

# PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



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

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**Johns Hopkins University**

# 2014

Edited by

**Brenda G. Thomas, Marsha D. Greenfeld, Emily K. Parker, and Joyce L. Epstein**



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  - » Annual evaluation of program quality (UPDATE)
  - » Research results, tools, and materials that help meet Title I requirements for family involvement
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**Norwich Technical High School, CTHSS, Norwich, CT**

**Rowena Chess Elementary School, Pasco School District, Pasco WA**

for the photographs of partnership activities in *Promising Partnership Practices 2014*.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES 2014

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., Director

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

In schools across the country, Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are guiding teachers to revise the curriculum and improve instruction to help more students at each grade level gain skills to meet the standards. Members of NNPS know that by engaging family and community partners in understanding and supporting CCSS, more students will be motivated to learn and master the specified skills. This can greatly help teachers, who are working hard to bring the standards to life in their classrooms. See several activities designed to orient families to CCSS.

Other activities describe workable and winning ways to engage families and community partners to:

- Prepare students for college or careers with visits to colleges, conversations, and career fairs.
- Orient students and families to a temporary school while renovations are made to the original location. Another orientation adapted *The Amazing Race* as a scavenger hunt to familiarize students and families with many important areas of the school. These activities can be revised to orient students and families for the transition to a new school or at the start of a new school year.
- Spotlight students in talent shows and as entertaining segments of workshops for parents. Students' artistic, musical, writing, science, sports, cooking, and other talents are proven ways to increase attendance at any school meeting.
- Demonstrate ways that parents can support student learning at home and ensure that parents who cannot attend the meeting receive the same information and materials so that they, too, can guide students' learning at home.

There's more! Look inside to find good uses of (1) high school alumni and community experts in science, business, the arts, and athletics; (2) new technologies to improve notices to parents about engagement activities; and (3) easy parent surveys to identify workshop topics of interest. At the district level, find excellent ideas to strengthen schools' ATPs with self-evaluations, retreats, and well-focused meetings.

The activities on every page describe important goal-linked engagement activities that may be adopted or adapted in any district or organization, by any school, in any community, and at any grade level. They are well-designed and joyful ways to improve the school climate and spur students to succeed in school.

### What's in this book?

All activities come from members of NNPS for members and others who use the NNPS website to strengthen their partnership programs. From over 100 submissions, the editors of *Promising Partnership Practices 2014* selected 78 activities from 60 schools, 12 districts, 5 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 and from one NNPS partner in Australia. There are basic, advanced, creative, and surprising goal-linked activities in every section of this book.

## FOUR TABLES OF CONTENTS

**1. GOALS FOR PARTNERSHIPS.** This Table of Contents identifies family and community engagement activities to increase students' skills and attitudes in reading, math, science, and other or multiple 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 identifies activities to strengthen parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each page highlights one type of involvement, but each practice may activate several types of involvement by design.

**3. SCHOOL AND POLICY LEVELS.** This Table of Contents identifies 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 identifies the locations of the contributors to this book. 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 2014* will be posted, in full, on the NNPS website — [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) — in the section Success Stories. See the Order Form for print copies.

**NNPS SAMPLERS.** NNPS SAMPLERS provide a shortcut for reviewing ten good activities from prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices*. The *Samplers* will help your school meet particular partnership goals in **reading, writing, math, science, health, the arts, homework, attendance, behavior, career awareness/postsecondary planning, transitions, 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 home page 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 1200 family and community engagement activities in all prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices*, from 1998 to 2013. Members Only also have access to all Samplers.

The **Members Only Code** for 2014-15 for selected sections of the NNPS website will be **memNNPS15**. It will be activated in January 2015. Active members of NNPS who evaluated their programs using the UPDATE survey and renewed membership with NNPS for 2014-15 will be reminded of the active code in NNPS monthly E-Briefs.

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## National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University

Established by Dr. Joyce L. 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 strengthen leadership for programs of school, family, and community partnerships. NNPS assists schools, districts, organizations, and state departments of education to develop and sustain research-based partnership programs that contribute to student learning and development.

- Each Partnership School strengthens its program by forming an Action Team for Partnerships, writing goal-oriented partnership plans, and activating partnership practices using the 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 facilitate schools to organize, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their programs of family and community engagement.

All members of NNPS benefit from on-going research and share best practices to improve school climate, engage all families, and increase student success in school.

For more information, visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).

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



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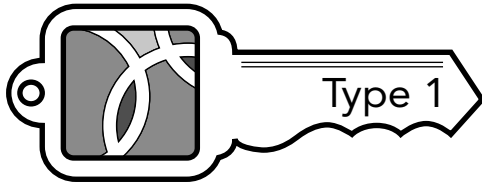
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# Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

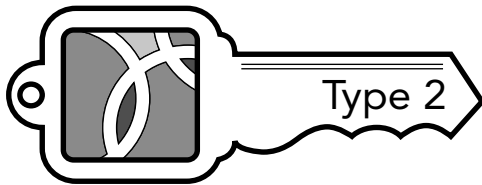
Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships

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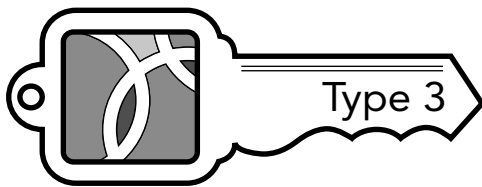
## **Parenting**

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.



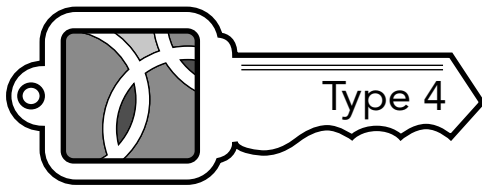
## **Communicating**

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



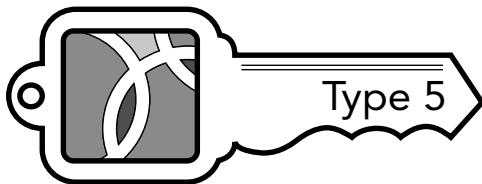
## **Volunteering**

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.



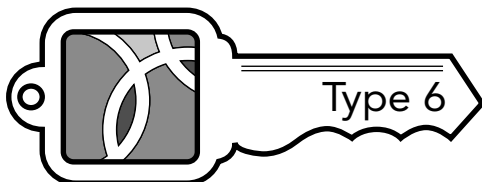
## **Learning at Home**

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, other academic subjects, or multiple subjects.*





# A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

**PRAIRIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**P**owerful storytelling does not require many words. Each year, a children's picture book that tells a story primarily through images is awarded the Caldecott Medal. Sharing these award-winning books with young children and their parents is an excellent way to increase students' enjoyment of stories, interest in reading, and emotional intelligence. Prairie Elementary School wanted to feature the Caldecott Medal picture books at its literacy night called A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words. The School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team and all teachers hoped that the emphasis on picture books would appeal to students in grades K-3 and would spark their interest in reading at home and at school.

The SFCP team planned the literacy night for the same evening as the school's annual Book Fair to encourage attendance. Nearly 200 children, families, school staff, and community members joined in the fun of A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words. The combined activities also benefitted the Book Fair, which raised more money for the school than in several years.

The featured book for the evening was *A Ball for Daisy* by Chris Raschka, winner of the 2012 Caldecott Medal. All students read the book in advance. Posters featuring images from the book were placed around the school and generated buzz about the literacy night. As a tie-in to the book, students were asked to estimate the number of bouncy balls in a container at the sign-in desk. The three students with the best estimates received kickballs as prizes.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words was held in the school gym, starting with pizza dinner pre-sold by fifth-grade Girl Scouts. A local bookseller presented information on the Caldecott Medal and recommended many of her favorite award-winning books. Then, students

and their families visited four different activity stations staffed by parents, teachers, and high school student volunteers. The activities gave students opportunities to think and write creatively, express emotions, or demonstrate feelings and moods.

At the first station, the school art teacher guided students to illustrate facial expressions showing a variety of emotions. Their work was displayed on a school banner after the event.

At the next station, local high school student-artists asked each child to describe him or herself. They used these words to draw caricatures of the students, which the students could take home. The young students loved this personal attention.

The third station featured pre-made blank books. Children were encouraged to write and illustrate stories about a prairie dog—the school's mascot. Parent volunteers were on hand to provide support.

The final station was located on the stage in the school gym. The school's music teacher guided students to express their emotions through dance for each piece of music she played.

The event cost just over \$400, which included tablecloths, balloons, and other décor, printed materials, prizes, and thank you cards for volunteers. The SFCP was encouraged by positive exit surveys. "Something for everyone," a student noted. "Very well-organized," wrote a parent, expressing the comments of many others.

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# ACCELERATED READER CARNIVAL

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**MOSS BLUFF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Type 3

**S**tudents at Moss Bluff Elementary School are extra motivated to complete their Accelerated Reader (AR) curriculum each year. The reason? Their hard work is rewarded in May with the Accelerated Reader Carnival set up by parents, teachers, and community members.

AR is a computer program that helps teachers manage and monitor children's reading for pleasure. Students select books they want to read at their own reading levels and read for a certain number of minutes each day at school and at home. After completing each book, children take a short quiz on the computer to demonstrate skills and understanding. Teachers monitor the number of books, time reading, and quiz results on vocabulary, comprehension, and other literacy skills to track progress and to help students advance to books at higher reading levels.

Anticipation of the AR Carnival begins in the winter, when teachers set Accelerated Reader goals for the school's 550 students based on their test scores. Each student is assigned an individual goal for the number of minutes to read in school and at home every day and every week. Students monitor and maintain their own AR records throughout the year. Parents are provided information about the program, their child's goals, and how to access the cumulative log of their child's progress. A parent must sign a data log each week.

Accelerated Reading (AR) is a topic of conversation at home. One parent reported, "My son wants to read all year because he wants to attend the Carnival.

While the students are hard at work, the Accelerated Reader committee of representatives from the administration, Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), and Partners in Education, meets regularly to plan the celebratory AR Carnival. Members have

different tasks, from contracting a magician to purchasing food and paper goods.

Last year, Coca Cola, one of the school's business partners, supplied a beverage truck for the event. Another Partner in Education, Cameron Communications, provided a food tent. A magician agreed to perform at a discount. Thanks to these contributions, the Carnival cost just \$500 for the rental of a snow cone machine, a cotton candy machine, and carnival games.

Parents, teachers, and high school student volunteers worked together to make the Carnival a success. Parents staffed the game booths, prepared volunteers, and helped with clean up. Teachers staffed some booths, circulated to greet families, and kept an eye on student behavior. The high school dance team performed for the crowd, and other high school volunteers served cotton candy and other treats. The elementary school students enjoyed interacting with the high school student volunteers. The local press took photographs and interviewed students.

"This event has given children an opportunity to feel successful in school at their reading levels, even if they are not honor roll students," said a teacher. "The Carnival molds the whole student beyond academics alone."

The ATP and staff at Moss Bluff Elementary aim to include even more community partners in the future. The Carnival is an annual activity and a powerful student motivator. It also is an opportunity for the entire community to celebrate their combined interests in student success.

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READING

# BOOKS AND BREW: A HOME VISIT PROGRAM

HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA

Teachers may be hesitant to visit students' homes, but when they do everyone reaps major benefits. Studies indicate that after well-planned and well-implemented home visits, families and teachers enjoy better communications; teachers gain new perspectives on their students' lives outside the classroom; and students feel more support for their education from their families and their teachers. This is just what happened at Hawthorne Elementary School, where seven teachers visited the homes of fifteen students.

Books and Brew—A Home Visit Program was proposed by a parent on the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to promote positive teacher-parent communications. The ATP partnered with teachers to identify students who would benefit from a home visit. This included students who were struggling academically or whose parents had not previously engaged with the school. The team prepared suggestions for the initial telephone contacts of teachers with students' parents. The team also purchased supplies and wrote guidelines for the teachers to ensure that the visits would be both purposeful and enjoyable for everyone.

Teachers called parents and arranged appointments for their visits. On the evening of the appointments, teachers stopped by the ATP area at school to pick up a book, a math game, and a prize (such as a gift card donated by a community member). They also picked up a cup of coffee—the “brew” in Books and Brew—for the parents. Along with a colleague such as an interpreter, the principal, or an ATP member, they drove to students' homes.

Upon arrival, the teacher offered a cup of coffee to a parent. After friendly introductions, the teacher and student demonstrated a few

strategies that the parent and child could use to practice reading and math skills at home.

The strategies were linked to the learning goals for students by grade level. For example, practicing reading aloud can be fun and improve students' reading fluency. Asking probing questions about the plot and characters in books students read can start a good conversation about reading.

Teachers kept the visits short, positive, and friendly, purposely avoiding discussions of behavior problems. They thanked the families for hosting them and reinforced how happy they were to have the students in their classes.

After making the visits, teachers were glad to have met the parents and engaged with their students in their own homes. “...It was a good experience,” said one teacher. “I enjoyed talking to the parent at a more personal level. I will do this again . . .!” “The value of these visits is huge,” added another teacher. “I saw a great change in my relationships with the parents and the students.” Students enjoyed the visits so much that they talked about them at school. Soon, their peers were eager for home visits, as well.

“We want to make it a culture within our school,” said the ATP Co-Chairs, who allocated \$200 for the practice. The ATP may grow the practice by hosting an informational meeting for all teachers at the beginning of the school year. “Our vision is that, someday, each teacher will visit each child [sometime] during the year.”

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Type 4

READING

# FALL INTO READING

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**JOHN J. JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Type 4

**E**ngaging young readers in fun activities may be one way to set them on the path of life-long reading. At Johnson Elementary School nearly all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Their teachers have set goals and are working hard to encourage their students to love learning and to love to read. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers planned Fall Into Reading—a fall festival and family reading night. Teachers, parents, community members, and AmeriCorps volunteers took active roles preparing and conducting this event.

The ATP organized a many-faceted publicity campaign to attract families and community partners. Teachers put information about the event in students' report cards; reminders were posted on the school's marquee; colorful posters were hung inside and outside of the school; flyers were distributed throughout the community; and invitations were extended in the American Press newspaper. Families and community members were impressed when some teachers and school staff knocked on doors to deliver flyers about the reading night.

At Fall Into Reading, students and their families had many opportunities to participate in hands-on reading activities and informational booths organized by the teachers, students, and staff from the Calcasieu Parish Public Library. Each grade level set up a reading-themed, standard-based activity station for attendees to enjoy. The activities and games were designed to show parents what reading and language arts instruction looks like at their child's grade level and ways to practice and reinforce specific skills at home. Students were eager to demonstrate reading and language arts skills for their parents. One parent appreciated this focus, saying, "I enjoyed the

time I got to spend with my son getting to see what he does in school each day."

College students and staff from the McNeese State University's athletic department were featured guests. They came to talk with students about the importance of reading, even in college athletic activities.

AmeriCorps volunteers along with some Special Education Teachers built a hair-raising, horrifying, haunted house, and dressed for the occasion. After being scared "out of their wits," families could recover by going on a country hay ride, which was offered during the entire evening.

Hot dogs, chips, and drinks were served when participants arrived. The Fall Scholastic Book Fair was open for browsing and buying. Students and parents could explore and purchase books and educational games and toys that encouraged reading. Chick-Fil-A donated one free book for each child attending. At the reading stations, families collected ideas and materials on how to help with reading at home.

The ATP received lots of positive feedback from 100 students, 65 parents, 30 teachers and 20 community members. One parent represented many others by commenting, "I wish you all would do more activities like this one. We really enjoyed ourselves!" That certainly expresses the joy of reading.

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READING

# GROWING A LOVE FOR READING

JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL

From nonfiction narratives to dystopian novels, there are many engaging literary genres for teen readers to discover and enjoy. To introduce students to various genres and to foster a love of reading, the School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team at Jefferson Junior High School worked with several community partners to host Growing a Love for Reading—a family reading night. The teachers also wanted to give families some ideas about what their student could be reading at home.

Fifteen teachers worked in groups of two or three to develop 10-minute sessions about their favorite literary genres. Students and their families could rotate through four sessions to hear presentations on topics such as “Good Things Come in Threes—A Look at Popular Trilogies and Book Series;” “Multicultural Literature;” “Chills and Thrills;” “Must-Read Non-Fiction;” “A World Less than Perfect-Dystopian Novels;” and “Award-Winning Teen Literature.” It was exciting to be introduced to so many new books.

Or, parents and students could select a 20-minute demonstration by staff from the public library on how cardholders could access e-books for free from the library. Other information on technology was presented on reading on personal devices. Parents were shown how to access online resources in the school’s Dual Language and Spanish Literacy programs.

“Last night was amazing!” reflected one attendee. “What a wonderful opportunity for our families, teachers, and staff to come together—along with district representatives. ... it was one of the best events I have attended. It just felt very unified.”

In between sessions, students entered raffles to win the books they had just heard about. There were separate raffle baskets for

each book genre. Each student received six tickets to place in the baskets of their choice. About 45 books and 3 iTunes gift cards that could be used to purchase e-books were given as prizes. The raffle was made possible by a \$1,000 grant from the Jeanine Nicarico Memorial Fund for Literacy.

Other community partners for the activity were local high school students and staff from the Naperville Public Library. The high school volunteers offered babysitting services for toddlers to fifth-graders. They read children’s books aloud to these youngsters and facilitated arts and crafts activities.

Plenty of tasty refreshments kept energy high throughout the evening, which ran from 6:30 - 8:30 p. m. The school’s Family and Consumer Sciences students baked cookies, and granola bars, juice, and water were available.

Much of the success was due to good planning and good teamwork. A group of teachers submitted a grant proposal to the Nicarico Fund. After the grant was approved, the SFCP team reached out to all teachers and to the staff at the public library to plan the sessions. They advertised Growing a Love for Reading via Talk 203 and the school website. Teachers reinforced attendance with announcements in class.

At the end of the evening, two representatives from the Fund for Literacy read aloud to the group. Over 50 students, 100 parents, 30 teachers, and 20 community members gathered to listen to Dr. Seuss’ famous *Oh, the Places You’ll Go!* It was clear that reading good books on many topics would take the students to new and intriguing places.

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# LEARNING AT THE LIBRARY

**GREENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC**

Type 4

“**R**eading certainly is taught differently from back when I was in school,” a parent at Greenwood Elementary School observed. Upon learning that many other parents shared this sentiment, the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) brought families together to explain the school’s new literacy curriculum and Common Core State Standards in reading. The ATP and reading teachers also wanted to provide strategies that parents could use at home to help students practice and improve reading skills and attitudes.

To encourage attendance, the ATP hosted Learning at the Library off campus at a convenient time and appealing community location—a wonderful new public library for the area. They advertised the gathering by posting flyers around the school, tucking invitations in students’ weekly parent communication folders, generating automated phone calls to parents, and displaying a sign in the car line outside the school. Over 50 parents and 53 students attended the Learning at the Library workshop. The principal noted, “We did reach some parents who would benefit and usually don’t attend things at the school.”

Attendees were welcomed to the library with snacks. A jargon-free PowerPoint presentation outlined the teachers’ reading curriculum, instructional approaches, and Common Core standards. School staff members distributed guidelines for parents to reinforce approaches to increase reading fluency such as decoding, using context clues, and increasing reading rates. Other guidelines focused on improving reading comprehension such as sequencing events, reading directions, interpreting main ideas, evaluating facts or opinions, and other higher-level thinking skills. The guidelines were on laminated cardstock bookmarks that could be easily used at home when children were reading library books or

when parents and children were reading together. “After this workshop, I know how to better help my daughter study for reading tests,” one parent said. “I didn’t know that you weren’t supposed to tell a child a word that she doesn’t know, but should instead use context clues to help her figure it out.”

Parents were given time to practice the strategies with their children, while teachers circulated to answer questions or demonstrate techniques. Parents and children also met with members of the library staff, who gave them an overview of the library’s services and special programs for children and families. After a tour of the library, the families could sign up for library cards and check out books.

Each child received a high-interest book at the appropriate reading level, purchased with \$500 of Title I funds. “I liked the book I got,” one student reported. “I read it and made a good Accelerated Reader Grade on it.” Teachers reported that they observed improvements in the reading skills and attitudes of students who attended the workshop with their parents. The emphasis on reading spread to include students who could not attend Learning at the Library. In the month after the workshop, students at Greenwood completed 1,000 more Accelerated Reader activities with higher scores than in the prior month—over 74,200 in all. Fewer students were identified as “at risk” on the Accelerated Reader program ratings.

Learning at the Library helped many families learn more about students’ literacy education. Greenwood Elementary School is defining the right place for reading as the school, home, and community.

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READING

# PARENT FEEDBACK BUILDS STRONGER READING NIGHTS

**EASTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**T**hanks to parent feedback, annual family reading nights at Eastgate Elementary School keep getting better. Reading Nights were first implemented when the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at the school heard that families wanted to support their children’s literacy education, but were not sure how to do so. Now, the ATP plans activities each year for teachers, students, and parents to enjoy reading and to show families how to help their children strengthen reading skills at home. Parents enjoy these events, offer suggestions for improvement, and look forward to the next reading night. One suggestion was: “Why not include local community members in the fun?”

The ATP agreed that this was a great idea. Last year, Family Reading Night was conducted on the school’s Pajama Day to celebrate Dr. Seuss’s birthday. The program for Reading Night featured community leaders including the Superintendent of Elementary Schools, the Chief of Police, a fireman, an artist, players on local sports teams, a DARE officer, and bilingual high school and college students who were alumni of Eastgate Elementary. The community leaders conducted two sessions, each 30 minutes, in eight classrooms to meet and talk with groups of families. Speakers were given guidelines by the ATP to introduce themselves and explain why reading was important to them. Next, they read a favorite story aloud to the families and children.

The participation of bilingual high school and college students, who were Eastgate alumni, was a real highlight. Many families in attendance speak Spanish at home. They were encouraged to attend when they learned that some of the stories would be told in Spanish. The alumni enjoyed giving back to their former school. “It was really fun to come back to Eastgate

and read to the kids and families,” said one.

Teachers were in every classroom. After the community leaders read a favorite story aloud, the teachers demonstrated for families how to ask children questions to increase reading comprehension. They distributed bookmarks printed in English and Spanish with simple questions, such as “Who are the characters?” and “What is the setting?” Teachers also announced an upcoming raffle featuring a bicycle as the prize. Students could earn tickets by reading at home with their families. “This will help me ask more questions about the book my child is reading and ask the right questions,” one parent stated.

More than 80 students and about 60 parents attended the community-based Family Reading Night. There was plenty of advance publicity. The ATP sent home flyers and put notices in the school newsletter and on the school website. On the day of the event, teachers distributed reminder stickers that students wore on their pajamas, worn for the daytime celebration of Dr. Seuss’s birthday. Family Reading Night concluded with cookies and milk for all.

The ATP credits much of reading night’s success to parent feedback. “At every event, we survey families to see if we met their objectives and if they have any suggestions for how to improve future events,” the ATP Co-Chairs explained. “We truly appreciate our parents’ perspectives and always look at the previous year’s survey when we begin to plan our events.”

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Type 6

READING

# PJS & PALS

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**GANON GIL PRESCHOOL OF TIFERETH ISRAEL  
BEACHWOOD, OH**

Type 5

**A** visitor to the Ganon Gil Preschool last year may have encountered a surprising sight. More than a dozen pajama-clad children were enjoying stories, snacks, and crafts with their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and other important male role models in their lives. The activity—PJs & Pals—aimed to promote a love of reading and to foster a warm, caring atmosphere at the school.

PJs and Pals was organized by the Dads Committee of the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to reinforce the fact that children thrive when they spend quality time at school with male mentors. The committee’s plan supported three themes that are important at the school—building students’ literacy skills, being father friendly, and encouraging parent volunteers. The preschool serves children from 6 weeks to 5 years old to develop the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills that lead to success in school and out.

The preschool teachers were present throughout PJs and Pals to facilitate the activity and to get to know the dads and other adults who attended. They provided name tags and introduced the guests to each other to encourage conversations among the families. PJs and Pals was publicized via flyers, phone calls, and social media.

