

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



**An annual collection from the members of the
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Edited by

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Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships



Parenting

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



Communicating

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



Volunteering

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



Learning at Home

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



Decision Making

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



Collaborating with the Community

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

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ACCELERATED READING PROGRAM

PORT BARRE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PORT BARRE, LA

Sometimes, students just want the company of a good book. For some Port Barre Elementary School students, however, the local library is ten miles from home—which is ten miles too far. The rural school serves over 600 students in grades PreK-4. Believing that it is vital to have reading resources available to all students, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers at Port Barre implemented the Accelerated Reading Program. The program makes it easy for students to choose a good book to read.

Accelerated Reader (AR) is an online program that guides and encourages individual students to continually improve their reading comprehension and other reading skills. With a teacher's and/or facilitator's assistance, each student checks out books on his/her reading level. Parents have opportunities to read to and with their children. They stress the benefits of reading for entertainment and for comprehension. After reading each book, students take an Accelerated Reader Test about the particular book. When they pass a series of tests, students are promoted to the next reading level.

Students, teachers, and parents are able to view their student's test results online to provide immediate, individualized, and constructive feedback on the student's performance. With these data, teachers and parents monitor students' growth and progress and guide student's ongoing reading activities.

Most teachers at Port Barre have incorporated Accelerated Reader (AR) books, skills, and tests into their curriculum and use the AR test scores as part of each student's report card grades. One teacher reported that "some parents have even become more avid

readers because of the example set. . . by their child."

According to a survey of parents, the school and family connections around reading have helped parents support their child's interest in improving their reading skills and in moving up the AR reading levels. Students' sense of accomplishment increases when they see their scores improve. At school, students encourage each other to go "up the ladder" of reading. One student noted happily that, though unable to get to the public library, "I can still check out books that are fun to read."

To implement Accelerated Reading, teachers worked together to identify books for each grade level, each reading level, and that cover topics of interest to all students. Once the books were obtained, teachers held sessions with students to clarify how AR worked, and how every student was expected to proceed from one reading level to the next by reading books and completing tests that indicate they understood the fictional stories or non-fiction reports. The school evaluated AR, to date, by the number of students who participated, reached their personal reading goals, and improved their scores, grades, and interest in reading.

The ATP and teachers publicized AR in newsletters and bulletins sent home with children, marquee announcements about events, progress reports, and announcements in the local newspaper and School Board bulletins. The program makes students, parents, and teachers partners in the reading process to motivate students to keep reading to improve their skills and attitudes.

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CAMP OUT WITH BOOKS

**FULBRIGHT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

Type 4

On a survey last year, parents at Fulbright Elementary School requested more information and ideas for enhancing their children’s reading skills and joy of reading. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and reading teachers designed Camp Out with Books to help parents encourage children to read “S’more.” At Camp, there were literacy stations, creative decorations, and refreshments. The planning group evaluated the activity, analyzed the data, and will use the data to plan future reading-related engagement activities.

One of the school’s community partners—Huntington Learning Center—contributed funding and resources for families. A college English professor was designated as the “campfire round-up reader.” Other information on summer reading camps and resources came from the University of Central Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and the Little Rock Writing Project.

At Camp Fulbright, families were welcomed by Park Rangers (faculty and staff). After signing in at the Visitor Center, families entered Camp Fulbright Pavilion (cafeteria) where they were addressed by Park Ranger Jackson (the principal). The winners of a school-wide book mark design contest were announced and awarded a gift certificate from Barnes and Noble.

Each family was given an Official Reading License that guided families along reading trails with camp-themed activities for students and their families by grade level. Among the literacy stations were Summer Reading Journals, Campfire Book Swap, Exploring the Future, myOn Technology (a digital books platform for students), and Campfire Read Aloud. The book swap was a huge success. Over 300 books were exchanged at this station. Leading up to the event

students had been encouraged to bring books to exchange for new reading material and they enthusiastically complied.

After two activity rotations, the “dinner bell” rang and participants went to the Fulbright Picnic Area for an old-fashioned camp cook-out of grilled hot dogs (cooked by parent volunteers), chips, s’mores and lemonade. Students played playground games, while parents visited teachers and each other.

Camp Out with Books was evaluated by about 150 parents and caregivers and 30 teachers who attended. Responses to the event were very positive. Suggestions will be considered for future activities to engage parents with students on reading and literacy skills.

Students and parents were happy to come to Camp to enjoy reading, gather information, and meet others in an informal setting. As one parent shared, “Our family had a great time at Camp Out with Books with our Fulbright Family! My twins especially enjoyed the story time around the campfire and the book exchange. The myOn Technology session was particularly helpful to me. It was such a fun evening and a great way to get kids excited about literacy.” A teacher reported, “This was a very well planned and orchestrated event. A lot of teamwork went into making it a successful opportunity for parents and students to grow. The decorations were adorable, the activity stations were engaging, and the food was delicious. What a fun night for all!” Throughout the planning and implementation of Camp Out with Books, teamwork, leadership, and friendships were strengthened, and a sense of community was cultivated at Fulbright.

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READING

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

SIXTH WARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

PEARL RIVER, LA

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Read All About It! at the Sixth Ward Elementary School had a unique focus—using the newspaper to reinforce thinking and literacy skills. Students and parents linked their own experiences to news and feature stories, and used skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, math, social studies, and science to solve some puzzles and problems. Each family received a copy of the big Sunday newspaper, which they took to six newspaper-related stations set up with interesting activities.

Station 1: What’s so funny? With the paper’s comics section, children chose their favorite comic strip. They whited-out the dialogue and, with their families, used their imaginations to write new dialogue for the characters in each frame.

Station 2: Let’s have fun. Families planned a weekend of activities to enjoy with visitors who were coming for a family reunion. They used the entertainment, travel, and weather sections of the paper to explore restaurants, find places to visit, and plan indoor and outdoor activities. Parents and children were encouraged to discuss and negotiate things they liked to do. They incorporated math skills by setting a budget for the family reunion and events.

Station 3: For the sport of it. Children and parents read the sports section’s news and articles about players and coaches of the New Orleans Saints. Each family wrote a message to the team or to a player on a stamped postcard, which were mailed to the Saints Camp. Students drew pictures next to the sentences written by mom or dad.

Station 4: Skim and scan. Students and parents used highlighters to identify a story in any section of the paper that interested them. This included a feature about another country;

movie review; advertisement; article about an animal; letter from a reader; crossword puzzle; house for sale; or something else. Parents and children discussed why they chose the story they did.

Station 5: What’s the weather? Students were asked to answer higher-order thinking questions to make meteorological predictions based on weather maps, graphs, tide forecasts, and charts.

Station 6: Adopt a pet. The ATP knew that the paper would include a few “free to a good home” advertisements. They asked students to use creative, persuasive writing skills to convince a pet owner to let them adopt their pet. One parent expressed surprise, “I never realized there were so many things for children in the newspaper!”

Administrators gave greetings, offered refreshments, and encouraged families to meet each other. Each student received a certificate of participation. The public librarian talked about library programs and helped parents and children sign up for library cards. Families also shopped a book fair for new or gently used books.

The ATP used the newspaper theme for flyers to advertise the evening. Cartoons and sports figures appeared on posters in the halls. Robo-calls invited families to come to “read all about it!” Newspapers and cookie trays cost about \$125, with other donated items.

Read All About It! extended current-events to encourage children and parents to read and talk about sports, weather, entertainment, ads, and all kinds of news stories. This was, itself, a newsworthy event that everyone could read about.

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HERO BREAKFAST

**SOUTH FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

Type 6

At South Florence High School, heroes do not come with capes. Parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, friends, and community members were all among the many heroes welcomed to school for a Hero Breakfast one Friday last May. To support the school’s Habits of Mind program, writing across the curriculum, and expressing gratitude for family and community, students wrote essays about a real-life hero. Each student’s hero was, then, invited to school for recognition and thanks.

To support classroom discussions of Habits of Mind, students were tasked with writing an essay describing someone in their lives who exemplified one or more of the featured traits. The 16 Habits of Mind include problem solving, persisting, finding humor, managing impulsivity, creating and innovating, questioning, applying past knowledge to new situations, listening with empathy and understanding, thinking flexibly, striving for accuracy, and other good qualities for success in life.

Teachers helped students revise their essays. Many illustrated their writing with PhotoShop. In advance of breakfast, essays were printed.

At the breakfast, students brought their heroes to the library, retrieved their essays, and presented the printed copies to the happy honorees. One student wrote of his dad, “He taught me to persist. I wanted to quit my soccer team because we were losing a lot of games, but he convinced me to keep trying and our season turned around and we won the state.” Of her grandma, another student wrote, “She remains open to continuous learning. She always wants me to further my education. I would be the first person to graduate [from high school] in my family and that would make my family so proud of me.”

Students and guests were deeply moved by this activity. One dad said, “It’s very special—

heartwarming. It just makes you feel like you are a hero.” The principal agreed, adding, “When the honorees read their essays, there were teary eyes and affectionate hugs, smiles, and looks of appreciation. It was very touching!”

This activity grew from teachers’ questions of how to help students internalize the lessons of Habits of Mind. All freshman take an Academic Enrichment class on health, finance, career exploration, sex education, technology, and 16 Habits of Mind. The school emphasizes writing across the curriculum. Knowing that students would write more careful essays if they knew their work would be printed and shared, teachers created a publishable moment by linking writing to the Hero Breakfast.

