their families,” said a teacher. “That pride of achievement encourages students to work hard in whatever they do, whether in the classroom, on the sports field, or practicing their musical talents.”

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RESOURCE PARTY FAIR

**CHARLES R. DREW MIDDLE SCHOOL
MIAMI, FL**

Type 6

Parent engagement often decreases when students enter middle school. Without a well-planned partnership program, starting at the transition to middle school, some parents think that their involvement is less necessary than in the elementary grades. Others are busy attending to the needs of younger children and leave their early adolescents on their own. Studies show that this decline in involvement can be corrected when an action team at the middle school plans and implements age-appropriate, goal-linked, welcoming activities to engage students' families.

To connect with students' families and encourage them to become more involved, Drew's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) invited them to a Resource Party Fair. The Fair was scheduled on Valentine's Day to create an atmosphere of love and community partnership.

Over 100 parents, students, and community members gathered to explore table exhibits set up by various community organizations that offered family services related to shelter, food, and health care. The police department, local transit department, and department of corrections also had booths and representatives on hand. Other school partners—School Transformational Facilitator, Communities in Schools, and City Year—took part in planning, funding, and conducting the Fair.

To give the resource booths a fun feeling, the ATP turned the fair into a party. A DJ played music and a staff member, called the Barbeque Man, prepared hamburgers and hot dogs. The ATP decorated the area with balloons. Cool drinks also were available.

The principal and assistant principal were present throughout the fair. From the DJ's booth, they welcomed the parents and encouraged them to visit and call the school regularly.

Participants benefited in a number of ways. Parents felt more comfortable and welcome at the school, and gathered information about resources they could use. Community partners enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their services. Students loved having the chance to show their school to their parents.

"This fair was super fun," commented one student.

"Kudos," praised the principal. "So many different resources came out!"

The ATP invited more than 30 community organizations to make sure the event was worthwhile for attendees. The planners distributed flyers and made personal phone calls to parents to increase participation. The extras at the fair cost about \$800 to implement.

The Resource Party Fair set a positive, friendly tone for communications of families, school staff, and community partners. This was a good first step in the middle school's plan to improve and increase family engagement in students' education.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

ROSS PARENT EDUCATORS

GEORGE ROSS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LANCASTER, PA

In recent years, George Ross Elementary School has served a growing population of Nepali families. To welcome these families and encourage them to engage with the school, nine members of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) met with a representative from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) to create an action plan. Together, they agreed to start by involving Nepali parents in monthly PTO meetings.

To accomplish this, they developed a number of ways to increase families' awareness of the PTO meetings and make the meetings convenient and appealing. For example, they publicized the meetings via a Facebook page, and arranged for parents to receive automated phone call reminders about them.

The principal helped publicize the meetings by talking with Nepali parents in person before and after school. A bilingual parent was on hand to translate to make sure everyone understood the information.

To make the meetings as easy to attend as possible, the PTO offered childcare and dinner, which averaged about \$200 a month. As an additional incentive, they also distributed dress down day passes to students whose parents attended. On a personal note, PTO members took care to sit with the Nepali parents during the meetings to make them feel welcome, and solicited their input throughout and questions throughout the meetings.

The efforts paid off. A number of Nepali families joined the PTO and they didn't miss a meeting all year.

The regular meetings were an excellent opportunity for school staff and parents to forge strong relationships and to share important

information to help families make the most of the school's services for their children.

Community partners frequently joined the meetings, as well. Representatives from the Sylvan Learning Center, Lancaster County Library, Nutrition Education Program, and the YMCA attended meetings to share knowledge and resources with parents. The visitors made added interest to many meetings.

Teachers appreciated the chance to get to know the new Nepali families and to better understand their perspectives on children's education. Nepali families found the gatherings valuable, too.

"The Nepali families were very grateful and appreciative of the new learning tools gained from the monthly meetings," the principal reported. "Their experience also showed in their students' role here at the school."

Going forward, the George Ross PTO will continue to create a welcoming atmosphere and to involve parents who reflect the school's diversity. They found that ensuring that meetings are comfortable, convenient, and useful is a good way to accomplish this.

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THANKSGIVING DINNER

OLIVER WOLCOTT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL TORRINGTON, CT

Type 6

Since 1982, Oliver Wolcott Technical High School has partnered with community volunteers to serve Thanksgiving dinner to those in need. The tradition enables students to use their culinary and leadership skills to enrich others' lives.

"It is nearly impossible to explain how affirming it is to see students, teachers, community members, the elderly, church members, and parents all come together on this day like a huge family," explained a school staff member.

Last year, school staff donated \$2,000 to purchase food for nearly 400 meals. Students specializing in the culinary arts, guided by their instructor, cooked and deboned 20 turkeys and prepared savory side dishes. Members of a local church baked chocolate, apple, and pumpkin pies for dessert.

When the preparations were complete, volunteers packaged 250 meals using materials donated by restaurants. Parents took a variety of roles. They coordinated delivery sites with local churches and local housing groups. They also drove to deliver the meals to individuals who were unable to leave their homes.

Students and staff served other meals in the school cafeteria. A local transit company brought guests, many of whom were homeless, to the event. Teachers, students, administrators, action team members, and alumni worked together to set up and clean up the event.

The recipients were grateful. "I had no plans for Thanksgiving Day because I am alone now," said one woman. "I cannot thank you all enough for the beautiful meal that was delivered to my home."

Those who ate at the school admired centerpieces and placemats created by children at the YMCA. They enjoyed the welcoming atmosphere as well as the delicious food.

"I come here every year," said one attendee, who took photos throughout the event. "This is my Thanksgiving. This is my family."

Forty high school students devoted their day to the activity. They learned the importance of serving those less fortunate while forming closer relationships with peers, teachers, and their community.

Participants are invited to evaluate the experience. The following week, the action team reflects on how Thanksgiving Dinner went, and brainstorms improvements for the next year.

The tradition is so meaningful to the students that many return to help out after they graduate from this active, technical high school. One noted, "I've been coming [to help] since I was in grade school." It is clear that the annual Thanksgiving Dinner project is an important and solid tradition at Wolcott. The activity builds a sense of community and imparts values to students that last long after the holiday has ended.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

WARREN 4 R NIGHT

WARREN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
ST. PETERS, MO

Warren Elementary School doesn't just teach reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. They also want students to learn the importance of four more Rs: Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, and Results. To this end, the school hosts quarterly 4 R Nights. These activities are designed to bring families, teachers, and community members together to exemplify and celebrate these values.