The focus on reading and crafts gave meaning to the gathering. In one room, half of the dad-child pairs worked together to decorate quilt squares. In another room, a dad read a story and everyone enjoyed a snack. During story time, children discussed illustrations, characters, and whether they liked or disliked the

book. After 20 minutes, the groups switched rooms and activities.

PJs and Pals was positively reviewed. “I really enjoyed the evening,” said one dad, who noted that he did not often have a chance to spend time with his daughter and her friends at the school. Another dad echoed the sentiment. “What a great time we had last night!” he said. “My son really enjoyed showing me around school and I got to meet the other children in his class.” A teacher added, “It was a wonderful opportunity for the dads to meet each other and to socialize.”

The children in pajamas, making a quilt, and reading together created a cozy climate. The evening was documented in photos, which were made into a poster displayed at the school. Children and dads who could not attend had the opportunity to create quilt squares at home so that they would be part of the project. The ATP assembled the squares in a school family quilt. It represented the uniqueness of every family and the fact that all families were welcome at the school. The quilt was hung in a school hallway next to the school’s motto: “We are more than just a preschool; we are a family.”

READING

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# READ FOR THE RECORD

**MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**S**tudents at Mark Twain Elementary School are improving their reading skills and flashing pearly whites and healthy grins, thanks to a creative literacy program sponsored by a local dentist. Every month, the 300 students in grades K-5 receive a calendar to record the amount of time they spend reading at home each day. They also record whether they brushed their teeth. Students are expected to read for pleasure for at least 20 minutes per day and to brush their teeth for at least two minutes in the morning and evening. The students' parents monitor their children's reading and health habits. At the end of each month, parents sign the calendar. Qualified students are entered in a drawing for an electric toothbrush, toothpaste, and flossers.

"Read for the Record aims to help students increase their reading accuracy and fluency and being a lifelong habit and love for reading," a teacher explained. As an added bonus, the students are also developing crucial self-care habits and learning to keep their teeth healthy.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) generated excitement for the program by announcing it on the school calendar, on the school website, and at school assemblies. They also made calls to the school's community (PEAK) partners to find a sponsor. A local dentist's office agreed to support the program.

Volunteers tally the records in students' calendars each month and enter the information in a spread sheet that records student name, teacher, minutes read, and brushing accomplished from month to month. Students also may boost their totals by

reviewing a book they read to recommend it to others. The valued prizes have helped fuel student enthusiasm for the program throughout the year. The winners always are pleased to receive gifts from the Tooth Fairy. The winners also are honored by having their names posted on a bulletin board outside the library.

As an added bonus, the student who has read for the most minutes each month receives a special prize—a gift card for a bookstore or an age-appropriate book. In December and May, the prizes get even more exciting. One boy and one girl from grades K-2 and 3-5 win a bicycle. The incentives are provided by the dentist's office and by other community partners.

The ATP estimates that the donations and printing cost of the monthly calendars amount to about \$800 per year. The program has worked well, is popular, and continuing. Among lessons learned, is the need to print the monthly calendars for recording reading and brushing in advance to make distribution easy and timely.

Incentivizing daily reading and tooth-brushing may be an odd paring, but a worthwhile goal. After a while, both will become good habits of good students at Mark Twain Elementary School.

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Type 4

READING

# READING: THE BEST 20 MINUTES OF YOUR DAY

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**SUNSET VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 4

**W**hen families start reading together, the time often becomes the best 20 minutes of the day. The practice deepens family bonds, encourages children to enjoy reading for pleasure, and demonstrates that parents support their children’s literacy education. To help families make reading a good habit, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers at Sunset View Elementary School helped plan Reading: The Best 20 Minutes of Your Day. Parents on the ATP gave useful input for designing and implementing this event.

The family reading night was conducted on Pajama Day during the school’s Spirit Week. The ATP advertised The Best 20 Minutes by mailing flyers home, putting a notice in the school’s e-newsletter, and hanging posters around the school. On the day before the event, the ATP sent home one last reminder. Over 50 students and 75 parents gathered to read together.

The principal kicked off the event by juggling apples, reading a Dr. Seuss book, and explaining three ways to organize short family reading sessions. First, he said, the sessions should be fun. Second, books and stories should be of interest to the child involved—and students have different interests. Third, the student should receive a hug, pat on the back, promise of reading the next day, or other token of progress at the end of the session.

After this introduction, families participated in breakout sessions on literacy skills by grade level led by 20 teachers. The activities put a spotlight on students and showed parents what their children were learning in reading class. Teachers prepared handouts for parents so they could reinforce the same skills at home when they read stories with their children.

For example, kindergarteners played games to improve letter knowledge fluency

and rhyming skills. First graders demonstrated five strategies for decoding difficult words and took home star-shaped magnets featuring the tips. Second graders demonstrated a five-point story-retell strategy and received hand-shaped magnets printed with the five points. Students received a free book donated by the National Reading Foundation and practiced reading the book aloud with their families.

The school librarian met with students in grades three through five and their families. Originally, the ATP had not planned to include older grades in the event, but agreed to do so when teachers from these grades showed interest. They were glad they did. The older students were interested in the librarian’s presentation about new books for their reading levels and interests. “Students were excited about reading the new books with their friends and family,” the ATP Chair reported.

A visit from the Community Bookmobile was a highlight of the evening. Some parents and students signed up for library cards and all enjoyed browsing the books. Some checked out books to take home. The Bookmobile visits the school every other week.

The Best 20 Minutes reading night concluded with hot chocolate for all. On the exit survey for reactions and suggestions, teachers noted that they enjoyed spending time with families, including many they had not previously met. Families appreciated learning how to organize family reading time that will help their children practice reading skills. This activity demonstrated how to create a cozy time—even 20 minutes—for shared reading at home.

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READING

# SKYPE SESSIONS FOR INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING

**DELMAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC**

**W**hen test results showed that third-graders at Delmae Elementary School needed extra help on reading skills, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers leveraged community resources and technology to develop a solution. They partnered with teacher candidates at Francis Marion University (FMU). The future teachers in an elementary reading methods course provided Delmae's students in one third grade class with weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions in Skype video chats. Eighteen students received personalized instruction over the winter months. By spring, Measures of Academic Performance (MAP) tests showed that all but one met grade level reading requirements.

The students looked forward to their weekly Skype sessions. "They've just been so excited about having a college friend that they get to work with and the technology piece," their teacher reported.

The FMU teacher candidates, who were not able to conduct the sessions in person due to their class schedules, relished being Reading Buddies who could help from a distance. To prepare, they reviewed each student's past test results and developed individualized lesson plans including shared reading activities and language and literacy activities. The students at Delmae sent letters via the U. S. mail to introduce themselves to the tutors. The letters helped the FMU students assess the students' abilities and their personalities and experiences.

Next, the teacher candidates began meeting with the students every Thursday in a Skype video chat. The third-graders sat together in a classroom, each with an iPad and headphones provided by the district technology team.

The FMU teacher candidates provided support and encouragement along with

instruction. Dr. Shirley Bausmith, Education Dean at FMU, observed, "I would hear [the FMU] students say 'Way to go!' and 'What a great reader!'...and I think the elementary school kids were thinking, 'Wow, this is a college student working with me!'" (Reported March 6 by Ellen Meder of the Florence Morning News Online, at [www.scnow.com](http://www.scnow.com)).

In the spring, students' test scores indicated the project—Skype Sessions for Individualized Learning—was a success. Nearly every third-grader who had received instruction from an FMU Reading Buddy was able to read at grade level and with enthusiasm. "They've gained a confidence about reading," their teacher observed. "They've got somebody that is encouraging them and motivating them and helping them one-on-one."

The school ATP and teachers recommend the Skype instructional practice, particularly for schools in rural areas. They noted that it would be best for a school to have its own set of iPads and headphones for the sessions. At Delmae, the district technology team came in every week to set up the equipment. The children's teacher suggested that it may be helpful to have parent volunteers join the sessions to help supervise and assist the children. They also may see ways to support reading skill-building activities at home. "Having several adults on hand might help the process," the teacher noticed.

The school plans to continue Skype sessions and the partnership with FMU. The approach not only helped students improve their reading skills and confidence, but also benefitted the teacher candidates. They gained experience in instructional design and delivery.

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# STAR – STUDENT TUTORING ACTION RESOURCE TEAM

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

Type 3

**R**esearch shows that well-organized tutoring programs can benefit struggling students. When students need help on reading skills, individual tutoring can make a difference if it is coordinated with the child’s teacher to meet particular needs.

The School Improvement Team at Independence Elementary School analyzed local and state assessment data and discussed ways to help Kindergarten students who were struggling with early reading skills. They also wanted to improve the purposeful work of parent volunteers within the program of school, family, and community partnerships. These two goals led to the Student Tutoring Action Resource (STAR) team. STAR ensures that parent volunteers provide strategic reading interventions to help struggling Kindergarten students master basic early reading skills before moving on to 1st grade.

Starting in 2010, Kindergarten teachers and the principal recruited parents who they believed would be effective tutors. Reading Recovery Specialists developed activity kits and trained parent volunteers to help students practice specific skills such as letter recognition, handwriting, and phonemic awareness. The teachers identified the students who needed extra help. A daily schedule was arranged for the volunteers to meet one-on-one with the students they assist.

Kindergarten teachers, with the principal’s support, conduct quarterly professional development meetings for the volunteers to ensure that they remain up to date on how to tutor children on specific skills. One STAR parent reflected, “It is such an amazing feeling experiencing and observing a student grasp a new concept... truly powerful!”

STAR has evolved over time. Kindergarten and Reading Recovery teachers developed assessment tools that the STAR team uses to track students’ progress.

The volunteers were given notebooks to collect skill-specific data and to record their notes on each tutoring session. This helps the STAR volunteers and teachers monitor students’ work and plan next steps in the tutoring process.

With the addition of Common Core State Standards, reading specialists collaborated with Kindergarten teachers to include reading fluency, sight word recognition, and early writing skills in their reviews of students’ needing extra help and in the training of tutors to assist students on the kindergarten standards. This year, there was a shift to incorporate technology in all academic areas. The reading specialists wrote a grant to purchase iPads for use in the STAR program. Parent volunteers reported that the new technologies have increased students’ engagement and interest in the tutoring sessions.

A reading specialist has documented results for students. She reported, “It is very evident which students participated and excelled in the STAR program when we assess incoming 1st graders each fall.” A Kindergarten teacher concurred, “The STAR Team is a resource that we must have in place for students to be successful in school.”

The results at Independence Elementary School have been of interest across the school district, with a district-level program modeled after STAR for use in other schools. Parents of children who participate in STAR expressed gratitude for the extra academic assistance given to their children. STAR volunteers develop strong and caring relationships with the students they assist. This is a win-win program for everyone, especially for the young students who are placed on a positive road to reading.

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READING

# CAFÉ MATH NIGHT

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**PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**N**umbers are all around us—part of everyday life, but some students and parents are intimidated by middle grades math. In the past, Park Middle School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) has struggled to achieve strong family attendance at math events. No longer.

Last year, the ATP developed a wonderful way to make math popular and palatable by pairing math with ice cream sundaes. More than 100 students and 300 parents and family members gathered at the school to earn delicious treats by playing a variety of math games at Café Math Night.

Community collaborations helped ensure success. GEAR UP donated materials for math gift bags to be distributed at Café Math, and a local casino donated decks of cards for some math games. The school’s math coach incorporated the playing cards in math games aligned with Common Core State Standards. With these contributions, the event cost about \$300 to conduct.

To promote Café Math, the principal mailed home flyers and created a video to show to students during first period announcements. He also reminded staff about the event at meetings, and thanked them for their planning and participation. More than 25 teachers volunteered to help with the event. The teachers built interest and confidence about Café Math Night in advance by teaching students in class how to play the math games that they would play with their family partners at Café Math. Students also helped by creating posters to mark the locations of the different games.

On Café Math Night, families were welcomed by the school secretary and given

a menu of games and a map of the game locations. They attended one session to hear about the games and how to play them. To earn ice cream sundaes, they had to visit four math game stations. If they visited five stations, students would receive an extra ice cream topping. As an extra bonus, if a family created a homework plan together, they would receive a math gift bag full of games to take home.

At the first four stations, families played games that enabled students to show off their knowledge of integers, fractions, multiplication, and probability. Commented one attendee. “I didn’t know you could make math fun.”

At the fifth station, families watched a slide show explaining how to make an effective homework plan. Families were given time to create their own homework plans, and teachers were there to help. The gift bag incentive ensured that families did not skip this important stop. Families were happy to get the gift bags, which contained versions of the math games that they could play together at home. “This is something really fun we can do together at night, instead of you texting on your phone,” one parent was overheard saying to a student.

Café Math Night facilitated school and family communications and showed parents and students that math was nothing to fear. As the principal put it, “Parents learned ways to work on math with students at home in positive and engaging ways, and to be an active participant in their student’s learning.”

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# MATH BACKPACKS

**MILL STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**M**ill Street Elementary School is lucky to enjoy high parent engagement, but its School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team knew there was room to improve. To involve all parents in their children’s education, the team launched a new program: Math Backpacks. Each classroom—all grades—received six backpacks full of math games. Students took turns bringing the backpacks home to play the games with their families. The program was funded using a \$4,300 grant plus \$2,700 in donations from parents and the community. Some commercial games were purchased; other games were developed by teachers to help students practice and master grade-specific skills.

To launch the initiative, the SFCP hosted a dinner party and Math Game Night at the school. They invited families via announcements in the school newsletter, e-mails, and phone calls. The evening began at 5:30 p.m. when families and school staff met for dinner. Then, youngsters under age six headed to a childcare room staffed by volunteers, while parents and students learned to play math games that were appropriate at each grade level. The students and families would see the games again when the students took home the backpacks. More than 300 students and parents attended. “That was a really fun math party,” one student said.

SFCP members were pleased to see many parents who had not previously engaged with the school at evening events. This time, the school offered transportation and childcare to families, which helped boost attendance. Also, where needed, the SFCP sent invitations home in Spanish, translated the math game instructions in Spanish, and recruited parent volunteers who taught others how to play the math games in Spanish. This helped make everyone feel welcome and part of the

program.

In the weeks that followed, the SFCP stuffed the new backpacks with the math games that they had played on Math Game Night and distributed them to all classrooms. Over the next several months, more than 600 students took the backpacks home to play these games with their families. Each backpack rotation lasted a few nights. The 31 teachers involved ensured that the backpacks were returned promptly so that everyone could have a turn.

This was a great way to involve all parents in their children’s education and to show students that learning math skills can be enjoyable. Math Backpacks resulted in stronger school and family ties and increased the involvement of hundreds of parents. They also contributed to an increase of 10% on district and school assessments of students’ math scores, particularly for students from minority and low-income subgroups. Everyone gets credit for this increase—the teachers and students for their work in class, and the parents and students for practicing math skills with games at home.

This unique approach can be adapted to engage all families and help students at all levels improve skills in other academic areas. Reading, writing, science, and music backpacks could be designed to spark parents’ interest in school subjects and increase parent-child interactions on school skills at home. This is an important addition to even the strongest engagement programs. A backpack program ensures that families who cannot come often to school meetings or events are valued for their involvement at home.

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Type 4

MATH

# MATHS DEADLYS

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**CRANEBROOK HIGH SCHOOL  
CRANEBROOK, NSW, AUSTRALIA**

**I**n Australia, students from indigenous populations tend to score significantly lower on their standardized maths exams than their counterparts. Educators believe that poor math skills contribute to the high rate of early high school leavers among indigenous students. To show these students that maths (as math is called in Australia) can be fun and important for success in high school, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Cranebrook High School sponsored a maths competition for primary school students.

Cranebrook is one of the high schools guided by Partnership Brokers—family engagement experts in the organization School Industry Partnerships. The high school serves 20% of students with Aboriginal backgrounds. The school is working to lift these students’ maths skills and test results. “With maths becoming increasingly vital for students’ future careers, the Maths Deadlys program provides a foundation for developing and practicing numeracy skills prior to the students entering high school,” a staff member of School Industry Partnerships explained.

The ATP reached out to local primary schools to invite their participation and to publicize Maths Deadlys. Six primary schools that feed into Cranebrook High School and 60 students signed up. The Cranebrook ATP connected these students with teacher trainees at University of Western Sydney (UWS) and with volunteer high school students who helped them learn, practice, and master math skills. Parents were informed about the opportunity and encouraged to coach and root for their students.

Students and their families gathered at Cranebrook High School for Maths Deadlys. Fourteen teams played a variety of fast-paced math games to win a trophy. One favorite game was Fast Money, in which players

used electronic buzzers to answer maths questions as quickly as possible. Another game was Jeopardy, in which students worked together to earn points by answering maths questions in different categories. Other games were Problem Solving and Timetable Killer—a multiplication race using playing cards. The scores of all teams were posted on an electronic scoreboard for all to see. Parents, teachers, other students, and community members cheered students throughout the event.

Prizes were donated by community members. The young students and high school volunteers were delighted by a surprise visit from players in the Indigenous Panthers Rugby League. All attendees joined together for a sausage barbecue at the end of the day to celebrate their successes and to celebrate the subject of maths. “I benefited ...because it helps my maths and I enjoyed meeting new people,” a student reflected. “Maths Deadlys is a great way to learn.”

“I’m impressed by the way Maths Deadlys brings so many partners together to help students with maths skills,” said the principal of Cranebrook High School. She also wanted the activity to help the primary students and their families feel welcome at the high school.

The competition cost \$1,800 AUS, mainly to compensate teachers for their time. The UWS teachers in training are planning to conduct practice sessions with the primary grades children between future competitions. Cranebrook High School would like to host school, family, and community events twice a year. The practice is an excellent way to focus indigenous students and families on maths in the primary grades and its importance for success in high school.

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# MATH IN THE REAL WORLD

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**FORT BRADEN SCHOOL**

**TALLAHASSEE, FL**

**M**ath anxiety is real and challenging for many students and for many parents. Although math is all around us, it is difficult for some students and adults to see how classroom skills apply in “real-life” situations.

The Fort Braden School’s partnership team planned a family night to demystify mathematics in grades K-8, and to provide parents with useful strategies to help their children at home. One of the school’s goals is to improve student understanding of math using “high-return” instructional strategies. Teachers aim to increase the percent of students who attain math proficiency on the state’s math test. Guiding families to encourage positive attitudes about math in school and on homework is one high-return practice.

For family math night, the team purchased Math-a-Phobia from Workshops in a Box—a kit of skits with scripts about math problem solving in the real world. Fort Braden’s teachers and students donned various costumes to introduce the math problems and solutions. Teachers performed many speaking roles and many students from the audience participated.

For example, in one skit, 16 students tried out for a part in a fictitious school musical. The make-believe teacher was in a hurry and eliminated the students in a funny way. First, all of the odd numbered students were eliminated. Then, students with a number divisible by 4 were eliminated, and so on until just one student was left. The preselected final student had a great voice and could sing a song for the audience. Other skits showed how math is used in different occupations. One parent laughingly reported, “I liked seeing the teachers interact with students in a funny manner.”

At the Fort Braden math night, the large room was attractively decorated with

math objects such as rulers, protractors, pencils, mini-calculators, erasers, and logic puzzles, which students could take home at the end of the evening. To tie the program to students’ literacy skills, the partnership team used contributions from business partners and from the school to purchase math story books to raffle off to students. These included Grandfather Tang’s Story, Pizza Counting, Sir Cumference and All the King’s Tens, among others. (Search “story books about math” on the internet.) At the dinner after the workshop, participants had to ask for pizza by the fractional part, not by the piece.

It should be noted that math teachers and partnership team members could get together to create math skits in a similar manner linked to the school’s math standards by grade level. The goal is to spotlight math in ways that relieve some math anxieties and to link math computation and problem solving to real-world situations.

Fort Braden’s math night brought parents, students, siblings, friends, and staff members together to reinforce math skills and have some fun. The program was supported by the Leon County Administration, Title I, and Fort Braden School personnel. The district is committed to strengthening school programs of family and community involvement. Title I provided \$1,500 to purchase the workshop and to help support the dinner and math story books. The partnership team and other teachers planned the activity, performed in the skits, and helped make this a successful evening for about 75 students, 50 family members, 10 community members and 15 teachers. That’s a real-world sum of 150 in attendance.

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# MATH WITH MOM

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**J.I. WATSON MIDDLE SCHOOL  
IOWA, IA**

**T**here is a mystery surrounding Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and parents want to know more about this new school reform. At J. I. Watson Middle School, a large K-8 school, about 400 parents came for a day-time demonstration workshop on Common Core standards in math. They learned, first, that CCSS is not a curriculum, but a set of grade-specific standards that the school will help their children attain. In so doing, their children should proceed through the grades and graduate from high school on time and ready for the future.

The ATP and all teachers hoped that the workshop, Math with Mom, would enable many parents to support their children's math learning, encourage positive attitudes about math, and, ultimately, increase students' scores on standardized math tests. Parents and their children experienced a sample math lesson on a CCSS math standard in each math class. Parents could see how the school's curriculum and the teacher's instructional approaches helped their student learn the skill and meet the CCSS standard. They also saw how the teacher taught the lesson.

The ATP posted a notice about the workshop on the school marquee and placed announcements online and in the school newsletter. Math teachers at each grade level prepared a lesson that showcased a Common Core standard and that used active learning and math manipulables to engage both parents and their children in the lesson.

At Math with Mom, parents came during their child's math block. Student council members greeted parents and escorted them to their child's math class. The classrooms were crowded with the students and their parents—the big turnout something

of a welcome surprise. The ATP, teachers, and principals could see that Common Core-related workshops would, indeed, draw a crowd.

Despite packed conditions, everyone was in good spirits and highly interested in the math activities. For example, one teacher distributed maps of the town and used the grid to explain how coordinates work. Then, the students and parents set to work to find particular locations. Other teachers explained math concepts using bingo cards or beads to explore multiples. The teachers also addressed parents' questions about Common Core standards. School administrators circulated to meet parents and show their support.

Parents completed an exit survey to provide feedback. Results were very positive and revealed the kinds of questions that parents had about CCSS and the school's math curriculum. Said one parent, "Now, I can see some of the thinking processes that go along with Common Core Standards." The ATP and teachers plan to create a Frequently Asked Questions list with answers to share with all parents.

Students enjoyed being the center of attention in each math class. According to the Assistant Principal, they "were able to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge to their parents." Having their parents come to school to learn about math standards and their math lessons made clear to the students that their families valued education. Math with Mom was a great way to inform and engage parents with students to focus on academic success.

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# OUT OF THE BOX FOOD DRIVE

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**RUTH LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**R**uth Livingston Elementary School took a creative approach to the common practice of a canned food drive. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) linked the Out of the Box Food Drive to math standards to increase scores on the state math test on the topics of number systems and graphing. The ATP paired the food drive with hands-on math activities across grade levels. For example, students learned to collect, record, interpret, and evaluate data. They made individual, classroom, grade level, and school-wide bar graphs to report the number of donations collected each day.

As a project kick-off, the ATP worked with the Union Gospel Mission to design a PowerPoint presentation on who would receive the food and why the school was participating in the drive. Teachers shared the presentation in their classrooms. They discussed how many families would benefit from a large number of donations, and why community service is important to the students, the school, and people in need. Students brought home flyers about the drive to share with their families and the drive was publicized on the school and district websites.

Out of the Box Food Drive was conducted for one week. Each day was linked to a different category of food item. For example, on Monday, students brought breakfast foods, followed by canned fruits and vegetables, proteins, grains, and miscellaneous. There were math related challenges. For example, it was decided that a box of ten oatmeal packets counts as a single donation, not ten.

Students were responsible for tallying their classroom's contributions each day by

category and reported the data to the teacher in charge. "Students were observed collaborating with each other and having conversations about what to bring to donate to the community," said the ATP chair.

The results of the drive were, indeed, Out of the Box! The school collected 4 482 food items weighing 2,800 pounds. "The amount collected by the Livingston kids is about four times the amount collected by any other school," said a representative from the Union Gospel Mission. "This shows the difference between living in a community and being a community." "It was great to see the school come together for such a good cause," said a parent.