In preparation, the Action Team for Partnerships and other faculty and staff worked with the food service manager to order and prepare the food, and to serve the breakfast. Over 400 heroes and 400 students attended. A school grant covered the \$475 cost of breakfast for all of the heroes.

Hero Breakfast enabled high school freshmen to practice writing for a specific audience and purpose, reflect on Habits of Mind, publish text for an audience, and give back to family and community members who helped them along the way. At this emotional and communal school breakfast, the heroes might not have superpowers, but they had superior powers to influence South Florence High School students.

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READING

HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY CELEBRATION

UPPER MERION HIGH SCHOOL KING OF PRUSSIA, PA

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, administrators, and students at Upper Merion High School expanded the school's recognition program from athletes and students who earn high test scores to recognize and encourage students' accomplishments in literacy. Faculty, parents, students, and community members (including public library staff) worked together to increase students' motivation to read and to build skills and appreciation for literary arts.

At the Literacy Celebration, the talents and accomplishments of students and community members took center stage. There were four components: keynote speaker; awards ceremony; workshops on increasing students' professional, entertaining, and personal reading and literacy skills; and a school open house. Over 100 students, parents, and community members attended.

The opening address was presented by a local author, well known in the media, who had published several nonfiction books. Then, an awards ceremony recognized the achievements of students involved in literacy activities such as Reading Olympics, the township library's Reading Buddies program, literacy-related senior graduation projects, and student theater critics. Awards also were given to students who made significant advances in reading and writing during the school year.

One of Upper Merion High School's overarching goals is improving reading across content areas. Workshops focused on a variety of genres. Community members in a local Master of Fine Arts program ran workshops on poetry and connections between food and literature. Other community members taught blogging, storytelling, writing through grief, and history writing. "The storyteller was awesome!" one student remarked. "I want to be like her when I grow up."

The evening culminated in a grand Open House. A local book store continued its school-day Book Fair into the evening. Students organized a free book swap with books they'd collected. Students also curated a Gallery of Literacy that showcased students' reading and writing projects. In keeping with the theme, the ATP and administrators awarded literacy-related door prizes.

Many groups in the school and community had an active role in planning the Literacy Celebration. Teachers on the planning committee met to select the four basic components of the evening. High school students and parents were invited to an open planning session to provide ideas about the date, activities, organizers, hosts, and the keynote speaker for the event.

Each member of the parent, student, and faculty committee volunteered to lead some aspect of the Literacy Celebration, including soliciting food and drink donations; coordinating with community organizations; serving as the contact person for speakers and workshop hosts; creating the gallery of student work; soliciting and arranging door prizes; organizing a book swap; and creating print and video event advertisements. The high school budget covered the \$700 cost of refreshments, door prizes, and speaker compensation.

At Upper Merion, the future looks bright for improving the Literacy Celebration. Next time, they plan to extend invitations to middle-school students and parents as a means of introducing them to the high school and to students' reading and literacy levels. The Literacy Celebration is poised to continue spotlighting excellence and enthusiasm for reading, writing, and literature.

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LITTLE FREE LIBRARY AND PARENT CONNECTIONS

ST. JOHN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 2

One of St. John Elementary School's improvement goals is to create a welcoming school environment for all parents, family members, and community stakeholders. The Parent Connections program opened the door for parents to join their students in enrichment classes during the school day. Once parents were involved at school in this way, the school's Little Free Library encouraged even more families and community members to promote literacy and a love of reading.

Parent Connections developed from the school's goal to actively involve parents in various ways with teachers and students during the school day, not only as volunteers for special events. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) outlined a plan to start by engaging parents with children in one grade level's enrichment class per month. Each month, the parents of children in the selected grade level received a Parent Connections invitation to return if they planned to attend.

For example, the enrichment pairings included: Kindergarten-Library: Parents helped check out books and read with their children. 1st grade-PE: Parents participated in PE exercises and games with their children. 2nd grade-Music: Parents and students learned to sing a song together. 3rd grade-Art: Parents and students worked together to design an original Mardi Gras mask. 4th grade-Art: Parents worked with students on a water color designs. 5th grade-PE: Parents helped students practice events for the upcoming School Olympics. About 120 parents participated during the year.

Once parents became involved in their children's instructional day, the principal sought more options for family and community involvement. The Little Free Library is a worldwide program that provides free books in communities in a box of some kind in yards,

parks, or near sidewalks. Its slogan, "Take a book, return a book" means that anyone may stop by and pick up a book, read it, return it, or bring another book to share (see <http://littlefreelibrary.org/>)—all at no cost.

St. John Elementary is located in the south part of the city. The principal approved locating the Little Free Library on school grounds. The school secretary's husband volunteered to build a replica of the school to house the books. Teachers, parents, students, and community members donated books to start the Little Free Library. The school's custodian moved an unused school bench near the Little Free Library for students, families, and community members to sit and read nearby. The principal sent photos via e-mail, school newsletter, and local paper to advertise the new library.

St. John's students are the library's stewards, strengthening leadership skills and developing character traits of responsibility, cooperation, respect, self-discipline, and integrity. Students organize the books into categories, such as fiction and non-fiction. Teachers bring their classes to the library as a reward, and the principal reads a book of the students' choice aloud during weekly Wednesday Reads. Community residents visit the free library, including many who take a book to read while waiting to pick up their children each afternoon. During the summer, the extended day program takes care of the library.

St. John takes parental and community involvement seriously. Parents' participation in school and a little library right outside make a big difference.

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READING

READERS ARE LEADERS FAMILY READING NIGHT

**CANYON VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Heroes inspire students. If admirable leaders read stories aloud to students, perhaps more students would read more. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Canyon View Elementary School designed a Family Reading Night where local leaders read aloud their favorite children’s books. Students and families—many English Learners and families who are migrant farmers—met the readers and listened to good stories to spark students’ interest in reading for pleasure.

A planning subcommittee included educators and parents. It was chaired by the school librarian who developed the Readers are Leaders Family Reading Night. Local leaders were recruited from the community as the reading heroes. They included police officers, local semi-professional football players, the school principal, district superintendent, two Spanish speaking professionals, and local high school students. Also, each grade level team of teachers was asked to develop a “make and take” activity for parents and children to do during the evening and that they could take home to help their children practice a useful reading skill.

The school publicized the event actively, including sending home a ticket that could be traded at the Reading Night for new books for each child attending. To cast the community leaders as “reading heroes,” teachers and students were invited to dress as superheroes that evening. Dinner was provided and served for a half-hour before stories were read aloud.

The school mascot and greeters welcomed about 300 families to the Reading Night and gave each a map of the school with the schedule of the Leader-Readers and their stories, and make-and-take activities in different rooms. Families chose which story they wanted to hear for each 20-minute session, with 5 minutes to change rooms for

the next story. Throughout the evening, the make-and-take activity room was open for families to visit and chose the activities to make with children at different grade levels.

After all readings, the teachers and volunteers were in the cafeteria to trade the entry tickets for a new book for each child to take home. Each child also was given a bag of classroom supplies, donated by teachers. Also, a booth was set up for families to take photos of their children in their super-hero costumes.

The ATP reviewed the activity and discussed possible improvements. Parents received a survey for their views if they attended the Reading Night or were asked why they could not attend. Students benefitted from the make-and-takes that helped their parents see how to interact with them at home on key reading skills.

Mainly, everyone enjoyed hearing leaders from the community read some good stories. Many of the Leader Readers were new visitors to Canyon View. As community partners they were making a new contact and they were impressed with the enthusiasm of the parents, students, teachers, and others they met at the school. One Leader Reader raved, “I enjoyed reading to the families. It was fun to share one of my favorite stories and show the families how using expression makes a story come alive.”

Canyon View’s ATP always includes a Reading Night in its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. This one was a page-turner that everyone enjoyed.

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Type 6

READING

SEUSSATIONAL READING EXTRAVAGANZA

**MARK TWAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 6

“**T**here was no time for play. There was no time for fun. There was no time for games. There was work to be done.” So begins *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, the sequel to one of the most enduring children’s books by Dr. Seuss. This year, Mark Twain Elementary School proved, to the contrary, that play, fun, games, and learning could be combined at the Seussational Reading Extravaganza.

The Suessational Reading Extravaganza had four fabulous features. From 9:30-10:30 a.m., the Guest Readers Session welcomed community members to read in participating classrooms. They were given guidelines and a bottle of water, and then read to children in their assigned classrooms in two 20-minute periods. They shared one of their favorite childhood books and talked about how reading is useful in their adult roles and professions. Students created “Thank You” cards for the guest readers.

Community members also served as guest judges for the Door Decorating Contest. Two weeks prior to the event, classroom teachers and specialists decorated their classroom doors based on a Dr. Seuss book. The Guest Readers dropped two votes in a ballot box for the Best Primary and Intermediate Decorated Doors. Treats were awarded to the students in the two winning classrooms.

Read with Thing 1 or Thing 2—aka, Read with Our Principal and Vice Principal—was a third component. Teachers could sign up for a 15-minute time slot for the administrators to read a Seuss story to students in their classrooms. The administrators dressed the part in Thing 1 and Thing 2 shirts.

From 3-3:30 p.m., Parent Readers came to read with their children for the last

half-hour of the school day. In all of the Suessational sessions, students benefited by listening to good readers read good stories, discussing what they heard, and practicing their own reading strategies during class.

“As a parent of a first grader,” said one guest reader, “I know my daughter...is excited to... have a fun day enjoying Dr. Seuss’s many amazing books. What a great way to help our children find a love of reading early on.”

