



## SAMPLER

### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE

**It's time to go. Soon school will start.  
I must be there to get real smart!**

Good attendance is a critical ingredient for student achievement. When students are in school on time and ready to learn, they are more likely to stay in school, pass their courses, and graduate from high school. When students are late or absent, teachers must take time to reteach skills and help students make up the work they missed. This may slow the flow and progress of learning of all students in the class.

Learning problems multiply for students who are *chronically absent* for many days each year. The steps to help students catch up on lessons and homework can be difficult and disruptive. When absence is a problem, school, family, and community partnerships can help students improve their attendance.<sup>1</sup>

The *Promising Partnership Practices* in this **Sampler** were conducted over the years in schools in diverse communities and at all grade levels. School-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) activated the six types of involvement — *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and collaborating with the community* — to encourage students' regular attendance, celebrate excellent and improved attendance, and motivate students to come to school to learn. See the chart on page 3 for approaches that activate the six types of involvement and see the activities in the *Sampler* for specific designs.

**Improve Classroom Management and Student Attendance.** Individual teachers and grade-level teams of teachers may adapt the activities to engage their own students' families in ways that improve student attendance and on-time arrival. For example, every teacher should provide parents with information on the school's attendance policies, whether a note is required for students to return to class, and how students can make up the work they missed.

Individual teachers may meet with the parents of chronically absent students, as in the *School Attendance Support Network for Parents*. Any teacher may display a banner celebrating days of perfect attendance, offer incentives to students for measurably improved attendance as in *Attendance Roundup* and *In Line On Time*. Thoughtful teachers may work with students to develop individual goals for improving their attendance in the next marking period as in *Improve Attendance*.

Two activities in this *Sampler* are from schools that earned awards for their partnership programs, along with eight activities from annual collections of *Promising Partnership Practices*. See many more activities at <http://www.partnershipschools.org> in the section Success Stories.

<sup>1</sup> If absence is not a problem, a school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers and administrators should focus on other goals for student success with family and community involvement.

---

This **Sampler** was developed by Marsha D. Greenfeld, Joyce L. Epstein, Steven B. Sheldon, Darcy J. Hutchins, and Brenda G. Thomas. © Baltimore: National Network of Partnership Schools, Johns Hopkins University, 2012.

NNPS thanks **MetLife Foundation** for its support to improve programs of family and community involvement. We also acknowledge support from the U. S. Department of Education Innovations in Education (i3) grant to CSOS at JHU.





## Review of Research: Family and Community Involvement to Improve Student Attendance

Joyce L. Epstein and Steven B. Sheldon

When educators set goals to improve student achievement, they automatically recognize the importance of good attendance so that students have opportunities to learn in school. Scores of studies conducted over many years confirm that students with good attendance have higher achievement and better behavior in school than do similar students who are frequently absent (Sheldon, 2009). One approach—organizing comprehensive, goal-linked programs of school, family, and community partnerships—has been shown to increase attendance over time.

**Parents' Actions and School Outreach.** Early studies reported *parents' actions* were related to good attendance. For example, students had lower rates of truancy if their parents monitored their whereabouts, discussed school at home, volunteered at school, and were members of the PTA or PTO. Other studies found that *schools' outreach* engaged more family and community partners in ways that improved more students' attendance (Sheldon, 2007).

The following actions positively influenced rates of average daily attendance from one year to the next.

### School Outreach Activities that Increased Student Attendance and Reduced Chronic Absence

- ✓ **Orient parents on school policies and expectations for student attendance and on-time arrival.**
- ✓ **Provide parents with a school contact person and phone number to call with questions or messages about student attendance.**
- ✓ **Create two-way communication channels for teachers and parents to share attendance and other information about students.** These include connections by phone, e-mail and other e-connectors (e.g., parent portal), and written notes or memos.
- ✓ **Reward or recognize students for excellent or improved attendance.** Alert parents to these awards.
- ✓ **Conduct strong afterschool (extra-curricular) programs for students,** which motivate participating students to attend school all day.
- ✓ **Conduct other attendance-related activities to engage students, families, educators, and community partners in various ways.** See a measure of 14 activities reported by schools working to improve attendance in Epstein & Sheldon, 2002.

