



## SAMPLER

### IMPROVE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE GRADES

**Early adolescents are puzzling, indeed.  
Family and community involvement is just what they need  
To guide their development for success in school.  
The right mix of guidance and independence is “cool.”**

In the middle grades,<sup>1</sup> students become more independent, expand and identify their interests, learn more and deeper facts and concepts in many subjects, and, often, make new friends if they attend new middle level schools. These are exciting and important years of growth and development. The middle grades also can be turbulent and challenging times for students as their bodies, emotions, and attitudes change. They may struggle to find the right balance of work and play, friends and family, school and home.

Parents struggle, too, to understand their early adolescents and to support their needs for love, guidance, and independence. Parents' questions and concerns, however, often go unanswered, leading to a general decline in parental involvement in the middle grades. This can be corrected with well-planned, age-appropriate programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

School-based programs of family and community involvement help everyone who is engaged in the education and development of early adolescents (Epstein & Hutchins, 2012). With an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), all middle level schools can organize effective plans and practices that involve all families, community partners, and the students, themselves, in ways that ensure a welcoming school climate and help early adolescents meet clear and important goals for student success (Epstein, et al., 2009). Families and community partners may, for example, help smooth students' transitions from the elementary to middle grades, improve attendance, increase students' learning in class, improve

relationships with peers and adults, reduce high-risk behaviors, and enable students to develop their individual talents.

#### **Improve classroom teaching in the middle grades.**

The activities in this *Sampler* were conducted by middle level schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to engage teachers, students, and parents across grade levels. Individual teachers and grade-level teams may adapt the activities to strengthen partnerships with their own students' families and communities. For example, a middle level teacher may reorganize parent-teacher conferences as *Student-Led Conferences*. A social studies teacher might adapt *Wildcats Make a Difference* to engage the class in a community service project.

This *Sampler* includes a few of many excellent family and community involvement activities from middle level schools in NNPS annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices*. The activities, alphabetically ordered, illustrate ways to engage parents, other family members, and community partners in chats with the principal and in activities to increase students' reading, math, and social studies skills and learning, improve school behavior, and contribute to community service. See other creative ideas at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) in the section Success Stories. Click on a particular year's book and use the search function to identify involvement activities from middle schools.

<sup>1</sup>The term “middle grades” refers to any combination of grades 5–9 that occur in middle schools (6-8), junior high schools (7-9), K–8 schools, K–12 schools, and other grade organizations.

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## Review of Research: Middle Grades Programs of Family and Community Involvement

Joyce L. Epstein, Director

School, family, and community partnerships in the middle grades have been studied in two main ways. Some studies report what parents do. Others examine what schools do to involve families. Both yield useful—but different—information.

**What do parents do to remain involved in their child's education in the middle grades?** For more than two decades, researchers have studied factors that affect parents' involvement in their children's education in the middle grades, including their beliefs, influences, and individual practices at school and at home. The studies showed that parents became involved according to their beliefs about their roles in education, their feelings about their abilities to help their children, and their responses to invitations from their children and the schools (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2006). Other studies asked students about their own parents' involvement. Even in low-income communities, and after accounting for students' prior report card grades and sense of belonging at school, those whose parents were involved in their education had higher report card grades in Grade 6 than did similar students without active family involvement (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Nevertheless, many studies report that parents of middle grade students want more and better information from the schools so that they can remain involved (Kreider, et al, 2007).

**What do schools do to involve more parents?** Studies of schools' outreach help us understand whether and how parents and other family members (e.g., grandparents, foster parents, guardians) become involved and the results of their involvement on student achievement and other indicators of success in school. On average, parental involvement tends to decline in the middle grades. Middle level schools are large and distant from home and the students have different teachers for school subjects. This causes some parents to avoid the school and distance themselves from their children's schoolwork. Teachers have many students and little time to communicate with parents. This causes some teachers to avoid communicating with parents. These deficiencies occur *unless* schools take action to organize effective partnership programs (Hutchins, 2011). When middle level schools implement goal-linked and inclusive partnership programs, more families respond, including those who would not become involved on their own. These programs can be as active as in elementary schools and may have measurable effects on students' attendance, behavior, and various measures of achievement (e.g., report card grades, homework completion, standardized test scores). Two longitudinal studies with case and control treatments indicated that family involvement with students on interactive homework in language arts and science in the middle grades contributed to students' positive attitudes and gains in achievement test scores in these subjects (Van Voorhis, 2011).