Over 915 students and their families participated in the drive, by donating food and by graphing results. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) partnered with the ATP to reward the class in each grade that collected the largest number of food items. These students celebrated with root beer float parties which cost \$175. The Boys and Girls club in this growing rural community recognized all students participating in the drive.

Parent and community volunteers collected cartons to pack and transport the goods. This big job was completed with the use of one family's horse trailer. The ATP suggests that other schools interested in running food drives develop creative ways to count donations to keep the tallies accurate and to reinforce the application of math in the real world.

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# PI NIGHT

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**WESTERN GREENBRIER MIDDLE SCHOOL  
CRAWLEY, WV**

**M**ath is a critical part of our world, but it is difficult to make middle-grades math understandable and enjoyable to students and their families. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Western Greenbrier Middle School knew that unlocking the language of math and linking math to familiar activities would help students and parents reinforce skills and concepts taught in class and increase math confidence. Pi Night set these goals and aimed to have some fun with math.

All teachers were given information about pi—3.14—the irrational number used to determine the area and circumference of a circle. Pi is, in fact, the number of times the radius of a circle (one half the distance of the diameter) can be used as an arc to measure the distance around the circle—the circumference—using the formula  $C=\pi d$  or  $C=2\pi r$ , where  $d$  is the diameter and  $r$  is the radius). Students find the circumference by multiplying pi (3.14) times the length of the diameter of a circle or twice the radius. Pi also is important for finding the area of a circle using the formula  $A= \pi r^2$  or 3.14 times the square of the radius. In real life, knowing the diameter of a circular track, students might want to know how far around they must run. Knowing the area of a circular stage, students might want to know how much smooth flooring they must purchase to cover the stage. There are real-world applications of pi ( $\pi$ ).

Because it is an irrational number, pi is a decimal with an endless number of digits. The more digits of pi that are used, the more accurate the computation. However, students mainly use the value 3.14 to represent Pi ( $\pi$ ).

Math and other teachers selected fun

math activities linked to math standards and prepared students to a class activity on Pi Night. There were many stations with activities such as the following. Spin Art—conducted by students and the art teacher using the digits of pi to guide their creations. Guess the Area of the Pie—the person closest to the correct answer won the pie. Digits of Pi—to memorize and say as many digits of pi as possible. Pin the Midpoint in the Circle—blindfolded students tried to attach a small circle with its push-pin to the exact center of a hula hoop attached to foam board. Capacity Exchange—to convert standard measures to equivalent forms.

Parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members were leaders, monitors, and participants of the activities. Math teachers requested many of the school's Partners in Education and other businesses to donate dinners, materials for activities, and gift cards for prizes. Refreshments of circular pizza, pies, cookies, and soda were sold, with the proceeds going toward the purchase of Math Field Day t-shirts for students.

The school wanted to hold Pi Night on March 14—3.14—but had to reschedule it due to winter weather. Still, over 100 participants enjoyed the activities. One parent was surprised, "I never knew that changing measurements was so easy!" A teacher happily reported, "Everyone is having a blast!" The ATP may improve and add games in the future, while maintaining the spirit of math fun and learning.

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# EGG-STRAVAGANZA!

**EDISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**T**here are many designs for Family Science Nights, where parents learn about the school’s science curriculum and students and parents enjoy hands-on science activities together. A parent on the Edison Elementary School Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) had a creative idea—an Egg-Stravaganza based on challenges linked to the common egg. The design spotlighted the importance of STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math) with a unique focus on E for Engineering (and E for Edison).

The ATP invited all fourth and fifth graders and their families to spend an evening using recycled materials to build carriers that would prevent eggs from breaking when dropped. The families spent an hour constructing carriers out of donated materials such as cereal boxes, egg cartons, rubber bands, and cotton balls that had been collected over the previous month.

Ten teachers came, too. Earlier in the day, they fueled students’ interest in Egg-Stravaganza by conducting an entertaining egg drop demonstration on the playground. One teacher created a superhero cape for her egg, while another added a parachute to his. Afterward, they distributed stickers to the students to wear on their shirts to remind their families to attend. The families had already received invitations in both Spanish and English. More than 100 students and their parents participated. “I was so tired after work and really wanted to stay home,” said a parent, “but now that I’m here, I’m really glad I came.”

After the students and families engineered their egg carriers, they turned them over to local firefighters. The firefighters took the carriers to the top of a fire ladder on a truck in a safety-zone on the school parking lot. They dropped each carrier from the same height, as the students and families watched with great expectations. A local Eagle Scout

kept track of which egg carriers successfully protected the contents. Students ran to pick up their carrier after impact to see if the egg was unbroken. The classroom with the greatest number of effective egg carriers was declared the winner.

“Students benefited by being inspired to engage in hands-on science experiments with their families,” explained the ATP Co-Chairs. “They learned that science and engineering activities don’t require expensive equipment—just common household materials and imagination!” “I can’t believe my egg survived!” exclaimed a student. “Look how far it fell!”

The egg drop wasn’t the only fun event of the evening. An engineering student from a local university ran an activity in the gym involving eggs and catapults. The principal supervised a station where students competed in building a life-sized Lincoln Log Cabin. An “egg-sticle” course set up by a teacher was popular. Students navigated the obstacles while balancing an egg on a spoon.

The eggs used throughout the evening were near expiration and had been donated by local grocery stores. Egg-Stravaganza was a community effort, from the donation of the eggs and recycled materials to the participation of the Eagle Scout, firefighters, and university student.

Edison’s ATP noted that since the school started implementing family science activities, students’ scores on standardized tests have risen nearly 20%. Egg-Stravaganza was an engaging way to teach students and their families basic engineering principles and to strengthen relationships of home, school, and community.

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# IF YOU TEACH THEM...THEY WILL GROW

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**DOLBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
**LAKE CHARLES, LA**

**A**t Dolby Elementary School, growing a healthy student body and school community starts with nutrition. When the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers at the school noticed that students were not making good food choices at lunch, they created a school vegetable garden to teach students and their families about the importance of healthy eating with an emphasis on a plant-based diet. They discovered that the vegetable garden was an excellent way to teach students about nutrition and to develop interesting lessons in math and science. As a bonus, creating the garden strengthened the school’s relationship with families and the community.

To acquire funds for the garden, a teacher at the school read about the Teaching Gardens Grants, applied for, and won a \$10,000 grant. Dolby became the first recipient of the American Heart Association’s Teaching Garden Grants in Southwest Louisiana. The school set up a Teaching Garden Committee, which included representatives from community sponsors, including The Christus St. Patrick’s Hospital (the project’s sponsor), Our Garden Grows, and the Green Gate Garden Center. The committee met monthly for six months throughout the winter, and communicated with the school staff and ATP by regularly attending Monday night faculty meetings.

By spring, the Committee was ready to organize the planting of the garden. The project was split into four day-long phases—Build Day, Dirt Day, Plant Day, and Harvest Days. First, fifth-grade math students learned about measurement, area, and perimeter in order to assemble planter boxes for the garden. Next, every student at the school was asked to shovel and fill buckets of soil to fill the planter boxes. After this, local master gardeners advised the school about which vegetables to select. Together school staff, family members, and students planted the seeds. Finally, the school

celebrated the garden by hosting Harvest Days for students and the community in the spring and fall. Each phase of the work was supported by 10-20 parents, grandparents, and community members. Some volunteers came to help students build and plant the garden. Others volunteered to water the garden during school vacations and pull weeds.

At the Fall Harvest Day, students enjoyed eating raw vegetables from the garden. Most learned that they liked these healthy foods. “I tried corn this year. I love it!” said one fourth-grader. The Spring Harvest Day entitled “From Garden to Plate” featured a master chef who taught students how to harvest, wash, cut, prepare, and cook the vegetables.

Students and families were so engaged and invested in the school garden that many began their own vegetable gardens at home. “I help my uncle with his garden. We planted watermelon, cucumbers, collards, and tomatoes. I water them and pick the weeds,” one student claimed.

In all, 485 students, 52 school staff members, 45 parents and family members, and 15 community members worked together to grow the garden. “Getting our parents, grandparents, and community members involved in the garden was the biggest success for our school,” the assistant principal reflected. “It helped to build some new partnerships within our community, and allowed our students to see that people believe in them and our school.” The seeds of partnerships have been planted to produce healthier students and stronger family and community partners at Dolby.

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# OUR PARENTS ARE OUT OF THIS WORLD

D'IPPOLITO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

VINELAND, NJ

**A**n extraterrestrial visitor would have felt right at home at D'Ippolito Elementary School when the school was decorated to look like outer space, complete with a rocket, glow-in-the-dark signage, and teachers dressed as aliens. School staff, students, and their families gathered to enjoy a meal on Mars, learn about space, and celebrate the fact that Our Parents Are Out of this World. The combined event celebrated National Parent Appreciation Day—a school tradition. “It sets a tone and helps to define the relationship we hope to have with our parents,” said the Principal. Honoring parents also encourages volunteerism and increases family engagement in their students’ education.

Families were invited, by mail, a month in advance. They were reminded about the science-themed dinner in the school newsletter, on the district calendar, and in an announcement on the marquis in front of the school. These efforts brought 224 students, 237 parents and grandparents, 41 teachers, and 7 community members to Our Parents are Out of this World.

The participants were welcomed with alien hats and glow-in-the-dark bracelets at the sign-in table. Families began their space odyssey by traveling through a glowing portal in the school lobby where they encountered aliens—costumed staff members. Next, they boarded a rocket in the cafeteria. They watched a video of the rocket blasting off, traveling through space, and landing on Mars.

The families were escorted to a Red-Planet Dinner served by alien-teachers in the gym. The gym was decorated with red lighting, red lanterns, and red tablecloths to represent Mars’ red terrain. Even the meal was red: the families ate pasta and meatballs, BBQ pork sandwiches, red leaf salad, and red velvet cake. The point was well taken. “My kids were in

awe of the scenery and all of the Martians!” exclaimed a parent.

After dinner, families enjoyed a variety of educational space-related activities such as a Prismatic Laser Light Show entitled Space Science Spectacular, a Star Lab planetarium display of the constellations, and a Jedi training session in using a light saber, provided by a local martial arts instructor. Other highlights included playing Space Word Bingo, taking family photos with an alien, and playing NASA for Kids in the computer lab. In preparing these activities, teachers addressed New Jersey Common Core Standards in Science.

Our Parents are Out of this World cost \$3,680 and was funded by a New Jersey Education Association Pride Grant. This was a true community effort. Parents donated decorations, created the rocket launch video and music, and assisted new families as they walked through the sessions. Local businesses provided signs, backdrops, and the laser light show. Students set up chairs and tablecloths in the gym for dinner, and inflated and deflated hundreds of aliens and Jedi swords. Teachers and administrators designed the sessions, ordered supplies, greeted guests in costume, and helped to clean up afterward.

“The kids loved Star Lab. It was very educational,” a parent said. “It was great fun for the family,” reported more than one earthling. Students gained science vocabulary skills and learned about constellations in the night sky. The other-worldly evening set a strong foundation for educators and families in the diverse and creative D'Ippolito Elementary School to work together right here—in New Jersey—on earth.

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# STUDENT-CENTERED SCIENCE FAIR

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**ROBERT FROST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**A** Science Fair is even more exciting, students at Robert Frost Elementary School discovered, when real scientists are involved. Although fifth-graders at the school have held an annual Science Fair, this year the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) added new components. The team integrated community partners in the Student-Centered Science Fair and invited all grades to participate in a school-wide Fair. More than 200 students displayed their science projects and shared their findings with teachers, over 300 family members, and with 30 local scientists, engineers, and technology experts who served as judges.

The expanded Fair brought students, families, and community members together to focus on STEM—science, technology, engineering, and math—learning. This required good planning and preparation. The ATP formed a Science Fair Committee months ahead of time. This committee used guidelines from [www.sciencebuddies.org](http://www.sciencebuddies.org) on how to organize a Fair and increase participation.

The committee announced the event in advance to teachers at a staff meeting. Teachers were provided with a PowerPoint presentation about the Fair to share with their own students to help generate buzz. Students received information to bring home about the Science Fair rules. Over the next few weeks, each student identified a question and had it approved, planned the scientific method to address the question, conducted experiments, and designed posters to display their results.

Families were invited to the Science Fair via a flyer and reminders were sent home with students. The committee also sent a press release about the Fair to the local news media.

The committee agreed that hosting the Fair in the gym would be too noisy, so they assigned students to set up their projects in various classrooms. The projects were grouped

by science discipline. Students set up their displays a day in advance of the Fair and practiced their presentations.

At the Fair, the judges met with each student to learn about his or her project, while families browsed all of the displays. The students loved discussing their work with the visiting scientists, and their parents were impressed. "It seems magnificent to me that my son understands more about the science of things and methods," one parent commented.

Unlike the traditional Science Fair, the Student-Centered Science Fair had no first, second, or third-place winners. Instead, judges awarded certificates recognizing positive aspects of the projects. For example, an Edward Jenner Award went to the student with the most thoughtful scientific question. An Isaac Newton Award went to the most "moving" experiment, which was located in the room for Physics projects. Family members, students, and other attendees voted for their favorite project. One winner from each grade level was awarded the People's Choice ribbon.

The committee sent personal thank you notes to all judges who participated. One wrote in return, "Thank you for the opportunity to be a judge. I really enjoyed the opportunity to interact with your students as we discussed the elements of their science projects. I was impressed by their enthusiasm for their work."

The ATP reflected on the Fair. It helped address a school goal to increase rigor and relevance in science instruction. One ATP member put this in perspective, saying, "...it is truly inspiring to know that people who attend might leave with a greater understanding of or curiosity about science."

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# A.C.H.I.E.V.E.

## AMISTAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

KENNEWICK, WA

Twice a month, from 5:30-6:30 p.m., families head to Amistad Elementary School on a Friday night to relax, socialize, and learn strategies to support their children's learning at home. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) describes the atmosphere of these workshops as "festive," with smiles and laughter in abundance.

"We all learn how to work together and learn together," a parent said. About 60 parents and 120 of their children engaged in activities to better understand how to create positive home learning environments, how to use household items to practice math skills, and how to ask questions to improve reading comprehension.

The ATP calls the monthly meetings Amistad Campus Home Involvement Excellence Via Education, or A.C.H.I.E.V.E. The team developed the workshops last year after asking teachers what families need to know about helping their children at each grade level. The team sent ATP event calendars and flyers home to invite families to join the meetings.

Teachers made personal calls to "focus families" whom they believed might benefit from attending. On workshop days, students received stickers to wear to remind their families about the A.C.H.I.E.V.E meeting. "We found that it is best to invite early and invite late," the ATP Chair explained.

Each workshop began with a bilingual icebreaker conducted in English and Spanish. Playing "people bingo" and similar games enabled parents, students, and school staff members to get to know each other and established a comfortable environment. For the first half hour, teachers, Boy Scouts, and other volunteers escorted students to various classrooms or to the gym for enriching activities, while their parents learned grade-specific tips on how to support their child's education at home. The informational sessions for parents were conducted in English and in Spanish. Then, the groups reunited and all parents and

children enjoyed a hands-on activity together.

At the first A.C.H.I.E.V.E meeting, teachers and the principal explained the importance of having a dedicated, organized space at home where students could complete their homework. In the second half of the meeting, parents and children worked together to design a homework center with decorations of tools that students use with math and reading assignments.

At the next meeting, parents learned how to reinforce classroom lessons while doing daily chores at home. Then, parents and children used masa (tortilla dough) to form, numbers, make patterns, and solve multiplication and geometry problems.

At another session, teachers modeled how to ask questions to increase students' reading comprehension. They demonstrated how to ask students about the setting of a story and character development, or to make predictions and inferences about the story. Parents and children, then, read together, with parents practicing to ask the probing questions.

Families completed surveys after each meeting. The ATP used the parents' feedback to improve the A.C.H.I.E.V.E. workshops. Overall, parents loved having time to build positive relationships with teachers and other parents, and learning how to help their students succeed. The 20 teachers involved liked getting to know families in a more casual setting. They reported fewer behavioral problems from their students during the school day.

Amistad Elementary will continue to host monthly workshops to strengthen partnerships, extend parents' social networks, and increase student learning. These are real A.C.H.I.E.V.E.-ments!

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# BRIGGS AMAZING RACE: FAMILY EDITION

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**BRIGGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC**

Families who enjoyed watching the popular TV show *The Amazing Race* were given the chance to participate in an education-themed scavenger hunt at Briggs Elementary School—a large, diverse school in Florence, South Carolina. Over 200 parents, children, community members, and teacher gathered to complete fun activities in the computer lab, gym, science lab, art classroom, nurse’s office, and other locations. The Briggs Amazing Race: Family Edition enabled them to get to know more about the school, teachers, and school staff in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

The school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed the scavenger hunt to increase attendance at the school’s annual November family activity. Attendance generally lagged at meetings held the week before Thanksgiving. The ATP knew that an appealing activity could boost attendance. The Briggs Amazing Race was publicized in flyers, on the school’s Facebook page and website, in class newsletters, on school displays, and in the principal’s monthly newsletter.

The ATP emphasized academic content in response to families’ requests on a survey for involvement activities focused on school subjects and student learning. Several ATP members, with input from the chairpersons of each grade level, developed “clue sheets” based on learning standards for students in grades K, 1-2, and 3-6. The clues, written in rhyme, directed participants to various locations in the school where teachers and staff conducted activities that reinforced class lessons in math, English/Language Arts, and Science/Social Studies, and other enrichment subjects. At each stop, teachers initialed the families’ Amazing Race clue sheets, and at the final destination took a ticket from each family, which was entered in a raffle for a grand prize.

For example, a Kindergarten reading/writing clue told families: “Mrs. Haynes is trying to make some words, but isn’t sure they are right. Please go help here make them so she can go home tonight.” At Mrs. Haynes room, students and families solved three puzzles linked to the beginning and ending sounds of words. For other grades, one clue directed: “Science is fun. Science is neat. Report to the Science Lab for a real treat.” Students and families conducted grade specific experiments, including dissecting a diaper and testing absorbency, and using tornado tubes, slime, and dry ice. In grades 3-6, a clue urged: “Ms. McFadden keeps you busy working on your art skill. This time she mixed up some famous paintings. Help her if you will.” When sent to the library, students were asked to find particular authors or books on the shelves. Activities in the gym and computer lab demonstrated other skills.

At each location, the activities were fun and informative about students’ subjects and classes. The ATP and all of the teachers were well organized with planned carefully so that grade-specific activities were clear and so the different grade levels would race to different locations without getting in each others’ way. Participants were fortified with bottles of water and granola bars.

Teachers and families raved about the event. “This was fun to do with my child,” said a parent. “It allowed me the opportunity to meet more of the teachers and learn about the school and the daily activities provided for my child.” The ATP knows that the hard work that went into creating the clues and activities can be used in the future for the next Briggs Amazing Race: Family Edition.

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# DONUTS AND DATA WITH DAD

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**SUNSET MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**SUNSET, LA**

**R**ecord-breaking cold weather did not deter 80 parents from heading to Sunset Middle School one morning last winter to learn about the new Common Core State Standards. What were the standards? What do they mean for student learning? How can parents help their children meet the academic goals for the year? These were a few questions on parents' minds.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) made a special effort to boost participation by fathers and other father-figures in students' lives by calling the Common Core meeting Donuts and Data with Dad. Mothers, grandparents, and others were welcome to attend. The title helped—mostly dads and other male role models for students attended the breakfast meeting.

The ATP publicized Donuts and Data with Dad in several ways. Students were given flyers to take home with a section for families to RSVP. An announcement was placed in the Community Events section of the local newspaper. Text message reminders were sent to parents using the school's automated communication system. The ATP believed that this publicity-package would help many parents make time to attend the breakfast meeting. Coffee, hot chocolate, and donuts were served.

At the school, dads and other family members were greeted by ten ATP members and 15 teachers. They socialized and enjoyed breakfast, and received information prepared by the school's Instructional Specialist. The handouts were personalized for each family, and included the student's test scores in language arts, math, science, and social studies from 2013 and the target for improving skills for the upcoming state test in the spring of 2014. Families appreciated receiving information specific to their children.

The school Parent Educator and principal welcomed everyone, and shared an overview of the Common Core State Standards. Parents were curious. Information outlined what students at each grade level should know and be able to do in specific subjects. The Instructional Specialist explained how the curriculum and teachers' instructional methods would help students meet the standards. The Science Coordinator explained specific curricular changes. The presenters also shared strategies that parents could use at home to support their child's learning. "This was great information," said a dad.

The district's Supervisor of School Choice and Accountability attended and was pleased by the number of parents at the breakfast. She thanked them for participating and praised the school for the academic advances its students made in the past few years. Sunset Middle School, she reported, with about 70% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, had been named a "Top Gains School" in St. Landry Parish. After the presentations, family members were encouraged to visit their students in their classrooms.

Donuts and Data with Dad was a great way to strengthen the connections of educators with families. Dads, moms, and others gained a clear sense of what their students needed to achieve in the upcoming months and were ready to help them reach these goals. As students move through the middle grades, all parents will need information on Common Core State Standards and how to work as partners with teachers to help students advance their skills.

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# FALL FOR LEARNING MATH AND READING NIGHT

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## CHICOT PRIMARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER MABELVALE, AR

Chicot, a school in the Little Rock School District, serves students PreK-2, starting at three years old. A large school of over 800 students, Chicot's students and families have diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, with 60% African American, 30% Latino, and 10% White. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) knows that helping families support their young children with early reading and math skills will enable parents to continue to guide their children across the grades. The ATP designed and implemented Fall for Learning Math and Reading Night to show families what their children were learning in class and how they could reinforce and celebrate the same math and literacy skills at home.

The combined focus on math and literacy skills was scheduled at the same time as the school's Book Fair to increase attention and attendance. The Book Fair also gave families the opportunity to purchase high-interest children's books to advance reading skills and positive attitudes about reading. The PTA donated funds so that each child could select one free book for their home library. Community members and the PTA also supported Fall for Learning with donations. The district donated three computers that were raffle prizes at the event.

The young students at Chicot served as ambassadors at Math and Reading Night as they escorted their parents to designated classrooms. In each classroom, teachers provided an overview and examples of math and literacy skills that students were learning, with information on why the skills were important at each grade level. One student reported, "Thank you for teaching my

parents the work we do at school. Now, they can help me more with my homework."

Teachers created math and literacy games by grade level linked to state standards for parents and children to take home to reinforce and practice the skills they learned about at school. A parent thanked them, saying, "This was a great experience [with ideas] that I can take home and share with my child."

The ATP, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and community leaders collaborated to plan and implement Math and Reading Night. Over 125 parents, 80 students, 21 teachers, and 5 community members participated at the event—more than expected. Refreshments were served and childcare was provided for very young children.

The ATP team achieved its goal for engaging many parents in their young child's learning. Students benefitted from seeing their parents at school talking and working with their teachers. They will benefit from the games for parents and children to practice early reading and math skills.

At Chicot, a Parent Center offers resources to parents, including books on parenting, books with tapes to support reading, supplies for students, videos, and computer access. These resources are always available, but it also is important to have events like Math and Reading Night to reflect the school's mission to work together with parents to set students on a path to success in school.

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# GOAL SHARING NIGHTS

**ROWENA CHESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**A** folder and a lot of support was all that was needed for each student at Rowena Chess Elementary School to achieve important learning and behavioral goals. The students were guided to set personal goals and monitor and record progress throughout the year.

Teachers directed students to identify their own goals in reading, math, behavior, and attendance. The students were shown how to track progress toward their goals via charts and graphs. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) hosted three Goal Sharing Nights throughout the year for individual students to present the content of their folders to their parents and teachers.

"Goals give us something to work toward and a sense of accomplishment," said the ATP chair. "Goal Sharing Nights," she added, "helped us create a building-wide campaign of setting and sharing goals."