### The following actions were linked mainly to reducing chronic absence:

- ✓ **Make home visits.**
- ✓ **Refer chronically absent students to a truant officer in firm and positive ways.**
- ✓ **Refer chronically absent students to a counselor or mentor.**

A comprehensive approach to improve attendance means that **all partners** play important roles in helping students improve attendance and on-time arrival (Chang & Romero, 2008). Teachers, counselors, and other school staff will conduct some activities. Educators know that their schools receive some state funding based on attendance records. Teachers work to meet state and district standards for attendance and to develop motivating lessons and safe and friendly classrooms so that students want to attend school.

Families must do their part to help their children get up and to school (or the school bus) on time. Community organizations and services stand ready to help students and families solve problems that obstruct good attendance. Students, themselves, take responsibility for attendance and learning. When educators, parents, community partners, and students work together in consistent and positive ways, more students get the message and attend school.

For details on these and other studies, see:

Chang, H. & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades*. New York: National Center on Children in Poverty, Columbia University.

Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 308–318.

Sheldon, S. B. (2007). Improving student attendance with school, family, and community partnerships. *Journal of Educational Research*, 100, 267–275.

Sheldon, S. B. (2009). Improving student outcomes with school, family, and community partnerships: A research review. Pp. 40–56 in J. L. Epstein, et al. *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

## Approaches to School, Family and Community Involvement to Improve Student Attendance

How is the framework of six types of family and community involvement (Epstein, et al., 2009) activated to help students improve attendance and on-time arrival? Activities to improve attendance may be developed by Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) for school-wide participation or by individual teachers to improve their own students' daily attendance and on-time arrival.

Type of Involvement	Family and Community Involvement to Improve Student Attendance
<b>Type 1–Parenting</b>	<p>Inform families and discuss information on school attendance policies and parents' responsibilities for ensuring regular, on-time attendance.</p> <p>Invite and address parents' questions, concerns, needs, and ideas on attendance.</p> <p>Conduct workshops for parents on attendance topics, including the connections of attendance to students' grades and promotion, with special invitations for parents of chronically absent students. Include translators as needed.</p>
<b>Type 2–Communicating</b>	<p>Share and discuss with families and community partners the school's attendance goals, strategies, incentives, and time line for reaching the goals.</p> <p>Provide families specific information about their own child's attendance records.</p> <p>Provide a contact person at the school for each family with phone and e-mail information for questions and messages. Create effective two-way communications with all parents about student attendance, behavior, and learning.</p>
<b>Type 3–Volunteering</b>	<p>Recruit and train parent volunteers to call other families with information on their child's absence and make up work. Train volunteers on the rules of privacy.</p> <p>Encourage all families to attend school and extracurricular events to support students' activities and efforts. In this way, students learn that their work and activities are valued by and of interest to important adults in their lives. This may encourage more regular attendance at school.</p>
<b>Type 4–Learning at Home</b>	<p>Provide information to parents (from teachers) on assignments that their child must complete to make up class lessons and homework missed due to absence, with guidelines on how to monitor or guide their child to fulfill these requirements.</p>
<b>Type 5–Decision Making</b>	<p>Involve parents and community partners in planning activities to engage all families in helping students meet attendance goals. In a goal-linked One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships, schedule involvement activities throughout the year with families and the community to help students meet attendance goals and assess progress.</p> <p>Obtain input from all families on attendance goals, challenges they face in supporting students' regular attendance, and ideas for solving these challenges.</p>
<b>Type 6–Collaborating with the Community</b>	<p>Solicit donations and incentives from community partners to recognize and celebrate improved student attendance.</p> <p>Develop collaborative activities with business partners and other organizations to encourage good student attendance. Involve high school students' part-time employers so that school attendance is one criterion for their work.</p> <p>Organize mentors for chronically absent students to motivate them to attend school, plan their futures, and fulfill their potential.</p> <p>Connect families with community mentors and with social service providers to support students' health and education. Refer parents, as needed to community services that will help solve family or student problems and improve conditions for student attendance.</p>

Epstein, J. L., et al., (2009). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Also see examples of activities for these approaches at <http://www.partnershipschools.org>.