Costs for Suessational Reading were covered by a \$150 Pasco Association of Educators grant, which purchased pencils and bookmarks for every student and treats for the winners of the door decorating contest.

The ATP and other event organizers sent reminders to the community and parent reading volunteers two weeks and, again, a day in advance of Suessational Reading. Although the read-alouds were conducted during one day at Mark Twain Elementary, the ATP reasoned that the schedule could be modified to different days of the week. They also considered having cross-grade-level reading buddies—e.g., fifth graders reading to kindergarten children—to build school spirit about reading.

The school principal recognized the shared joy of reading that was generated throughout the day, and added, “When kids are excited about literature, you know you’re doing something right!” As Dr. Seuss stated, “*The more that you read, the more you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.*” Mark Twain’s students were clearly going places by reading and learning.

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READING

SUMMER READING PROGRAM AND POETRY WITH PARENTS

BADGER MOUNTAIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RICHLAND, WA

Badger Mountain Elementary School is on a mission to improve students' reading skills at all grade levels and to guide parents to encourage students' literacy learning. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and teachers are particularly focused on students who are in reading intervention programs and families who have not been actively involved. This year, the ATP implemented two reading-related activities to address these goals.

Poetry with Parents was held in April, which is National Poetry Month. To encourage attendance by previously less engaged parents, the ATP featured students who were in reading-intervention and extra-help programs for literacy skills. Teachers chose two poems for each grade level, K-5, and made copies for students. They taught the students choral reading skills in the Learning Labs. Then, they scheduled Poetry with Parents on a Friday evening. In the school library, students and parents had dinner of roll-up sandwiches, cookies, and water, and prepared to enjoy poetry together.

The Reading Specialist spoke with families about the importance of reading at home, and introduced the Summer Reading Program (see below). Then, each grade-level group of students presented their poems, showing their skills of fluency, pronunciation, and expression in reading.

Proud parents took photos and videos, laughed, and applauded. The ATP chairman noted, "This was a night just for the students who needed reading-intervention assistance to shine!" At the end of the evening, families chose a free book to take home, donated by a local reading organization.

The Summer Reading Program aimed to reduce the "summer slide" in reading often experienced by students who struggle with

reading at school. After obtaining approval from the principal and legal approval from the district, the ATP identified two neighborhoods in which many of these students lived. They designed a weekly reading program to be conducted in the students' communities. At a "buy one, get one free" book fair at the school year's end, students and parents donated new and used children's books for the summer program.

Two teachers volunteered each week to bring a cart of high-interest books into the neighborhoods. Apartment-complex managers were very cooperative, providing access to Community Rooms for the program. Each Wednesday, the teachers shared stories in a read-aloud period and prompted students' participation with interesting questions. Parents and grandparents also came to listen and read with their children. Some were Spanish speakers who were learning English. They enjoyed time when their children read to them.

After 45 minutes of story time, discussions, and reading for pleasure, teachers helped students choose books to read during the week. Students who attended at least five weeks received a free ice cream coupon. At summer's end, teachers were able to give away six books to each student. The Summer Reading Program strengthened students' positive attitudes about reading and maintained students' connections with teachers. Attendance grew as students and their families shared their appreciation for these sessions with others in their neighborhoods. Through these programs, Badger Mountain is supporting its high-needs readers and is showing that reading is fun in school and under the sun.

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THE BIG READ

**J.M. WRIGHT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
STAMFORD, CT**

Type 4

J.M. Wright is a newly reopened and diverse Technical High School. At opening it served students in grade 9, but will include grades 9-12 as it grows. The school—in Connecticut’s Technical High School System (CTHSS)—offers students academic subjects and the choice of 10 trades. One school goal is to ensure that students experience academic success and prepare for postsecondary education and training. This starts, as all educators know, with reading.

To increase 9th grade students’ reading skills and to bring students, staff and families together, the Parent Engagement Team organized a friendly competition called The Big Read. All faculty, staff, 9th graders, and many parents read the novel *Wonder*, by R. J. Palacio. This young people’s best seller is about a young boy with a serious facial deformity and how he and his schoolmates cope with his differences. The book raises difficult questions about things all students seek: friendship, understanding, and the freedom to be oneself.

With support from district Leaders for Partnerships at CTHSS, books were purchased for the 138 students. One book was for use in class and one reading at home in the language of the student’s choice. The school’s partnership team took the activity a step further by “gamifying” the reading experience with assessments, activities, projects, and special incentives.

As they read the book, students completed activities including daily quizzes, doing random acts of kindness for others, designing a new cover for the book, comparing characters, and having a family member read the book and discussing themes and messages at home. Students took a summative test about the book as part of their Accelerated Reading (AR) quarterly reading goals and English grades.

Successfully completing an activity earned students Warrior Points (WP) named for the school’s mascot, the Wright Tech Warrior. Collecting WP earned students prizes—such as dress down days, bonus points on quizzes, and chances for gift baskets and gift certificates donated by local Stamford business partners. The point system and prizes were managed by teachers in the Schoology Learning Management System, an online program usually used to manage coursework and classroom content. This allowed everyone to see students’ progress, comments, and points.

From mid-April to mid-May, the Big Read was the story of the school. Morning announcements, posters, “teaser” pictures on school TV screens, and a presentation to parents at an information night kept the Big Read front and center at the school. It also was a friendly competition among shop classes, as the 9th grades selected their permanent shops for their years at the school. The shop or trade with the most WP at the end of the event won a pizza party at the park outside of the school.

One extra benefit of the Big Read was that parents who read the book could talk with their teens about many challenging issues about growing up. Teachers elevated the discussions by conducting activities that connected the book’s themes to their shop, science, social studies, and English classes. The Big Read of *Wonder* was a big, unifying event that spotlighted the importance of reading in the right way at Wright Tech.

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READING

WHITTIER WINTER READING EVENING

**WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

When it's cold outside, there's nothing better than curling up with a good book. That is what happened at the Whittier Winter Reading Evening. Children and parents were invited to come to school in pajamas, bring blankets and pillows, and settle in for an evening of reading and learning together.

When they arrived, families found activities at five station-locations, each staffed with at least five staff members, high school students, or parent volunteers. At the Family Reading station, families read in a cozy classroom while enjoying cookies and a cup of hot cocoa. Parents read to their children from books borrowed from the school library. They were excited, later, to find that teachers, community members, and the local library donated enough books for all 300 participating students and their siblings to take one home.

The fifth graders conducted a Reader's Theater in the cafeteria. The Food Station offered meals donated by Second Harvest, a community organization. In the library, Photos with Santa Claus could be taken in front of a wintry background decorated by one of the school staff. The custodian volunteered to be Whittier's jolly Santa. At the Second Harvest Food Donation station, families received a bag of food to take home, courtesy of a nonprofit organization that uses community funds to benefit families with low incomes.

Whittier wanted the event to meet the needs of their students and families, who include many English Language Learners. Because research suggests that all students would benefit from reading for pleasure at home at least 20 minutes a day, Whittier's teachers wanted to forge a strong connection between home and school to encourage students' love of reading and to increase students' vocabulary in English and their home language. Many families work long hours

during the May-November harvest season. The ATP scheduled Winter Reading Evening in December so more families could attend.

The evening was evaluated at a monthly ATP meeting and at a Vertical Team meeting. The ATP agreed it was good to obtain the donations of children's books in advance, and to recruit volunteers from the high school and community as helpers. The flyers and school's automatic phone message system increased attendance. Over 100 parents and 300 students attended. "Take homes" were very important. After reading, eating, and celebrating the season, all families took home at least one children's book, a bag of food, and some new strategies for encouraging children's reading at home. Over 20 raffle winners won holiday wreaths donated by teachers, community members, and Action Team for Partnership (ATP).

The evaluations also produced some suggestions for the future, including creating a map giving the locations of the activity stations; distributing hand-outs to all parents on strategies for reading at home; and inviting the public librarian to register families for library cards.

One parent commented on the friendly atmosphere, "The classroom was very warm and welcoming for reading." A student added, "And we get a free book. Yay!" A teacher remarked, "This is awesome. I love working at this school." It was clear that the Winter Reading Evening was evidence of a welcoming school climate for all partners in education.

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W.T. HENNING FAMILY READ NIGHT

**W.T. HENNING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SULPHUR, LA**

Type 4

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at W. T. Henning Elementary School wanted to create a compelling new approach for encouraging students to become better readers. Along with reading teachers and the school administrator, the ATP paired the school's annual Book Fair with a family dinner, local author reading, and fun and educational reading stations. The school has set goals to increase literacy skills and positive attitudes about reading. All 338 Henning students with diverse racial backgrounds receive free or reduced-price meals.

Family Read Night invited parents and children to come to the Book Fair and have some fun at three activity stations that featured various reading skills. One station provided reading-linked crafts that students could make with their parents and siblings. Young and old artists designed and created bookmarks and book covers. They also wrote clever endings to stories.

A second station featured reading teachers who provided parents tips and tricks to help children develop a love of reading at home. The school set a goal of raising Accelerated Reader (AR) scores and increasing all students' reading skills. Family engagement is a good way to support student learning, reading for pleasure, and reading stories together.

At the third station, a local guest author told stories to the delighted crowd. In addition, at this station, students read aloud AR books, took AR tests, and showed their parents how the AR program worked at their reading levels. The Lead Teacher observed that students felt "such happiness and pride having their families share the activities they do each day at school." The school's speech therapist added, "It was great watching the kids show off their reading skills."

Dinner was served as part of Family Read Night to increase parents' participation. They received support from local business partners, who were recognized and thanked in the school newsletter and on the school marquee.