To make the Goal Sharing Nights fun and rewarding for students, the ATP awarded a pizza party to the classrooms with the highest rates of family participation. The ATP also created a candy estimation jar contest. For a week before each Goal Sharing Night, an estimation jar full of candy donated by a community partner was displayed in the main office. On Goal Sharing Night, students guessed how many pieces of candy were in the jar. The student with the most accurate guess won the jar. Parents were also incentivized to participate. Each Goal Sharing Night featured a raffle with prizes for parents. The prizes cost \$200. More than 300 students and 200 parents attended.

Students quickly found they enjoyed sharing their goals and progress with their parents, who were proud to see their children's plans and records. "I'm excited to see my

child's goals and achievements for the year," said one.

Teachers also liked the opportunity to build relationships with the families in a warm, supportive environment that changed the nature of a parent-teacher conference. They, too, were proud of their students' dedication and accomplishments. More than 45 teachers and administrators participated in the practice.

Best of all, Goal Sharing Nights resulted in stronger standardized test scores. "We believe that this activity is one of the factors contributing to our overall academic growth and success," the ATP chair explained. "Our school has been recognized by the district and the state for excellence in English Language Acquisition and Spanish, reading, language, and math scores."

Organizing Goal Sharing Nights was simple. The ATP publicized the schedule of student-led parent-teacher conferences via flyers, daily intercom announcements, and reminder labels attached to students' shirts. The ATP also met before and after each Goal Sharing Night to review the activities and rates of participation, and to consider ways to make the next one run even more smoothly.

Based on the positive feedback and improved test scores, it is clear that Goal Sharing Nights are an effective way to score with the entire school community. Goal Sharing Nights gave a useful structure for students to set their own goals and then conduct student-led parent-teacher conferences to share their work and progress. Students, parents, and school staff all benefitted from this practice.

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# MONSTER MATH AND SPOOKY SCIENCE

**EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

Families, school staff, and community members enjoyed an evening of tricks and treats at Emerson Elementary School last October. No, it wasn't Halloween. It was Monster Math and Spooky Science Night—an activity to engaging students, parents, and the larger community in STEM education. The goal, too, was to demonstrate activities that could help students practice math and science skills at home. At Emerson, more than 90% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and over 60% are English Language Learners.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) began planning in mid-September by asking English and Bilingual teachers at each grade level to create at least two activities for participants to use math or science skills in a fun way to reinforce grade-specific standards. The ATP printed lists of the activities for students to check off as they completed them. Flyers, personal invitations, signs, and the school's reader board encouraged families to attend.

The ATP also purchased door prizes, including math games, flash cards, and notepads. They ordered cookies from a local baker. The cost of prizes and refreshments was \$200, which was covered by ATP funds.

On Monster Math and Spooky Science Night, about 200 students and 65 parents were greeted at the school's entrance by the principal and the ATP chair. Each attendee signed in and students picked up the activity checklist. Messy activities were located in the gym and the others were arranged in classrooms throughout the school. Signs were placed outside the rooms to announce the activities. Teachers facilitated several of the activities, while 20 community members from local

science groups conducted others.

One favorite activity was Spider Skip Counting, in which each child grabbed a handful of toy spiders. Each spider was marked with a certain number of points. The children had to skip count based on the sum of points on their spiders.

Another highlight was the Pumpkin Ring Toss. Students tossed glowing rings around the stems of pumpkins. Each pumpkin was marked with a number. Depending on the students' grade levels, they had to add or multiply the number of points of their successful rings to complete the activity.

At each activity, students were able to demonstrate math or science skills for their parents that could be reinforced with similar games at home. Throughout the event, a teacher took photos of the students and families to document the fun.

As attendees departed, ATP members distributed cookies and solicited feedback. What did the students and families enjoy most? What would they like to try again? The responses were extremely positive. "We enjoyed spending time with our kids and learning more about what they are doing at school," said a parent. "I liked being able to build things with my parents!" a student added.

Monster Math and Science Night was a great way to show that learning STEM skills need not be frightening, especially when they are conducted at school with friendly teachers, family, and community members. Students, teachers, and parents all benefitted from the information gathered and the interactions enjoyed.

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# STEM 4 R NIGHT

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**WARREN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
ST. PETERS, MO**

**4**R Nights at Warren Elementary School strengthen the school's core values of Respect, Responsibility, Relationships, and Results, linked to the character education curriculum. Last year, the STEM 4 R Night was particularly popular, with its focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) education. Students, families, and school staff gathered at the school to build rockets, practice computer coding, engineer LEGOs, and complete other educational activities that also were fun.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) advertised STEM 4 R by distributing flyers and by posting announcements in the school newsletter and on the website. Students made signs that were posted around the school. Over 150 students, 117 parents, 25 teachers, and 4 community members attended STEM 4 R Night.

Attendees received family passports at the welcome table in the lobby. The forms guided them to record something interesting that they learned at each activity station organized by STEM category.

Science activities included a rocket launching station. Students built rockets out of paper tape and launched them through a hula hoop using a pvc and bicycle pump pressurized chamber. At a butterfly station, students used their art skills to color pictures of butterflies to accurately represent specific species, and learned how insects and animals use natural coloring to blend into the background to remain safe from predators. Families learned about surface tension in an activity that required students to put drops of water on a penny.

Technology activities included a coding station, where students used a computer code

to create Valentine's Day cards on Chromebooks. They were guided by two web-based tutorials: [code.org](http://code.org) and [codeacademy.com](http://codeacademy.com).

Engineering activities featured a marshmallow architectural challenge. Families were invited to build structures out of marshmallows, spaghetti, masking tape, and string. A judge used an iPad to chart the results. The family with the tallest structure at the end of the evening received an award. Another activity challenged students and families to design a package for a single Pringle chip that would withstand dropping and stacking.

Math activities required estimating, measuring, and calculating skills. For example, students calculated their age in seconds, days, months, and years, and guessed the number of items in various different-sized containers.

Two more STEM activities were organized. Volunteers from the St. Louis Children's Museum set up a science exhibit where students could learn about magnets and electrical circuits. Fifth-grade students organized an area where students could demonstrate robotics and engineering using their LEGO-building skills.

The event was supported by many parent volunteers and school staff members, and cost just \$125. "This is a low cost event, but it builds strong parent-child connections within our school community," a school administrator noted. "Students benefited from building relationships and learning about STEM concepts and challenges." The students put it simply: "More STEM! It was great!"

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## 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.*





# CRADLE LOVE

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**HALL HIGH SCHOOL  
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

**C**oncerned that teen mothers, teen fathers, and expecting teens were struggling to attend class and graduate on time, Hall High School designed Cradle Love—a lunchtime informational clinic sponsored by community partners. The activity supported goals in the School Improvement Plan to improve students’ health and to increase parental engagement to improve student attendance, achievement, behavior, and on-time graduation. The two-hour meeting aimed to educate teen parents and their parents on how to stay in school while raising a child, how to deal with stress, and how grandparents may be valuable partners in the education of the teen parent and the grandchildren. Twenty-one teen parents and 15 of their parents attended the discussion.

During Cradle Love, 24 community partners described resources that they offer to teen parents and their parents. For example, representatives from the Department of Human Services talked about Medicaid and daycare vouchers. A public librarian spoke about free books available for babies. There were presentations about breast feeding, peer counseling, contraception, mental health, and college scholarships for teen parents. The meeting was held in a separate building on campus so that the attendees would feel comfortable about attending.

The teens were grateful for the information. “I was a little scared about having the baby, but thanks to the newborn care booth, I feel like I can do a good job,” said one expecting teen. “The clinic was very helpful in finding daycare for my baby,” added another. The parents of the teens also were appreciative. “I’m glad this clinic was held to show my daughter what is in store for her and why she still needs to stay in school,” one parent confided.

Attendees enjoyed lunch together. The teen parents received gift bags filled with baby items donated by school staff and community partners. Going forward, the school plans to host a support group for teen parents and their families.

Hall High School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and faculty urge other schools to offer similar clinics. They acknowledged receiving some criticism at first. Some community members felt that it was inappropriate to “showcase” these teens by conducting a clinic just for them. However, the ATP, teachers, and staff explained that they were trying to provide teen parents with available resources that would, in fact, help them stay in school and graduate on time. The staff reported improved attendance and behavior by the teen parents and expecting teens immediately after Cradle Love.

“This is a hidden problem that [some] people in the school system are afraid to address for fear it will bring unwanted attention to their school,” explained a leader for partnerships. “We must correct this misconception and look at the bigger picture—teen parents need help. They need to know that we care only about helping them improve their current situation so they can progress toward graduation.”

Hall High School is taking a national leadership position by being forthright on the topic of school attendance and completion by teen parents. The school is supported by many health and education organizations in the community whose services will assist teen parents, expecting teens, grandparents, and the babies.

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# DADS IN THE DUGOUT

JOHN W. MOORE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC

**B**aseball icon Babe Ruth once said, “Baseball was, is, and always will be to me the best game in the world.” Agreeing with this, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at John W. Moore Intermediate School partnered with Francis Marion University’s baseball team. The goal was to strengthen relationships between students and their dads or other male role models, and to strengthen core character skills including good sportsmanship. The leaders hoped that Dads in the Dugout would provide a powerful bonding opportunity and result in improved student behavior at school and at home.

The activity began with an essay contest in which all 815 students at the school were invited to interview their father or a male role model and write about what they learned. The essay contest enabled girls and boys to deepen their relationships with their fathers, develop their communication skills, and polish their writing skills.

A series of communications publicized the essays and the day with FMU. This included notices home, RSVP invitations, flyers posted at the school, and information shared on TV monitors in the cafeteria and hallways. The Principal added her invitation for participation to her weekly phone call to parents. Over 115 students, 75 of their dads and role models, and every teacher from the school joined the FMU baseball team to play games, think about desirable character traits, and exercise good sportsmanship.

The FMU baseball coach kicked off the event by talking about the Moore Intermediate School’s ROAR program. ROAR aims to increase students’ Responsibility (making good choices); Opportunity (doing the right thing at school and at home); Accountability (owning up to one’s actions); and Respect

(treating adults and peers well in all settings). It was fitting for the FMU coach to reinforce the middle school’s initiative to encourage positive student behavior. The ten winners of the essay contest were announced and honored for their work.

The coach invited everyone to play baseball games and skill building activities at three stations. At each station, FMU college baseball players taught students basic baseball skills and modeled appropriate sportsmanship and character. The players also distributed ribbons and prizes and autographed a baseball for each student. The middle school students saw the college players as role models, too. “The FMU team and coach made this such a memorable event for our students and their fathers and male role models!” a teacher exclaimed.

At the conclusion of the event, everyone gathered for a feast of hot dogs, chips, and Cracker Jacks—a true baseball menu. The treats, materials, and prizes were purchased for \$500 using Title I funds and a \$1000 grant from FMU’s Center for Excellence for the Moore Intermediate School’s partnership program.

Dads in the Dugout knocked it out of the park. Said one student, “It was fun to spend time with my dad and the FMU baseball team!” “I had a fantastic time with my daughter and niece,” said one parent. “I am thrilled that Moore did this for us!” The game plan is to repeat Dads in the Dugout with FMU and to encourage the participation of more students, fathers, and other important males in students’ lives.

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# DISCUSSION BY AND FOR PARENTS OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS

FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL  
ST. CHARLES, MO

**T**ime flies when parents of middle-schoolers get together to talk about the challenges of raising healthy, successful, and respectful early adolescents. The Parent Involvement Team (PIT)—the school’s partnership team—and other teachers and staff at Francis Howell Middle School learned this, firsthand, last year when they hosted a roundtable—Discussion By and For Parents of Early Adolescents. Led by a professional counselor, the discussion offered parents a safe environment in which to share their experiences and solutions to common parenting concerns. Also, it was a perfect opportunity for the counselor to provide a few parenting tips and strategies for smoothing family relationships and improving student behavior at home and at school.

More than 30 parents attended the discussion, which was held at 7 p.m. on a weeknight in the school library. Over 100 more parents received notes by e-mail on the topics discussed. The counselor—who also was the parent of two students at the middle school—started with a short presentation. He discussed some key concepts from the field of psychology, including the importance of setting boundaries for early adolescents. “You are the parent, not the friend,” he advised. “Staying consistent is key. State consequences and stick with them.”

The counselor went on to suggest other ways for parents and children to build mutual respect. For example, he advised parents to explain decisions they make, rather than say “. . .because I said so.” They also should allow their children to make independent choices, such as what clothing to wear, and should support them when these choices are positive.

After the presentation, the counselor

presided over a Q & A session, which led to an animated group discussion among parents. The parents were eager to talk with each other about important challenges that arise in the middle grades. “This makes me feel better as a parent—that I am not alone with issues that come up,” one parent acknowledged. “I really like how open everyone can be in sharing their experiences,” agreed another. Others expressed eagerness to attend similar roundtable discussions in the future.

The Discussion By and For Parents of Early Adolescents was promoted using flyers and website announcements, and was also featured on the school’s Twitter timeline. There were no extra costs involved, beyond planning time and strong commitments.

Based on parents’ responses, the PIT, teachers, and administrators at Francis Howell Middle School plan to host discussions next year on a variety of parenting topics with different guest speakers for each session. They plan to videotape the presentations and share them using social media for parents who are unable to attend the discussions. The continuity of confidence of parents is very important for students’ success in school. Open and honest discussions by and for parents can help more parents guide their children through the middle grades.

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# FAMILY LEADERSHIP NIGHT

W. T. HENNING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SULPHUR, LA

**W**.T. Henning Elementary School won a grant to implement Leader in Me to develop students' leadership skills and good behavior. When teachers reported that parents were eager to learn about the new program, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned Family Leadership Night.

The Leader in Me or 7 Habits for Happy Kids is based on the book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen Covey. The adaptation for schools aims to enable students to take responsibility for their own learning and behavior, and make good decisions that will help them succeed in school. Students set goals and are given leadership roles. Teachers integrate the language of leadership and guidelines for student behavior into their classroom management, curriculum, and instruction.

The ATP spread the word about Family Leadership Night in the school newsletter, the automated phone message service, and on a sign in front of the school. The publicity resulted in high attendance—113 students, 88 parents, and 37 teachers. Community partners also played a role, as local restaurants and grocery stores donated dinner and volunteered to clean up. The ATP supplemented these donations with juice and water.

At Family Leadership Night, attendees gathered for a Synergy Assembly to celebrate students' academic, attendance, and leadership achievements with music, videos, and school cheers. "If you . . . put the students in the spotlight and give them the opportunity to show their leadership skills, attendance [at family activities] will be good," a teacher explained. "Featuring the students' best qualities rather than their deficiencies is a win-win for all."

Breakout sessions for parents presented details on the 7 Habits for Happy

Kids. Students were escorted by volunteer Key Club members from the local high school and school staff to several classrooms where they watched videos related to Leader in Me, read books, or played games.

In the discussion groups led by teachers and administrators, parents learned how the program guides their children. The goals for happy and successful students are to be proactive and responsible for one's attitudes and actions; have a plan for success; make a schedule putting school work first, before play; solve problems to produce win-win results; listen to understand others' views; work cooperatively to use everyone's strengths and talents; and create a balanced life with good health and good relationships at school, at home, and with friends. These goals may take a lifetime to achieve, but even young students can show that they are in charge of their attitudes, behavior, and learning.

Attendees commented on the meeting's good organization and information. "Glad we are a part of a great school and community," one participant said. Another parent thanked the school, saying, "It's a joy to see you go above and beyond—truly showing the love and compassion you all have for our children and each other."

Hamilton Elementary knows that with good guidance, students can take the lead for their learning and behavior in school and out. By sharing this information with parents, they can reinforce the same leadership skills at home, as students strive to complete homework, study for tests, and get along with siblings, friends, and other family members.

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# P.E.A.R.L.S.

## McLAURIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

One of the benefits of membership in NNPS is the ability to network with other schools to learn from each other. This was important at McLaurin Elementary School for addressing its goal to improve student behavior and good health. One project focused on a group of 4th grade girls who needed to improve behavior, study skills, and healthy food and beverage choices. McLaurin modeled its approach after a successful program featured in the NNPS book, *Promising Partnership Practices 2011*. McLaurin's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wrote for and were awarded a Center of Excellence grant from Francis Marion University to support P.E.A.R.L.S.—Positively Enthusiastic, Ambitious, & Responsibly Loyal Sisters.

The fourth grade teachers recommended girls who had leadership potential, but who were not measuring up. Parents were informed of the program and were asked to approve their daughter's participation in PEARLS. The girls and their advisor met monthly to discuss the purpose of the group and to plan activities to build leadership skills, help others, improve health, and increase their own success in school.

The students reviewed a video on You-Tube produced by the Fearless Lions at the Frank Porter Graham Elementary School in Chapel Hill, NC. It chronicled the transformation of students who gained respect for themselves and others. The girls also discussed other books, materials, and websites to aim for success.

The target group of girls was said to have changed for the better. Some PEARLS met important goals for Accelerated Reading and Math Masters because of the weekly checkups on school assignments. All improved behavior, were more aware of food choices, and selected appropriate clothing to wear to school. Some improved confidence in leadership roles. One

fourth-grade teacher observed one participant: "At one point she seemed very focused on boys. Since she became part of PEARLS, I haven't heard any boy talk at all." A third-grade teacher noted: "My third-grade girls look forward to becoming PEARLS next year in fourth grade."

During group meetings, discussions ranged from etiquette and manners to healthy food choices. The girls were asked to reflect on a topic and write their views in a journal at home. Often they used the journal to begin a conversation with a family member. Parents signed the journals and added notes, views, or questions for the PEARLS teacher. One parent wrote, "Thank you for teaching my daughter to be the best she can be."

Each month the PEARLS were given a calendar to keep track of the beverages they drank. The goal is to reduce the number of sugary drinks and increase the amount of water or low-sugar beverages that the girls drink. During warmer months, the group invited parents and other family members to Table Talk luncheons. The picnics were conducted to share more information about PEARLS meetings, goals, and results.

The project engaged the community by inviting guest speakers to the group meetings. These role models shared their stories and examples with the PEARLS. Thanks to the grant from COE, the school provided T-shirts for the girls in the group, purchased health and fitness resources, and conducted a field trip. An end-of-year celebration with family members, and school and district personnel, recognized the PEARLS who completed the program. Each girl received a piece of pearl jewelry to celebrate her accomplishments.

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# COMMUNITY CAREER AND RESOURCE FAIR

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**NORWICH TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
NORWICH, CT**

**T**hese days, it's not just high school seniors who are searching for job opportunities and crafting their careers. It's their family members, too. Knowing this, the student services team and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Norwich Technical High School hosted a Community Career and Resource Fair to give students and their parents opportunities to explore postsecondary employment and education programs in the area.

"The purpose of the Career and Resource Fair was to provide networking opportunities for our students and their family members to learn about possible careers in different companies," a school staff member explained. "This includes current and future opportunities for job shadowing, volunteering, internships, and part-time or full-time employment."

The ATP and other teachers compiled a list of organizations that might be interested in attending, ranging from local businesses to colleges to military recruiters. The school's social worker created a database and asked school staff, work-based learning partners, and members of the technical trade advisory committee to send suggestions. These contacts were then e-mailed or faxed formal invitations five weeks before the event. Nearly 80 representatives agreed to attend.

Teachers and other staff members talked about the Community Career and Resource Fair with their students and discussed appropriate networking behavior. They suggested that seniors bring copies of their resumes to give to prospective employers, and advised juniors to chat with work-based learning providers. They also gave freshmen and sophomores tips on how to engage in professional conversations.

Flyers advertising the Fair were included in student report card mailings to ensure that

families were aware of the opportunity. About 700 students and many of their parents visited the Fair.

The school's Culinary Arts students played a special role in the event. They prepared a lunch buffet for the career representatives, and ensured that there was plenty of coffee and pastries to keep energy high throughout the afternoon. The refreshments cost about \$500.

All attendees enjoyed the afternoon. The career representatives from businesses and other agencies and organizations had high praise for the students. One representative described the students as "unbelievably polite, friendly, and engaging." Another added that he was "impressed by [the students'] ability to approach a complete stranger and introduce themselves with a solid handshake."

Even if a participating organization did not have openings at the present time, students and parents from Norwich Tech could benefit from the insights and advice that representatives shared about their industries. Meeting the career representatives made the students even more excited about life after high school. The Fair was "awesome," according to one student. "It gave me a lot of opportunities to think about."

Norwich Tech plans to host a Career and Resource Fair at least every two years. They recommended that schools interested in implementing a similar activity prepare months in advance and distribute maps of booth locations to make navigation easy. Norwich Tech also recommends including families at the Fair so that the practice will truly benefit the entire school community.

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# INVOLVING PARENTS IN CAREER READINESS EVENTS

**UPPER MERION HIGH SCHOOL  
KING OF PRUSSIA, PA**

Selecting a college or career is an exciting part of the high school experience, but it also may be stressful to students and to parents. There are countless options to consider, many forms to fill, and difficult decisions to make. To provide as much information and support as possible to students and families, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Upper Merion High School launched a series of college-readiness workshops and hosted a college and career fair. The school district set a district-wide goal to prepare students for college or careers, provide information on postsecondary paths, encourage applications, and increase admission to colleges and career training programs.

In the fall, workshops were led by the high school’s college counselor. The ATP advertised the sessions using flyers, website announcements, and ConnectED (a mass notification service). Teachers regularly reminded students about the workshops, and encouraged them to attend with their families.

The workshops focused on topics such as college searching, admissions requirements, financial aid options and forms, structuring resumes, and writing college application essays. Students left the workshops with specific guidelines to complete steps in college applications. There were seven workshops on financial aid and FAFSA forms led by college financial aid officers. Parents and students were able to select a workshop that fit their schedules. Parents were very satisfied. “Thank you for providing the financial aid nights,” said one. “They are extremely helpful in trying to figure out how to pay for college.” This assessment was echoed by many others.

In the spring, the College and Career Fair offered students and families an opportunity to talk with college admissions representatives and local community members about their careers.

The ATP contacted the Community Alliance for a Safer Tomorrow (CAST) to

invite adults interested in giving presentations about their careers to come to the high school’s College and Career Fair. The ATP also asked students’ family members in various occupations to serve as career presenters. About 100 community members agreed to speak to students and parents.

Five hundred students and 150 of their family members attended the Career and College Fair, which was funded by the district and by donations. They enjoyed speaking with many of the presenters about their careers and their career paths. Students gathered information on the educational and behavioral requirements of specific careers or career clusters. This information would help students in grades 9-11 plan their high school courses, as well as their futures. One student remarked, “I was very excited to learn more about particular careers and I plan to enter the medical profession someday.”

The ATP solicited feedback after each event using Survey Monkey. Among the suggestions, they may consider how to create internships and long-term partnerships with the community members who participated in the fair.

College and career readiness is an important goal in every high school. The ATP realized that parents must be partners with school counselors and teachers in advising students about their options and helping students make decisions. Workshops on college entrance requirements and the Fair’s information and interactions on educational requirements for specific careers are two low-cost and effective approaches enabling high school students and their parents to plan for the future.

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# OCHOA CAREER FAIR

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**ELLEN OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**W**ould you like to meet and talk with a news anchor, an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), an environmental expert, and other professionals to learn more about their occupations and what it took to prepare for these careers? More than 600 students at Ellen Ochoa Middle School and their parents had the chance, last year, to hear from and talk with people in many interesting jobs at the Ochoa Career Fair.

Students were eager to learn more about careers and career paths that appealed to them. By hearing the professionals' histories, the students gained information to help them choose appropriate courses in high school. Even if the students change their minds about a specific profession, having an understanding of the education needed for particular types of jobs will set them on the right path to high school graduation with a plan for the future. "The sooner students determine their interests, the sooner families can begin planning for their students' paths to college or career training," a teacher noted.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) began planning the Ochoa Career Fair in the fall. ATP members surveyed students about their possible career interests. Each student completed a survey during a Language Arts class. The ATP used the results of the survey to determine which community partners to invite to the Career Fair.

