

CAREER NIGHT

ENTERPRISE MIDDLE SCHOOL

WEST RICHLAND, WA

Students in the middle grades juggle a delicate balance between childhood and adulthood. Although perched to make that leap and wanting to grow up as quickly as possible, students need to build knowledge and good judgment to make important decisions. Early adolescents need guidance and opportunities to learn so that they avoid serious risks and missteps on the journey of growing up. At Enterprise Middle School, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and colleagues wanted to guide students to explore careers and set ambitious education goals so they stayed on a path to success in middle school, high school, and beyond.

The ATP adapted Career Night from one conducted at a middle school in neighboring Pasco, WA. The ATP divided the workload by creating subcommittees for advertising, personal invitations to students, resources/facilities, and presenter recruitment. Parents on the ATP took the lead in recruiting volunteers to talk about their work. Over 30 presenters agreed to participate, mainly parents of students at Enterprise Middle School and a few community members. Students requested to hear from high school coaches, as well. The careers represented included pipe-fitters, masons, fire fighters, and police officers, to name a few.

To encourage more and different students and their families to attend, the ATP asked teachers to identify students who typically do not engage in extra-curricular activities. ATP members personally invited these students to come. They also asked these students what careers they wanted to learn more about so that parents or community partners could be recruited to talk about those occupations.

On Career Night, booths were set up in two gymnasias to give the speakers and students plenty of space. The middle school

students, parents, and others took a gallery walk, stopping at the careers they wanted to know more about. The presenters supplied information about their work, the education and training needed to do that job, and addressed questions.

The ATP separated groups of careers so that students could learn about related career choices in nearby booths, and different career opportunities as they explored the scene. The team also created a scavenger hunt activity, which encouraged students to visit various booths to find the answers to a set of exploratory questions. Students turned in the results of the hunt to be part of a drawing for prizes.

It was clear that students were excited about exploring careers and learning about the education needed for different professions. They received advice from experienced presenters who willingly answered students' and families' questions about their work. Participants were asked how to improve Career Night in the future. One student's response was typical of most others, "It was good just the way it is!" A parent agreed, "Keep doing this. Great idea!" A presenter confirmed the success of Career Night, "Thank you for the invitation to present. I had a great time with the students."

The ATP wanted students to think about completing middle school, selecting high school courses, and thinking about careers that may interest them. A Career Night is one way to help middle school students think about doing their best, staying the course, and growing up to a bright future.

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PARENT LITERACY CENTER

J. D. CLIFTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LAKE CHARLES, LA

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. The Parent Literacy Center at J. D. Clifton Elementary School speaks to this ancient Chinese proverb by offering parents opportunities to build skills to prepare for work and postsecondary education, and to support their children's learning. Parents without a high school diploma may attend classes to earn a General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma. Those with a diploma can prepare to transition into postsecondary training classes, and/or gain skills for careers in local high-demand occupations.

Parents also may attend workshops on traditional topics such as helping children's reading and math skills, tips on family budgeting and financial literacy, and family fun activities with children. The Center supports a school goal to increase students' commitment to education by helping parents set their own learning goals, and by enabling students and parents to conduct enjoyable learning activities together. By having a Parent Center at school with programs during the day, Clifton Elementary School expects more parents to attend other workshops to help strengthen their children's math and reading skills. More students will see their parents choosing to continue their education and may be influenced to stay in school through high school graduation and beyond.

Parents were surveyed to determine if they wanted adult education classes on campus. With a positive response, the Principal, Chairperson of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), and Parent Liaison met with staff of the Literacy Council, a non-profit educational organization in the community, to invite them to conduct classes at the school's Parent Literacy Center. Leaders were awarded a grant for capital investments in furniture and technology for the adult education project.

An advisory team for the Parent Center included the Principal, Literacy Council Director, ATP Chair, PTO president, Early Childhood Director, Parent Advocate, and a community partner. This group wrote a vision statement, set goals, selected topics for classes and workshops, developed a budget, and outlined roles and responsibilities for the advisors.