**Why is this research important for improving practice in the middle grades?** According to the Association for Middle Level Education, all middle level schools should involve families in their children's education. It is one of 16 essential characteristics of successful middle level schools—whatever the grade organization (AMLE, 2012). Educators need to know that there are feasible, research-based approaches for engaging all students' families, as illustrated in this set of *Samplers*.

For details on these and other studies and complete references, see:

- AMLE. (2010). *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*. Westerville, OH: Association for Middle Level Education.
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- Epstein, J. L. et al. (2009). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, third Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gutman, L. M. & Midgley, C. (2000) The role of protective factors in supporting the academic achievement of poor African American students during the middle school transition. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29, 223-248.
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- Kreider, H., Caspe, M., Kennedy, S., & Weiss, H. (2007). *Family involvement in middle and high school students' education. Brief 3*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved from [http://www.hfrp.org/content/download/1340/48835/file/fi\\_adolescent.pdf](http://www.hfrp.org/content/download/1340/48835/file/fi_adolescent.pdf)
- Van Voorhis, F. L. (2011). Costs and benefits of family involvement in homework. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 22, 220–249.



# Amacca Museum

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*Isaac Stevens Middle School  
Pasco, Washington*

Sixth graders from Isaac Stevens Middle School took a cue from the Smithsonian last March, transforming their cafeteria into a virtual Egyptian tomb, explored by over 300 parents during Amacca Museum Night.

The idea for the project came when two of the school's sixth grade teachers put their heads together to spice-up a unit on Egypt in their curriculum. They decided to transform six weeks of lectures on mummies and hieroglyphs into an event that expanded beyond the classroom, getting parents and other family members involved in the history lesson.

Teachers began teaching the unit in January, dubbing their students young archeologists and inviting them to dig deeper into specific aspects of ancient Egyptian civilization. Students spent the next five weeks in class and in the library researching topics pertaining to ancient Egypt: daily life, the Nile Valley, religion, government, mummification, language, and pyramids. In the final week, the sixth graders worked in school and at home to recreate the artifacts that they had been studying, with the intent of putting them on display in the virtual museum.

On the night of the event, 100 students managed 28 different exhibits around the school cafeteria. Students made statues of Egyptian gods out of clay and papier-mâché. They recreated burial masks, amulets, and clothing. Several students worked to build a life-sized sarcophagus out of cardboard boxes and papier-mâché that visitors could lie in.

In addition to the artifacts, students also developed several Egyptian themed activities to entertain museum-goers. They set up tables where parents and siblings could practice writing in hieroglyphics, or play the ancient game of Senet. Other displays asked parents to solve pyramid math puzzles and watch a puppet show about Egyptian gods and goddesses. All around the room, posters instructed parents on the timeline of Egyptian pharaohs and the

hierarchy of the social classes. 3D models replicated several of the most important pyramids.

Parents, students, and teachers were thoroughly impressed with the content of the exhibit. All involved enjoyed the collaborative atmosphere, as students taught their parents many things they never knew about ancient Egyptian culture. "Visiting Egypt at Stevens was really, really cool!" one parent participant remarked at the end of the event.

The extravagant event cost surprisingly little to produce. Parents and teachers provided most of the materials that students needed for the Egyptian projects, leaving a nominal \$50.00 for the school to spend on odds and ends.

Isaac Stevens Middle School plans to host another similar event next year. The planning committee hopes to expand the activity by featuring multiple civilizations, such as people of the Tigris and Euphrates Valley.



## Family Days at Barnum School

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*Barnum School  
Taunton, Massachusetts*

As the preschool program for the Taunton Public Schools, the Barnum School is strongly aware of the tremendous impact that families have on school readiness. To be responsive to its diverse families and to involve and support families as they begin to work with their young children toward academic success, the school sponsored Monthly Family Days.

Each month, the school invites families to school for a parent workshop followed by visits to the classrooms. The adults take part in regular classroom activities, such as enjoying a snack, playing in the block area or pushing their child on a swing. Realizing that many parents are working, the school always invites other important adults in the child's life to come in place of parents who cannot make the meetings.

Each Family Day begins with coffee and a welcome from the principal or chair of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). After news of upcoming events, there is a half-hour presentation by various staff members. For example, the school's occupational therapist presented a successful workshop, *How to Develop Your Child's Fine Motor Skills*. Participants learned how the hand develops and worked in groups exploring wikki stiks, theraputty, pencil grips and other activities to do at home.