Family Read Night succeeded largely due to great planning and preparation. The ATP and teachers contacted parents with notes and phone calls, and RSVPs registered an accurate head count of attendees. There was plenty of food, drinks, and supplies for over 90 parents, 170 students, and many teachers and staff. The \$240 cost was covered by donations and Title I funds. By pairing the reading-engagement activity with the Book Fair, the school's library also benefited. As the librarian watched the comings-and-goings at the Book Fair, she commented, "I loved the energy between parents and kids. It was great to watch."

Parents completed exit surveys to provide their comments on the evening, telling: What was your favorite part? What would you like to see done differently? Do you have any suggestions for next year? Their responses made it clear that the Family Read Night was not only fun, but helped them understand how they could encourage their children's reading skills and attitude.

Family Read Night sent students and parents home with new books, crafts, and reading tips. Family Read Night was on the best sellers list any way you read it.

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READING

FOCUS ON MATH

**WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Westgate Elementary School knows that many parents find it challenging to help children at home with math assignments. Many students at Westgate are from families who are refugees or new immigrants from other nations. They speak over 20 languages other than English at home and are not familiar with U. S. schools and children’s curricula. About half of the students are English Learners or receive other bilingual services.

Focus on Math was developed to share some simple math strategies with parents and students that they could practice at home to master skills linked to Common Core State Standards in math. Another goal was to guide families to talk with their children about math at dinner time, bath time, or other free time at home. Teachers believed that with hands-on games and activities and a few guidelines, more families could discuss math at home, feel more confident about using math vocabulary that their children were learning in class, monitor their children’s math homework, and reinforce positive attitudes about math.

The ATP publicized Focus on Math with save the date notices, Facebook announcements, conversations with families, individual invitations, and stickers on students as a final reminder. Each teacher called five families who might not come without the extra touch. The ATP provided bus transportation to pick up families who lived too far to walk. Over 195 families attended with their children. All families received math materials to use at home, whether they attended the evening or not. Focus on Math was conducted on three nights to focus on grade-specific math materials for K-1, 2-3, and 4-5.

When families arrived they were greeted and signed in. Each family received a zip-locked

bag of the math materials that they would use at Focus on Math and take home. Families selected a room that included language interpreters. Translators for Arabic, Karen, Somali, and Spanish stayed with the families they were serving. Three presenters rotated from room to room every 20 minutes to share three math strategies and to guide parents and children in that room to use the materials during the session.

Math activities included dot cards, number bonds, and number puzzles. The materials and guidelines for parents helped students practice part-whole relationships, addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, and hiding numbers in games appropriate for each grade level. They tried out the games and activities with the teachers at Focus on Math and then could play them at home.

After the three presentations, families were invited to the gym, where dinner was served. The ATP partnered with a local church that supplied pizza for the families. Another partner, Second Harvest of Kennewick, a local food bank, provided a tote full of groceries for each family who attended Focus on Math.

In its evaluation, ATP member agreed that they could conduct Focus on Math on one evening instead of three with specific rooms for each grade level. All of the parents appreciated the activities at school and the materials to take home. They knew that their children could count on them to support math learning.

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INTERACTIVE MATH NOTEBOOKS

**OPELOUSAS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
OPELOUSAS, LA**

Type 4

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and math teachers at Opelousas Junior High researched best practices for helping students retain math skills to improve scores on math tests. One math teacher developed Interactive Math Notebooks to help students in the middle grades stay organized and reflect on the skills they learn in class. She invited parents, teachers, and the community to contribute to student success by reviewing and discussing the notebooks with students.

In the beginning of the school year, math teachers sent all parents a list of the units and math skills that their child would learn. Parents of 7th graders also were told that their students would use Interactive Math Notebooks. Seventh graders were oriented to this new feature: “This year you will be using an Interactive Math Notebook to keep your work organized. The notebook will be a personalized reference book.” Students created a cover page for their notebooks that uniquely represented them. They also created a table of contents of the skills they learned in class and kept it current. Students were guided to write neatly, use colored pencils and highlighters, label all diagrams and models, use the notebook as a study tool, and take the notebook home each night to share with a parent and to help with homework and study.

The left side of the notebook was labeled “Output,” for students to record math skills such as problems of the day, test corrections, and reflections. The right side was “Input,” for notes, vocabulary, and graphic organizers.

Parents were asked to help students use the notebook as a study tool. Parents could write notes to the math teacher, ask questions, or provide feedback. Parents added a signature each week if their child reviewed the notebook contents at home.

Community partners also were engaged with students’ Interactive Math Notebooks. For

example, local bank representatives came to math classes as guest speakers. They brought Real World Applications of math and financial literacy to students to add to their notebooks. Bank tellers talked about withdrawals and deposits as examples of positive and negative numbers. They also discussed credit card interest in lessons on percentages. Students wrote about the skills they learned in their notebooks and shared their weekly work with parents.

If students were absent, they could check with students who served as peer tutors to obtain information they missed. Absent students also could check with their teacher.

Each student’s notebook was evaluated for the quality of the organization, accuracy, and consistency. The school newsletter spotlighted students whose notebooks were especially detailed and well organized for others to recognize exemplary work.

Interactive Math Notebooks aimed to help students keep track of and study the math skills they learned. One student reported, “When I needed to remember something we did months ago, this really helped me [study for] the comprehensive test.” Parents were gratified as one expressed, “Thank you for making my child more organized and showing him the benefits of keeping his work in one place.”

Interactive Notebooks could be useful tools in any subject. One student summed up the meaning of the notebook in math, “This really shows how much I learned this year. Wow!”

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MATH

MANIPULATING MATH

**DELMAE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

Without good guidance, most parents have a hard time supporting their children’s math learning. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and math teachers at Delmae Elementary School knew that they could increase student success on Common Core Math Standards if more parents felt comfortable about helping their children practice math skills at home. Fourth graders’ parents, in particular, asked for this information. Teachers created some friendly training sessions for parents—Manipulating Math.

Parents of Delmae’s fourth graders came to school on two evenings from 5:30-6:30 p.m. Teachers welcomed them and then demonstrated instructional strategies for specific math skills that students needed to practice. These included long division and fractional parts—important standards that students had to master. “This really helped me understand how my child is being taught,” one parent noted.

An important element of Manipulating Math was the take-home component. While math teachers were demonstrating lessons and parents were trying to solve sample problems, the PE teacher videoed the sessions and posted them on the fourth-grade website. This enabled parents who were unable to attend at school to see the videos, and served as a review for those who did attend. The video also was available on a CD, on request. Parents also took home tools used at the workshop, including rulers donated by a local bank and fractions strips.

A complimentary dinner was served. Papa John’s offered discounted pizza to the school and drinks were donated anonymously. To cover the remaining costs, the Center of Excellence at Francis Marion University provided a \$500 grant.

Manipulating Math responded to specific needs within the school community,

raised by fourth graders parents who spoke to teachers. The parents’ wishes matched the school’s goal to improve 4th grade PASS Math scores and to increase parental attendance to at least 90% at workshops on Common Core State Standards. Announcements about the event also went home in weekly folders, daily e-mails, parent-link messages, newsletters, student agendas, and word of mouth.

The focus on fourth grader’s math skills had some quick results. Students’ scores on topic and chapter tests improved, and the number of students on the retention list in math decreased. Teachers heard many positive comments from students about how their mom or dad was helping at home. Many parents felt better about helping their children. “It seems to me the biggest difference is that [the standards] focus on the thinking part of math, and not just [on] the answer,” said one parent.

Delmae teachers plan to continue to respond to parents’ requests for information that will help them help their children. Teachers may offer workshops each quarter on specific units on which students struggled. Parents completed early and end-of-year surveys to help teachers learn what they wanted to know more about. Teachers requested ideas about how to make their presentations on Common Core State Standards more useful so that more parents could help their children at home. One teacher summarized the new approach: “Anytime we as teachers can help parents support us and their children at home, there is no downside.”

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MATH BINGO

**PROMENADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CORONA, CA**

Every year, the Promenade Elementary School PTO conducts important fundraisers for the school and thanks its families by hosting “give-back” nights. This time, the PTO and Action Team for Partnership (ATP) conducted a family night with an academic twist to enable parents to assist their children’s mathematical learning. At Math Bingo Night, the ATP and math teachers shared important information with parents about Common Core State Standards in math in a welcoming and entertaining atmosphere. Families at Promenade are racially diverse—with over 50% Hispanic families and large percentages of Caucasian, African American, and other families. About 55% of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

On Math Bingo Night, the PTO President shared a video with parents that explained the new California Common Core State Standards. This helped extend parents’ understanding of how classroom instruction and student learning are changing. A fifth grade teacher presented more detailed information on the standards for mathematical practice. The overview of math concepts from K-12 helped parents understand the progression of math standards across the grades. Parents also heard how teachers are developing their curricula and instructional approaches to help students meet rigorous learning expectations.

For Math Bingo, teachers at each grade level created various math problems, which were both Common Core-based and conducive to team problem solving. Parents and students worked together to solve the grade-specific math problems. The answers to the math problems were used to mark Bingo cards in the game. To help anyone with questions, some upper-grade students were designated “math experts.” These experts and teachers helped parents and students who were stumped in

solving particular problems. No one was left out of the chance for B-I-N-G-O.

Math Bingo was a collaborative effort between the PTO, ATP, and teachers. A family night was already scheduled, so turning it into Math Bingo Night still fit parents’ schedules. The organizers encouraged attendance with flyers, phone blasts, posters, morning announcements, and teachers’ encouragement in classrooms. Over 125 parents, 100 children, and 20 teachers enjoyed Math Bingo. PTO and school funds covered flyers, refreshments, bingo supplies, and some prizes. Other prizes were donated by community retailers.