The focus of one of the most popular 4 R Nights was Warming the Hearts of Others. At this event, participants worked at activity stations devoted to helping local community organizations. They made blankets for a crisis nursery, created holiday placemats for a retirement center, and designed holidays cards to accompany food delivered by Meals on Wheels. They also boxed up food and winter clothing donations that they had collected on behalf of a local nonprofit.

Preparing for the event was a team effort. Parents and school staff started by reaching out to local community organizations and asking how the school could help them. Once they had identified several organizations to work with, fifth grade students researched these organizations and used the information they learned to create informational brochures and display boards. Their work was exhibited on the night of the event.

Students also collaborated with a parent volunteer to design a flyer featuring holiday community service ideas. The flyer was distributed at the 4 R Night. It contained suggestions such as visiting hospitals and care centers to chat with lonely patients and baking treats for the homeless or elderly.

Warming the Hearts of Others—a 4 R Night—was well-attended. Two-hundred students, 300 parents, and 25 teachers participated. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) the event using flyers, posters, and school newsletter announcements. The event was scheduled before the school's annual holiday show choir concert, so that families could go directly to the concert after completing the community service activities.

Participants checked in at a welcome table to make it easy to monitor attendance. They left feedback at an exit table on their way out. The event earned much praise from parents, teachers, and students.

"Warren does a great job doing community events," one parent commented.

"Thanks for the fun night," a student added.

The 4 R Nights cost a total of \$150, but were priceless in bringing families, school staff, and community members together in the service of others. Students also benefited as they learned the importance of social responsibility. This was very active learning—it takes cooperation, dedication, and hard (but good) work to assist those in need.

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Type 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

4

DISTRICT, ORGANIZATION, & STATE LEADERSHIP



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

BRIDGING THE GAP: ATP AND PAC

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT PASCO, WA

Pasco School District in Pasco, Washington, serves a large migrant and bilingual student population. The District Leaders for Partnerships knew that it was important for parents of these students to have a voice on their school ATPs, but school ATPs reported difficulty recruiting them.

To address this challenge, the district leaders established a partnership with the district migrant/bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (PAC.) For the past four decades, one parent from every school in the district received leadership training and served on the district PAC, which advises the superintendent on the development and improvement of programs for migrant and bilingual students. These parents, the district leaders thought, would be an excellent addition to school-based ATPs.

To launch the partnership, district leaders for partnerships met with the PAC coordinator, who agreed to encourage PAC parents to participate on their schools' ATPs. Next, the district leaders supplied school teams with tips on how to recruit and train new members, and asked them to make an extra effort to involve PAC parents. They also guided ATP co-chairs to track PAC parents' attendance at the monthly team meetings.

At first, the school teams found it difficult to involve PAC parents. In many cases, inviting PAC parents to meetings also meant including an interpreter, which was another challenge to solve.

In response, district leaders gave school teams a list of ways to find interpreters. For example, they suggested offering extra pay to bilingual staff or extra credit to bilingual high school students in exchange for serving as interpreters at ATP meetings.

School ATP members came up with other ideas to better accommodate PAC parents. For example, several ATPs rescheduled meetings to more convenient times and offered snacks and childcare.

By the end of the year, several school ATPs had successfully partnered with school PAC representatives. District leaders recognize their achievement with public appreciation and prizes. School ATPs with documented PAC parent involvement were rewarded with dry erase boards. PAC parents who attended at least one ATP meeting received a basket of school supplies for their children.

The next year, awards included laptops to support ATP initiatives. Most recently, participating school ATPs received \$100 to further encourage bilingual parent involvement. These incentives cost about \$2,500 over three years and resulted in a significant increase in ATP-PAC partnerships and diverse families' participation.

School ATPs have been enriched by PAC parent involvement. "Our PAC partnership has been an essential piece of our ATP," a school principal reported. "It's very much opened up a new two-way stream of information to support families and kids!"

Through education, encouragement, solutions to challenges, and incentives, Pasco School District has shown that it is possible to build powerful school ATPs that truly reflect the diversity of their student populations.

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COLLEGE BUS TOURS

**CLEVELAND SCHOOL DISTRICT
CLEVELAND, OH**

Road trips are a time-honored family bonding experience. Last year, Cleveland Metropolitan School District added an academic slant to the activity. They sponsored a series of college bus tours for parents and students to explore colleges that students might attend.

The purpose of College Bus Tours was to increase high school students' attendance and graduation rates by introducing students to postsecondary educational opportunities and requirements. District leaders also hoped that the college visits would boost parent engagement in their teen's college application and decision processes.

District Leaders for Partnership, the Family and Community Engagement department (FACE), and a community organization called College Now Greater Cleveland collaborated to organize the College Bus Tours. College Now provides students with guidance and access to funds to prepare for and graduate from college. It also prepares families for students' college-going. Although students are the ones who must graduate from high school and be ready for college, they cannot do it alone. Family support and guidance help students attain their goals.

The planning team informed families throughout the district about the opportunity to tour colleges. Every parent of an 8-12th grade student received an automated phone call invitation. More than 6,000 families were contacted. The planning team also hosted registration tables at community events, distributed pamphlets, included information in district e-mail newsletters, and canvassed neighborhoods to raise awareness of the program.

Interested parents and students signed up for the trips at school or via an online portal. After they registered, parents received a phone call and a letter confirming their participation.

Seventy-six students in grades 8-12 and 46 parents signed up to visit one or more campuses within two-three hours of Cleveland, from Oberlin College to Ohio State University. The trips were schedule over a month or so.

Students and parents boarded buses early in the morning, and received breakfast and snacks. While the families were in transit, a representative from College Now presented a parent-student workshop about preparing for college including tuition costs, financial aid, admission requirements, and more.

Upon arriving on campus, everyone ate lunch and followed an agenda set by the host college. Parents and students enjoyed the opportunity to tour colleges and learn more about their programs. The host colleges provided the lunch, and the breakfast, snacks, and buses were paid for by the district. The bus tours cost \$850.