Another month's presentation was a *Make It and Take It Literacy Workshop*. A special education teacher instructed parents, working in four rotating groups, how to create literacy games to use at home. At one station, parents put together fishing games using dowels, string, magnets and alphabet cards. At another, parents made bean bags out of plastic bags and rice to use for an alphabet or shape toss game. Other groups designed game boards with markers, stickers and lots of imagination. At the final station, parents created letter and rhyming matching games.

Throughout the morning, there was a special camaraderie among parents. All of them left with four games they could play with their children that night!

Additional popular topics include how to prevent colds and other diseases, how to increase their preschoolers' physical activity, and a round-table discussion with the principal on how to improve parent-teacher communications. One of the most popular programs was a special event for the whole family featuring a performance by a children's singer and storyteller.

The ideas for the workshops came from a parent survey conducted at the beginning of the year and from staff suggestions. With the principal's input, Family Days are scheduled in advance and put on the calendar for the whole year.

Attendance has been consistently excellent. The children benefit from the active involvement of their families. Families connect with one another and gain valuable insights into strategies for helping their preschoolers develop readiness skills.

The staff believes that more parents are reached in these morning get-togethers than at evening workshops. Barnum School plans to continue its Family Days as it explores new ways to ensure that parents see the school as a welcoming, engaging place.





## FOCUSING ON STUDENT SUCCESS

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### KEARNS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# MATH FAMILY NIGHT

**ELLEN OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PASCO, WASHINGTON**

One teacher summed up Ellen Ochoa Middle School's Math Family Night perfectly by raving, "The best thing about family math night is that families come to the school and are 'playing' together in a purposefully fun activity." This popular annual event enabled participants to visit various stations to work on interactive displays, activities, crafts, and games on mathematical topics aligned to state math standards.

Students helped math teachers set up each rotation with games, projects, and activities. The stations included: multiplication using Pringles cans, bingo, tangrams, bull's eye, deep knee bends, highest number game, math facts, factor game, geometric shapes, and probability and estimation actions. Some stations required students and parents to work together and others to compete.

Math Family Night gave parents information about and hands-on experiences with the school's Connected Math program. Teachers and students worked cooperatively to present each activity to parents—all of which mirrored classroom instruction. Turning the middle schoolers into teachers and parents into students helped families better understand what their children were learning in class.

"I think Math Family Night was fun. My family liked it. It helped my mom learn more new things. When I got home, my parents helped me with my work, too. Thanks for family math night," one student reported.

To keep enthusiasm high, Ochoa's teachers announced between eight and ten raffle winners every 30 minutes. Community business partners donated most of the gift certificates and prizes and some teachers contributed as well. The donations kept the cost of Math Family Night to a low \$200.

Ochoa's Action Team for Partnerships set specific goals for this event. They hoped that students would step outside of their everyday

math curriculum and:

- » *Get excited about math with unusual topics to spark their interest*
- » *Better understand how math applies to many different kinds of problems in the real world*
- » *Learn about mathematicians and their discoveries and contributions*
- » *Overcome math anxieties;*
- » *See that math can be fun and*
- » *Encourage families to have fun with math at home!*

Based on feedback, the ATP met those goals with flying colors. As one teacher reported, "I saw students engaged in mathematics. It is one thing for students to go to math class because they are required to, but quite another thing for students to choose to come to Math Family Night and bring their families. That is a powerful statement about their interest in math. There were so many parents that some activities ran out of supplies. I love to see that!"

The math coach, math teachers, and math subcommittee of the ATP worked in collaboration with the entire ATP to organize, plan, and set up Math Family Night. This team is already planning improvements to next year's event. They want to include a math journal so that families can record and reflect on information they received. As the staff and families at Ellen Ochoa Middle School can tell you, *Math × (Teachers + Parents + Students) = A Fun Evening!*



# PARENTS' DAY

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## SALEM MIDDLE SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

**C**ome spend a day in middle school. Some adults might run from this invitation, but not the parents of students at Salem Middle School. Hundreds of parents came to see what their children's school days were like and enjoyed the experience.

Although common in elementary schools, parents' days are not traditional middle school activities. Salem developed the practice to give parents and guardians a snapshot of their children's day-to-day experiences and to strengthen the bonds between school and home. Now, Parents' Day is an annual event.

A committee of parents, teachers, students, and administrators planned the day. They sent invitations to parents and guardians in mid-September. Because of space limitations, only one adult per student could attend. Subcommittees worked on registration, publicity, attendance, cafeteria, name tags, and evaluation forms, among other details. Volunteers even assisted with parking.