## SPOTLIGHT ON ATTENDANCE: Recognizing Improved Attendance

Two activities to improve attendance were conducted by elementary and middle schools that earned awards from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. One shows how community partners—here, local sports celebrities—contributed to the school's goal for improving attendance. The other demonstrates the importance of giving students' responsibility for improving their own attendance, with support from adults at school and at home.

**Robert Frost Elementary School** in Pasco, Washington, serves highly diverse students whose families speak many different languages at home, including a large number of Latino and Russian families. A large percentage of families live below the poverty line. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) continually improves its partnership program by engaging families and the community in productive ways. In 2008, Frost Elementary worked to increase student attendance, as one goal in its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.

In the *Trimester Perfect Attendance* project, teachers connected with families to recognize students with perfect attendance each semester. At the end of each marking period, athletes from two local sports leagues, high school sports teams, and/or the mascot of a local hockey team came to individual classrooms to deliver Certificates of Excellence to the Attendance All-Stars. Some students asked the athletes for their autographs and some took pictures with them.

In addition to the certificates, winners were given a coupon for a free item at McDonald's and a letter of recognition to take home to their parents. The letters were written in English, Spanish, and Russian—the languages of most families at the school. In this project, 197 perfect attendance certificates were awarded. The school's average daily attendance increased to 93% in 2008 and the ATP aimed for even better statistics. Follow up: In 2011, the school reported 95% Average Daily Attendance and under 1% unexcused absences.

From: NNPS Partnership School Award, 2008. Meet the Robert Frost Elementary School ATP and read more about its work at <http://www.partnershipschools.org>. Click on Success Stories and follow the school's efforts on partnership program development from 2008 to 2011.

**Francis Howell Middle School** in St. Charles, Missouri, is a successful school that serves an economically advantaged community. Still, some students were absent too often. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and others implemented *Improve Attendance*—a project that targeted a small group of students to help them take charge of improving their own attendance. Students with many absences in the prior school year were given a *personal attendance goal* and were recognized quarterly if they met their goal. These students received a letter of commendation for their parents in their Character Connection (CC) classes, along with a certificate and an invitation for the student to pick up a treat—popcorn, pretzels, or a popsicle—during the lunch break.

CC teachers talked with students about their attendance goals at the end of each quarter when the certificates were awarded. Parent volunteers, recruited through the school's daily ENEWS bulletin, popped and bagged popcorn or purchased and prepared other treats. They also assisted in distributing treats to the award winners.

In the middle grades, attendance often declines. It is important to enable each student to take charge of his or her goals for attendance, behavior, and achievement in school with ambitious, but attainable, steps for incremental progress. It is equally important to engage students' families in ways that support their children's success in improving attendance.

From: NNPS Partnership School Awards, 2009. Meet the Francis Howell Middle School ATP and read more about its efforts to develop a goal-oriented partnership program at <http://www.partnershipschools.org>. Click on Success Stories and Past Year's Partnership School Awards for 2009. See another FHMS activity to improve attendance in this *Sampler*.





## ATTENDANCE ROUNDUP

---

### **FROST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FROSTBURG, MARYLAND**

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

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

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

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

Theaters.

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

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

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



## Be Cool, Pack the School Attendance Campaign

---

*South Saint Paul High School  
South Saint Paul, Minnesota*

**T**he purpose of our Attendance Campaign was to increase student attendance by educating students, parents, staff, and the community about attendance issues. Achieving a higher rate of attendance was a school improvement goal for the year. The Attendance Campaign was sponsored by the Partnership Action Team, which met over the summer to begin this project.

A previous task force on Attendance Concerns indicated that parents did not understand attendance procedures. They forgot to send notes when students were absent, misunderstood legal issues, and were unaware of guidelines to help determine if the student should or should not go to school. The team developed clear communications to help clarify attendance rules and guidelines for parents, students, teachers, and the community.

**Parents:** A mailing to parents included: a flyer on the importance of students attending school; sample note for absent students to return to school; an attendance magnet with a 24-hour call-in number; and business cards with school numbers to call with questions. Each of the principal's monthly newsletters home contained an attendance fact. The attendance page in the student/parent handbook was revised to provide simple guidelines for attendance and for returning from excused absences. Parent meetings, held each week with interested parties periodically included attendance as a discussion item.