The planning team noted that coordinating the buses, food delivery, and meetings with host college representatives was challenging. They worked together to ensure things ran smoothly by creating a central spreadsheet detailing bus arrival and departure times and contact information for those involved.

The first College Bus Tours were successful and valuable to the participants. The district decided to sponsor a second series of tours in August 2013. The trips introduced parents and students to new possibilities and motivated them to continue conversations about planning for college or other postsecondary education. The tours produced an unanticipated benefit—some of the parents said that they were inspired to apply to college themselves.

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COMMUNITY ENGLISH CLASS

ALVORD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT RIVERSIDE, CA

Due to a decrease in state funds for education, the Alvord Unified School District can no longer afford to place an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at every school. Still, language acquisition remains an important priority for the district, which includes 42% English Language Learner (ELL) families. To help these families learn English and to increase their involvement in their children's education, the district spearheaded a Community English Class.

"When we teach [parents] English and about our educational system," a district staff member explained, "they are better able to serve as partners in the education process and are better able to support their children and strengthen our schools." District leaders hoped that increasing parent engagement through the Community English Class would, ultimately, result in higher graduation rates for ELL students.

To create content for the class, the district's Teacher on Special Assignment modified existing ESL curricula and added lessons about navigating Alvord schools and engaging in their students' education. She incorporated information about the Six Types of Parent Involvement. She and the Coordinator of Instructional Support Services also solicited input from English Language Advisory Councils (ELACs), District English Language Advisory Council (DAC), School Site Councils (SSCs), Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and Booster Clubs.

Thanks to these partnerships and publicity efforts such as flyers, marquee advertisements, and automated phone calls, the Community English Class filled quickly and had a wait list. This year, nearly 90 parents of K-12 students throughout the district participated in the class.

The Community English Class aims to equip parents with language skills that will enable them to engage with their children's teachers, and to monitor their children's schoolwork at home. In class, the teacher explains concepts such as back-to-school night, state testing, and report cards. Parents also learn about graduation requirements and pathways to college. Parents receive copies of their children's test results, and are taught how to set academic goals and track their child's progress. Parents practice writing questions for teachers. As part of the class, they are required to spend time in their children's classes.

The positive impact of the Community English Class is clear. "First of all, I lost my fears," said one parent. "I am more sure of myself. I can help my children with their homework. [The class] has given me control of my children's learning and I like that."

"I am no longer embarrassed when I want to ask the teachers about my kids because I understand a little more English and the programs in school," added another participant.

The class has also prepared several parents for employment. This has made it easier for them to financially support their families.

The class is offered after school, and childcare is available. It costs about \$12,000 annually to run, with funds from English Language Development and other programs.

Throughout the program, parents never lose sight of the end goal: to support their children's education. A bulletin board in the classroom displays photos of all of their children with a sign that says "This is why I am here."

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FAMILY CONNECTORS UNIVERSITY

**SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SEATTLE, WA**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

When it comes to education, parent engagement and advocacy are essential. To equip families with these skills and strengthen meaningful school-family partnerships, the Office of School Family Partnerships in the Seattle Public School District initiated a new program: Family Connectors University.

Family Connectors University, a ten-week “train the trainers” series, was developed in collaboration with Seattle University. For two hours every week, parents representing schools throughout the district attended a class taught by expert facilitators at Seattle University. Topics included “Understanding and Interpreting Student, School, and District Data” and “Preparing Families and Students for College and Careers.” After completing the classes, the parents—called Family Connectors—were able to teach parent leadership classes to other parents at their home schools on a volunteer basis for at least one year.

“We believe that if we graduate 60-75 Family Connectors each year who, in turn, work with 10-20 families, we can grow [the number of engaged parents] exponentially and positively change the culture of our system,” explained an organizer.

To plan the program, the Office of School Family Partnerships surveyed a diverse group of families to better understand their interests and needs. Next, they worked with Seattle University to develop the course. Seattle University provided a graduate student instructor to teach one of the sessions and offered free use of its classrooms, bringing the program cost down to \$5,000.

The 42 Family Engagement Action Teams (FEATs) in the district pitched in by reaching out to families to publicize the opportunity. The Office of School Family Partnerships e-mailed every school and also sent a media release to news

outlets. Bilingual instructional assistants made sure that refugee and immigrant families were aware of the class.

Three cohorts, totaling 60 parents, signed up to be Family Connectors last year. For many of them, Family Connectors University was their first college course. The weekly sessions covered a wide range of topics from best practices of family engagement, to how to facilitate a meeting, to developing conflict resolution skills. Each week, there were two or three clear learning objectives. For example, in the first week the goals were to: understand research about the importance of engaging families in their children’s education; learn the role and expectations of Family Connectors; and gain skills and strategies to engage other families.

Interpreters attended each class so that every participant understood the information. By the end of ten weeks, the Family Connectors were ready to conduct their own parent training programs.

Family Connectors University strengthened the bond between families and schools in several ways. It built the capacity of many parents to work as equal partners with teachers in the education of their children; increased parents’ abilities to advocate for their students and their schools; and improved parent understanding of school and district policies and protocols. Given the well-established relationship between engaged families and student academic achievement, Family Connectors University is viewed as an effective way to help hundreds of students in the district succeed to their best potential.

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT REFRESHER TRAINING

CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS MIDDLETOWN, CT

After Family Engagement Action Teams for Partnerships (FEATs) are established, they continue to need and benefit from on-going guidance and support. Refresher trainings can help new members better understand their roles and responsibilities, and strengthen the leadership skills of current members. Receiving ongoing family engagement workshops is “like having a golf lesson after you have played a few times,” said a member of the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS), which recently launched a FEAT refresher program. “You now know what to ask.”

CTHSS leaders were inspired to reinvigorate their school-based teams by going to the conferences sponsored by the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). The advanced workshop sessions at the NNPS Conferences were so helpful to them that they decided to offer similar opportunities to the teams in their district.

To begin, they created a three-tier needs assessment survey. They distributed it to their 16 schools’ action teams for partnerships, and used the responses to develop customized content for the refresher workshops. By seeking information about schools’ needs, the leaders were able to create a responsive set of workshops for their teams.

Next, the district leaders announced the training initiative at site visits with school teams, at meetings, and via e-mail. To make the sessions convenient, they offered FEATs the option of day-long workshops or shorter sessions on a monthly basis. District-level consultants for each participating FEAT cost \$400.