ATP members and other Ochoa teachers recruited 43 local professionals in various occupations to come to the Career Fair. Each one was asked to bring a display board to share information about his or her career, including the education required for an entry position. The ATP also set up color-coded posters to indicate the occupational interest category for

each display. In that way, students could focus on the displays that met their individual interests.

The Career Fair was publicized with flyers. It was scheduled for a two-hour period in the cafeteria and gym. Students visited in groups of 30. They were taught in advance how to interact with the professionals. They prepared focused questions and conducted other conversations, which they found informative and enjoyable. "I'm looking forward to high school so I can get a head start on my career by taking the right classes," said an 8th grader who clearly knew the point of the Fair. The local professionals were pleased to meet the students. "Your students asked some really good questions," one declared.

Teachers collected feedback about the event from their students and the ATP evaluated the Fair at their next monthly meeting. They agreed that this was an important activity for strengthening students' confidence with adults and for increasing students' sense of purpose in selecting high school courses. All students attended the Fair, but only a few families. To increase parents' attendance, the ATP plans to provide more advanced notice of the date and time so that even employed parents may plan to attend.

"The more that we invest in students' dreams in middle school, the greater their potential for success in life," a teacher observed. "Students were very interested in the Career Fair and benefited greatly from the opportunity to connect with many productive people in the community."

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# PARTNERSHIP COMMUNITY MEETINGS: “TAKING IT TO THE STREETS”

**GREENBRIER EAST HIGH SCHOOL  
LEWISBURG, WV**

Parents of teens know that it can be a challenge to get their high school students to talk about their school programs. To facilitate communication between parents, high school students, and school staff, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Greenbrier East High School launched a series of six town hall-style partnership community meetings. Because each meeting was conducted at a different venue—from firehouses to a community college to an armory—the ATP dubbed the program Taking It to the Streets.

“We hoped to make parents, students, educators, and community members feel welcome,” explained an ATP Chairperson. The high school serves students from many small communities in a large rural area. It was important, then, to foster a sense of inclusion, togetherness, and school spirit in every part of the community.

A major goal of Taking It to the Streets was to provide information to families about local resources, opportunities, and services for their teens’ education. For example, the principal spoke about a new work-study initiative called Greenbrier University in which students may work half-days at The Greenbrier for union wages. This program, the principal explained, would equip participants with valuable workplace skills and could guide them to make informed career choices.

At one town-hall meeting, the school counselor for the senior class spoke about recent changes in education legislation. She also discussed changes in the high school’s math curriculum, standardized testing, required credits for graduation, ACT tests for admission to college, college requirements, Promise Scholarship requirements for financial aid from the state for tuition and fees at colleges in West Virginia. All of these topics affect

students’ completion of high school and entrance to college and other training programs. She distributed students’ individual transcripts to seniors or their family representatives to review to see if the student was on track for on-time graduation. She discussed tutoring resources in the community for students who needed extra academic help.

A presentation by one of the school’s Career and Technical teachers was another highlight in Take It to the Streets. The teacher discussed different college prep courses and vocational programs that were available to students.

The meetings were well-attended, thanks to phone calls and announcements on the radio, on the school’s website, and in local newspapers. Across venues, over 175 people joined a meeting, including 89 parents, 73 students, and 14 community members, plus school staff. Culinary Arts students prepared refreshments served at each meeting.

It is important to provide information to parents in clear terms so that they can discuss school programs and plans for the future with their high school students. In this way, Taking It to the Streets helped many parents talk with their teens, teachers, and counselors. Evaluations indicated that families, students, and school staff appreciated the town-hall meetings. One parent said, “I wish we had [this kind of meeting] when my older son was in school.” The Chairperson of the ATP noted, “We discovered that attendance at the town meetings was greater than at [school-based] open houses. This was a great opportunity to meet with parents and discuss their questions, comments, and concerns.”

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# POSTSECONDARY PLANNING: SPA DAY AND BREAKFAST DRIVE-BY

WASHINGTON-MARION MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 2

Students at Washington-Marion Magnet High School must make major decisions about completing high school and planning their futures in college or career training. Students often ask parents to help them plan for the future. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers and administrators at Washington-Marion planned two different engagement activities to increase parents' information about the school and their teen's education. Spa Day linked moms with their daughters who were studying Cosmetology at the school. Breakfast Drive-By informed all parents about the high-stakes tests that students must take to graduate from high school and enter college.

Spa Day. Mini facials, hand massages, foot soaks, make-up demonstrations, and toe polishing were some treatments on Daughters Pamper Mom Spa Day. Spa Day informed moms of the school's Cosmetology specialization, and made moms feel special at the high school. On Spa Day mothers and daughters came together for parents to experience the skills that their daughters were learning, and to obtain information on the resources at school and in the community to help students prepare for their End of Course (EOC) tests for graduation from high school and the ACT exam for college entrance.

On Spa Day, 20 moms were pampered by their daughters. This made a positive impression on the moms and confirmed for the daughters that they were being trained well and had a good start in their chosen field. The ATP and others at the school contacted local businesses for donations. One staff member from a local fitness club served as a guest speaker for the event.

On the day before Spa Day, students worked together to create a tranquil and relaxing spa-like atmosphere for their guests. They

planned selected treatments and how refreshments would be served. When the moms arrived that Saturday morning, they were escorted to the "spa" to receive the royal treatment from their daughters. One mom beamed, "I really enjoyed my special day. Getting a facial from my baby was the best part!" Parents also received related information to discuss career choices and postsecondary education with their daughters.

Parent Breakfast Drive-By. The ATP wanted to inform more parents of upcoming ACT and End of Course (EOC) prep classes. High school students take EOC tests in six subjects required for graduation—algebra, geometry, English II and III, biology, and U. S. history. There are classes available to prepare students to take these tests and do their best. As 125 parents dropped their teens off at school, teachers gave them a simple breakfast-in-a bag containing pastries, juice, and crackers. Attached to the bag was a flyer containing critical information about the two types of tests, including the minimum ACT scores required for acceptance to several universities in Louisiana, the criteria for passing EOC tests for graduation, and the dates when prep classes would be offered.

Both Spa Day and the Breakfast Drive-By were activities that reflected the school's mission to have educators and families work together to help all students learn, achieve, and succeed. Helping students complete high school on time and prepare for college entrance or career training is something that students, parents, educators, and community partners must do together.

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS

# PRE-REGISTRATION NIGHTS

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**LYFORD HIGH SCHOOL**  
**LYFORD, TX**

**S**tudents and their parents headed to Lyford High School for individual academic counseling appointments last February. The goal of these meetings? To help students in grades 9, 10, and 11 register for courses that would ensure that they graduate from high school and are prepared for the colleges or careers of their choice. “This activity gave students and parents time to ask questions about their future college and career plans. They were provided with specific information about their career interests,” a school staff member explained. “As a result, students were more focused in their classes and more concerned about their grades.”

Pre-Registration Nights also were beneficial for parents, who gained a better understanding of the school’s course registration process and how to collaborate with staff members to ensure their children were on the right track to succeed. “This is something new and I love it,” remarked one parent. “I am glad I came with my daughter to discuss her classes for the upcoming year and for her to start thinking of her goals after she graduates high school.” A teacher echoed this sentiment. “These pre-registration nights have been great—seeing the parents and students holding conversations about their classes and discussing what they want to be and do in the future,” she said.

Nearly 350 students and their parents participated. Ten teachers, who had been trained to address challenging questions about preparing for college and careers, met individually with each student and his or her parents for half an hour. The teachers used a script to ensure that all students and families received key information. Then, they went beyond the script to tailor the conversation to help each

student select courses that would help reach the stated goal. Each teacher scheduled four half-hour periods per night, from 5-7 p. m. Compensation for the teacher-counselors cost \$1,400. Combined with the cost of mailing pre-registration packets in advance, the activity cost about \$1,600.

Planning began in December. The staff compiled folders for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Each folder contained a course pre-registration form, an outline of graduation requirements, a class schedule, and the student’s current transcript. In January, the staff mailed the folders to students and their families, along with information on how to set up an appointment at Pre-Registration.

It was very important for students and families to keep these appointments. To address inevitable scheduling problems, the staff rescheduled appointments, as needed, via phone, text, or e-mail. For families who could not come to school at the scheduled times, the staff conducted home visits.

Pre-Registration Nights were successful in gathering families, students, and faculty for positive, goal-oriented, academic conversations. The comprehensive planning meant that every student could take courses that would meet their goals for on-time graduation and future plans. The responsive scheduling that included time at school or a home visit meant that at least one parent of every student knew that the teachers at the school wanted parents as partners who could guide and monitor their teens’ steps on the road through high school and into the future.

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# VAMOS A LA UNIVERSIDAD (WE ARE GOING TO COLLEGE)

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**VINAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
MIDDLETOWN, CT**

**T**he partnership team and teachers at Vinal Technical High School wanted to help Latino students and their families learn about their options for postsecondary education. They developed *Vamos a la Universidad (We Are Going to College)* to introduce them to local college students, faculty, and administrators. The high school students loved the opportunity to hear, firsthand, what college was like and were eager to learn what steps to take to go to college, themselves.

The program was designed by the high school's Spanish and Career Development teacher, who saw the need for more tailored programming for the school's Latino population. In partnership with the ATP and other school staff and community members, he planned a series of three events to introduce students and families to college life and to provide the information they needed to go to college.

The program launched in October, when a representative from the Connecticut Association of Schools met with parents and other family members to offer an overview of the college application process. She talked about scholarships available specifically for Latino students, and emphasized the importance of the SAT, noting that review sessions for the test were available nearby at Wesleyan University.

The next event was hosted by Manchester Community College. The college's financial aid director gave a presentation on how to apply for financial aid for college, the FAFSA form, and the many interesting programs on campus. Next, she led the students through an activity called "Creating Your College Story" in which they created Power Point presentations about their goals, how they would reach those goals, and how they would then give back to their community. Then, former Vinal students who currently attended the college gave a guided tour of campus. The day concluded with a

motivating speech by an ESL and Spanish professor in which she shared an essay written by a technical high school student that spoke to many concerns facing the Vinal students.

The final event in the three-part series took place at the University of Connecticut-Storrs campus. It was co-sponsored by the university's School of Education and its Puerto Rican/Latino Cultural Center. At this gathering, university staff gave an overview of the college admissions process. Latino students attending UC-Storrs shared their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds and spoke about why they had decided to go to college.

The Vinal students who participated in the program wrote reflections on what they had learned after each college visit. Their families also completed questionnaires to enable staff to evaluate, review, and improve the program. Said one student, "I liked how the college students came and talked with us about their experiences." "I learned about the multitude of programs that help students achieve academic success," added another. "The orientation was very diverse and full of students that were a great help in explaining college life."

College and career readiness is a state goal in Connecticut. At technical high schools like Vinal, the focus is on career readiness, but college readiness also is important and links to career choices and preparation. Vinal High School looks forward to continuing to support all of its students in their postsecondary plans and choices, including the Latino students. The faculty, students, and parents are eager to hear about the college decisions made by students who participated in *Vamos a la Universidad*.

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# FAMILY LITERACY AND FITNESS NIGHT

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**ELI WHITNEY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
HAMDEN, CT**

**W**hen it comes to multitasking, the Family Engagement Team (FET) at Eli Whitney Technical High School has learned to connect activities to engage and benefit more students, families, and members of the school community. Last spring, the partnership team organized the Family Literacy and Fitness Night to encourage support for and active participation in reading and exercise. Students, families, school staff, and community members gathered at the school one Friday night for yoga and Zumba sessions. They also listened to a presentation by a local librarian, took advantage of health screenings, learned about the school's tech system for students and parents on students' grades and progress, and enjoyed a healthy meal together.

The high school students ran most of the activities. The evening "provided an avenue for some of our students to assume leadership roles, which they executed with confidence and style," said the school social worker. Students taught the yoga and Zumba classes. Culinary Arts students cooked the meal. Others babysat younger attendees. Some volunteered to sing and rap as entertainment during dinner. "What a glimpse of the hidden talent in Eli students. Wonderful event!" a parent praised.

A New Haven public librarian joined the group. She gave a presentation about library programming tailored to teens, offered attendees the chance to sign up for a library card, and distributed free books to the students. Nearby, a nurse offered free blood pressure screenings and tips on how to stay healthy. A school staff member taught parents how to use PowerSchool, a program designed

to enable students and families to stay on top of students' grades and assignments.

To maximize attendance, the FET mailed home parent invitations and told students that the homeroom with the most RSVPs would receive a pizza party. The team also e-mailed teachers about the event, posted an announcement on the school website, and distributed flyers.

Over 80 students, families, staff, and community members attended. The cost of dinner and materials was just over \$700 from school funds for partnership programs. Parents on the FET donated gift certificates to award during Family Literacy and Fitness Night.

Eli Whitney Technical High School serves students with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds from several communities. The school offers course work and certificates in 10 trades and prepares students for postsecondary education and training. The FET is building its partnership program to enable all parents to support their teens' success at school and preparation for college or careers.

The FET was pleased with the results and aims to host similar multi-purpose gatherings in the future. "We have found that the key to success is getting students involved in the event," one team member noted. "There were many students willing to participate by performing or volunteering to assist at the event. Parents came to the event eager to see their teens perform." "This was a beautiful family night out," a student added.

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# FUN RUN

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**JAMES MCGEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA**

**A** parent called the school reporting that her child came home saying that Fun Run was the best day ever! Another parent agreed, sharing, “It was so much fun to watch how excited the students were to get outside and run in the fresh air. It was amazing to hear the students encouraging each other and to see the teachers and staff participating with the students.” What caused such a joyful reaction from students and parents?

A group of parents at James McGee planned and organized the Fun Run from start to finish. The goal was to increase students’ physical fitness and to promote class teamwork. The parent leaders had heard that other schools in the area had conducted similar activities with good results.

The Fun Run was also a fundraiser. Students recruited sponsors to support the number of laps they completed. The proceeds were to be used to pay for items needed at the school, such as new technology, playground equipment, field trips, and books. At the end of the race, the top 10 student fund raisers received awards such as gift cards, prizes, and the opportunity to do a fun activity with the principal. The classes with the most participation and the most laps run earned an ice cream or pizza party. It is important to note that prizes were earned by students and classes at all grade levels, from K-5. By the end of the first week after the Fun Run, over \$5,000 had been raised.

Teachers worked with the parents and offered support to excite the students in advance of the Fun Run. The principal approved the event and helped parents with logistics such as where to put the track and how to procure enough wheelchairs for

disabled students to participate. Flyers were sent home with students three weeks in advance of Fun Run to make sure everyone was aware of the opportunity and could begin getting sponsors. Other notices were sent periodically.

On the day of the Fun Run, each participant was reminded to aim for their personal best, whether walking, jogging, or running. The physical education teacher and a parent had marked a track of approximately a quarter mile on the field outside of the school. Parents were on hand to time the classes and hand out rubber bands for each lap completed. Each class ran for 10 minutes, encouraged by their peers, teachers and parent volunteers. Some parents chose to run with their student’s class. Wheel chairs were provided for students who could not walk. Laps were counted for runners, students in wheelchairs, and the people pushing them.

It was clear that students, parent volunteers, and staff had a great time participating. It was especially good to see students encouraging their peers to press on to do their best. Students benefitted from teachers’ and parents’ discussions of fitness goals. The Fun Run demonstrated that it is good to be fit at James McGee Elementary School!

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# EMBRACING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

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**STEEPLE RUN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**S**teeply Run Elementary School considered many ways to organize its annual Turn Off the TV Week. The School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team, teachers, and students designed two fabulous activities for Embracing Culturally Responsive Practices. The goals were to showcase student talent, learn about the diverse backgrounds of Steeple Run students, and broaden students' interests in reading books about another culture.

First, on World Performance Night, more than 70 students and their families presented songs, dances, folk tales, and oral histories on their cultural heritage. Second, all students were introduced to the book *How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay* by Julia Alvarez. The book is about a ten-year-old boy in Vermont whose aunt comes to visit from the Dominican Republic. The two activities combined to increase awareness of the school's diverse cultures, ethnicities, and traditions.

The music teacher spearheaded the organization of World Performance Night. She distributed a flyer to students and families inviting them to share their talents and cultural stories. Classroom teachers also encouraged students to participate. Several dozen students agreed to perform 22 different acts. To help them prepare, the music teacher e-mailed Tips and Suggestions for a Great Performance. Students also prepared for show in their art classes. They created a banner and flags from around the world as a backdrop for the performances.

Reading teachers selected the book *How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay*. The principal read two chapters aloud during lunch periods and grade-level teachers read other chapters to their classes. Chapter summaries were given to students to take home. Students were told that at World Performance Night, each one would

receive their own copy of the book to read at home with their families. *How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay* contains several Spanish words. To improve students' reading comprehension and cultural competencies, the principal gave the definition of one word each week during morning announcements and encouraged students to use the Spanish word in their daily conversations.

At World Performance Night, parent and teacher volunteers supervised performers in a green room. They were able to watch other students' performances on a live feed, while waiting to take the stage. Audience members received a program listing each performances and the country that inspired it. For an hour-and-one-half, the audience enjoyed music and dancing from India, China, Taiwan, Israel, Colombia, and Ireland. The local Girl Scout Troup prepared a song for the finale. "This was a huge success," stated a staff member. Over 150 parents, 150 students, and more than 40 staff members attended.

In reviewing the evening, the partnership team agreed that it was difficult to keep track of all performers' music for their performances. For future shows, the team will compile all students' background music on one CD in advance.

Giving students with different backgrounds a chance to share their cultures with families and with other students was much more exciting than watching TV at home. Add the opportunity to read a deep and moving story about another culture, and the result is an excellent set of experiences that embrace the concept of culturally responsive education.

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# GETTING TO KNOW US

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## CLOVERDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL

### LITTLE ROCK, AR

**E**arly adolescence—the period of time when students make the leap from childhood to the teen years—is full of excitement and challenges. There are added challenges when students and families with different cultural backgrounds enter the middle school. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all teachers at Cloverdale Middle School wanted to help all families understand the school’s educational requirements and the resources that are available to help them support their early adolescents’ success in grades 6, 7, and 8.

To begin, the ATP surveyed families to learn what they needed and how the school could support their efforts with their children. All parents wanted more information on how to help their children take advantage of the opportunities offered at the school. The parents of English Language Learners wanted a family night where they could share their culture and discuss particular challenges. The survey responses led to plans for the first Getting to Know Us meeting with parents of English Language Learners. Along with whole-school events, the school holds other targeted meetings for families of children with special needs and children in gifted programs, but this was the first for parents of English Language Learners who make up about one fourth of the school population.

The Cafetorium was the place to celebrate the culture of the school’s population. The ATP planned activities for participants to receive and deliver information, with the goal of strengthening the rapport between parents and teachers. There were welcome signs in several languages and a parade of flags of the home countries of Cloverdale’s students and staff. Most of the immigrant families were Latino from different home countries. Students’ performances included dances and poetry readings. Then, parents were asked to share their stories. They talked about their

support for the academic achievement of their children and shared personal stories about their family’s transition to Arkansas. The challenges they faced and the strengths required were clear.

Teachers and students presented information about the school’s ESL program and the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA). Parents were introduced to the components of that test and how to interpret the scores. Teachers, parents, and students discussed their roles in ensuring that students pass the ELDA to become Fluent English Proficient. The school and district ESL Specialists met with parents and students to discuss individual results on ELDA.

Everyone benefitted by Getting to Know Us. Over 100 parents attended, were welcomed, and gained information on the school’s expectations and requirements for students, and how to help their children at home by supporting school assignments and activities. The 27 teachers, administrators, other staff members, and 12 community members benefitted, too, by establishing a better rapport with the diverse families of their students and gaining a better understanding of the countries from which they came. When the event is repeated, the ATP plans to ask local churches to provide buses and vans to help transport families to and from the school.

Just as students need support as they proceed through adolescence, families, too, need support to best guide their children to succeed in middle school. Educators and parents were pleased to get to know each other. An administrator concluded that educators and parents were definitely on the same page: “We value education and want the best for our students.”

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# HAWTHORNE PARENT LEADERS UNIVERSITY

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**HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA**

**A**t Hawthorne Elementary School, where students’ families speak at least 21 different languages at home, some parents are sometimes hesitant to get involved in school life due to their concerns about their English language fluency. Hawthorne Elementary is said to serve one of the most culturally diverse communities in the nation. Over one-third of its students are English Language Learners. To engage and empower the parents of its students, the Hawthorne School-Family-Community partnership team arranged a Parent Leaders University. The workshop, facilitated by the organization Community and Parents of Public Schools (CPPS), helped 20 representative parents learn leadership skills, gain ideas on how to support their child’s learning and success in school, and were encouraged to participate actively in the school community.

“[The training] taught me that I don’t have to speak English to volunteer more at school and have good communications with my child’s teacher,” said one parent. “The opportunity to have good, focused, open conversations with a diverse group of parent leaders made this workshop invaluable,” added another.

Attendees at the Parent Leaders University were parents who had completed a series of free adult ESL classes offered at the school with the support of a neighborhood Community College. The school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA) wanted to continue to engage these parents by offering strong leadership training. They asked CPPS to create a tailored workshop for parents at an affordable price. The full Parent Leaders University cost just over \$1300 to account for the workshop (paid with Title I funds), plus child care, translators, and refreshments supported by

the PTA.

Knowing that it was a challenge for parents to spend an entire Saturday at a workshop, the team and others at the school planned extensive publicity and explained the importance of participation. Flyers in multiple languages were distributed. The PTA advertised the workshop on Facebook, the school website, and in backpack mail. The partnership team also made personal phone calls. A CPPS facilitator attended a school coffee chat to explain how the workshop would be customized for Hawthorne’s diverse parents.

Parent Leaders University was well-received. Parents valued the opportunity to meet other families and learn about leadership. “Parents were empowered and [now] can empower other parents to understand their role in the children’s education,” one parent leader commented. Students whose parents attended the workshop expressed appreciation that their parents gained a greater understanding of the school and their education. One student said that, now, when she discusses schoolwork, “my mom knows what I’m talking about.” In the months following the training, the school’s English Language Learner (ELL) teacher noticed an uptick in the number of ELL parents who initiated conversations with staff members.

In any language, it is clear that when parents feel welcome, comfortable, and valued at their children’s school, they will become more engaged in their children’s education. When parents of ELL students understand that they are leaders in the school, they will encourage other parents to do the same.

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# HOW TO COMMUNICATE IN OVER 20 LANGUAGES

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**WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**S**tudents at Westgate Elementary School come from as far away as Iraq, Burma, and Somalia and speak more than 20 different languages at home. To ensure that the school reflected this diversity, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) set a school improvement goal of having parents from at least three different ethnic backgrounds involved in all major school decisions. The first step to achieve this goal was making all families feel comfortable at school by engaging them in activities to improve the school and increase their children’s success.

The ATP realized that it had to solve the challenge of inviting families to the school in their native languages. Translation services were not available for several of the languages spoken by families. The challenge was solved by recruiting students to serve as valued Ambassadors to connect home and school. Each month, school calendars of scheduled events at all grade levels are distributed to students to share the information at home with their parents in their native language.

More than 500 students took the calendars home and discussed them with their families. “It is so cute to see my child explain the calendar to us each month,” said a parent. “He takes it really seriously.”

School staff and ATP members say that the practice has made a real difference in family engagement. “Parents are now aware of what is happening at school, from testing, to field trips, to family engagement activities,” the principal explained. “We have noticed a sharp increase in attendance at ATP events since starting to use the calendar.”

Every month, the school secretary e-mails teachers and the ATP asking for information about school-wide and grade-specific upcoming activities. She compiles and prints the calendars. One side shows a calendar

grid with paw prints for the school’s Wildcat mascot listing events. The flip side provides details about each activity.

On the first week of each month, the librarian distributes the calendars to the Student Ambassadors during their class library period. She discusses the upcoming events in detail, and reminds the students to share them with their parents in their home language. She asks them to post the calendar on the refrigerator. A school magnet for this purpose was donated by a local photographer and distributed to all students.