**Students:** The desktop publishing class came up with the campaign slogan, "BE COOL—PACK THE SCHOOL" (based on the school's mascot for the South St. Paul Packers). Students also designed posters which were placed throughout the school and in every classroom. Morning announcements included an attendance fact or motivational quote. Students received awards for perfect attendance. The student

newspaper, *Packer Pipeline*, included an article on attendance.

**Teachers:** Two forms were created for teachers to help them keep better attendance records. Reminders about attendance were written in the weekly in-house staff memo, *In the Loop*. The high school held an instructional focus day on attendance. All teachers attended a half-hour presentation which included comments from teachers who have worked in the attendance office. Administrators were present to clarify teachers' comments and to answer questions. "Good News Notes" were used by teachers to send notes to parents when students had perfect or improved attendance.

**Community Members:** The principal wrote an article about the importance of school attendance that was published in the local newspaper. School attendance reminders and results were published on the high school web site. Signs were given to local businesses which said, "If you're skipping school, skip this place."

The district graphics department designed the parent flyer, magnet, and business card. The building budget paid for the printing of these pieces in our district duplicating department. Student rewards for perfect attendance were donated by local businesses.

Student attendance for September and November 1999 was 92.5%, as compared with 90% for these months in 1998. This translated into 42 more students in school every day. We gave awards to 485 students for perfect attendance in Term I. The instructional focus day on attendance received high ratings from teachers and positive comments on their evaluation forms. Parents' feedback was positive when they were asked about the attendance mailing and use of magnets. We believe our attendance campaign was off to a good start.





## HEALTH FAIR

---

### EDWARD D. SADLER, JR. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

**H**ealthy bodies help to build and support healthy minds. Knowing that student health directly influences academic achievement, Edward D. Sadler, Jr. Elementary School held a Health Fair to promote wellness throughout the school and help its families to lead healthier, happier lives.

Sadler Elementary serves students with diverse backgrounds, and over 90 percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Its surrounding community has disproportionate rates of preventable diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. Making matters worse, many families do not have adequate health insurance.

Health Fair provided Sadler families with many of the tools they need to reverse these trends. Families received free access to medical screening procedures along with information about such topics as preventive medicine, stress management, oral hygiene, and exercise techniques.

Sadler's Parent Specialist welcomed everyone and guided families to visit at least 3-4 stations at the fair. When families visited a station, the presenters wrote their initials on "tongue depressors" fashioned from jumbo popsicle craft sticks. After families visited at least 3 stations, they enjoyed healthy snacks.

Health Fair was, indeed, a community affair. Medical students from Highland School of Technology High School provided blood pressure screenings, exercise demonstrations, nutrition facts, and oral hygiene demonstrations. They counseled students about the grades and subjects needed to be accepted into their high school and to the program to become medical professionals. Sadler's Guidance Counselor used SMART board technology to play a matching game in which students had to pair a medical job description to its corresponding job title.

Gaston Memorial Hospital presented infor-

mation about cardiac health and the Carolina Center for Counseling discussed stress management and services they offer to deal with behavioral issues. The Program Coordinator for the Gaston County Healthcare Commission provided a preview of *Health at Home*, a book which serves to reduce emergency room visits and reduce the medical costs of underinsured families.

Classroom Central, a community-supported nonprofit agency that provides a place where teachers can "shop" for supplies, donated raffle items—pedometers, lunch bags, and water bottles. Every family had the opportunity to win door prizes for various reasons—with one going to the first woman to arrive dressed in red.

By the end of the evening, every student received a wellness-related book to continue building healthy habits at home. Each adult left with handy references including information about the Food Pyramid (including calorie information), cholesterol, glucose, blood pressure, stress management techniques, and drug dangers at home.

After the Health Fair, one of Sadler's Teaching Assistants summed it up well: "The families came and enjoyed physical activities together such as dancing, tumbling, and exercising. It provided information for the families' total well being by addressing physical, emotional, and nutritional needs so families can work together to meet these goals."



## IN LINE ON TIME—INCREASING STUDENT ATTENDANCE

---

*Stonehurst Avenue Elementary School  
Sun Valley, California*

**I**n Line On Time involved the entire school community in encouraging students to be at school, every day, on time. Many students took the bus to school, but if they missed the bus, they stayed home. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted to provide an incentive to be at school every day.