Several FEATs were eager to take advantage of the training sessions. Forty school staff, 15 students, 10 parents, and 5 community

members participated. The interactive workshops, they said, helped their teams to refocus and regroup, and provided team members with a clearer understanding of how they could best serve their school communities.

“Thank you for letting me know the real purpose for me to be on this team,” said one parent participant. “I was not sure as to exactly what I was supposed to be doing during these meetings.”

“At first I didn’t want to be on this team,” said a student, referring to his school FEAT. “I didn’t know what I was doing.” The training sessions helped him and others clarify their roles, focus family and community engagement on school goals for student success, and feel more valued as a team member.

As the FEATs become more experienced and self-sustaining, the district leaders plan to modify the advanced training workshops to meet the needs of each team. They hope that the FEATs will use the lessons they learn to improve their action plans, make more welcoming schools, and increase the impact of family and community engagement activities on student learning.

Whether you want to tweak a golf swing or to reenergize a FEAT, extra coaching from an expert can make a big difference. The CTHSS Leaders for Partnerships hope that their experiences will increase the quality of the partnership programs in their schools and inspire other district leaders to offer refresher initiatives to their schools’ action teams.

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GREAT BY 8

FRANCIS HOWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT ST. CHARLES, MO

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Research shows that students' academic success is influenced by their ability to read by third grade. When a state test showed that 38% of the third-graders in the Francis Howell School District had basic or below basic reading proficiency, the district strategic planning committee sprang into action.

The committee began by appointing a task force of teachers, parents, administrators, reading specialists, and community members to develop an initiative to help kindergarten, first, and second grade students improve their reading skills. Among the actions taken, the task force established a community volunteer program called **G**iving time as **R**eaders to **E**nsure **A**ll children **T**est proficient by **8** – or, more simply, GREAT by 8.

GREAT by 8 paired more than 100 community volunteers with 53 kindergarten students who had low scores on a reading screening. The volunteers received training on how to work with young students on literacy skills, and were equipped with crates of reading materials. They dedicated 30 minutes to one hour per week for the entire school year to tutoring the students one-on-one.

A free online tool called Sign Up Genius made it easy for volunteers to schedule the sessions. Volunteers coordinated activities with for students with teachers and gave weekly reports to teachers using students' communication folders or by e-mail.

GREAT by 8 cost \$3,500 to launch, with most of the funding going toward the reading crates. Although the program has only completed its first year, it has already shown success. Participating kindergarteners demonstrated improvement in letter identification and letter sounds fluency. They also gained self-confidence

from spending time with a caring and trustworthy adult. Teachers reported that formerly shy students began to speak up more often in class.

Going forward, Francis Howell School District plans to expand the program to more elementary schools and to include students in first and second grades. District leaders hope to eventually enlist 2,000 volunteers.

The marketing subcommittee of the GREAT by 8 task force took steps to achieve this goal. In the past year, that group recruited volunteers by asking the schools' Parent Involvement Action Teams to encourage participation. Next, it sent informational letters to staff who had recently retired from the school district and current teachers, and alerted education students at a local university about the opportunity to become a GREAT by 8 volunteer.

The marketing subcommittee also used technology to target volunteers. It posted an announcement on the district website and made a video featuring volunteers' testimonials.

The district leaders who started GREAT by 8 remained actively involved in its implementation. Twenty-five members of the administration staff served as volunteers at the elementary school next door to their building. Even district Superintendent volunteered—proving that no one is too busy to help a child learn.

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HOW TO BE AN INVOLVED GRANDPARENT

CALCASIEU PARISH SCHOOL DISTRICT LAKE CHARLES, LA

According to the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury Human Services department, 11% of children in Louisiana live with their grandparents. To help support grandparents who serve as the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, the department partnered with six other community organizations to host a free conference called Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Knowing that you are never too old to learn new tricks, the co-leaders designed the conference to discuss topics of parenting skills at different age levels, how children cope with abandonment, custody issues, and grandparents' rights. Nearly 70 grandparents attended.

Calcasieu Parish School District's Leader for Family Involvement was asked to speak at the conference's opening session. She used the opportunity to create awareness about the 43 Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) in her district and to share some of the best practices for engaging grandparents in children's education. Her presentation was called "How to be an Involved Grandparent in Calcasieu Parish Public Schools." She also distributed a helpful handbook for grandparents and encouraged attendees to get involved in the ATPs at their children's schools.

The grandparents in the audience asked questions and sought more information about ATPs and other resources. "This has been very informative and supportive for grandparents," one thanked.

The district leader's presentation included a number of tips and strategies from her district's ATPs. She gave grandparents a list of ten questions to ask their grandchildren about school, and explained that the key to a good conversation was asking specific open-ended

questions such as "Who did you sit with at lunch?" and "What was the hardest thing you had to do today?" There are known to be better questions than "How was school today?"

She also advised participants on the best ways to praise their grandchildren by being specific, and by praising effort rather than only results. Topics also included step-by-step instructions on how to read and write with their grandchildren, etiquette education, and information about planning for and financing college.

Throughout, the district leader for partnerships included personal touches by sharing stories about how her own grandparents had influenced her life and the joys of being a grandparent herself.

The conference was an excellent forum to share best practices gathered from Calcasieu Parish schools' ATPs with a large, interested audience. Grandparents came away feeling appreciated and empowered by the knowledge and strategies they had gained.

"This was a wonderful opportunity to network and build relationships with community members and organizations," the district leader observed. "Most importantly it was a time to celebrate and honor the grandparents who are raising their grandchildren—and, in some cases, great-grandchildren!"

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NSSSED VIP: VOLUNTEERS IN PARTNERSHIP

**NORTHERN SUBURBAN
SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT
HIGHLAND PARK, IL**

After examining the results of a multi-district needs assessment and reviewing the partnership practices of other school districts, the District Partnership Team (DPT) of the Northern Suburban Special Education District (NSSSED) launched a volunteer program to increase family and community engagement. In the first year of the program, 24 trained volunteers worked with 175 students as mentors, coaches, lecturers, chaperones, and leaders.