This family night—designed to increase students’ positive attitudes about math and successful math learning—also helped improve communications with parents about math. Parents, students, and participating community members (including one Board member) now speak a common mathematical language and have a better understanding of Common Core standards. Parents also took home strategies to use to support students’ math homework. Students benefited, too, by seeing that they had mastered some skills, were learning new skills, and could show and share math with their parents.

Parents realized that the way they learned math in school has changed and that students were expected to know many ways to solve problems. When working on Bingo problems, parents often chose different methods than their child for finding solutions. Then, the students showed their parents new math methods. One student chimed, “I like showing my mom how to solve math problems!” The spirit of fun and learning made everyone want to say, “Bingo!”

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MATH FUN AND LEARNING WITH A DECK OF CARDS

**MADISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
BRIDGEPORT, CT**

When Madison Elementary School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and math teachers wanted to implement a parent workshop about math, they wanted to make a fun, playful environment in which parents learn alongside their children. Math Fun and Learning with a Deck of Cards enabled parents and children to play card games over dinner, while learning math skills for school and state testing. At the end of the event, students and parents got to take home the cards for future fun and learning.

When families arrived at school, they were given a deck of cards and a handout with grade-level explanations and directions for five games and activities. They practiced each game for 10-15 minutes. The five activities focused on math fluency in the following areas: ordering/comparing numbers; addition; subtraction; ordering fractions; and comparing fractions. The activities were designed for each grade level, as indicated by the following examples:

1. *Unshuffle*

- * Kindergarten: Turn 5 cards face-up. Order the cards from lowest to highest numbers.
- * Grade 1: Turn and order 10 cards.

2. *Addition*

- * Kindergarten: Turn over 2 cards. Touch the pictures on each card to count and add the values.
- * Grade 1: Create and add 2-digit plus 2-digit card configurations.
- * Grades 2-4: Create and add 3- and 4-digit card configurations.

3. *Subtraction*

- * K-1: Turn over 2 cards. Compare to see which is greater. Count how many more symbols/pictures the greater card has than the smaller.
- * Grade 2: Subtract 2 digits from 2 digits. Take the smaller number from the larger.

- * Grades 3-4: Subtract 2, 3, and 4-digit numbers from each other. Take the smaller number from the larger.

4. *Comparing*

- * All grades: Compare which values are "greater than" or "less than," with older grades receiving larger numbers.

5. *Fractions*

- * Grades 3-6: Two players aim to collect the most cards. Remove the face cards. Place two cards on a Fraction Mat to create a regular fraction. Then, both players decide which is closer to 1 whole. The winner takes all four cards. Variations include closer to zero, closer to one-half, and improper fractions.

Parents at the event were grateful to gather strategies to help their child practice math concepts at home. By taking home the playing cards, they will be able to conduct the same activities to "play" math at home. One parent noted: "We had fun tonight. I will try this with my child when we are away on vacation this summer."

Math Fun and Learning with a Deck of Cards include time for parents to talk with teachers and ask questions about math. Dinner also was served to nearly 50 parents and 50 students. The event cost about \$100 for decks of cards and \$125 for dinner.

When the evening ended, everyone felt more prepared to support students' math skills. Parents, students, and teachers agreed that cards are an easy and fun math manipulable. When it comes to enthusiasm about student learning, Madison Elementary School has it in spades.

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MEN AT WORK! LEARNING WITH LEGOS!

**DOLBY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

What do you get when you cross a group of involved dads, their elementary school-aged kids, and a school building full of Lego sets? The answer at Dolby Elementary School is Men at Work! Learning with Legos—a fun way to help dads understand and support their children’s math learning at home.

Dolby held Men at Work! one November evening from 6-8 p.m. When dads and their students arrived at the school, they found four Lego stations through which to rotate to build various math skills. Activities, iPad apps, and game stations helped students and fathers learn about parts, part totals, building square numbers, fractions, and addition and subtraction. Activities were selected for two grade ranges: Pre-K to 2nd grade and 3rd to 5th. Dads with students at both grade spans worked on different activities with each of their children.

In addition to the fun of working together with Legos, dads and students received a packet of activities to take home from each station. The dads and grandfathers used some of the time to ask their math homework questions. This gave teachers an opportunity to meet the dads, share information on new math curricula, and demonstrate math instruction with hands-on models. The morning after Men at Work, the KIDS TV news station announced four lucky attendees who won Lego kits as door prizes.

Many dads came in curious about linking Legos and math. They had Lego sets at home, but did not realize that there were math connections that could be made while playing with their children. Teachers modeled how to use playtime with Legos as a learning time to ask their children questions that require mathematical reasoning.

One parent told the assistant principal, “This was the most fun I’ve had at a school event.” He was glad to see that something he had used as a child was useful in the education of his own child. Another noted that this was the first school event he attended “on my own” with the children. The dads also extended their social networks as they met and talked with other dads.

Dolby reports that Dads at Work! was an easy practice to implement, but had to be well planned. The idea for Men at Work was sparked by an NNPS conference session on involving fathers with hands-on, fun, and educational activities that could be easily replicated at home. Dolby’s team used the Scholastic website on Using LEGO to Build Math Concepts as a resource in selecting the topics for their activity stations. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) publicized the event through school newsletters, School Messenger telephone calls, and Watchdog Dads meetings.

In addition to Watch Dog Dads and the Dolby PTO, McDonalds—a school partner in education—and Title I funds also helped cover the \$350 cost. The ATP plans to watch for Lego sales during the year to establish a collection of materials for future Men at Work sessions.

The focus on Learning with Legos! gave fathers and their kids time to connect and learn through play. These popular toys can be learning blocks for building a stronger foundation in math.

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PI R-SQUARED: PARTNERS IN RESOURCES AND RESOURCEFULNESS

SOUTH FLORENCE HIGH SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at South Florence High School (SFHS) knows that Algebra 2 is a primary predictor of students' success in college. They know, too, that most parents of struggling students are unable to help their teens with Algebra 2-level mathematics. On Pi-R-Squared (πr^2) Day, the school invited parents to enjoy a slice of pie and learn to access the *USA TestPrep* resource that could help tutor their child in Algebra 2.

During the school's annual Simply the Best Showcase, πr^2 : Partners in Resources and Resourcefulness made its debut. As families ate delicious pie, they browsed a showcase of students' math work. They also experienced tutorials on how to use *USA TestPrep* and other Algebra 2 math resources. Students were trained to conduct the workshop for parents. They explained the software using laptops in the classrooms. They also described other online Algebra 2 resources and why this subject was important for college entrance exams.

Pi R Squared (πr^2) Day was the culmination of the school's initiative to improve Algebra 2 skills at SFHS. Parents, teachers, community members, and students who served on the School Improvement Council (SIC) wanted to find ways to help more students succeed in Algebra 2. Although 85% of SFHS students planned to attend college, many were struggling in this subject. A grant written by school administrators was funded by the Center of Excellence at Francis Marion University for the purchase of *USA TestPrep* subscriptions for all Algebra 2 teachers. COE helped SFHS structure the evaluation of results from Test Prep.

To keep data consistent, a lead teacher selected sample questions for pre- and post-

tests. All Algebra 2 teachers administered the pre-test to their students. Based on the results, students were instructed on how to use *USA TestPrep* at home. Teachers offered homework and classwork credit for students who used the software. Along with *USA TestPrep* software, the school also purchased four calculators for the library for students who did not have their own.

USA TestPrep solidified the school and home connection in math learning. As students practiced at home, they brought questions to teachers the next day. The software tracks students' progress making it easy for students, parents, and teachers to monitor students' mastery of skills. Departmentally, all Algebra 2 teachers used the data to identify learning gaps and to develop instructional approaches to reteach the material so that more students could solve the math problems. Teachers, then, administered post-tests, which showed a 70% improvement in students' math skills as a result of the new software initiative.

The ATP was aware that student involvement tends to drive parent participation at school events. At the culminating Pi R Squared (πr^2) Day, students were the "stars" of the math presentations. They showcased their skills and described the *TestPrep* software. The Principal noted, "Seeing students 'tutoring' their parents on how to use the software was very exciting. Even more exciting are the results we have been getting from partnering with parents to help them help their children succeed with high-level, college-prep algebra." πr^2 Day showed that the area for student success in math was filled with technology, teachers, and support from parents.

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CATAPULT OLYMPICS: LAUNCHING INTO STEM NIGHT

VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA

Vista Elementary School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed a STEM Family Night where parents, students, teachers, and community members worked together to engineer a project. The ATP, teachers, and staff at Vista collaborated with the engineering department and students at a local community college to design Catapult Olympics. Teachers, community college volunteers, and students participated in hands-on engineering activities during the school day. Then, they then applied the same concepts with their families at an Olympics STEM Night.

The community college engineering students visited classrooms the week before Catapult Olympics to build students' interest in engineering. For example, the engineering students introduced Vista's 4th and 5th graders to the challenge of using one piece of construction paper and a small amount of tape to build as high a tower as they could that would stand for 3 seconds. These pre-events generated student excitement, which generated family attendance.

For Catapult Olympics, students built catapults to shoot mini-marshmallows into the air. The students used their catapults to compete in three events: 2-foot accuracy into a bowl; 4-foot accuracy into a bowl; and farthest overall distance. This required the 4th and 5th grade students to stop during the evening to redesign their projects as part of the engineering process.