This project requires the ATP, teachers, school secretary, librarian, community partners, and student Ambassadors to work together to increase communications with all families. “I have noticed a difference in the number of families who call with questions about dates or times of events,” noted the school secretary. Teachers, too, have commented that they now engage with many parents they had not seen at school before.

Westgate Elementary has implemented and improved this practice for three years—a simple and effective way to promote parental involvement, especially among underrepresented groups. Now, “students from diverse backgrounds encourage their parents to participate in school events and increase their sense of belonging in the school community,” explained the principal. The creative implementation of Student Ambassadors is particularly exciting because it builds all students’ confidence by giving them an important role in increasing positive school and family connections.

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# COLLEGE TRANSITIONS: I GOT INTO COLLEGE, NOW WHAT?

**NAPERVILLE NORTH HIGH SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**G**oing to college is, indeed, an adventure, and can be an expensive exploration. To increase their chances for success, students must transition successfully from high school to college—academically, socially, and emotionally. The young people—just out of high school—will have to connect with professors, develop strong study habits, manage their time, meet deadlines, and negotiate with roommates. These are a few of many essential skills for college freshmen, but high school seniors seldom learn them until they arrive on campus.

To address this knowledge gap and prepare more students for postsecondary success, the School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team at Naperville North High School partnered with the high school’s guidance department and recent alumni to create an informational evening for juniors, seniors, and their parents. They called the event “I Got Into College—Now What?”

The goal was to address topics that seniors sometimes struggled with after leaving high school. “We noticed an alarming trend of recent graduates after their first year in college—dropping out of college and/or transferring to another college,” a staff member said. Although the school prepared students for college academically, some students—especially those first in their family to go to college—needed extra help in making social and emotional adjustments to college life.

The SFCP planned an evening program during Senior Week to prepare students for college life. They started by soliciting feedback from parents. In what areas did they think students needed the most assistance for a successful transition to college? The SFCP forwarded this feedback to the guidance

department. Counselors created a customized presentation to address the most common areas of concern.

The SFCP reached out to recent alumni who had successfully completed a year or more of college. They asked these alumni to use smartphones to record short videos of themselves to share their college experiences and advice. The alumni were asked to focus on specific topics to avoid duplication. Next, a team of three tech-savvy parents worked with the school’s IT specialist to compile the alumni’s one-minute clips into a 20-minute video.

The presentation and video were scheduled during Senior Week to maximize attendance and were promoted in the school’s weekly e-mail. On the night of the event, over 100 juniors, seniors, and 100 parents gathered at the school. “I thought it was so valuable,” said one parent. “I think all seniors and their parents need to hear this information. The fact that the talk was funny and entertaining was simply a bonus.” “The program opened the door for parents to have conversations with their students about topics they were thinking about, but were afraid to bring up,” a staff member added.

At the end of the evening, everyone received handouts summarizing the advice. Although it is too early to know whether this activity affects the Naperville North High School students’ adjustment to college life, the SFCP looks forward to hearing from the students—as alumni—to learn the results.

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# NEW STUDENT/PARENT EXPERIENCE SURVEY

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**NAPERVILLE CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**S**tudents' first impressions of a school may set the tone for their experiences there. In the transition to a new school, it is important to plan how students and families will be welcomed, informed, and engaged with teachers and staff. Every student should feel safe and valued at the school. Every parent should be a partner in their teen's education through the high school years. Naperville Central High School wanted to know how newcomers experienced the transition into the school, with an eye to creating a better experience for future enrollees. A committee of parents, students, and teachers was formed to develop a survey to find out.

The first step was to conduct an open meeting of parents, staff, and students at which informal interviews were conducted to learn about their experiences at the school. E-mail and phone messages were used to invite parents to attend this meeting to provide input for the survey. Teachers and students also provided some ideas. Students conducted some of the interviews. The survey committee used the information from the interviews to construct the questionnaires for students and for parents.

The goal was to administer the survey to a large sample to gather ideas on how to create a welcoming school from "day 1" of attendance at Naperville Central High. In the survey, parents and students are asked to give their views of current programs at the school. What is the

school doing well? What improvements are needed? What were the strengths and weaknesses of their experiences when they were new to the school? What should be done differently to welcome all students so that their adjustment to the school is quicker, easier, and more successful?

At first, there was some hesitation. Parents and students were concerned about saying anything negative. They did not want to minimize many positive aspects of the school's program. To address their concerns, the principal and teachers reinforced the meaning and importance of real partnerships of home and school. They explained that frank comments on strengths and weaknesses of current programs were needed to improve the transition process and the experiences of future classes of students at the school.

The principal, teachers, staff, and partnership team anticipate that the surveys will yield a treasure trove of good ideas for school improvement. Although the results have not been finalized, the principal plans to use the information to support the school's goal to ensure that all staff, students, and families feel safe at school, respected by others, and engaged as partners in education. "Students and families will benefit from the [planned] improved orientation and induction experiences," he said.

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# STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

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## DONNA HIGH SCHOOL

### DONNA, TEXAS

The transition from middle school to high school is not easy for anyone, and is especially challenging for students who live in poverty, are from migrant families, have limited English proficiency, or have special needs. Donna High School serves many such students. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) partnered with the organization GEAR UP to help freshmen adjust successfully to high school.

The ATP and other teachers developed a mentorship initiative called the Student Ambassador Program. Junior and senior mentors were paired with rising 9th graders to welcome them to high school and to advise and support them to pass their classes, move on to 10th grade, and—ultimately—graduate from high school with plans for college or careers.

The Student Ambassador Program was launched prior to the start of the school year with an orientation Fish Camp (to denote that freshmen are the new fish swimming in a school). Teachers presented information to the freshmen on the school's traditions, policies, procedures, and extracurricular clubs. The ATP advertised the Camp with mailings and phone calls. A new gas station in the community helped the school advertise Fish Camp at its grand opening, and donated a \$1000 college scholarship for a student at Donna High.

To inaugurate the program, 27 Student Ambassadors were selected as mentors from applicants in the junior and senior classes. Each Ambassador was paired with up to 28 freshmen. Four teachers met with the mentors every Friday to prepare them to share information with their mentees on specific topics. Twice a week, mentors joined their assigned freshmen during the school's 45-minute advisory period to talk about the weekly topics, including high school expectations, attendance, report card grades, test preparation,

graduation requirements, athletics, and college and career readiness. If mentees raised other questions or issues, the mentors sought advice from a teacher leader. Teachers tracked each mentee's attendance and academic progress throughout the year to keep freshmen on track to success.

Ninth graders' parents also took part. They attended Fish Camp with their teens and attended Round Table Meetings for parents to learn how to support student success in grade 9.

The program cost \$4,000 for Ambassadors' shirts, program materials, and schoolbags full of school supplies for every freshman in the class of 2017. One challenge was the retention of mentors and mentees. A few mentors dropped out for personal reasons and a few mentees transferred to other schools.

The program enjoyed significant success. Mentees exhibited gains in attendance and grades. Most agreed at the end of 9th grade that the Student Ambassadors had helped them adjust to high school and focus on schoolwork. Data on students' successes in grade 9 convinced some skeptical teachers to support the Ambassadors' Program.

Mentors gained leadership skills and earned community service hours. "Not only was this program impactful for the freshman we mentored, but also for ourselves," said one. Two mentors who wrote scholarship applications about their experiences became Gates Millennium Scholars. The Ambassador Program's leadership roles for students and caring components are important examples for other high schools—just about all of which are challenged to help 9th graders succeed in high school.

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## 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.*





# 50TH ANNIVERSARY PIZZA PARTY

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**LINCOLN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

**W**hen Lincoln Junior High School became the first junior high in the district to reach its 50th year, the School, Family, and Community Partnerships (SFCP) team knew that an important pizza party was in order. The milestone was a great reason to bring more than 500 students, parents, and school staff together to celebrate the school's history and to strengthen partnerships in the school community. Many former school staff and students also attended, making the event even more special.

“From a social and emotional view, this event provided [students] with an opportunity to interact with a multigenerational community,” an SFCP Co-Chair reflected. “From a learning view, the students were able to learn about school's history via a Power Point presentation and the opening of the school's time capsule from 25 years ago.” The Learning Resource Center's director put together the presentation, which included interesting facts and photos. After opening the time capsule and sharing the historic items inside, a teacher added some new items for future generations to discover.

There was plenty of time to socialize over supper in the warm spring air, and students played field games nearby. The event was catered by Domino's. Participants, who had ordered meals in advance using RSVP forms, paid \$5 each for a slice of pizza, garden salad, a serving of penne pasta, and cinnamon sticks. Gluten-free and allergy-free options were available for \$6. Members of the school's Student Council raised money by selling drinks nearby. Donations and school funds covered all expenses, including a DJ and decorations.

A raffle added to the fun. Each student received ten tickets. 28 prizes ranged from school-related treats such as: daily cafeteria

speed passes to cut to the front of the line; front row seats for the school's spring musical; and items donated by local businesses, such as restaurant gift certificates, movie tickets, bowling passes, and book baskets. “The free raffle was awesome!” several students said.

Planning for the April party began in September. For the first few months, the SFCP met once a month. By January, they were meeting every two weeks. On occasion, they were joined by various stakeholders, including a Student Council leader and school librarian. Engaging many people in the planning process ensured that the final event would be beneficial and fun for all groups involved.

The party was publicized in several ways. First, the principal and school staff built buzz by hosting a celebratory assembly at which every student received a 50th Anniversary T-shirt-making every student a celebrant. The SFCP distributed invitations, put up posters, sent e-mail reminders, posted announcements on the school website, the outside fence, Talk203, and the school marquee. There was a large turnout, and two local newspapers sent reporters to cover the event.

Everyone loves a good birthday party. Recognizing the school community's history and progress through the years was an excellent reason for this partnership-building event. Lincoln Junior High School will continue to celebrate important milestones and achievements in the decades to come.

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# BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

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**OLIVER WOLCOTT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
TORRINGTON, CT**

Type 1

**F**or many years, students at Oliver Wolcott Technical High School have given a holiday gift to children from low-income families in Litchfield County—a special Breakfast with Santa. The students host the event in partnership with the Torrington Youth Service Bureau and Litchfield County Head Start, making it a real community celebration. This year, more than 125 children and their families enjoyed a hot breakfast, entertainment, and gifts. Breakfast with Santa contributes to the spirit of the season.

Planning for the annual event begins months in advance. Students in the school’s Culinary Arts program learn to prepare a meal of scrambled eggs, pancakes, home fries, sausage, biscuits, and a drink. After mastering the recipes, the students will prepare the dishes for the breakfast. Teachers, parents, student volunteers, and members of the school’s Student Council and National Honor Society and parent volunteers organize a winter clothing, toy, and book drive. Student volunteers also arrange the morning’s entertainment, which includes balloon artists, face painters, and a singer/songwriter. Some alumni return specifically to participate in this activity. Everyone helps clean up.

Breakfast with Santa starts with a good meal served by the high school students. Soon Santa and his merry elves arrive by limousine, fire truck, police cruiser, or helicopter to steal everyone’s attention. The young children get a chance to meet and have their photo taken with Santa. Many of the children in the area would not have this experience because the nearest mall is more than 30 minutes away. Each child receives a wrapped toy and a can of

candy. Books, coats, mittens, and hats also are offered.

Breakfast with Santa has been a powerful teaching tool and community-building activity for the Wolcott High School students. “The students learn how to be a part of something beyond their everyday lives, how to speak with the public, and how to work together,” the assistant principal explained. “It also affords students who don’t have family support to take part in a meal with a teacher, community members, and peers. This shared experience shifts the paradigm of student-teacher relationships and true bonds are formed.”

In the past, attendance has been a challenge, but the high school has solved that problem by advertising the event on its website and by word of mouth. The school’s community partners also publicize the celebration. Last year, Breakfast with Santa was well attended by 125 children, more than 75 parents or family members, 75 high school students, 45 teachers, and many community members.

The event costs about \$800 and is funded by the Student Council and donations from families and the community. The school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other participants meet to evaluate all aspects of the event and to plan improvements for the future. Breakfast with Santa is a community tradition. The holiday spirit also provides high school students with the gift of giving to others.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

# C.A.M.P.—COLLABORATIVE ATMOSPHERE FOR MEETING POTENTIAL

LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA

One thing that is constant in education is change. It was a time of dramatic change at Lincoln Elementary School. While the building was being remodeled, the “school” moved across town to a temporary old building. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all faculty and staff wanted to make students and families feel welcome in the provisional place. They tripled their efforts to make Lincoln a friendly “home-like” school during the period of change.

In the past four years, Lincoln experienced a great shift in demographics. The population of students changed from a majority of English speakers with 10% FARMS (free and reduced meals) to over one hundred English Language Learners and 57% FARMS. The ATP knew that it needed to be creative to maintain the school spirit and partnership climate that was carefully built over the years. Team members wanted to continue to support wonderful parent volunteers and parents who dropped in for lunch with their children. They were especially concerned that students would not be excited about coming to school every day. They brainstormed about ways to make the temporary school welcoming for families and inviting to children. Because everyone was going to be living out of boxes for most of the year, they decided to go with a camping theme. The Principal was the Camp Director.

To begin, the staff planned an Open House before the official school year started. Each teacher wrote a letter to the families of their incoming students inviting them to the Welcome to CAMP Lincoln event—promising a Collaborative Atmosphere for Meeting Potential (CAMP). They added a personal message to welcome each student and family to their class.

Teachers began planning the event before

they moved. They spruced up classrooms and decorated the office, entry, halls, and common space in the camping theme. The goal was for students and families to recognize the essence of their old school and feel comfortable in the different building. Many local organizations contributed to the Open House and camp theme. Some donated school supplies that were offered to families who needed them. A local reading foundation donated books that were distributed to the students.

The CAMP Lincoln theme set a positive tone and common focus for over 630 students, their families, teachers, and the community. For example, the music teachers used the camping theme for their music and drama programs. As the Principal noted, “The camping theme was a fantastic idea! . . . It brought everyone together and helped make the transition . . . fun for everyone!” A staff member concurred, “It gave everyone a sense of belonging—being part of a CAMP—working through rough spots together.” And a parent thankfully reported, “My daughter was nervous, but CAMP Lincoln made it feel like an adventure, so she was excited. Everyone loves camping!”

The ATP learned many things coping with change. In particular, the team reported that there is a huge pay-off for kicking off the year on a welcoming note—especially before the school year begins. An inclusive theme can tie everything together for families, students, teachers, and others in the community. The ATP plans to capture the same feeling of collaboration in the newly remodeled school where the theme may be Welcome Home!

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Type 2

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

# ELLIS TECH COFFEE HOUSE AND FAMILY GAME NIGHT

**HARVARD H. ELLIS TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
DANIELSON, CT**

Type 3

**H**. H. Ellis Technical High School became a nightlife hotspot this year with two creative school, family, and community partnership activities: Family Game Night, which featured representatives from a local gaming store and the Ellis Tech Coffee House, which featured students' musical and artistic talents. Both activities were designed to improve the climate of partnerships at the school and meet the school's goal of increasing family engagement activities and parents' participation by at least 5%. The school serves over 500 students from 18 towns in Northeast, Connecticut. Its ATP is working to create a welcoming climate and to encourage more and different families to participate in some school-based activities every year.

Family Game Night featured traditional games such as Twister and Pictionary and new simulation and strategy games brought by local gaming enthusiasts, including some parents. The Simulation Club at the school helped to organize and publicize Game Night. The only rule? No electronics or technology allowed. This ensured that the 50 students, teachers, and family members who attended would spend get to know each other by actually talking and playing games together.

A local community organization donated its popcorn machine for the evening. The attendees enjoyed popcorn, pizza, and juice while they learned and played games. Participants enjoyed time at Game Night and learned something about the gaming industry from expert gamers invited by the Simulation Club. "This was awesome!" a student exclaimed. "When are you going to do this again?" a parent asked.

The Ellis Tech Coffee House was an important and unique activity. The idea grew from a brainstorming session of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). A teacher on the team mentioned that many of his students had artistic talents. He suggested organizing an activity to show and share their skills,

knowing that parents would appreciate the effort.

The ATP announced the event via e-mail three weeks ahead of time, distributed flyers, and made personal phone calls to encourage attendance. The school's Simulation Club, Gay Straight Alliance, and Student Council publicized the activity and helped to generate buzz.

The ATP scheduled the event directly after a pasta dinner for athletes, which was already scheduled. The timing worked well because students and families who attended the pasta dinner were happy to have coffee and dessert while listening to the students sing, play instruments, and share their artwork. The Coffee House attracted 40 students, 50 parents, and 8 teachers, and a few community partners.

Many of students had never showcased their work outside of their classes. They loved the opportunity to share their work and talents with parents and friends. "I had no idea people would like my metalwork so much," remarked one artist.

Other highlights of the evening included performances using karaoke equipment lent by a local DJ. Two students asked family members to perform with them. "Watching one father and son team play the guitar and sing was so powerful," a teacher noted.

The ATP plans more activities to feature students' work, specialties, and talents, and suggests that other schools do the same. "The best thing you can do to improve your school's climate is to feature students and their talents. It also helps to engage the staff, parents, students, and community members in planning, conducting, participating in, and appreciating the event," said a school staff member.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

# FAMILY FUN FAIR

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

**L**ast fall, the Emmett O'Brien Technical High School might have been mistaken for a carnival, as hundreds of school staff, community members, students, and families came to play games, create arts and crafts, enter contests, and enjoy snacks. The Family Fun Fair was all the more meaningful because it was developed and conducted by many partners in the school community. More than 80 students, parents, school staff, and community members volunteered their time and talents to make the event a success.

Parents made posters and obtained donations from local businesses for food and prizes. Teachers constructed games, supervised booths, ran friendly contests, obtained donations, and helped clean up. Students helped plan, construct, create, and run the Fair. Organizing the fair was an excellent opportunity for the student volunteers to develop management skills and the ability to work with many adults other than their own teachers. "Students learned the importance of commitment and leadership," a teacher pointed out. "They learned to improvise and problem solve, and that hard work can make you feel successful and appreciated."

Planning for the fair took place in multiple committee meetings, under the leadership of two teachers. At the meetings, the planning committee members divided responsibilities, taking on tasks such as coordinating volunteers, planning food distributions, and organizing games and contests. The whole school campus was used to set up all of the activities.

Because of good planning, the Fair offered fun for all. Everyone enjoyed nachos, pizza

from the local pizza parlor, hot dogs and hamburgers donated by Shoprite, and ice cream offered by the local ice cream truck. Attendees played games constructed by trade teachers and their classes including ring toss, beanbag toss, hockey shot, football throws, frisbee flings, and bowling. Families entered donut eating, basketball free throw, bubble gum blowing, obstacle course, hula hoop, and apple bobbing contests. Winners received gift certificates donated by McDonald's and other prizes.

Artistic attendees created bracelets, sand art, and holiday decorations at various arts and crafts stations. Other participants danced to music DJ'd by the assistant principal. Two inflatable Jumpies donated by a teacher were particularly popular.

The fair, which lasted three hours, aimed for just plain fun, good will, and a joyful school climate. Costs of about \$800 were covered with school funds for family engagement and donations. "I had an awesome day and am so glad I volunteered," said one teacher. "Thank you so much for such a wonderful day," a parent beamed.

The high school is working to establish its environment as a partnership place. The school serves students from many communities in the lower Naugatuck Valley and is characterized by racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse families. The Family Fun Fair demonstrated the spirit of O'Brien Technical High School and reinforced students' and families' decisions to choose this school for the students' high school education.

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# FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

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**BELL CITY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Type 1

Everything you buy comes with detailed instructions, except children—who come without a manual. Parents at Bell City School, a PreK-12 school in a rural community in Louisiana, checked out books on parenting topics from a new library section in the school’s Family Resource Center. The Center and library were developed by the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) with a great deal of help from the school counselors and teachers. They wanted to provide parents with information about child development and home conditions that support student learning and success in school at all grade levels. According to the elementary school counselor, the Resource Center quickly became a valuable resource for many parents with useful books and materials that supplemented those available in the counselors’ offices.

The library for parents grew stage by stage. The school curriculum coordinator compiled a list of 100 books on topics ranging from single parenting to children’s attention disorders to understanding and preventing bullying. Other topics included parental involvement in school, increasing students’ self esteem, educating children with special needs, how family members raise relatives, and anger management, among others topics. Next, 50 teachers and staff members read and reviewed the books to determine which would be valuable to a large number of parents in the school community. The top titles were purchased for \$500 in Title I funds. These included the popular *Chicken Soup for the Soul* series.

When the books arrived, some of the school’s high school students organized them by topic using stickers, and arranged them on bookshelves that the students had built. The

curriculum coordinator also created a log book to keep track of which items were checked out. The area was decorated with attractive plants and helpful signs.

“As with any [beginning project], it took time to promote awareness until word spread and more were familiar with the Resource Center,” a staff member explained. The ATP used flyers to parents and signs at school to publicize the Resource Center, located in the school lobby.

In a short time, parents began to use the library regularly. About 150 parents, 45 students, and 20 community members checked out books last year. “How nice to have all of the resources at our fingertips in a familiar place,” one parent commented.

The ATP took note of which titles were borrowed most frequently and will obtain more books and materials on those topics next year. They also may survey families to identify new topics that are of the greatest interest to the greatest number of parents. Because the school includes all grade levels (K-12), it is important to provide materials for parents with children at all age and grade levels.

The ATP expects that, over time, good information on parenting topics at all age levels, will contribute to happier, well-functioning families and that more informed parenting will transfer to good student behavior and student learning at all grade levels.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

# MARDI GRAS GUMBO AND TALENT SHOW

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**LEBLEU SETTLEMENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

**W**hen LeBleu Settlement Elementary School changed administrators, the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) knew they had to plan an event to unify the school community and the new administration. “For some of our parents, school is not always associated with great experiences,” a staff member explained. “It is important to provide positive opportunities for families to build positive relationships with the school.”

The ATP and PTO accomplished this goal by hosting a Mardi Gras-themed gumbo dinner combined with a talent show. The event, which drew more than 500 attendees, enabled students, families, teachers, and community members to socialize over a meal and enjoy a series of student performances.

“We didn’t talk about student behavior, good or bad,” one staff member explained. “We spent time building relationships.” She noted that it was important for the school to make families feel welcome so that they know that they are valuable members of the school community.

The ATP and PTO advertised the event on the school calendar, school marquee, and in the school newsletter. They sought volunteers to staff a dessert booth and to organize how the audience would vote for their favorite student talents. Parents and school staff members who were interested noted their availability on sign-up sheets. The leaders also solicited food donations from the community to provide the Mardi Gras gumbo meal, which was prepared by cafeteria staff.

In the weeks leading up to the show, students prepared their acts. Staff members used an audition process to select acts to include in the final Talent Showcase. The students loved both performing and seeing their peers onstage, even if they were not

selected for the final show.

One challenge the project leaders faced was to figure out how to accommodate the large audience and number of participants in the cafeteria, while a new gymnasium was being built. That was a good problem to have. It was clear that the ATP and PTO wanted to work together to maintain strong family and community engagement with the school while parts were under construction.

Parents and school staff also enjoyed themselves. “This is an event for the entire community,” a parent said. “We celebrated pride in our school and enjoyed each other’s company.” An administrator added that the evening generated a “wonderful feeling of family and of support for our school and students.” “The best part was the talent show,” a student said. “Everyone laughed and had fun.”

The evening cost \$800, funded entirely by donations. The school also used the event as a fundraiser, and plans to use the proceeds to purchase incentives for positive student behavior.

Next year, the ATP and PTO hope to give students more leadership roles in planning the event. “Older students could help with budgeting and organization,” a school staff member suggested. The planners also may add a canned food drive to add a service component to the evening.

Everyone in the school community is looking forward to Mardi Gras 2015. “... Collaborating with our parents, students, and community partners to host this special evening at our school makes Mardi Gras Gumbo one of the best events of the year,” a staff member said.