NSSSED is a special education cooperative. It coordinates three educational programs across 18 member school districts. The Educational and Life Skills program provides services to students (6-21 years old) with developmental delays and various disabilities. North Shore Academy is a K-12 therapeutic school for students who struggle with the social, emotional, and behavioral demands of school. The Early Childhood Program provides educational services to preschool-aged children with disabilities. The NSSSED District Partnership Team (DPT) was eager to develop ways to connect community volunteers with students in all three of these programs.

The DPT tested a pilot version of Volunteers in Partnership (VIP) in 2011-12 in one teacher's classroom in a member district. Based on the positive results of the pilot, the DPT hired a part-time volunteer coordinator to recruit, interview, and place volunteers with students in the three programs listed above. The DPT involved the staff of each program by surveying teachers to understand how volunteers could help them in the classroom or with individual students.

The volunteer coordinator was responsible for interviewing volunteers, running background checks, and conducting orientation and training sessions. All volunteers received information about basic teaching strategies, communication skills, and behavior management

techniques. After volunteers were matched with a program, the coordinator scheduled regular follow-up meetings to ensure that everything was running smoothly.

The volunteers engaged with students in a variety of ways. They taught yoga, led music therapy sessions, read stories, prepared classroom materials, tutored specific skills, and completed gardening projects. "The experience has been really rewarding and educational," said one volunteer. "I look forward to every Tuesday. Being in the classroom is always the highlight of my week."

The feeling seemed to be mutual. Students loved working with the volunteers. Teachers reported that students improved their interaction skills by developing close relationships with the volunteers and showed academic gains thanks to the 1:1 tutoring sessions.

Teachers, too, were grateful for the help. The volunteers assisted them by working with students on academic, communication, and social emotional goals, and provided an unexpected side benefit—emotional support. Teachers appreciated having empathetic volunteers in the classroom who understood the challenges they faced and offered praise occasionally.

The program cost \$20,000 to run. This included the salary of the Volunteer Coordinator as well as supplies.

VIP has enriched the lives of students with disabilities by bringing them together with caring volunteers for educational, vocational, and recreational activities. NSSSED's partnership team hopes to recruit more volunteers next year.

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NSSSED - WAGNER FARM PARTNERSHIP

**NORTHERN SUBURBAN
SPECIAL EDUCATION DISTRICT
HIGHLAND PARK, IL**

When the Northern Suburban Special Education District (NSSSED) District Partnership Team (DPT) searched for ways to strengthen connections between students and the community, they found a solution in an unexpected place—a local farm. Now, more than 70% of the NSSSED’s students have learned academic lessons and acquired practical skills by seeding, watering, and harvesting plants at Wagner Farm—an 18.6 acre historic farm owned and operated by the Glenview Park District.

NSSSED is a special education cooperative that provides programs, services, coaching, and consultation to 18 member school districts. NSSSED coordinates three educational programs to help students with special needs gain skills necessary to succeed in preschool, elementary, middle, and high school, and obtain and sustain long-term employment. As one initiative, the NSSSED DPT partnered with Wagner Farm to create an educational agriculture program. The farm earns \$20,000 annually for the use of its greenhouse and garden and for the consultative support of its staff.

In the first year of the program, three students in the NSSSED Transition Program spent half a school day at Wagner Farm learning about agricultural through hands-on activities. They seeded a 12,000 square foot plot, watered the plants, and harvested the crops in the spring.

The next year, NSSSED added horticulture and agriculture curriculum to all of its classroom programs. More than 250 students visited the farm to apply concepts they learned in class. They worked in the greenhouse, cared for plants, and received a lesson in broom-making from a community volunteer. They also kept journals to improve reading and writing skills and completed learning-at-home worksheets with their parents.

A highlight of the partnership between Wagner Farm and NSSSED is a Community Support Agriculture (CSA) program called Be@the Farm. The CSA program was formed by the Wagner Advisory Team, which consists of NSSSED and Wagner Farm staff and a parent representative.

Be@the Farm aims to teach students job-related skills and to involve the public in the school-farm partnership. Once a week, the students run a stand at the farm where CSA members pick up boxes of produce. The proceeds help to purchase t-shirts, seeds, and other farming supplies. Last year, 30 memberships were sold.

CSA membership is not the only way that community members participate in the project. Six community members volunteered to work alongside students in the garden or teach classes on agriculture-related topics.

NSSSED’s partnership with Wagner Farm and the Be@the Farm program have strengthened students’ ties to the community and enabled them to learn important skills. The students “have really taken great pride in seeing that the work they put in produces something very quantifiable,” said the director of Wagner Farm. “It’s been very successful. We couldn’t be more happy.”

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

PLANTING HOPE

KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT KENNEWICK, WA

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

In the Kennewick School District, many secondary schools excel at conducting workshops and other events for families. However, the Federal Programs office noted that few Spanish-speaking parents participated. To ensure that English Language Learner’s (ELL) families felt welcomed at school and received important information about their students’ education, the district leaders for partnerships organized a day-long program—Planting Hope—designed to meet and hear from these families.

Spanish-speaking families throughout the district with students in middle school and high school were invited to attend via personal phone calls, flyers, postcards, and announcements on local Spanish radio stations. A local Univision station also advertised the event by airing a student-made commercial and an interview with students and parents about the importance of attending. The publicity worked: 72 parents and 160 students attended.

Early on the morning of Planting Hope, a crew of migrant and ELL student and parent volunteers arrived at one high school to set things up. Some of the volunteers also served as greeters at the front door to welcome families. Others staffed student, parent, and childcare registration tables or served a breakfast of hot chocolate and Mexican pastries.

Planting Hope included several sessions for attendees to provide parents with information on their rights, school programs, and importance of fostering leadership skills in their children. The day included a keynote presentation from a law enforcement officer, who spoke about parent’s important roles in guiding adolescents through middle and high school.

“The information was very good,” one parent commented. “I learned about the tools that I have to help my child be successful.”

Parents and students split into separate groups for sessions of interest in English and Spanish. Parents learned about how they can help prevent drug and alcohol abuse, and about graduation requirements from high school. Migrant and ELL high school student volunteers had been previously trained to lead younger students in leadership development activities.

Afterward, everyone reassembled for a Mexican lunch and to evaluate their experiences at Planting Hope. A completed evaluation entered the family into a raffle for valuable prizes.