The Literacy Council provided the teachers of the adult education classes and workshop speakers. Neighborhood churches and businesses advertised the Center's offerings. A Parent Center Career Day and Open House for parents and the community was conducted. There, eight community groups had booths on information for families about home buying programs, employment opportunities, nutrition programs, and continuing education at the local University and Technical College. Parents signed up for classes and workshops at the Literacy Council's booth. Refreshments and door prizes were shared.

Parents registered for GED, post-secondary preparation, and other workshops. As an incentive, those who registered earned "Clifton Bucks," which could be redeemed at the Clifton Parent Store. Over 120 parents registered for at least one class or workshop.

Informal evaluations indicated that the parents were using what they learned in adult education to move toward more fulfilling and better paying jobs. They also were more confident about supporting their children's learning. In the long term, it is expected that the Parent Literacy Center will strengthen families and increase student success in school.

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REACHING OUT TO BUILD LIFE SKILLS

**PLATT REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
MILFORD, CT**

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Platt Tech conducts many school, family, and community engagement activities to help students complete high school and plan for the future. Last year, several outreach activities were implemented.

The ATP focused, first, on the importance of reading for success in many school subjects. Educators know that to become a successful reader, students must read, read, and read some more. The Millionaire Luncheon challenged students to read one million words in conjunction with the school's Accelerated Reading (AR) program. Those who met this goal were invited to bring a family member to a red-carpet luncheon celebrating the accomplishment.

Culinary Arts students provided a delicious menu to honor the millionaire readers. Teachers stopped by to congratulate the students and their parents and to acknowledge the importance of reading. One parent was impressed, "...this really made me and my child feel special."

Another engagement activity focused on the digital world. Based on a survey of parents early in the school year, the ATP knew that families were interested in the benefits and pitfalls of social media. The ATP wanted to begin a conversation that parents and students could continue at home about internet and social media safety. At Social Media and Your Teen, a panel of two Platt Tech first-year students and six community partners discussed the benefits of technology, dangers of some sites, and the importance of maintaining a clean digital footprint as it relates to college admittance and future employment.

One parent wisely acknowledged, "This panel was exactly what we needed to get a discussion going at home. Technology changes so rapidly that it is difficult to keep up with

what kids are using these days. . . . [Now, I] understand the challenges today's teens face in using new technologies, how they interact with their peers, and the pressures of growing up in a digital age."

Another engagement activity also was suggested on the survey of parents. The ATP sponsored a panel on Financial Literacy for Students and Families, with attention to smart goal setting. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. A school counselor and the Coordinator of Student Financial Literacy and Advising at Southern CT State University were the panelists. They addressed topics such as learning to stay on track financially, becoming a savvy consumer, successfully managing credit and debt, improving money management skills, and setting and implementing SMART financial goals.

The panel was advertised at Platt, at a local public high school, and at the Milford Public Library to create some new connections with Platt Tech. The school's Culinary Arts students made sandwiches and desserts. One parent evaluated, "The information presented tonight was compelling. Learning to save at an early age and ... paying attention to your finances regardless of whether you are working, going to college, starting a business, or working in a trade . . . are life lessons that everyone should learn."

The ATP at Tech Platt continues as a strong force in engaging students, educators, families, and community partners in ways that add to student success.

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TAKE YOUR PARENTS TO SHOP DAY AND HOLIDAY TRADEMALL

BULLARD-HAVENS TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL BRIDGEPORT, CT

Learning about and participating in trades is serious business at Bullard-Havens Technical High School. To spotlight students' work, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers designed activities to build a sense of community and pride in students' skills and products. Two activities went hand in hand to celebrate the work that students do in their shop and trades classes.

On Take Your Parents to Shop Day, the Bullard-Havens ATP adapted an Open House design used by other schools in the Connecticut Technical High School System. Parents were invited to shadow their student to all classes on one half-day and work as hands-on partners with them on their projects.

Over 130 parents came at 8:30 a.m. and were treated to coffee and breakfast treats made by Culinary Arts students. Parents heard a welcoming address from the Assistant Principal and information from the family engagement team. Then, they went off to work with their students in class for the full trade experience. Each shop instructor designed a lesson specifically to involve parents in their children's learning.