On the night of the event, a subcommittee of parents, teachers, and administrators met half an hour early to set up the event stations. The community college engineering students directed the event stations in the gym and the supply table with all available materials. Four classrooms welcomed families with preliminary information about the Catapult Olympics.

As each classroom filled, teachers presented a PowerPoint that outlined the design challenge, shared learning objectives, and offered some catapult-design strategies. Teachers then handed out score cards and sent students with their families to the gym to gather supplies.

In the gym, students and families found a stockpile of materials: styrofoam cups, drinking straws, plastic spoons, masking tape, large and small paper clips, rubber bands, craft sticks, clothespins, twist-ties, construction paper, bowls, and marshmallows. After students selected supplies to build their catapults, they took their creations and their families off to compete in the three challenges.

Community college students monitored activities, and kept track of event leaders. Students were encouraged to work with their families to design and redesign their catapults to make them ever-more accurate and successful. One parent commented, "It's amazing how something so simple and fun hits all of those learning objectives! I can't wait to do more projects like this at home."

District funds for partnership programs covered the \$180 cost of materials. Leftover supplies were saved for next year.

The community college students collected score cards to determine the winners—one per event for the 4th and 5th grades. The students returned to the school later in the week to announce the winners over the school's intercom and award certificates.

At Vista Elementary School, the Catapult Olympics: Launching into STEM Night was a great way for teachers, family, and the community to catapult students into the world of engineering.

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NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

**OTTER CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

Although science is all around us, some students and their parents find it intimidating. At Otter Creek Elementary School, the teacher of a Gifted and Talented class wanted to encourage school-wide excitement and inquisitiveness about STEM subjects. She partnered with the Museum of Discovery to host Night at the Museum to make science interesting, engaging, and fun. The museum offered free attendance to all Otter Creek families to encourage parents and children, faculty and staff to experience wonderful science exhibits and hands-on activities together.

At the Night at the Museum, students and parents learned about many scientific concepts. In hands-on exhibits and shows, the range of fascinating subjects included: the distance a sneeze can travel; energy efficiency of compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) versus regular lightbulbs; tornado simulations; the role of the intestines in the human anatomy; visualization of sound waves; learning about live animals; and more.

Throughout the evening, parents saw that their children were active learners in fun ways. The children were energized by sharing the whole trip with their parents. One parent voiced everyone's reactions, "My child really enjoyed this... it was a great way to get the entire family excited about science and to generate interest for our OCE Science Fair."

Night at the Museum also increased connections and conversations among parents, teachers, students, and community members—all in the name of improving student achievement. Said another parent, "I loved the whole experience. Not only did my children have fun, but I also got to visit with other parents and staff that I normally do not get to see because of my work schedule."

Many parents and students reported that this was their first visit to a science museum. The Otter Creek teachers and Discovery Museum staff hope that the positivity of the experience will inspire parents to consider visiting again when planning future family outings.

To make Night at the Museum a success, staff and students announced it on morning announcements. Flyers were sent home emphasizing the museum's free entry for all Otter Creek parents and children. Teachers included information in their class newsletters and on the school calendar. Families received a ParentLink message the night before and the day of the event, and students went home with labels on their shirts reminding parents to attend.

The school's Parent Involvement Funds made a donation to the museum to open the museum on one evening (when it might otherwise be closed) and the museum contributed to the free family and staff admissions. That meant that the only challenge to participation was the drive from Otter Creek to downtown Little Rock of about twenty miles for most families. About 125 parents and more than 225 students, along with 20 teachers enjoyed a Night at the Museum.

The Museum of Discovery has many resources linked to the Arkansas Education Framework and Common Core State Standards. Other school-museum connections are being explored. The Night at the Museum extended classroom teaching and learning, and enabled families to experience science in new ways that would otherwise go unexplored.

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SCIENCE NIGHT

**WHITE BLUFFS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RICHLAND, WA**

The 5th grade teachers at White Bluffs Elementary wanted all students to think of themselves as scientists—and they really meant every one. They coached all fifth graders to be accomplished presenters of their science projects to parents and to all students at the school’s Science Night. The presentations were the happy culmination of teachers’ efforts to help students plan and conduct a good experiment and to guide parents on how to support their children’s science learning. The goal was to ensure that these students experienced success as science “experts” in preparation for their transition to science classes at the middle school. This included the students who, typically, struggled in science. They, too, needed to shine at the Science Night.

Students were coached on how to share their work in an engaging way. At the Science Night, from 6:30-8 p.m., all fifth graders presented their science projects to their parents and to the younger students. “We had a great turnout,” said one teacher, “but the really surprising element was that all . . . students [who had struggled in science] arrived with a parent to hear their presentations. Some of these parents had not attended any other school event.” Student presenters felt prepared and knowledgeable—like real scientists.

Also at Science Night, the school’s Lego Robotics Club performed a demonstration, and two parents who work as soil scientists brought high powered microscopes and soil samples for students to observe. The PTO arranged for the Astronomy Club to help students observe the planets outside the school building.

Science Night grew from the fifth grade’s Scientific Method Unit for which every student conducted an at-home science project. This included students who were eligible for

free or reduced-price lunch, English Language Learners (ELL), and students in the Learning Adjustment Program (LAP). Teachers gave these students—many of whom struggled in science—special attention by phoning or e-mailing their parents to discuss how to support their children’s work on their science experiments at home.

Teachers provided detailed guidelines and rubrics to all students and parents on steps and criteria for the experiment, report, and presentation. They spoke with all students who needed extra support, monitored their projects, provided feedback, and coached them on how to present their work to young students. For example, one student was studying the effect of light on plants in a cupboard, dark room, and windowsill. The teacher talked with the student about how to document results, and asked his parent to take pictures of the student’s work on her smart phone, which the teacher would print for the student’s display. At school, teacher and student worked together on the display board. “By the time the science fair came around,” said the teacher, “the parent was as excited as the child . . .”

White Bluffs used its robocall to invite all students and parents to Science Night. Teachers personally called the families of struggling science students. Science Night was an inclusive, fun, educational way to build science knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes. “My child is so confident,” one parent stated, “she was even talking about pursuing a science degree in college.”

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SCIENCE WITH SOLDIERS

**ROSALIND FRANKLIN STEM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Rosalind Franklin STEM Elementary School envisioned a unique school day spent celebrating veterans. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP), teachers, principal, and others imagined a day when veterans from the local community actively engaged with students. The result was Science with Soldiers, where veterans worked side-by-side with students in classrooms conducting hands-on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) activities.

At Science with Soldiers, veterans from the community were welcomed to school throughout the day. Educators and parents located veterans in the community and invited them to school. At morning and afternoon receptions, the veterans received warm welcomes from the Principal, student leaders, and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). Third-graders greeted their guests by performing a song. Teachers developed classroom activities for veterans to participate with students in hands-on science experiments. Organizers designed a Boot Camp Obstacle Course to connect veterans' experiences with students' fitness.

The visiting veterans were assigned to kindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms to engage with students on a wide range of science and engineering activities. For example, they designed and built earthquake-proof structures, experimented with the properties of light and shadow, practiced computer programming skills, and shared other areas of expertise.

A Boot Camp Obstacle Course, developed by the PE teacher, ATP parents, and others, combined health education, fun, and fitness. Students wore camouflage and gained an appreciation for the physical challenges that members of the military experience when they prepare for service. The obstacle course created memorable intergenerational connections between veterans and students.

Science with Soldiers was an innovative approach to engaging veterans with students.

As a newly opened school, Rosalind Franklin educators and ATP members met during the previous spring and summer to consider how family and community involvement could be given a STEM focus. Science with Soldiers was one activity designed for this purpose.

ATP funds covered the \$200 materials cost. Teachers, staff, parents, and family were among the veterans who participated with students. Others were community members without students at the school.

According to Rosalind Franklin's Principal, "Staff, students, and veterans had amazing experiences together. The activities provided opportunities for more meaningful and personal conversations between veterans and students." The Principal also noted that the students and veterans surprised each other in many ways. For example, one student was surprised to learn that his father had used science skills in his career and had developed his interest in engineering during his military service. Veterans commented on how much they enjoyed learning what students were doing in STEM classrooms. As the principal observed, "Students were able to see how their schoolwork now could lead to careers and opportunities later in life." This kind of learning is unusual and long-lasting. The students were grateful for the veteran's participation and wrote cards, letters, and poems to thank them for working with them on STEM activities at school.

Science with Soldiers garnered a wealth of positive feedback from veterans, staff, parents, and students. It enabled the Rosalind Franklin STEM Elementary School to combine education, goodwill, and new partnerships with the community.

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COMPUTER CONNECTION

**HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

When students know that their families have access to their grades and attendance records, they become more responsible about schoolwork. That is why Highlands Middle School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted more students' families, including those of English Language Learners (ELL), to understand the school's grading system and to know how to monitor their own child's grades and progress. At Computer Connection, parents learned computer literacy skills and how to follow their children's grades online.

Computer Connection was conducted as two workshops for parents. The first session helped all parents to open an e-mail account that they could use for general communications with teachers and others at school. The second session focused on the PowerSchool Parent Portal. To encourage attendance at both sessions, childcare and light dinner were provided at no cost.

At the first session, teachers and counselors presented a PowerPoint in English and Spanish on the steps to set up a gmail account. Parents were given a folder, note pad, and pen. Print copies of the presentation were available to families who attended the workshop and those who could not attend. ATP members, counselors, and the afterschool Coordinator attended to provide assistance as needed.