The program, which engaged many parents and students cost about \$700. High school student volunteers gained valuable organization, event planning, and teamwork skills. The middle school students whom they mentored became more motivated to do well in school. Parents learned about school programs, parents’ rights in various school decisions, and how to keep their students safe and healthy. The parents also reported that they felt more comfortable interacting with teachers and administrators, and understood that the district and their children’s schools valued their involvement.

This was the fourth year of Planting Hope. In Kennewick School District, this is one strategy for increasing connections with a previously underserved group in its community.

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PRINCIPAL FEAT TOOLKIT

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS SEATTLE, WA

The Seattle Public School District is eager to implement Family Engagement Action Teams (FEATs) in its 95 schools, but faced a challenge. Only a few central staff members were available to provide school-based teams with training and on-going technical support. “We wanted a more systemic way to help schools set up their FEATs,” a district outreach specialist explained.

A suggestion from an assistant principal provided an efficient solution. Why not distribute FEAT start-up guides for principals?

District Leaders for Partnerships worked in concert with the district’s School Family Partnerships Advisory and existing FEATs to produce a toolkit with detailed information about how to start and implement successful teams. Copies of the Toolkit would be given to every principal in the district at a summer leadership conference. The booklets cost just \$475 to print.

The FEAT Toolkit—in binder form—is filled with useful information, some adapted from the NNPS *Handbook for Action* and some customized for Seattle schools. The first page explains the definition of a FEAT. Then, a section explains how to set up a team. Guidelines recommend recruiting family members that represent the diversity of the school; inviting teachers from a variety of grade levels; and finding key community members from on-site child care programs, nearby businesses, and organizations that serve families at the school. Examples of recruitment letters are included.

The binders also contain easy-to-use templates, such as a Meeting Minutes Report Form and a Mid-Year Evaluation Form. Family literacy, math, and science toolkits for Pre-K through 12th graders are included.

As the 2013-2014 school year progresses, Seattle Public Schools staff will follow up on the progress of each school’s FEAT by monitoring monthly FEAT meetings and conducting periodic school visits. Schools will receive varying levels of support according to their individual needs. First-tier schools will receive the most support to help them form and start well-functioning partnership teams. Third-tier schools that have FEAT teams working effectively with well-developed, goal-linked action plans for family and community engagement will receive assistance upon request. This tiered-structured approach will enable the school district to support all FEATS efficiently.

The Principal FEAT Toolkit is a low-cost, way to help many schools increase family engagement. The Seattle Public School District expects that good partnership programs will positively impact 47,000 students and their families. It is certainly something to work toward.

As one partnership leader noted about the toolkits, “...Teachers, school staff, community members, and above all, families, will be ‘on the same page’ when it comes to helping children succeed in school.”

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SPANISH PARENT LITERACY LEADERSHIP CLUB

**MORENO VALLEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
MORENO VALLEY, CA**

A *Purpose Driven Life. Emotional Intelligence. The Four Agreements. Once Upon a Cow. And the Earth Did Not Devour Him.* Last year, more than 30 English Language Learner (ELL) parents in the Moreno Valley Unified School District gathered to practice their English and improve their leadership skills by discussing these and other popular educational and inspiring books.

The Spanish Parent Literacy Leadership Club was supported by the District Board. Every year, the Board reviews the district's parent involvement plans created by district partnership leaders and the District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC). A recent plan included the establishment of a rather unique parent literacy program. The Board approved the program and allocated \$2,400 to implement it.

The program consisted of more than just the Spanish Parent Literacy Leadership Club (SPLLC). It also included the development of a lending library open to all parents with books on parenting, self-help and other topics of interest to parents, and a book exchange. Parents involved in the initiative honed their literacy, communications, and leadership skills by attending the book club, reading at least six books during an 11-week period, and encouraging their family members and friends to read as well.

The SPLLC was conducted by the parents themselves. They set a meeting schedule, appointed reading leaders, voted on book selections, and agreed on group goals. District staff took a secondary role, providing supplies and a meeting place.

"Listening to parents the other day share their thoughts and pour their hearts out to one another was an amazing experience," said one district leader. "The book study has allowed them to gather as a group, read and learn together."

Parents in the book club became more involved in their children's education and in their school communities. Several parents reported that they had organized home literary circles for their families, including grandparents and children. School staff also noted that the participating parents took on more leadership roles in the school community. For example, they attended and presented at conferences, organized food drives, and volunteered at city-wide events.

Recruitment for the SPLLC book club was easy. DELAC representatives started by announcing the program at schools and made personal phone calls to families. Soon, they had far more parents interested than the club could support. The district encouraged parents on the waiting list to start their own book groups and created a presentation on how to do so.

Now, there is an international version of the SPLLC. After seeing photos of the group on Facebook, a friend of one of the SPLLC members began a similar book club in Guadalajara, Mexico.

The District Board approved funding for the parent literacy program in the 2013-14 school year. The SPLLC is an excellent way to accomplish multiple parent education and engagement goals, and has inspired parents and students throughout the community.

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STEPPING UP LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

ELOY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

ELOY, AZ

Students who have not been recognized as leaders deserve to dream big. To inspire students on the sidelines to reach for their academic, career, social, and personal goals, the Eloy Elementary School District Family Involvement Action Team (FIAT) organized Stepping Up Leadership Academy. The day-long activity enabled the Eloy Elementary School District to align partnership programs and policies across its three schools, which serve students in grades K-8. The Academy also enabled the Eloy Elementary School District to join forces with the Santa Cruz School District, where most students to attend high school.

The Eloy FIAT worked with the District Superintendent, Grants and Research Director, Director of Food Services, Director of Curriculum Instruction, and Director of Family Outreach to create a banner day to increase students' emotional well-being and college awareness. The planning and design group selected the theme "empower yourself."

The Eloy FIAT members visited classrooms throughout the district to spread awareness about the program. They asked teachers to identify six students whom they believed had leadership potential, but who were not yet student leaders in the school. Students who were members of the student council and the National Junior Honor Society were automatically invited. Because the goal of the program was to target students who had not been recognized as leaders, students also allowed to nominate themselves to attend the Stepping Up Leadership Academy.

About 150 students and 40 of their parents attended. The day began with a continental breakfast and the distribution of backpacks donated by community members. At the opening session, several speakers with

high community visibility and motivational talents gave presentations. The speakers included the district superintendent, selected teachers, a representative from a local community college, and a representative from an organization that promoted college preparedness.