On the "shadow day" (when parents shadowed their children), members of the school staff and Student Council Association greeted the adults and served them refreshments. The principal welcomed the parents at an assembly and gave them a brief overview of what their day would be like. After that, the adults accompanied their students to class, following a regular schedule that included lunch. One diversion was the closing reception, with refreshments, and time for adults to complete a questionnaire to evaluate the day.

"I was utterly exhausted at the end of the day," one parent commented. "I had no idea just how hard middle school was and what my daughter does all day."

One sixth-grade science class actually extended Parents' Day into Parents' Night. The teacher assigned parents the same homework as the students. The sixth grade scientists had the

option to either turn in their own homework or their parents' homework. Surprisingly—or maybe not so surprisingly—most children decided to turn in their *own* assignments, leaving their parents' work at home.

The PTA provided \$800 to cover morning and afternoon refreshments and the lunch vouchers for visiting family members. It was money well spent, as the parents expressed their appreciation for the hospitality and the opportunity to share a day with their children.

The school plans to continue this long-standing annual event, strengthening its organizational strategies to make the day even more engaging. They will find ways to help more families RSVP in a timely fashion so that all who want to attend can be accommodated.

In addition to building school-home-community partnerships, Parents' Day has other benefits, according to school officials. The students are on their best behavior and focused on their classes, so it is a good day academically with few discipline issues. Parents understand better what their students do all day, see the teachers in action, and are better acquainted with the content of the courses. The event also creates good public relations for the school in the community.



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## **STRATEGIES TO INFORM EVERYONE**

### **Harborside Middle School**

#### **Milford, Connecticut**

The Action Team for Partnerships at Harborside Middle School offered many parent workshops in order to reach as many parents as possible. Due to parents' busy schedules, the Action Team found it challenging to get parents to attend the presentations. The Action Team for Partnerships addressed this challenge by implementing several ways to get the presentation information to those families who could not come.

Team members created links on their School/Family/Community Partnerships website to articles pertaining to monthly topics presented at school. They also included a monthly reading list of books that addressed the topics. The team sent home a reading list of books parents could obtain from their parent library. Parents were invited to come in and browse the library at their leisure, or they could have their child bring the books home for them.

The Action Team for Partnerships video taped and audio taped all presentations. If parents had a schedule conflict with the school presentation but wanted the information, they could check out the videos to watch at home or the audiocassettes to listen to while driving in their cars to work or running errands.

Staff members and administrators who conducted the presentations were willing to meet with parents or community members to discuss the workshop or provide additional information. Presenters also offered to help parents implement any strategy discussed in the presentations. This assistance could be face-to-face, by telephone, or through e-mail.

Harborside's Action Team for Partnerships did not stop holding workshops because of low attendance rates. Instead, they found several ways to provide the information to the families who could not attend. By using their website, videotapes, and audiocassettes, the information could be accessed for years to come.





## Student-Led Conferences

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*E. Russell Hicks Middle School  
Hagerstown, Maryland*

Who says that parental involvement decreases in middle school? Certainly not the staff at E. Russell Hicks Middle School! More than 750 parents attended the school's Student-Led Conferences! During this annual activity, all students share their academic progress and success in an individual presentation for their parents or another supervising adult.

Not only did the conferences afford students an opportunity to review and showcase their year's work, but they also helped students develop their organizational and speaking skills. Preparation was key for the conferences' tremendous success. Students prepared by compiling a portfolio of noteworthy assignments for every subject throughout the school year. Teachers helped students assemble and organize their portfolios and worked with students on their presentations.

Each grade, six through eight, was assigned a day toward the end of the school year for its conferences. Parents came to school to attend the meeting and visit their child's Language Arts class. For 20 minutes, the student shared his or her successes in every subject. The school gave all students binders in which to keep examples of the activities and assignments they were particularly proud of and wanted to share.

Once the conference was finished, students and their parents enjoyed refreshments provided by the school. Every student conducted a conference. If a parent was unable to participate, a teacher who the student is comfortable with, district leader or other community volunteer attended to hear about the student's progress.

The middle school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) recognizes that a strong home-school connection is crucial for students' success. Student-Led Conferences enabled students to serve as a bridge from school to home.