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# RAKE AND RUN

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**KINGSLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
NAPERVILLE, IL**

Type 6

**A**t Kingsley Elementary School in Naperville, IL, the school climate extends beyond the school walls. Kingsley students are becoming partners in their own community. The School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) Team knows that it is never too early to help students learn that they can be positive change agents who contribute to improvements in their community.

Rake and Run, now in its second year, encourages students and families to work together to rake the yards of families in need—to beautify the neighborhood at a prime leaf-raking time by assisting those who need some helpers. Kingsley is known for having many community volunteers who are generous with their time and talents. Rake and Run strengthens this tradition.

The SFCP team planned the logistics for Rake and Run and coordinated activities with the help of all teachers and administrators. Parents on the SFCP team hand-delivered flyers to mailboxes throughout the community. The flyers invited neighbors to request some help from Kingsley students to do some yard work as volunteer rakers. Rake and Run was publicized by e-mail and on the school’s website.

Community members called and e-mailed the school in response to the flyers. The school’s secretary kept a list of families that responded and gave the information to the SFCP chairs. They created a map identifying the areas to be raked.

In November, leaves are everywhere and are most need of raking. Just about anyone would be grateful for some help from volunteer rakers who make the task of high-piling leaves

more fun than it might be. On the Saturday for Rake and Run, 40 Kingsley students, 30 parents, and 10 staff arrived at school and formed raking groups. With rakes and maps in hand, a sense of purpose, and with determination in their steps, the group marched off. Each group went to a particular area of the neighborhood, met the residents, and went to work.

Neighbors and the community-at-large benefitted from the activity. So did the students, parents, and staff. One student shared, “It was a lot of fun to work with my friends to rake the yards of people who need help.”

The day’s work ended on the Kingsley playground with a celebration of good work. Everyone agreed that the effort was worthwhile. They appreciated the thanks that came from those whose yards were raked. One community member wrote: “Thank you for taking the time to do this work again this year. You helped me a lot!”

Kingsley’s motto, “Building a passion for lifelong learning,” also refers to learning to give back to the community. The SFCP team believes that an altruistic spirit will influence the students’ sense of self and knowledge that they are valued by their community.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



# SIMPLY THE BEST

## **SOUTH FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC**

**L**eaders at South Florence High School (SFHS) wanted to showcase all of its programs and celebrate the culture and diversity of the school. Simply the Best: Academic Showcase and Fine Arts Celebration was planned with the School Improvement Council (SIC).

Each member of the School Improvement Council was assigned a specific task to organize for the Simply the Best family night. Seven tasks were identified: preparing, inviting, incentivizing, caring for children, showcasing student work, facilitating, and volunteering. Parents, teachers, community members, students, and administrators took leadership and helping roles.

The committee prepared a schedule for displays, presentations, and performances. This included designing, printing, and mailing invitations; advertising the event; and making table decorations. Invitations were sent to the Mayor of Florence, all School Board members, parents, and the community. An elected member of the City Council who is an alumnus of SFHS was invited to be the Keynote speaker. Plans were made to feature all departments, sports teams, and extra curricula clubs.

To encourage attendance, the committee planned incentives and services. Over 20 local businesses donated refreshments and door prizes. A childcare center for families with very young children was created. It was coordinated by the Early Childhood and Development teacher and staffed by student volunteers from early childhood classes and SFHS staff.

The Ninth Grade Academy set its display in the library. Eighth graders and their families had an opportunity to meet ninth grade teachers and see students' work samples. Each academic department displayed students' work. Student members of the School Improvement Council judged the departmental displays and selected a winner.

Simply the Best featured demonstrations by teams and clubs throughout the evening, including the ROTC drill team, step team, gospel choir, choraliers, and the dance, art,

drama, drum line, and bass fishing clubs. 15 concurrent sessions repeated from 1 to 4 times provided information and resources for participants on "hot topics" including school safety, law enforcement, financial aid for college attendance, dual credit programs, adolescent vaccinations, district test requirements, and Common Core State Standards by subject. School staff and community partners made these presentations, including a state-level representative from Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), area college representatives, and a local doctor. As a highlight of Simply the Best, the SFHS Alumni Association presented a \$2000 check to the school to renovate the auditorium and track.

Student volunteers had important roles. The football team and cheerleaders served guests dinner. Student Council representatives and marshals were tour guides. ROTC presented colors, led the pledge of allegiance, and handed out door-prize tickets.

In all, about 175 parents, 275 students, 100 staff, and 50 community members enjoyed the evening. A federal Safe and Supportive Schools Grant supported the \$1000 cost and a grant from Mueller's Spaghetti Company provided the spaghetti dinner.

The planning team learned that the more fun that students have in preparing, demonstrating, and performing at a school event, the more likely they are to participate. One student noted, "Everyone was checking out our boat! People were really interested in knowing that we had a bass fishing team." The principal laughed, "Wow, this is like being at Disney World!" Simply the Best enabled everyone to learn about and enjoy the exciting opportunities for student learning and success that are supported by the school.

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# SURVEYS FOR SUCCESS: USING PARENT INPUT TO INFORM ACTION

VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA

Type 5

**W**hen the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Vista Elementary School began drafting its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships, members realized they were missing something important—all-parents’ input. “[We felt...] that we did not have a lot of data directly from parents on what ... they would find most interesting, fun, or helpful,” an ATP member said. “We decided it was important to contact more and different parents as we planned the year’s activities and initiatives.”

The most efficient way to accomplish this, the ATP agreed, was with a survey. They created a short, half-page questionnaire with multiple-choice answers that would be quick and easy to fill out. The survey included questions about how parents were presently involved, what prevented or limited involvement at school, their ideas on what the ATP and others might do to increase their engagement, and how satisfied they were with communications from the school.

The ATP determined that the best return rate would come at a popular school gathering, where parents could complete and submit the survey within a few minutes. They selected the school’s annual Winter Music Festival, which had the highest parent attendance of any event of the year.

Prior to the Festival, ATP members spoke with teachers about the survey and the importance of collecting as many responses as possible. They supplied each teacher with a stack of surveys and plenty of pencils. These materials cost less than \$100 and were the only expense for the activity.

At the Festival, 30 teachers and staff asked parents to complete the surveys when they picked their children up after the performance. Most parents were happy to oblige, resulting in several hundred completed surveys. “We believe that the survey’s brevity and importance helped us to get a high return rate and increased the buy-in of parents and teachers,” an ATP member said.

The teachers returned the surveys to the ATP leaders the next day. The surveys were forwarded to the district’s Leader for Partnerships, who compiled the data for the school. When the ATP analyzed the information, they discovered that parents were particularly interested in evening events focused on the students’ curricula and classwork, particularly math and reading nights. As a result, the ATP planned STEM nights for the 4th and 5th grades. Next year, they will conduct a K-2 reading night.

“Surveying the parents directly has been a great way to make sure that our ATP is really meeting the needs of our families here at Vista,” the school principal said. She and the ATP members noted that enabling parents to have their voices heard should make them more likely to attend events and to feel included in the school community.

Five schools in the district already adopted this practice, which Vista Elementary School plans to continue on an annual basis. Next year, they will share the survey results with the entire school community to further promote an atmosphere of openness and to give parents and staff members an opportunity to react to the results.

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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.*



# COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS FOR PARENTS

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## CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEM MIDDLETOWN, CT

**A**s teachers in the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS) implemented Common Core State Standards, families became increasingly eager to learn more about it. Teachers and school staff told the administrators of CTHSS via a survey that they wanted help in answering parents' questions. The Leaders for Partnerships in CTHSS developed and distributed resources to all schools' Family Engagement teams so that they could explain the standards and related changes to the curriculum to help students meet the standards.

The CTHSS Family Engagement leaders met with each school-based action team to better understand the kinds of questions that parents in their communities were raising. Then, they designed a presentation to address these issues. The district leaders demonstrated the presentation for all school-based Family Engagement teams at a dinner meeting. The dinner was prepared by students in one high school's Culinary Arts program. Each school-based Family Engagement team was asked to present the same information to families in their own school community.

At the meeting, a CTHSS leader began by explaining why students will benefit from the higher Common Core State Standards. She showed a humorous YouTube video to engage the audience and summarized research that supported the new standards and the need for changes in the curriculum. She also used PowerPoint slides to lead the group in a game

of Common Core Jeopardy! The categories included "How families can support reading standards" and "How families can support math standards." Finally, she provided an overview of booklets and Internet sites that will help each school explain the Common Core State Standards to parents.

At the meeting, the school-based Family Engagement teams brainstormed creative ways to share the information with their school communities. "Ideas were flying!" said a CTHSS staff member. Some planned to post information on the school website. Others planned to host workshops for parents. All were excited to have the resources they needed to share with families.

"I appreciated the videos about the Standards and the Jeopardy! game because I did not know enough about this topic," said one school leader.

About 50 parents, 30 students, and ten community members from CTHSS's school-based Family Engagement teams attended the workshop. Each one left the meeting with a flash drive containing the PowerPoint and other resources.

The discussion of Common Core State Standards for Parents showed schools' action teams that family education and engagement remains a strong district priority.

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# DISTRICT PARENT ACADEMY

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**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LANCASTER  
LANCASTER, PA**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**F**rom a week-old infant to a 76-year-old grandmother, all are welcome at the Parent Academy, a four-week series of workshops for the entire school community. The series was first introduced by the School District of Lancaster six years ago. It has grown from a small set of workshops to more than two dozen offered twice a year. Each fall and spring families and community members are invited to a local high school on Thursday nights to enjoy dinner and workshops on topics ranging from Drug and Alcohol Prevention! What All Parents Need to Know to Reading In the Digital Age.

The Parent Academy “provides parents the opportunity to experience engaging educational workshops in a non-threatening, supportive environment where they can connect with other parents, district staff, and community members,” a district coordinator explained.

Parents appreciate the opportunity to socialize and learn ways to support their children’s education. Several families have attended District Parent Academy for several years. Moms, dads, siblings, and grandparents may register for the workshops—sometimes attending together. Last spring, 557 attended at least one workshop.

Organizers reported that it was most important to listen to parents’ ideas about the topics to offer. This is what affects attendance. For example, attendance jumped by 109 people when there was an introductory Spanish Language workshop. Other keys to Parent Academy’s success were effective advertising, offering door prizes donated by community business, providing diverse facilitators, limiting workshops to 90 minutes, and making transportation, translators, dinner, and childcare available. The Academy costs \$13,600 per year for publicity, presenters, instructional materials, and supplies.

Multiple modes of communication attract parents to the Academy. Three times a year, district leaders mail home *Lancaster Links*, a brochure listing the names and descriptions of all courses offered. The brochure also is posted online and courses are listed on a calendar distributed to all families at the beginning of the school year. Reminders are posted on the school website, Facebook, and Twitter. The local Spanish radio station contributes by regularly advertising the workshops as well.

A planning committee of 40 members meets four months before the start of the workshop series. Session facilitators include nurses, principals, public librarians, local university staff, police officers, bank representatives, and counselors. An average of six different workshop sessions are offered each Thursday night. For example, one Thursday topics included bullying prevention, understanding health care, elementary Common Core State Standards in math, and a make and take for things to do with the family for less than \$1.

The Thursday sessions begin at 5:30 with dinner. Workshops are conducted from 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. At the end of the evening, every child receives a small educational gift and parents participate in a raffle. Favorite prizes were a bike and an e-reader tablet donated by local businesses.

District leaders recommended that others who want to start a District Parent Academy start small. Providing a handful of workshops is a good way to gauge parents’ interests. This is how the School District of Lancaster has been able to expand its Parent Academy year after year.

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# DISTRICT-WIDE ATP CHAIR RETREAT

## KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT

### KENNEWICK, WA

**A**ugust was a good time for the Chairpersons of schools' Action Teams for Partnership (ATPs) to reflect on the prior year's program of family and community engagement and their plans for the new school year. Kennewick School District facilitated this process by asking more than a dozen ATP chairs to complete self-evaluation forms (adapted from one developed by the Pasco School District). Kennewick's ATP Chairpersons identified areas of excellence, skills that had improved over the year, and leadership skills that they wanted to strengthen. The District's Leaders for Partnerships analyzed the results and used them to design a one-day ATP Chair Retreat.

The Retreat began with a light breakfast and icebreakers. Each attendee received a folder containing an agenda, note paper, a copy of their own self-evaluation, and an evaluation to complete at the end of the day. The District Leaders for Partnerships welcomed the group and explained that the purpose of the day was to help all ATP chairs strengthen their leadership skills to continue improving their teams and their school-based partnership programs.

The first topic on the agenda was the art of delegating tasks to share leadership with others. Many ATP Chairpersons had reported that they struggled to effectively delegate tasks to others. The District Coordinators focused on how to assign meaningful roles to all ATP members and led the Chairs in a role-playing exercise. "Role play can be a very strong learning experience, but also may be a bit scary for some," one of the District Leaders cautioned. "It is important to create a safe environment for learning."

Next, the group focused on how to recruit and retain parents on their ATPs. This module explained the importance of personally inviting parents to participate, and maintaining

their participation by soliciting and utilizing their input during ATP meetings. This module also included a role-playing exercise for ATP chairs to practice these skills. "I feel like I have a better understanding of how to involve parents," an ATP Chair commented afterward.

The last module helped the ATP Chairpersons understand the "big picture" of the ATP model. The Chairs learned how to communicate what an ATP is and how it benefits a school community. Then, they were given time to use the information from the Retreat to "tweak" and improve their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships for the next school year.

Thanks to the Chair Retreat, which cost \$2,500, District Leaders noted a marked improvement in ATP shared leadership and parent involvement throughout the school year. "ATP Chairs were more intentional in their communications in team meetings about their action plans and progress," a District Leader said.

Next year, Kennewick will gain four new ATP Chairpersons. To keep the retreat small and relevant, the District Leaders will conduct two separate trainings: one for new ATP chairs and one for experienced ATP chairs.

The Retreat shows how Kennewick's District Leaders for Partnerships are responsive to their ATPs. They asked the Chairpersons what skills they wanted to strengthen and then provided targeted training on those skills. This kind of deliberate design of a Chair Retreat contributes to stronger leadership for effective partnership programs at the district and school levels.

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# EVERY DAY COUNTS: KINDERGARTEN ATTENDANCE

NORWOOD CITY SCHOOLS  
NORWOOD, OH

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**D**istrict Leaders for Partnerships in Norwood City Schools sprang into action when they learned that students who miss 2-3 days of school each month are more likely to have reading difficulties by third grade and less likely to graduate from high school on time. Using a framework from Attendanceworks.org, Leaders for Partnerships developed an early-intervention program for families of kindergarteners. During the first month of school, the first time a kindergartener was absent a staff member visited his or her home that day bearing gifts and information about the importance of attendance. Every Day Counts aimed to reduce absenteeism, show parents and students that they were valued, and strengthen positive relationships between educators and families.

In developing the program, the Leaders for Partnerships met in person with school principals and office staff to explain the program and its benefits. They asked the directors of kindergarten readiness camp to tell parents about it before the school year began.

For one month, school secretaries forwarded the names of absent kindergarteners to the district's Family and Student Services Office every day. That evening, the office sent a social workers, social worker interns, or family peer support workers to the students' homes, regardless of the reason for the absence.

The visitors introduced themselves and explained, "I heard that [child's name] was absent today. I wanted to stop by to tell you we missed (him/her) and are looking forward to seeing your child at school tomorrow. Every day counts! Please let us know what we can do to be helpful." If no one was home, the visitor left the box and a note to the same effect. Over 70 visits were made.

Some parents initially were wary, but when they realized the visitors were not truancy officers, they relaxed. About a third shared a social or medical concern that the visitor helped them with by sharing resources or other information. For example, one student had a feeding tube installed at the hospital that day. The visitor connected the parent with the school nurse, who explained the situation to the child's teachers so they could be prepared when the child returned to school.

Visitors remained outside the family's door and stayed only a few minutes to avoid being intrusive. Before leaving, they gave the family a gift—a small box with a mug printed with the district logo, a packet of soup mix, and a small stuffed bear wearing a graduation cap. The box also included a fact sheet from Attendanceworks.org about how a few absences can have a negative effect on a child's education. The district purchased the gifts with a grant of about \$800, but noted that others could enlist donations from local businesses.

Parents appreciated the extra support. One mother, who was new to the district, cried when she realized that someone had come to offer her help. Another posted the positive experience on Facebook.

The district observed a reduction in frequent absences, but will keep monitoring attendance data. Every Day Counts will continue, as it was not a novelty. In response to parents' suggestions, the district will add thermometers to the gift boxes along with information about local medical clinics and dentists.

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# FAMILY CONNECTORS UNIVERSITY

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SEATTLE, WA

**I**n Seattle Public Schools, children are not the only ones attending class. Parents also have opportunities to extend their education in the Family Connectors University. Last year, 85 parents graduated from one of four 10-week courses developed by the Office of School Family Partnerships and North Seattle College, with input from families and several community groups.

In their classes, parents learned how to advocate for their students and for the schools and how to promote positive school, family, and community partnerships. They also gained an understanding of the Common Core State Standards and the implications of CCSS for curricula and assessments at different grade levels. Upon completing the course, the graduates agreed to share their knowledge by serving as parent leaders at their respective schools for at least one year.

The district's School Family Partnerships Advisory Committee suggested establishing and expanding a Family Connectors University. "The [committee] saw a great need to build the capacity of families to work as equal partners in the education of their children to support academic achievement," a district leader explained.

District leaders planned well. They solicited ideas from diverse families to tailor the content of the classes to parents' needs and interests. They reached out to several universities to identify a partner. North Seattle College agreed to provide free classroom space, free parking passes, childcare providers, a graduate student instructor, and a professor. The professor spent 30 minutes with the parents at the end of every class to help them write reflections and plan activities based on the topic of the day.

The curriculum for Family Connectors University was developed with several partners including the state's Office of Education Ombudsman, the Bilingual Department,

North Seattle College, the Seattle PTSA, and the district's Parent Advisory Committee.

To recruit parents, the district's 44 school-based partnership teams (called Family Engagement Action Teams-FEAT) encouraged parents to enroll. The program was publicized via e-mail, robocalls in multiple languages, and in the district's monthly Family Connections Newsletter. Bilingual instructors urged refugee and immigrant families to enroll. Childcare and interpreters provided for every class.

District leaders solved many challenges along the way, but persevered with the Family Connectors University, which cost \$7,000 last year. "Offering a parent leadership program [is one way] to increase student academic achievement at a very low cost," one district leader pointed out.

For many of parents, Family Connectors University was the first time they had visited a college campus. The district used Title I funds to pay a small tuition fee for parents. The graduates earned 2.5 college credits for completing the course. There are plans to expand to 12 cohorts next year in partnership with North Seattle College, the University of Washington, Seattle PTSA, and an African American Community Based Organization.

The parents celebrated their success at a graduation ceremony. They were proud to serve as learning role models for their children and mentors to other families, who benefitted from information on how to navigate the school and district and how to support their children's learning. Many graduates of the Family Connectors University become members of their school's FEAT team to put knowledge of partnership into action.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

# FUTURE FOCUS 203

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

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**N**aperville Community School District 203 is always working to improve its schools and engage its families and the community in important ways. District leaders initiated Future Focus 203 to obtain ideas and suggestions for on-going improvements. A new Superintendent was settling in and a redistricting plan was settling down. The Superintendent was eager to have a better understanding of family and community values and priorities about education. His goal is to establish a positive, transparent, and collaborative decision-making process going forward in order to use resources effectively, serve an increasingly diverse population, and maximize student success.

He assembled a diverse group of 20 family and community members to plan and host a series of engagement forums for citizens across the district. The Facilitation Team was led by Co-Chairs who scheduled five community engagement sessions. Invitations were sent by video and flyers. The leaders met with local reporters, parent leaders, business partners, unions, and other key community stakeholders to encourage their participation and share their voices. The recruitment efforts were successful—nearly 500 families, students, staff, and community members attended at least one session.

Each meeting opened with a short presentation by members of the Facilitation Team. Each session was devoted to a different discussion topic including the state of the district, defining student success, programs of study, finances and resources, and facilities for learning. Attendees worked in small groups to discuss each topic, ask questions, voice concerns, and make recommendations. “By interacting in work groups, stakeholders learned from each other,” a Co-Chair explained. “They learned about different needs and concerns of parents with children at

different grade levels.” A parent commented, “This process was pure genius!”

After each session, notes and videos of the presentation were posted on the District’s website for all members of the community to review. The meetings were filmed by a videographer and later edited into a 32-minute documentary. Future Focus 203’s meetings, summaries, and video cost about \$30,000.

Students also were included as important stakeholders with ideas about school improvement. Focus groups were held at each high school to gather students’ ideas on defining student success. From the students’ feedback, it was clear that they were eager to have their social and emotional needs met while pursuing success in high school and plans for college or careers. Student success, they emphasized, should not just be measured by test scores.

The Facilitation Team analyzed the data from all sessions and presented their findings to the Superintendent and at an open forum. “Now, my job and the job of the District is to develop a plan with short and long term goals to show this community that we are listening,” he said.

Future Focus 203 required long hours from all involved, but was a valuable way to involve the community in decisions and directions for maintaining the district’s reputation for excellent education for all students. District leaders gained an understanding of diverse viewpoints that can be addressed with creative policymaking. They aim to use the results of this process to strengthen community support, ensure positive school climates, and promote positive academic, social, and emotional experiences for all students.

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# GREAT START! A PARENT CONNECTION SERIES

**NORWOOD CITY SCHOOLS  
NORWOOD, OH**

**P**arents of incoming kindergarteners are often unaware of many community resources available to them. Norwood City Schools leaders for partnerships wanted to introduce parents to these resources and to each other. They worked with a local nonprofit organization called Live It Like You Mean It to develop a series of six workshops for the parents of new kindergarteners. Each one featured expert guest speakers from the community. Each workshop aimed to help parents have a clear sense of how to support their child's education. Each one also helped parents strengthen their social network by connecting with other parents.

District leaders made announcements about the workshops at Kindergarten Round Up meetings, put ads in the local newspaper, and added workshop registration forms to school enrollment packets. District leaders also called parents once they had enrolled their children in kindergarten. To boost attendance, parents who signed up were given gift cards if they recruited friends. Reminder text messages helped to ensure that attendance remained strong from week to week. Ultimately, nearly 30 parents attended the series.

The two-hour weekly sessions were offered both in the morning and evening to make them as convenient as possible for parents. They included breakfast or dinner, and were held at a centrally located church. The church was an ideal location because it provided meeting space, a kitchen, air conditioning, and WIFI. The church also had space for childcare, which high school students provided.

Parents were given a binder in which to collect materials from the workshops. They were asked to put a photo of their child on the cover. The district's Curriculum Director gave a useful presentation about children's school readiness skills and showed short educational videos about parents' relationships with young children. Parents discussed the presentation, and each

participant listed a related action item in the binder to try at home. Parents also started a journal in which they wrote to their child about their hopes for the child's future and the role they planned to play as a parent.

The next five meetings followed the same format. They covered topics such as parent engagement, health, children's literacy skills, and summer learning and learning loss. Speakers included a representative from the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), dieticians and nurses from Cincinnati Children's Hospital, and Family and Student Services representatives. Members of the Family Peer Support organization attended every session.

At the final workshop, the group was joined by a panel of teens from a local high school. The teens shared what they wished their parents had known before they started kindergarten.

Over the six weeks, facilitators watched as families offered suggestions and support to one another. The most valuable moments, they said, occurred when families brainstormed to find solutions for each other's challenges. "We saw them grow individually and grow closer together as a group," a district leader said.

Participants were surveyed at the end of the workshop series and their responses were overwhelmingly positive. Several noted that the program should be mandatory for all parents of new kindergarteners.

The workshop series cost \$4,500. Norwood City Schools is currently working on a one-day version of the program to make it accessible to even more parents next year.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

# PARENTS IN ACTION NEWSLETTER

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**ALVORD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT  
RIVERSIDE, CA**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**T**hree times a year, Alvord Unified School District gives parents a reason to smile when they open their mailboxes and find a copy of Parents in Action. This very professional-looking newsletter is packed with useful articles and notices. It helps the district meet its goal of improving communications with parents. By featuring useful information and highlighting parental engagement opportunities, the colorful publications also increase parents' involvement in their children's education.