Families also heard from junior high student leaders and college-bound high school students from the Santa Cruz School District who had successfully overcome obstacles through hard work and perseverance.

Then, students and parents split into small groups for tailored presentations. Students had sessions on healthy eating, exercise, emotional well-being, communication, and Internet Safety. Their parents gained information on family-school collaboration and parental involvement at each grade level; monitoring their child's Internet activity; building students' self-esteem and leadership skills at home; and planning finances for college.

Participants met again for lunch. They enjoyed a dance performance and a motivational song from the Junior High Honor Society. They also went to a swimming pool to enjoy the rest of the day. The Academy cost \$3,500.

The Stepping Up Leadership Academy helped spotlight the leadership potential of students in the district's elementary schools. It linked them with active leaders in the junior and senior high schools that they would attend in the future. Participants agreed that it was a good way to bring people together to nurture budding leaders.

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STRENGTHEN DISTRICT LEADERSHIP FOR PARTNERSHIPS

FLORENCE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT LAKE CITY, SC

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Feedback from district-wide surveys of parents and parent-teacher conferences indicated that families in Florence County School District Three wanted to support their children's education, but weren't sure how to do so. To equip families with parenting strategies and information about how to engage with their children's schools, the district collaborated with the Action Teams for Partnership (ATPs) at its eight schools. Together, they organized an annual district-wide Back-to-School Family Conference and a series of parenting workshops called Parent Academy.

Parent Academy consists of a series of five or six interactive workshops for families on raising confident, academically successful children. Despite the name, the workshops are not only for parents. Children are welcome to attend, too. While parents engage in role-playing exercises and other sessions, children participate in planned activities of their own.

The workshops are conducted at or near six of the district's eight schools. The sessions are facilitated by parent liaisons on the schools' ATPs, who received intensive three-day training workshops in the summer to prepare them to effectively work with families.

Parent Academy was launched in 2009. Since then, enrollment has grown steadily from 29 to over 300 parents and their children. The district and school-based ATPs achieved this growth with good publicity and by adjusting elements of the program to meet families' needs. ATPs and other leaders advertised the Parent Academy via flyers, the school's website, and announcements on the local radio station. In response to families' requests, they began to offer the workshops at convenient locations, including different schools and community churches.

Word of mouth also contributed to Parent Academy's success. Families enjoyed the workshops and recommended them to others.

"As I visited the different Academies, I witnessed parents actively involved in learning how to support their child's learning and having fun while doing it," a district leader said. "The children enjoy attending and learning as well."

Initially, professional development for district leaders and Parent Liaisons cost \$7,500, but, now, to maintain and sustain the program, the cost is \$2,500 per year.

Florence County School District Three is continuing to seek innovative ways to collaborate with and support families. The district was recently awarded a \$50,000 grant to launch a program in which ATP members will visit families' homes and work with families to create homework and study areas. Students will collaborate with a teacher to construct desks for the study areas. The district also will run a community-wide Books for Desks drive to supply the new desks and students' home libraries with plenty of reading material.

By being flexible and responsive to families' needs, the Florence County School District Three and its school-based ATPs are working to strengthen their leadership on partnership program development, empower parents, improve student achievement, and strengthen connections of schools, families, and the community.

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TIP SHEET FOR HIGH SCHOOL

**NAPERVILLE SCHOOL DISTRICT 203
NAPERVILLE, IL**

Students benefit when their parents understand school operations and can easily contact school staff. Not all parents, however, remember when parent-teacher conferences are held, or who to call at school to ask their questions, voice concerns, or offer suggestions.

To keep parents informed and to promote their involvement with their children's schools, the School, Family, and Community Partnership (SFCP) leadership team at Naperville School District 203 provided families with a one-page Tip Sheet. The document contained key dates, phone numbers, and instructions for how to create an online Student Information System account.

The idea for a Tip Sheet came from a high school teacher and a junior high counselor. Separately, they created one-page information handouts to increase family engagement at their own schools. When the SFCP heard about their efforts, they centralized and disseminated the good ideas by distributing a Tip Sheet at the district's two high schools. They asked a graphic arts high school student to help create the Tip Sheet to make it visually appealing.

The graphic arts student designed a Tip Sheet under the guidance of a teacher and presented the new version to the SFCP at one of its meetings. A high school teacher at the meeting offered to translate the document into Spanish so that it would be useful for even more families.

The district SFCP leaders printed 2,700 copies of the Tip Sheet for the high schools at a cost of \$500. They were distributed to the families of all incoming ninth-graders and families who were new to the district.

"The student services staff expressed how helpful the Tip Sheet has been for new families coming in to the district, especially during the

middle of the year," a teacher at one of the high schools noted. When families miss the official opening of school in the fall, there is a real need for good, clear information when they enroll students later on.

She went on to explain that the Tip Sheet is particularly useful to English Language Learners' (ELL) families. "Providing the information to parents in Spanish allows them to take over the role of understanding and enforcing school rules and procedures in their homes, instead of their children [having] to act as both the student and the adult in the family."

The SFCP recommends that other districts interested in implementing the practice design their Tip Sheets to include only information that is clear and that remains the same from one year to the next. This reduces printing costs. They also suggest making a mobile app of the Tip Sheet available to parents with smartphones. The more ways that good information is disseminated, the better.

Whether in digital or paper form, a Tip Sheet is a relatively simple way to help educators, parents, and students know and remember important school facts, guidelines, and schedules.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

EFFECTIVE PARENT LEADERSHIP TRAINING IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
FLORENCE, SC

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

Once a school or district implements a successful school, family, and community partnership program, it is important to share it as widely as possible so that others may learn from it and adopt or adapt it. This kind of recognition and dissemination is a priority of the partnership leaders at Francis Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty (FMU COE). They strive to identify and disseminate best practices from the districts and schools in their COE-NNPS network. Using Constant Contact, COE publicizes its work and that of its districts and schools to over 5000 addresses, including all districts, higher education faculties, and other organization and contacts in South Carolina.