The second session offered one-on-one tutoring by teachers with parents on how to use the PowerSchool Parent Portal to access their own child's grades and other important school information. Each family's questions were addressed. The goal was for all families to be able—and eager—to sign on, understand the information on the Portal, and feel comfortable using all sections. The ATP and planning group recognized that many parents came to the session with minimal computer skills. This situation was best addressed with the one-to-one ratio of instructors to

participants at the workshop on the Parent Portal.

To assist parents who needed childcare, Highlands brought in four members of its 21st Century after-school staff and four middle school student volunteers to take care of younger children in one section of the library. The childcare group was given a variety of puzzles, play dough, card games, and coloring supplies for age-appropriate activities in a safe and interactive environment.

After each workshop, parents and children were invited to join Highlands' staff and volunteers for a light dinner of sandwiches, chips, fruit, and water in the cafeteria. This gave parents and teachers time to meet, hear about the afterschool program from the Coordinator, and review questions about gmail, the Parent Portal, and other computer skills. Costs for food and childcare activities were covered by the afterschool program.

To prepare for the Computer Connection sessions, teachers developed lesson plans and presentations, advertised the classes with their students, and placed phone calls to parents who might benefit most from the workshops. The afterschool coordinator created a flyer, and the ATP posted it on the school's Facebook page, reader board, and in other bulletins.

In many schools, there is a digital divide between parents who are computer savvy and those who have limited internet access and computer skills. With Computer Connection, Highlands Middle School found one way to begin to address this challenge.

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GOAL SHARING / STEM NIGHT

**VIRGIE ROBINSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

From the start of the school year, Virgie Robinson Elementary School teachers and administrators encourage students to think about their own work and progress. Students are guided to set their own learning goals in all subjects. Teachers work hard to help the students attain the goals they set. There are, then, state, district, school, class, and student goals that guide lessons, tests, and progress reports, but students' own goals may be most important. Goal Sharing / STEM Night was designed to recognize and celebrate this approach to student learning with all families.

Virgie Robinson Elementary's student body is about 90% Hispanic with English learners and many families who speak Spanish at home. Most students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators conduct three Goal Sharing Nights each year, and turned one of them into a fun night that also featured STEM activities.

Students and families participated in three activities in different areas in the school. As one feature, students discussed their individual goal folders and progress with parents and family members. In the library, the school's Barnes & Nobel community partners highlighted reading with a Book Fair. In the gym and cafeteria, each grade-level team set up family-friendly science and engineering experiences. Students and parents worked together to build marshmallow-launching catapults; foil rafts sturdy enough to carry dozens of coins; lava lamps; and gummy edifices. Students and families also visited a math candy-jar estimation table, and entered a bicycle raffle.

During the week prior to Goal Sharing/STEM Night, the candy jars and bicycles were on display in the office for students to see. Title

I funds covered the costs of goal-sharing folders for all students and the various math, science, engineering, and other materials at Goal Sharing / STEM Night. The good planning and diverse activities encouraged over 300 parents to attend.

Throughout the year, goal-setting and data collection on student progress is part of life at Robinson Elementary. Students set and update their progress in all school subjects in individual goal folders. Teachers guide students through the goal-setting process, and prepare them to share their folders with families. The charts and graphs in their folders include information about reading, math, behavior, attendance, and other important aspects of academic success.

Three times each year, teachers collect goal folders and invite parents to school to participate in student-led conferences on their progress in reaching their goals. Classrooms with the highest percentage of parents attending these important meetings earn a pizza party, and gifts for parents and families also are raffled off at each event. Although students assume the ultimate responsibility for gathering information in their folders and leading the conference with their parents, teachers and staff are present to answer questions and forge relationships with parents.

There is something very important about placing students in charge of setting and reporting their goals and progress throughout the school year. One teacher reflected, "Our students' confidence in their ability to learn is amplified [by setting their own goals], and we are already seeing strong academic gains."

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HOME TO SCHOOL LESSONS

MARY EMILY BRYAN MIDDLE SCHOOL
WELDON SPRING, MO

Mary Emily Bryan Middle’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wants to make school more home-like and home more school-like, so students have multiple sources of educational support. To show that many daily activities easily connect home and school, the ATP adapted an idea from another school for Home to School Lessons.

The ATP divided subjects into 8 categories: ELA, Math, Social Studies, Science, Fine Arts, Practical Arts, PE, and Reading. Two subjects were assigned to each quarter of the year.

The ATP provided a list of 30 topics and activities for interactive homework assignments that could be adapted for different subjects. The activities had to be smart, creative, and fun for students, parents, and family to do together—not always using paper and pencil. They had to be no-cost and easy to complete. Students would take the lead in conducting the activities with family members.

In the first quarter of the school year, teachers of fine arts and practical arts developed the assignments. Each teacher selected one to assign to students. These included talking about and collecting favorite recipes, listening to a piece of music together and noting how family members responded differently to the music, or playing a game of charades. Individual teachers could design other assignments in the fine or practical arts linked to their own curriculum.

In the second quarter, communication arts and science teachers developed activities. Ideas included asking a family member how technology is different now from when they were in middle school, asking a parent why they chose a particular career, or doing a science experiment together.

Social studies and math teachers had their turn in the third quarter. Teachers chose

from ideas such as discussing how math is used in a family’s daily life, writing a news article together about an event in the family’s history, or make a meal plan using a certain budget.

Physical education and reading teachers designed creative homework in the fourth quarter of the school year. Students could engage a family member in taking a bike ride or walk, going on a nature scavenger hunt, asking parents about their favorite books when they were children, and, if possible, reading those books together.

At first, the activities were optional. Fewer than half the students and families participated. This year, activities were improved and required as part of students’ grades. Over 91% of families participated and reported how much they enjoyed the activities.

One teacher reported, “...when students shared their family recipes, the [other students] made connections to their [own] family’s history...They want to create a cookbook to make all of the recipes at home.” A parent shared, “I can’t believe [my son] was able to teach me a song on the keyboard. ...We had a great time listening to some of my favorite songs from when I was his age!”

Although the assignments were fun, students engaged in higher level thinking discussions with their parents and family members, and connected school learning with real life skills. It seems that everyone wins when students take what they learn in school and make it come to life at home.

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MULTIPLYING AND READY-TO-READ MOMS

**WATSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

This spring, Watson Elementary School honored moms with a free, tasty, entertaining, and educational luncheon right before Mother’s Day. While moms enjoyed a special meal with their children and other families, they also received important information and practical tips on how to help their student succeed in meeting new Common Core State Standards in reading and math.

An Italian feast arrived piping hot just moments before the first mom signed in. As they dined, the women were entertained, first, by student winners of the school talent show including an acappella singing duo and a dance team. When the cheering ended, Watson’s reading interventionist and math coach presented useful ideas for parents who wanted to help their children at home, but did not want to “teach” kids the way that teachers do in class.

The reading specialist spoke about the importance of reading with children and offered practical strategies for creating a quiet space and time to read. She also offered information about how to help children choose books at an appropriate reading level, and, then, challenged moms to read at least one book per week with their children throughout the summer. Many moms pledged to do that. Moms also were reminded that the public library is an excellent source of free reading material for children and adults all summer long.

Watson’s math coach explained differences between how schools taught multiplication in the past and how multiplication is taught now. She explained: “In the old days, it [math instruction] was procedural. Now, it is conceptual—moving from clear, concrete steps to more abstract understanding.

The moms in attendance pledged to practice multiplication facts and other math skills each week with their children. Students then took the lead showing their moms what they were learning in math class. One student exclaimed, “It was funny teaching Mom how to do math!”

Multiplying and Ready-to-Read Moms was one of Watson’s most successful parental involvement activities with over 50 moms attending. One mom expressed the common view, “I didn’t realize how much math has changed since I was in school!”

To prepare for the lunch and learn activity, invitations were sent home with students about two weeks before Mother’s Day. The day before, the school made a Parent Link call as a reminder. Parent volunteers, students, and the Parent Coordinator made and printed paper flowers as centerpieces for the tables. A local Italian restaurant graciously offered a discount on a pre-ordered feast of Fettucine Alfredo and salad. Title I donations helped cover the remaining cost of \$120.

The experienced leaders at Watson set the luncheon and presentations in the school library and not the noisy cafeteria. They also agreed it would be a good idea to set aside some time for moms to practice the strategies in reading and math that were discussed with their children. All agreed that Mother’s Day was even more special for those who took time for lunch at Watson’s to learn that they could do many things at home to help their children succeed as readers and mathematicians at school.

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PARCC AND PASTRIES / AFTERNOON IN THE PARCC

**NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / GRAND COTEAU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
OPELOUSAS, LA / GRAND COTEAU, LA (ST. LANDRY PARISH)**

Test anxiety can strike all students—even the most confident learners. St. Landry district leaders are guiding schools to help parents support their children in achieving new learning standards that will be measured by a new test—PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). Grand Coteau Elementary School and Northeast Elementary School introduced parents to state standards in literacy and math, questions on PARCC, and ways to support student learning and reduce test anxiety.

After school from 3-5 p.m., Grand Coteau invited parents and students to a learn-and-do session—Afternoon in the PARCC—to increase their understanding of the standards, the curricular and instructional approaches teachers use in class, and sample test questions for third and fourth graders. Parents met with the Parent Resource Coordinator, principal, third- and fourth-grade teachers, and the district’s K-12 math specialist.