Another benefit of Student-Led Conferences was that they became a community affair. A number of businesses, such as Sam's Club, Wal-Mart, Sheetz, McDonald's and Rocky's Pizza, donated cash and food and offered discount coupons to participants. Others also stepped up. The Board of Education helped promote the event. The county television station publicized it and other community members sat in as substitute parents. Additional publicity included morning announcements at school and articles in the school newspaper. The school sent letters about the conferences to all families.

Even though the conferences took place only a few months ago, the ATP is already planning an even bigger event for next year! The team hopes to solicit more community donations and encourage more parents to attend.

There is no doubt that this year's Student-Led Conferences were a runaway hit. The parents enjoyed positive interactions with their children and the students proudly showcased a year's worth of hard work.



# STUDENT ORGANIZATIONAL HELP PROGRAM

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## ROOSEVELT MIDDLE SCHOOL BLAINE, MINNESOTA

**T**heir folders in disarray, lockers cluttered, and planners unused, some students just cannot seem to get organized. Concerned about some bad habits inhibiting these students' success, Roosevelt Middle School enlisted the aid of parent volunteers to help students get their schoolwork in order and keep it that way.

The Student Organizational Help Program targeted students identified by their teachers and the principal as needing additional support. The school paired each student with a volunteer to help them organize their homework and classroom materials, banish chaos from their lockers, and keep track of tests and assignments. The volunteers coached their assigned students on how to use materials like folders and notebooks, and suggested strategies for writing down homework assignments and keeping homework in order.

Meeting with their students weekly, each volunteer filled out a checklist on their student's progress. The checklist scored students on various organizational criteria, including whether their folders and notebooks were correctly labeled, lockers were neat without loose papers, and they had been using their planners appropriately. Using this information, teachers sent home weekly progress reports to parents and kept an extra report on file with the Assistant Principal. At the close of each quarter, the Assistant Principal took stock of each student's progress and decided who could move on without extra support and who needed to continue in the program.

Roosevelt's principal noted that the challenges were to build an adequate, committed volunteer base, secure corporate funding, and establish efficient lines of communication among all parties. Yet, the Student Organizational Help Program's "results have been so positive it's hard to ignore." According to the checklist data, an overwhelming majority of students in the program made significant academic and behavioral progress as a direct

result of their participation.

The volunteers valued the opportunity to build caring, one-on-one relationships with students, with one commenting, "I felt a sense of connection more than in other volunteering."

Thanks to the generosity of the volunteers who donated their time and of local businesses' contributions, Roosevelt was able to conduct the program at no cost to the school. The most significant challenge was finding and training enough parent volunteers. Roosevelt Middle plans to recruit more volunteers next year to help the program flourish.



# UN NIÑO, UNA COMUNIDAD

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## HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

with local Spanish radio stations and newspapers.

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

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

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



## Wildcats Make a Difference

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*Washington Junior High School  
Naperville, Illinois*

**M**ore than 220 students from Washington Junior High School got in the volunteer spirit last school year, thanks to Wildcats Make a Difference. Through the project, students in Grades 6 to 8 were encouraged to volunteer at local organizations in their community.

The School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) at Washington instituted the program two years ago to help encourage students to contribute to the community.

"The Wildcats Make a Difference program ties in perfectly with the community contributor aspect of [our] mission statement and meets one component of the School Improvement Plan," an SFCP co-chair said.

The SFCP team had the main responsibility for maintaining the program. Teachers and administrators provided support by announcing volunteer opportunities, updating the web site with Wildcats Make a Difference information, and encouraging students to participate.

The SFCP promoted the program in morning and lunch announcements to students, and in informational blurbs in the school newsletter for parents. SFCP designated a leader to keep track of updating the volunteer opportunities as they changed.

Between September and June, more than 220 students at the school spent some of their after-school hours entertaining senior citizens at local retirement homes, or stocking church pantries during food drives. The American Cancer Society asked some Washington students to help with its annual Walk for Life campaign. Outdoorsy students volunteered to help maintain the grounds at the local arboretum. Many other projects for and with the community were conducted.

The SFCP and everyone else involved wanted to be sure the students were recognized for their contributions. Washington Junior High staff asked all students who participated

in any volunteer work to fill out a form on the school's web site. On the form, students described who they worked with and what they did. SFCP staff encouraged them to include pictures of their work. Once the forms were complete, school administrators posted the forms on a large bulletin board in the school's cafeteria.

The project cost the school about \$125 to implement, with district grant money used to pay the bills.

Washington saw an increase in volunteerism this year, which translated into many benefits for the school, its students, and the greater community.