The new attendance program, In Line On Time, included the following steps: a two-minute bell rang to let students know it was time to line up in their class lines. Teachers waited at their class lines to count their students when the official school bell rang. If all students were present, the class earned a star on their attendance packet that was turned in to the office. Excused tardiness or absences were not penalized. A star was also put up in the classroom so that students could keep track of how close they were to earning five stars. A total of five stars won the class a popcorn party, sponsored by the PTA or extra time in the computer lab. Teachers made arrangements for the popcorn or computer lab rewards.

The Action Team for Partnerships sent a letter to the entire school community explaining the new practice, the district attendance policy, and the importance of children being in class every day, on time. The principal held an assembly at the beginning of the year to explain the new program. A simple sign reminding

students of In Line On Time was hung in each classroom. A bulletin board was put up in the school office.

Almost all classes earned five stars, and some classes earned five stars multiple times. Student attendance increased by 2% that year. Positive peer pressure helped students attend school on time. For example, as the first grade class was waiting in line, a student said, “We have 19. I sure hope Chris gets here. Oh look, there he is! Great, we get a star!”

A parent said to a teacher, “My son just does not want to be late; he keeps telling me to hurry up. ‘I have to be at school on time; we want to get a star, and we only need two more.’” This practice fostered a positive atmosphere at school and rewarded students for being at school on time. In addition, teaching time increased because everyone was in line before the official bell rang.

For next school year, the Action Team will use a staff development day to improve the program. They will work on maintaining motivation to be In Line On Time throughout the year. When classes had not earned a star in a long time, it was easy to forget to encourage the students. Working together, every student can be In Line On Time, every day.





# Papa John's Pizza Party Patrol

---

*W. T. Cooke Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

The pizza patrol hit the streets of Virginia Beach last year in search of students with perfect attendance records. As part of Papa John's Pizza Party, 63 families from W. T. Cooke Elementary enjoyed pizza, balloons, and dessert *at home* as a reward for getting their students to school on time every day for a month.

W.T. Cooke's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) came up with the idea to help boost the school's attendance rates. Cooke serves a high population of families with low income, some of whom have difficulty getting their students to school regularly and on time. They decided that the best approach to solve the problem would be to implement a reward system for parents because they, generally, are the most effective motivators for student attendance.

The school advertised the program in a flier sent home with report cards, and in reminders posted in school newsletters. They also dedicated a bulletin board in the school to promote past and present attendance winners and showed video clips of student pizza parties on the school's TV news network.

Every month during the 2007-08 school year, school administrators reviewed attendance records of students from grades K-5. Teachers entered the names of students with perfect attendance into drawings by class. At the end of each month, the principal appeared live on the school's television station, Cooke TV, and randomly picked the winners from bins for each class.

School administrators notified parents by telephone if their student won the monthly class raffle. The congratulatory phone call also confirmed that someone would be home to receive the pizza when it arrived. The school staff contacted Papa John's, Party City, and Harris Teeter to order the pizza, balloons, and desert items for the party. Later that evening, a team of school staff headed out into the school's

neighborhoods to find the winning families.

Last year 63 students and 120 family members enjoyed a hot, cheesy, pizza meal because of their high attendance rate. Once the pizza patrol delivered the food, they spent some time with families documenting the party experience. Staff took pictures and videos to show on the school's morning news program.

By the end of last year, the Papa John's Pizza Party program spurred a significant increase in school attendance rates. Staff at Cooke observed attendance increases every month except one in 2007-08. Families were happy to get a night off from cooking.

"Thank you for picking me and my family for dinner. It was wonderful," a student said.

The program cost the school about \$100 to implement. Donations from local businesses covered all food expenses. The school used funds from its regular budget to cover incidental expenses.

Cooke administrators hope to continue the program next year. They would like to expand the program to have at least two winners from each grade level per month.



## School Attendance Support Network for Parents

---

*Gaithersburg Elementary School  
Gaithersburg, Maryland*

Gaithersburg Elementary added a personal touch to its school attendance efforts by inviting the parents of children who were chronically absent to meet informally with school officials to try to remedy the problem. The administration hoped to improve student attendance and achievement, and develop school and family partnerships that increased teachers' understanding of families' needs and families' awareness of school goals.