"Newsletters always are difficult to produce," a district staff member acknowledged. "They can be costly and time-consuming. But they are appreciated by the community if they provide a consistent source of information, document good work, have historical value, and serve as a positive beacon to and from our schools."

Newsletters require collaboration. Here, the Parent Engagement Office (PEO) notifies all district personnel of three submission deadlines. For each issue, PEO solicits submissions from district divisions for information of interest to students' parents. A few examples include changes to the school lunch program, the District's focus on fitness, Common Core State Standards and what they mean to classroom instruction and assessments, and afterschool program highlights.

PEO staff members attend school-based parent education programs and governance meetings to spread word about the newsletter and to gather news. At these meetings, they may take photos or ask parents and school staff to write about their initiatives. Principals may write articles about parent leaders and the ATPs. The PEO staff edits all articles so that they will be clear to all readers.

Getting enough copy for each issue can be a challenge, but the PEO staff addresses this by writing stories for schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). They supplement articles

with notices, motivational quotes, photos, and parenting tips.

Site administrators love to highlight the good work accomplished by their teachers, students, and families. The District Instructional Services and Child Nutrition departments use the newsletters to meet program requirements to communicate with parents.

About 12,000 families receive Alvord's Parents in Action. They see features on parents and teachers they know, and read about local business partners' contributions to the schools. A recent issue included photos of parents and children participating in Read Across America; a list of the year's parent education activities; an interview with a parent volunteer; and information for English Language Learner's (ELL) parents about how to support their children's education. The issue also contained a thank you to a community partner for treats provided to one school for Dr. Seuss's Birthday Party.

Each issue of Parents in Action costs \$5,000 to produce and distribute. The newsletter is published in English and Spanish to reach as many parents as possible. It is distributed at parent leadership events, at workshops, and by the schools. "We get calls from parents if they don't get a copy from their schools," said a district staff member.

District administrators and school staff rely on the newsletter. When discussing how the busy district staff should prioritize projects at the end of the school year, the assistant superintendent said, "Of course, the last issue should go out. That is valuable." Parents in Action is, indeed, valued by parents. It lets them know that they are part of the story of their children's education.

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# PROACTIVE PARENTS: ENRICHING THEIR LIVES

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## PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT

PASCO, WA

**W**here can Pasco School District parents go to learn about and discuss important education issues such as preventing gang violence, supporting early learning development, and promoting good nutrition all in one day? They may attend the annual Educational Service District (ESD 123) Title I Conference. Every year, with the help of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs), 60 parents are able to attend the conference to gain information about how to support their students at home and at school.

"The sessions are educational, enjoyable, and encouraging," reported one parent. "The Conference gives me the tools to be healthier and more knowledgeable... It has helped me to help my family."

ESD 123 sends school ATPs a copy of the conference agenda and asks them to select five parents to attend. It is up to each ATP to determine how parents are selected in a fair way. For example, the ATP may mail home a flyer about the conference and ask all interested parents to fill out a contact form. The five participants could then be drawn at random from those who respond. All 18 schools in the district were represented by parents at the conference.

Last year, district leaders welcomed the parents to the conference center and directed them to a table to sign in and pick up a name tag and a welcome bag filled with items donated by local businesses. Parents enjoyed a buffet breakfast before visiting a variety of community booths. For example, at one booth parents could pick up a free book for their child. At another, they could sign up for a field trip to Washington State University.

An eighth-grade Spanish teacher gave the keynote address. He could relate very well to the many Latino parents in attendance. He shared the personal and educational obstacles he had encountered on his way to success as an educator. He had grown up in a hostile environment and starting at age 16, worked at an orchard for eight years. When someone encouraged him to pursue further education, he decided to go to college to acquire his teaching credentials. He inspired many to think of the possible directions they and their children might take. His father also spoke at the conference on supporting children's learning in Mexico and the U. S.

The parents attended three 1-hour expert-led sessions of their choice. Topics included STEM subjects; Getting Ready for Immigration Reform; Helping Your Child to Read; Making Math Fun; and Keeping Your Children Safe in a Digital World. Sessions were offered in both English and Spanish. Parents took a lunch break between sessions to network with each other.

The conference cost \$5,640 (\$60 per parent). "I loved seeing the parents' high enthusiasm for learning and their motivation to make time to attend," said a district ATP leader.

Leaders encouraged participants to attend their school's next ATP meeting to report the information, strategies, and insights they gained at the conference. This way, the content of the conference would be extended to encourage other parents' support for their children's success in school.

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# SCHOOL CLUSTER TEAMS

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## LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

### LITTLE ROCK, AR

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Transitioning to elementary, middle, or high school can be stressful for students and their families, but Little Rock School District (LRSD) Parent Involvement Office is working to ease the way. The district assigned parent, teacher, and community leaders at schools in the district to regional Cluster Teams. The teams were guided to plan and implement family and community events to prepare students to make the transition from preschool to kindergarten, from elementary to middle school, and from the middle grades to high school. The events also served to ensure families that they continued to be important partners in their children's education at school and at home.

Each Cluster Team elected a Team Leader and a Recorder in the fall. These two individuals organized efforts and reported their progress to the district on a monthly basis. District specialists in parental involvement provided the Cluster Team leaders with resources, advice, and encouragement.

The teams customized practices to help students and families make successful transitions to the schools in their assigned areas. For example, the West Side Cluster Team planned a four-hour Community Health and Grade Transition Fair on a Saturday morning, with over 450 parents and 200 students attending. The Fair featured student performances, guest speakers, and information for parents and students on how to maintain emotional and physical health in their new school.

At the Fair, a social media expert explained how social media has affected society and the schools. He offered suggestions for students and families to stay safe in the digital age. Families received information from school leaders about how to successfully transition to a new grade. Facilitators distributed

brochures and provided information about specific schools.

Students were offered free immunizations and physical exams. Adults had an opportunity to donate blood to the Red Cross. Throughout the morning, students currently enrolled in the schools gave performances to entertain the transitioning students and to demonstrate some of the clubs and activities that new students could join.

The Central-East Cluster Team took a more formal approach to supporting students and families who were entering new schools. The Cluster Team organized an evening session for about 50 parents and 20 students. The event began with a flag ceremony conducted by a local high school Honor Guard and the playing of the National Anthem. School administrators welcomed the group and offered tips on making a successful transition to a new school. The 15 schools in the area set up displays staffed by school volunteers to show some of their interesting programs and activities.

The students and families were directed to different classrooms designated by grade level. There were rooms for incoming kindergarteners, middle-schoolers, and high school students. Older students and staff members talked with each group to provide advice, answer questions, and build positive connections between school and home.

The District Leaders for Partnerships supported the Cluster Teams and the activities for transitioning students and families. Their combined efforts contributed to good planning and successful implementation of these events.

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# TRANSITION EXPEDITION

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## LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

### LITTLE ROCK, AR

**I**t's natural to be anxious about moving from a familiar school to a new school, but students and families in the Little Rock School District also get excited about the journey ahead. The Transition Expedition, held at a community center, aimed to quell students' fears about their upcoming transition from preschool to elementary, elementary to middle, or middle to high school with a comprehensive exposition on the schools they were to enter. Families learned that they were making the transition with their students, and that they would be welcome at the child's new school. More than 200 parents participated and many students attended, too.

Transition Expedition was planned and implemented by district leaders and one or two parent leaders from every school. The parent leaders also delegated tasks to many volunteers to oversee key services including interpreting, child care for very young children, set up, clean up, refreshments, security, and entertainment. All volunteers were thanked for their time and talents.

District leaders distributed flyers, asked each school to publicize the activity in their morning and afternoon announcements, posted signs at local businesses and restaurants, and used Parent Link. Neighborhood churches also promoted the event.

At the exhibit, families were welcomed by district and school staff, parent leaders, and student leaders from the schools. The attendees browsed colorful displays created by students and teachers that explained the mission and goals of the school. Staff, parent leaders, and students distributed brochures about the school and chatted with the new families and rising students. They shared information about school clubs, elective courses, and ways

that new parents could get involved in their children's education. To enable easy outreach later in the school year, the school staff collected contact information for the new families.

One highlight of the Transition Expedition was a series of student performances. Students shared their dance, poetry, and musical talents throughout the event. The performances sparked everyone's interest, and provided an opportunity for current students to share their talents, gain confidence, and receive positive recognition for their abilities.

Refreshments were served to all attendees and door prizes were donated by local businesses. The Transition Expedition cost \$800 to produce. A short survey asked parents to rate various aspects of Transition Expedition, including the facility, timing, displays, performances, and their feelings of welcome. Parents and students were equally enthusiastic about this event and the new schools they would attend.

As they evaluated their work, leaders agreed that a Transition Expedition could be conducted twice a year—in the summer before school starts and in the spring when students receive their new school assignments. The district leaders noted that it is important for incoming students and families to feel comfortable—even eager—about attending their new school. Smooth transitions promote better behavioral adjustment to a new location and enables students to think about their classes and schoolwork. As students and their families journey through elementary, middle, and high schools, a Transition Expedition is a good stop along the way.

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# WORDS OF WISDOM FROM ATP CHAIRS

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**PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**PASCO, WA**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**W**hen Pasco School District chose the phrase Words of Wisdom as its motto for the year, the district’s Leaders for Partnerships launched a guest speaker series featuring experienced Chairpersons of its school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). In Pasco, all schools are members of NNPS and have well-functioning ATPs. The district and many schools have earned NNPS Partnership Awards for excellent and sustainable partnership programs. There is a deep pool of experts on partnerships at the district level and across the schools.

For Words of Wisdom, three times a year three experienced school ATP Chairpersons at the elementary, middle, and high school levels shared best practices and lessons learned at district ATP cluster meetings attended by all school ATP chairs and district representatives. The series tapped into the knowledge of veteran or experienced Chairpersons of school-based ATPs.

Pasco’s district Leaders for Partnerships have an ongoing goal of showing that the work of ATPs is important and appreciated. “We know that people respond favorably to suggestions made by colleagues and take their ideas to heart,” said one district coordinator. The guest speakers celebrated success and seeded new ideas.

“ATP Chairs take the ideas back to their teams and make them their own,” the coordinator explained. “After listening to the speakers, we always feel rejuvenated and excited to incorporate the ideas shared into our own program,” agreed one ATP Chair. Another explained, “The ATP Chairs in attendance [at the cluster meetings] are guaranteed to walk away with tried and true practices that can be implemented to fit their schools’ needs.”

Among the practices shared in the past year was the 8th Hour Academy at Pasco High School, which enabled students who narrowly missed passing a course to attend a two-week afterschool program to complete missing assignments or retake tests to earn the necessary credits to pass the class. A middle school ATP chair loved the idea and planned to implement a similar “recovery” program at her school. As another example, the Chair of an elementary school’s ATP described soliciting important information from parents on a Getting to Know You Surveys early in the school year. Other elementary school ATP chairs were eager to try this practice at their schools.

Words of Wisdom cost only about \$100 for thank you cards and small gifts for the ATP chairs who are the invited speakers. Said a district leader, “The only challenge has been that some Chairs have a fear of speaking publicly. With strong encouragement, however, all of the invited speakers agreed to present and have done an excellent job!”

The speaker series is an effective way to ensure that good ideas spread and quickly improved students’ school experiences. In Pasco, District Leaders for Partnerships guide each school’s ATP to improve practices that engage all families in ways that support student success. The district leaders also listen to and learn from the schools’ ATPs. The Words of Wisdom speaker series shows that ATPs also learn from each other. Taken together, Pasco School District is, indeed, a “learning organization” for improving school, family, and community partnerships.

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# FAMILY WORKSHOPS ON READING READINESS

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## JUMPSTART

### SAN FRANCISCO, CA

It's never too early to provide families with information on how to support their children's learning. That is why Jumpstart—a national nonprofit organization devoted to educating preschool children in low-income communities—launched a series of family workshops at 14 sites in San Francisco last year. More than 180 families participated in the workshops, where they learned to encourage their preschoolers' early language and literacy development using strategies for storytelling, vocabulary, alphabet knowledge, writing, and phonological awareness. The workshops also provided families with a forum to share challenges, ideas, and resources with staff and with each other.

Five workshops were conducted at each Jumpstart site. Families learned about the workshops when they picked up their children at the end of the day. They also received flyers listing the dates of the workshops. The availability of childcare, food, and translators at the workshops encouraged parents and caregivers to attend. The workshops cost about \$3000 for staff travel, printing and supplies, translators' fees, and children's books.

The regional Jumpstart director developed the content for the workshops, with input from her colleagues. She recruited and trained five facilitators to conduct the workshops and handle the logistical planning at each site.

Each 1½ hour workshop was filled with useful information. At one, for example, parents created a shared-reading routine to follow at home. They learned how to select picture books for their child, and how to use prompts, questions, and observations to engage their child while reading with them. The facilitator modeled these strategies by reading a picture book aloud to the children in the group.

The facilitator also shared ways that parents who do not speak English can help

their children build reading skills. Parents learned that a physical book is not necessary. Rather, oral storytelling in any language can benefit children, too. Parents learned not to discourage their children by telling them to “stop” or “pay attention” if they made silly comments. It was okay, the facilitator said, to take breaks if the child could not sit through an entire story. This workshop included a family puppet-making activity. Also, each family received a picture book to read together at home.

A local university professor gained a grant to evaluate the impact of the Family Workshops. Through observations, surveys, and interviews of the families, the researcher learned that the workshops were effective teaching tools. “The preschool-aged children enjoyed interacting with their peers and family members during the sessions,” she noted. “Data revealed that families grew in their confidence to positively interact with their children around early literacy and language activities.” One father who participated said that after attending the workshops, he started asking his child questions about the story when they read together. A mother reported that she began labeling items around the house to enhance her child's vocabulary and furnished her child's room with an alphabet floor mat.

It has been shown in research and in practice that preschool children whose parents help them strengthen reading readiness skills are more ready for kindergarten. Jumpstart hopes to offer similar programs in the future if resources are obtained for Family Workshops.

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# FULL STEAM AHEAD WITH UPK

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**CUYAHOGA COUNTY UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN  
CLEVELAND, OH**

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

**I**t's rare to hear about preschool children learning STEM subjects, but the Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) proved that it is never too early to introduce children to science, technology, engineering, and math. UPK added "A" for the arts to the list of essential education topics. Last year, the organization proceeded full STEAM ahead with a creative series of community-based events designed to boost family learning and engagement.

The program was inspired by an article published in 2012 entitled STEM to STEAM: How early childhood educators can apply the Fred Rogers Approach. STEAM integrates and uses the arts to help children express STEM concepts. Because the arts are common in early childhood programs, it made good sense to give attention to the STEM curriculum through the arts. After reading this piece in *Young Children*, the UPK Family Engagement Coordinator adapted the ideas for UPK families. Soon various community partners, UPK directors, and other stakeholders were on board.

One STEAM activity was made possible by a grant from PNC Bank and support from the Children's Museum of Cleveland. Educators from the museum developed nine interactive math stations and brought them to seven UPK sites. Families escorted children from station to station where they sang counting songs, played matching games with dominoes, practiced sorting items, used addition and subtraction counter mats, and learned about money. Each family took home activity cards to continue the fun and learning.

Another STEAM series was facilitated by the Center for Arts-Inspired Learning and supported by a grant from the Bruening Foundation. Artists visited UPK classrooms to teach four sessions. Students learned about rhythm, beats, and cues, and participated in music and dance activities. Parents were welcome to join.

Individual UPK sites supplemented these activities with their own. One site distributed monthly Learning At Home tips, and another gave out family math kits. Others conducted photography, ecology, and computer science activities with students and families.

In June, UPK celebrated the yearlong STEAM initiative at the Great Lakes Science Center. UPK leaders from many sites discussed the STEAM activities they had organized. Parents were impressed to learn more about the UPK STEAM practices. "I didn't realize he was learning math in pre-K!" a parent exclaimed.

After enjoying dinner together, families toured the science museum's exhibits. They enjoyed learning about electricity, motion, and mechanics. The evening was an educational way to recognize the year's accomplishments and continue the STEAM momentum.

Over all, more than 400 parents, 1,500 children, and 150 preschool teachers participated in the STEAM events. "Parents benefitted from learning the importance of STEAM education in everyday life, and learned new ways to reinforce these skills at home," a staff member noted. "Children valued the time spent with their families at school, and enjoyed exploring new topics with guidance from community experts.

Full STEAM Ahead was supported by \$25,000 in grants. UPK recognized 50 community members and 20 district leaders who made the project a reality. UPK will continue to offer STEAM activities. Thanks to last year's activities, there is, now, a large group of parent leaders and volunteers who are ready to make future events even more effective.

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# PARENT LEADERSHIP IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
RIVERSIDE, CA

For several years, the Riverside County Office of Educations (RCOE) has teamed up with the 23rd District Parent Teacher Association (PTA) for Riverside County to increase family engagement in area schools. Last year, the team expanded its Parent Engagement Leadership Initiative (PELI) to serve early childhood programs and secondary schools. RCOE serves over 20 school districts in the region.

“The original PELI curriculum developed in 2009 focused on elementary school family engagement strategies, information, and research,” an RCOE staff member explained. “As it became clear that PELI is a research-based method to engage parents and families in public education, requests for early childhood education and secondary training modules surfaced.” PELI content is based on the Epstein Framework of Six Types of Involvement, California’s state recommendations for family engagement, and PTA resources. PELI workshops aim to help parent leaders work more effectively on school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to engage all parents in their children’s education.

For the early childhood PELI training, RCOE worked with the RC Head Start Policy Council of parent volunteers using Head Start’s expectations for family engagement as the basis for a series of PELI training modules. Sessions were offered at monthly Council meetings throughout the year with the goal of helping parents gain knowledge and skills needed to become leaders of family engagement programs at their respective schools.

One-hour training modules were titled with the Head Start Expectation followed by one of the six types of involvement. For example, one workshop was Continuous Program Leadership/Communicating; another was Family Partnerships/Parenting, and so on. Each workshop included information on the research base, definitions, activities, and applications. Participants were asked to try specific activities before the next Council meeting. For example,

after the Family Partnerships/ Parenting session, parents were asked to speak to each of their own children about their school experiences, dreams, and fears.

One parenting activity was called Crazy Momma/Daddy Time—when parents do something wild and crazy with their children. Parents reported that this helped them feel closer to their children as they had some fun together. In another communicating activity, parents learned to prepare for parent-teacher conferences.

RCOE and PTA used a similar approach to adapt PELI for secondary schools. They conducted workshops for members of Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) from nearby high schools. Topics covered the framework of Six Types of Involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, Collaborating with the Community and information on ATPs in high schools. In NNPS, students are on high school ATPs. PELI reported that this is opening opportunities for student leadership and decision making.

PELI leaders shared information about the workshops for preschools and secondary schools at several regional meetings and conferences, including the Riverside County Family Involvement Network, the Regional Partnerships Network, and the district Family and Engagement Leadership Conference. The presentations gained administrative support for the PELI trainings for parent leaders, which cost \$2,500 each. Ten administrators attended PELI trainings to see how they were conducted and received. According to one, “PELI provides excellent scaffolding and conversation starters to begin discussion between school and parents.” For information on PELI trainings and materials visit [www.rcoe.us](http://www.rcoe.us)

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ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

# POVERTY SIMULATION

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FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
FLORENCE, SC

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

**W**hat is life like for families with low incomes who must survive from month to month? Nearly 80 teachers and community members got a glimpse into the life of many families in the region at a Poverty Simulation conducted by Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty (FMU-COE). The simulation is a training tool to enable participants to view poverty from different angles in an experiential setting. "When teachers and administrators have a deeper understanding of their families who live in poverty," a COE staff member explained, "students benefit academically and behaviorally."

On the recommendation of a state education leader, COE purchased a kit to conduct the activity from the Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation (about \$2,000). Five simulations were conducted last year at FMU and across the state. Each one takes about three hours, and each time the kit is used, its materials must be replenished.

The COE began planning for the June simulation two months in advance with a mass e-mailing to educators and community leaders. Those who registered were reminded of the seriousness of the activity, and were told that latecomers and observers would not be permitted at the sessions.

First, 18 volunteers were recruited and trained to take specific professional and community roles in the life of families in poverty. They were prepared to act as banker, mortgage/rent collector, pawnbroker, social service worker, police officer, and other service providers. Recruiting these volunteers was a challenge. COE worked with the local Housing Authority to find individuals with experience living in poverty, but could find no volunteers available to play these parts. Instead, some registrants and COE staff members filled the

roles. The volunteers received small thank you gifts in appreciation for their time and effort.

The participants in each session also were assigned specific roles. They were designated as 26 different families with low incomes. Some families were newly unemployed, some had recently lost a breadwinner, and some consisted of grandparents raising grandchildren. Each family's goal was to acquire food, shelter, and other basic supplies and services during the course of four 15 minute "weeks" in the simulation.

It was difficult. Participants described the experience as "eye-opening." On evaluations of the experience, participants reported that they were more sensitive to issues related to poverty. "The entire system really needs to be re-evaluated to help those in need," one community member realized.

The poverty index in South Carolina's public schools is about 70%, so it is extremely important for educators and school community leaders to understand the experiences of their students and families. "Poverty is much more stressful than I imagined," observed one teacher. "I found the simulation to be very touching," added another.

Planning is underway for future simulations with local school districts. COE aims to add a bus tour of an economically depressed neighborhood paired with a guided discussion about poverty and education. "We highly recommend the simulation training for anyone interested in learning about life in poverty," said a COE representative. When you walk in someone else's shoes—even in an activity like this—you gain a real understanding of what others experience.

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# LITERACY AND LEARNING = STUDENT SUCCESS

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**UTAH GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON LITERACY  
MURRAY, UT**

**W**hen it comes to literacy and learning, summer is no time to snooze. That's why the Utah Governor's Commission on Literacy launched a statewide summer family reading program to engage parents in their children's education. The Governor's Commission on Literacy, started in 2003, set goals for Utah's children to read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade and for parents and children to read together for at least twenty minutes every day. Shared reading is not only fun for everyone, but also helps students develop their vocabulary, listening skills, and love of reading.

The summer program, Literacy and Learning, was spearheaded by Utah's First Lady, Jeanette Herbert. In May, every McDonald's restaurant in the state hosted a kickoff event. Families gathered at the restaurants to enjoy free apple dippers, face painting, art projects, and literacy-linked activities conducted by public librarians and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members.

They learned about the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge. If families read together for 20 minutes a day for the whole summer, then students in grades K-6 would earn a Certificate of Achievement signed by the Governor and First Lady, along with a gift certificate for a free McDonald's Happy Meal and coupons from Applebee's and Chuck-a-Rama. Families could record and mail a Family Progress Report on their summer reading, or report their minutes of daily reading on the state's website, [www.utah.gov](http://www.utah.gov).

Families started reading together right away, thanks to free new books distributed at

the McDonald's. Each restaurant distributed 100 new children's books purchased from Scholastic. Families also received reading calendars to keep track of minutes of reading and bookmarks printed with reminders of the 20-minute-a-day plan. Students who could not attend a kickoff received a calendar and bookmark at school. The materials were available in Spanish and in English.

Earlier, the Governor's office sent all school districts a PowerPoint presentation explaining the program and how it supported state goals for increasing students' reading achievement, along with stacks of calendars and bookmarks for over 300,000 elementary school students across the state. Press releases were sent to TV and print news organizations, and the PTA was asked to urge parents to read with their children. Participants could tweet progress and photos of family reading to @mcdonalds\_utah. Other supporters of the summer reading program were the University of Utah, the state library system, the PTA's Three for Me program to encourage volunteers, and Latinos in Action.

The summer reading challenge was made possible by the Governor's office and a large donation from McDonald's for its state-wide effort. Tasty treats, gift books, and valued rewards are a winning combination to encourage students to read for pleasure, prevent summer learning loss, and prepare for the next school year.

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