Last year, they highlighted a parent leadership training program in South Carolina conducted by Florence School District Three, one of the districts in the COE network. Participants in Florence School District Three said that the program, called Parent Academy, changed their lives. It increased their understanding of child development and taught them how to establish home conditions to support their children's academic needs and progress. "As a result of attending Parent Academy, I am more conscious of my actions around my children – what I say, how I say it, and what I do," said one parent. (See the description from FSD3 and other activities by that district on page 100.)

The FMU COE was impressed by the program's impact and potential. "This strategy has great promise to increase student achievement and promote healthy development," an FMU COE administrator said. "When parents feel empowered, children, teachers, and schools benefit." As important, this version of informative sessions for parents also encouraged

parents to volunteer and take leadership roles at their children's schools. This meant that the Parent Academy not only was an interesting day for the participants, but also helped strengthen schools' programs of family and community engagement.

The FMU COE staff promoted the FSD3 Parent Academy at various events to encourage other schools to implement similar programs. They asked the leader of the Parent Academy initiative to speak on a panel at the COE End-of-Year Breakfast Celebration and to facilitate a breakout session at the COE Summer Institute. The breakfast was attended by more than 70 district leaders and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) members, and the summer institute was attended by representatives from 81 school districts in South Carolina.

Also, the Associate Director of COE participated in the Parenting Partners Leadership Institute. She discussed strategies for expanding the Parent Academy program to more NNPS schools among COE's Partner Districts in 2013-14.

The partnership leaders of FMU COE look forward to seeing the results of scaling up the Parent Academy in other locations. Adaptations by other districts will be of interest. FMU COE also will continue to identify best practices conducting in its project's high-poverty schools to find other family, and community engagement practices that should be spotlighted for good design, good outreach, and good results.

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PARENT ENGAGEMENT LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION RIVERSIDE, CA

Parent engagement is directly correlated with student achievement, but not all parents know how to support their children's education. To give many parents opportunities to gain specific skills and strategies to encourage their children's success in school, Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) and the 23rd District PTA collaborated on a series of parent training sessions. They called the workshop Parent Engagement Leadership Initiative (PELI.)

After completing PELI training at the county level, participants are asked to lead similar workshops themselves in their own districts or schools. The goal is to encourage others to form Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to systematize teamwork and annual written action plans for family and community engagement.

In turn, new ATPs should be working to engage parents in their children's education. The spiraling influence of the PELI workshops was appealing. They should result in many schools engaging countless parents in their children's education at all grade levels. In short, RCOE and the 23rd District PTA aimed to guide and expand parent engagement by creating a training curriculum and modeling its implementation.

The PELI series consisted of nine modules based on information from Dr. Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement, the PTA's National Standards, and the California State PTA's Parents Empowering Parents guide. The modules were customized using a needs assessment and input from an RCOE Teacher Support Coordinator. Module topics included parent engagement, positive parenting in public education, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community, and forming effective Action Teams for Partnerships.

Participants were encouraged to attend the PELI workshops series in teams. A typical

team consisted of an administrator, teachers, and parents from a district or school. The workshops were conducted over four half-days. Participants learned from a variety of presentations and hands-on activities. All who completed the series received a CD containing the training materials in English and Spanish so that they could conduct their own workshops in the same way.

Each PELI series cost \$2,500 to produce. The cost covered training materials, promotional items, and salaries for the trainers.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. "As a parent of four children in public schools I loved it!" said one participant. "The information from this course helped me to view my role as a parent in a new light."

Although some administrators found it difficult to leave their campuses, those who attended were impressed. "The resources, the conversation, the presenters, and spending time with teacher and parents from my site made it very worthwhile," said one principal. The PELI team is working on developing a condensed version of the training to serve administrators who are short on time.

Leaders evaluated the practice using surveys for participants before and after the series to determine how much they had learned. They used the information to make the trainings even better. The PELI series has strengthened the county by supporting the creation of new ATPs and providing valuable information on partnership programs and parental involvement to 583 school staff, 88 district leaders, and 1,367 parents.

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DUST OFF YOUR OLD SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACT

**CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
MIDDLETOWN, CT**

STATE LEADERSHIP

Every school that receives federal Title I funds for low-income children is required to have parents and teachers sign a *compact* pledging to improve student learning. The goal to increase the collaboration of parents, teachers, and schools to benefit children's education is a worthy one. Too often, however, compacts were not meaningful for program development. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) wanted to turn schools' compacts into catalysts for action.

CSDE's Program Manager for School-Family-Community Partnerships partnered with leaders from across the country. CSDE is a member of NNPS that views One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships as Title I's definition of a compact. CSDE also worked with Anne Henderson, a national expert on family engagement with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform; Melissa Whipple, with Parent Outreach and Engagement for San Diego Unified Schools; and Patricia Avallone, former Title I Coordinator for New Haven Public Schools. Together, they customized more useful compacts for Connecticut's schools.

The initiative was launched in 2008 when Connecticut hosted a Compact Conference. Participants from urban school districts across the state came to learn how to transform compacts into actionable plans for partnerships of teachers and parents.

CSDE piloted a compact revision training program for 20 schools in five of the state's high-need areas. School leadership teams attended training with district-level administrators. The pilot phase proved successful and additional districts were added. In 2013, the CSDE approach for school-parent compacts began to rollout to all of the state's Title I schools. To date, 52 schools have participated in the pilot or development phases.

In training sessions, participants learn how to promote parent-teacher collaboration and explored promising practices. Participants follow a ten-step process to improve their partnership programs and to understand the compact as a plan. Schools are guided to motivate staff, form a team, align the compact's engagement activities with school goals for student success, specify activities at each grade level, celebrate progress, and continue to improve plans from year to year.

These steps are consistent with NNPS guidelines, used nationally. CSDE customizes action plans with targeted activities for student learning at each grade level. There also is an important emphasis on input to the compact from teachers, parents, and students.

The workshops are supplemented by a website, www.schoolparentcompact.org, which offers video coaching modules at no cost to any school. The website, videography, initial conference, and expert consultations cost \$35,000.

The compact revitalization has yielded excellent results. More schools' compacts now address learning issues specific to individual schools and grade levels, and focus on data-based engagement activities to strengthen students' academic skills. The compacts emphasize the shared responsibility of parents and teachers for children's education.

Although the compact initiative has been successful, CSDE is not finished improving partnership programs in its schools. As one next step, leaders plan to add a new protocol to make parent-teacher conversations more productive and meaningful.

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