To address attendance problems, teachers met, individually, with the parents of youngsters who were frequently absent. The families of about 20 students participated in meetings the first year they were conducted. The family-friendly meetings were more personal and less threatening than letters home. The Action Team and teachers wanted to help the targeted students improve their attendance and succeed in school for the school year.

The process began with a monthly review of attendance reports to identify all students in kindergarten through fifth grade who were chronically absent. No actions were taken for excused absences. In other cases, teachers sent letters to inform parents about their child's attendance and about the state's attendance law. If students continued to miss school, parents were invited to meet with a small group of teachers and administrators. Students also attended, if team members thought it was appropriate.

An administrator began each meeting by asking family members how they and others at the school could help them get their

young students to school every day. The classroom teacher talked about how truancy affects learning. The pupil personnel worker explained the state's mandatory attendance law and its consequences. Interpreters were available for families who did not speak English. If parents requested specific help, the team members put the families in touch with appropriate community services, such as the Even Start Program, the city mental health program, and the Parent Resource Center. The school also was able to access health insurance for some families.

The meetings shed light on attendance problems and solutions. "These monthly meetings have helped the school to better understand the struggles of our families and the resources that are available within the school and community to support them," said the assistant principal. Many of the families told school officials that this was the first time they were able to talk about "the issues they encounter on a daily basis" that affected their children's school attendance.

Data showed that monthly absentee rates declined and more parents called teachers to talk about their children's absence. Over the last three years, disciplinary referrals decreased 95 percent. In addition, the schools test scores increased annually.

The school's Collaborative Action Team agreed to continue organizing the individual conferences on attendance for parents and teachers. The school's administration plans to offer training so that all staff members gain a greater understanding of family dynamics and challenges.



# SCHOOL-FRIENDLY BUSINESS PROGRAM

---

## FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

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

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

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

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

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

and their families.

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

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

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

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

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



## TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

---

### LAKE CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

**I**n any school, some students fall through the cracks. Some may not measure up to their full potential. Some may lack strong support at home for their work at school. Lake City Elementary wanted to help all students succeed at high levels and increase the involvement of parents in ways that would prevent any students from failing in school.

The teachers and administrators knew that they needed some new approaches to reach families who, previously, were “hard to reach.” They decided to take their communications with parents in a different direction by *Takin’ It To The Streets*.

The plan was for teachers and administrators to visit three neighborhoods one Saturday. They would bring with them their interest in the children’s success, information on school and community resources, a picnic, and a chance for students and their families to win prizes. By *Takin’ It To The Streets*, the educators hoped to create new connections with parents and start some important conversations.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers began by making bilingual flyers about neighborhood visits in English and Spanish. They sent these home with students and distributed them to area businesses and community agencies. The team also ran radio announcements for two weeks before the selected Saturday activities. They made poster-size copies of the flyer for the areas selected for visits.

Two teams of teachers and administrators traveled to two neighborhoods in the mid-morning. They set up a sign-in table for parents. Parents and students visited booths for information on school-linked topics such as state tests, school attendance, kindergarten registration, and adult education. There was a final booth for good food and free clothing. Finally, the ATP and educators held a drawing for prize baskets of good things

for students and parents. After photos were taken, the teachers and administrators packed up and headed to one more neighborhood.

At this stop, the fire department also set up a table with fire safety information and displayed their great fire trucks. Even the mayor showed up, as did police officers. Parents and students enjoyed meeting their children’s teachers and talking about the important roles that parents and other family members play in helping their children succeed in school. Everyone enjoyed hot dogs for lunch.

The connections that were made were real and important. Teachers were able to meet parents, talk with them about their children’s school performance, and learn something about children’s lives outside of school. Parents received useful information. Students talked with teachers informally. Across all stops, teachers interacted with over 150 parents and 450 students.

*Takin’ it to the Streets* cost the school about \$300, thanks to significant support from community partners. PepsiCo donated drinks, Lake City Housing Authority and the local Title I Office provided the hot dogs, and Wal-Mart gave the school a gift card to help pay for supplies and prizes.

One administrator commented, “*Takin’ It To The Streets* was our most successful event this year.” It was successful because of strong teamwork, good planning, and the enthusiasm of parents and students on the streets where they live. It is expected that, as a result, many more parents will be more actively engaged with the school and with their children.