At the end of the day, the shop with the highest percentage of parent attendees—Fashion Trades—received a pizza party. A community member from the Bridgeport Advisors for Youth Ministry donated a computer, which was raffled off to all participants. But it was not the prizes that really mattered. Parents were excited about assisting their teens on actual projects. One exclaimed, "I really enjoyed seeing my daughter at work in her element. I could tell she was excited to learn new things that she can't at home." Another evaluated, "Exciting, comfortable environment. Learning experience for me. Happy to be here to support my grandchild."

The Holiday Trademall was another opportunity for families to support their teens' high-quality work. Based on the format of local trade and craft fairs, Bullard-Havens conducted a two-day fair for parents, siblings, community members, and students to purchase small, affordable, student-made crafts and products for holiday gifts. The products showcased students' best work in shop and art classes.

On the first day, the Trademall was open four hours for parents and community members to purchase unique gifts for \$1-10. On the second day, students had the opportunity to buy gifts from each other. Teachers also shopped for holiday gifts during their prep and lunch periods. Students who were certified to handle money were in charge of the donation box. The Fashion Department created a large stocking filled with candy that was raffled off for twenty-five cent tickets.

To strengthen the school's sense of community, all Holiday Trademall proceeds went to national and local charities. A local news station ran a story on the Trademall to advertise the event for the community. One student expressed the excitement of all students, saying, "It felt like an achievement to have my trade work shown to all members of the community. It was cool to see how people liked the things I made in Masonry."

At Bullard-Havens, family, community, and charity were strengthened with Take Your Parents to Shop Day and the Holiday Trademall—both demonstrating to all students that their hard work pays off.

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THE CELEBRATION OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON: CATCH HIS DREAM

WASHINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LITTLE ROCK, AR

Booker T. Washington was a man with dreams. The school community at Washington Elementary School is proud to bear the name of this educational leader. To celebrate his exemplary character, the school holds a thematic birthday every April. This year, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) spotlighted how Booker T. Washington used his dreams to plan his future, hoping that today's students would do the same. At this birthday party, parents and children talked about setting and meeting goals for college or for a career.

Everyone received a bookmark with a Booker T. Washington quotation, "If you can't read, it's going to be hard to realize dreams." On the other side was the motto of the Booker T. Washington Society, "I Choose" and a photograph of the man. This helped clarify the theme for the night.

Families were welcomed by the school principal, entertained by the afterschool program's Tae Kwon Do class, and enjoyed a light dinner. Fourth- and fifth-graders gave original presentations on the motto "I Choose." A teacher provided more information about Booker T. Washington and read *Fifty Cents and a Dream*, by Jabari Asim, while projecting the book's illustrations on a screen. The biography begins, "Booker dreamed of making friends with words, setting free the secrets that lived in books." A summary explains, "Born into slavery, young Booker T. Washington could only dream of learning to read and write. After emancipation, Booker began a five-hundred-mile journey, mostly on foot, to Hampton Institute, taking his first of many steps towards a college degree. When he arrived, he had just fifty cents in his pocket . . ."

Then, families participated in My Dream...My Dream for My Child. Attendees broke into smaller groups of parents, older students, and younger students to explore their goals and dreams. Student group leaders collected and charted the ideas. Then, each student received an individual paper on which to share their own dreams. Older students wrote their responses; younger students drew their dreams.

The parents' group was led by the assistant principal, who began with words of encouragement before asking each participant to write about their dreams for their children. After working separately, the groups came together to share their dreams. Many submitted their writings, which were displayed on two bulletin boards in the main hallway of the school.

The group sang Happy Birthday to Booker T. Washington and had birthday cake. Door prizes were raffled, including three copies of Booker T. Washington's books and two bicycles donated by a local civic group.

Exploring the lives of historic and inspiring people is a wonderful way to engage parents, students, and teachers in important learning activities. A parent noted, "...some teachers said that my daughter was a natural teacher, but I never had a conversation with her about dreaming of being a teacher. This activity impressed upon me to encourage my daughter even more to follow her dream." Taking time to talk about goals for the future is a dream worthy of becoming a reality.

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