The educators walked parents through the major standards in math and English language arts (ELA) and sample PARCC items on these standards. In addition to clarifying the state standards, school curricula, and test items, they also shared several strategies to help parents support their children’s learning at home. Parents asked questions and discussed their concerns.

Parents who attended Afternoon in the PARCC received door prizes. Students received goodie bags of school supplies, including a dictionary, thesaurus, two folders, pack of pencils, pencil sharpener, glue stick, ruler, highlighter, scissors, and calculator. These items were purchased with parental involvement funds allocated by the school district.

At Northeastern Elementary’s PARCC and Pastries, parents of students in grades 3-6 met one morning with the Parent Educator and an instructional specialist for breakfast and an informational PowerPoint. The presentation

explained state standards and sections of the PARCC test, including literary analysis, research simulation, and narrative tasks in language arts. Parents were given a chance to solve math examples and to consider how they would help their children doing similar problems for homework.

Parents received handouts listing the schedule of tests, frequently asked questions, sample test questions, and websites for test strategies and examples that they may use with their children at home. These included guiding parents to encourage their children to read and discuss stories and non-fiction informational text materials. The parents completed surveys to give their input and feedback on how well the session addressed their questions and gave them ideas on how to support their child’s learning. One parent commented, “ I did not know what to expect with PARCC until I attended this meeting.”

Refreshments were served at both schools’ events. The information sessions gave parents opportunities to meet their children’s teachers and other school and district leaders, along with other parents. Common parent reviews were: “Very informative.” “Very helpful.” “Very knowledgeable staff.”

St. Landry’s educators know that parents and family can be important influences in preparing students for annual tests. The PARCC information sessions at these and other schools (see PARCC and Pastries for Parents at Sunset Middle School in this section) are helping parents understand what is expected of students in class and how they can support and guide their child’s learning at home.

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PARCC AND PASTRIES FOR PARENTS

SUNSET MIDDLE SCHOOL
SUNSET, LA

Getting comfortable with a new test is no “walk in the park.” This is true for students and for parents. Sunset Middle School addressed this issue by conducting PARCC and Pastries for Parents to familiarize parents with the new PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) achievement tests. The Action Team for Partnerships and others at Sunset Middle School presented the important information in a relaxed, welcoming, and even caffeinated environment.

PARCC and Pastries for Parents included information and hands-on activities for about 45 parents. The school’s Parent Educator welcomed participants and acknowledged the teachers and staff who planned the event, and the community partners who donated pastries and coffee.

Sunset’s principal reviewed the school’s promotion policy and other school-specific academic issues and updates. She also provided parents with an overview of the PARCC test, its connections with high standards for student learning, and the testing calendar for the year. The instructional specialist shared the test format and an overview of the English Language Arts (ELA) and math test sections.

Parents, then, worked together in small groups to compare examples of old and new standards and test questions. They identified new standards for students’ thinking and writing in the practice items. For example, students are asked to compare different texts and to find evidence for their views in the information they are given. Parents also worked on an assortment of math problems. With these experiences, parents and teachers were able to discuss strategies for supporting student achievement at home.

One parent noted with appreciation, “I was surprised to see the differences in writing topics. [Now, I know] what is meant by ‘finding evidence in the text.’ I will ask my child different kinds of questions at home.” Another noted, “At first, [parents] shut down when we saw the 5th grade math example. We had to reread the problem to better understand what the question was asking. I guess that is teaching our children not to panic on these tests.”

Then, parents visited their child’s classroom, where the teacher presented sample lessons on some skills measured on the PARCC tests. Parents asked questions and teachers provided details on language arts and math standards and how PARCC assesses student learning. Teachers demonstrated various instructional methods that they used in class.

PARCC and Pastries for Parents was designed and implemented based on data collected last year that showed parents wanted to know more about the School Improvement Plan, new state standards, and new tests. The cost of the workshop (about \$50) was covered by community donations and parent involvement funding. The school advertised and promoted the workshop in advance, and described how parents would have opportunities to work with other parents on some of the new test questions to better understand the standards and assessments. With good planning, good information, and good ideas for parents on how to support their children’s learning at home, PARCC and Pastries for Parents was, indeed, a sweet success.

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PARENTS AND LEARNERS (PALS)

**JOHN F. KENNEDY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA**

Every September, a new school year begins and important transformations take place. Children become students again; parents become partners in students' academic success; and schools teach updated curricular standards. To start the school year off right, John F. Kennedy Elementary hosted Parents and Learners (PALs) to help parents understand changes in their children's instruction based on new state requirements.

The PALs program welcomed parents to the school library from 6-8 p.m. last September. Parents sat at tables with their children, while teachers demonstrated lessons on English Language Arts (ELA) and math at different grade levels. Teachers offered Best Practice Strategies that parents could use at home to help students meet Common Core State Standards that are measured on PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) achievement tests. Teachers also guided students on how to show their parents the skills they were learning in ELA and math classes.

Best practice strategies were presented for different grade levels, subjects, and skills. Parents received a list of interactive websites for all of the subjects covered and a set of sample activities that they could conduct at home. Children enjoyed watching their parents become students, as teachers asked moms and dads to answer math and ELA questions, just as students did in class. The parents took to their new roles happily—one even said, "What a great way to introduce us to the future of my son's education!"

In order to cover a wide range of ELA and math skills, teachers presented several types of exercises. For ELA, these included how students learn about phonemes, language dictionaries, building vocabulary, constructing sentences, and reading informational texts.

For math, exercises included how students learn numerals to five, tens frames, and exponents for math. After the academics, parents, children, and teachers enjoyed refreshments together. Families also received door prizes to reward their enthusiastic participation.

To get the word out about PALs, students took home flyers a few weeks in advance. Notices also appeared on the school messenger system and the local news station's breakfast bar. The \$100 cost of refreshments and materials was covered by Title I funds, partners in education, and teachers' contributions.

PALs organizers believe it was important to hold the activity early in the school year at a time that works for employed and other parents. For example, PALs was moved from 5 to 6 p.m. so that more parents could attend after work. The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) also recommended getting the message out about the program early so that parents could plan to attend and get babysitters for young children, if necessary.

By involving parents in students' learning, PALs supported the school improvement goal of helping all students reach high standards and achieve proficiency or better in Reading and Math. The ATP reported that when students see their parents actively involved in the kinds of questions and problems they work on in class, their behavior, academics, and homework success is likely to improve. Students enjoyed hosting a parent for dinner at school. Capturing the sentiment of the night, one mom said she enjoyed coming to school, because "in the end, it's benefitting *all* children!"

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PARENT PORTAL ACCESS

OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Teachers at Ochoa Middle School know that one of their most important tasks is to communicate with all parents about their child’s academic progress in school. About 95% of students are Hispanic and about 94% are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Teachers must solve a language challenge to communicate effectively with parents so that they feel confident about supporting their children’s success in school.

One tool Ochoa Middle School provides for parents is a web-based Parent Portal to make it easy to monitor their student’s report card grades, assignments, missing assignments, and grades on classroom assessments. Most parents of Ochoa students have internet access on a home computer or smart phone to connect to the Parent Portal. However, teachers were not sure how many parents actually used this tool, and, if they did, whether and how it helped them interact positively with their child about their academic progress. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers and administrators looked into details about parents’ uses of the Portal in a sample of two seventh-grade classrooms.

The ATP and colleagues revised the original printed directions on how to use the Parent Portal to make them clearer and more user-friendly. They also developed more detailed guidelines in English and Spanish on cardstock with a magnet affixed to the back for posting at home.

At the fall parent-teacher conference, parents in the two sample seventh grade classrooms received the printed, magnetized directions for accessing and using the Parent Portal. They were asked to place the guidelines on the refrigerator as a reminder to check grades often. These parents completed a three-question survey in Spanish or English that asked:

1. Are you familiar with or do you know about the Parent Portal (not at all, a little, somewhat, and very familiar).

2. Do you use the Parent Portal to monitor your student’s grades? (no, a little, sometimes, or very often).

3. If you use the Parent Portal, does it help your student be more successful in school? (not really, a little, a lot, or it is essential to student success).

The same parents were surveyed again at the spring teacher-parent conference. Data from the pre-and post-intervention surveys were collected, tallied and analyzed.

The results indicated that more parents used and found the Parent Portal helpful from fall to spring of the school year. Students, too, were more aware in the spring of their own grades because their parents used the Parent Portal. One 7th grade student stated, “My mom checks my grades all the time, so I know I have to work hard.” Parents could support their students better when they had information about which assignments were assigned, turned in or missed, and how students performed on a related assessment. A parent of a 7th grades lamented, “I wish I knew about this last year!”

The use of the Parent Portal is a work in progress at Ochoa. New parents arrive with their children every year when they transition into the school. The new guidelines and teachers’ discussions about the Parent Portal should help more—or all—parents support their children’s academic success in school.

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SOCIAL NETWORKING: MIX IT UP!

**CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL
EUNICE, LA**

Central Middle School (CMS), the only middle school in the district, receives students from four elementary schools in the community. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others at CMS wanted to improve communications among new students to create a positive school climate and cohesive culture. They also are working to develop family engagement activities that are linked to student learning. The ATP and colleagues focused on new standards for students' speaking and listening skills. The activity, Social Networking: Mix It Up!, required students to use structured dialogue to interview new peers and make new friends at school, with guidance from teachers and parents.

The goal was to help students learn interviewing skills and grow their social networks to include students who came from different schools. Students sat as a class with their teachers outside on a lovely Louisiana fall day. They received a list of interview questions from their teachers, which they clipped or taped to a notebook, and recorded answers to the questions in complete sentences. A local newspaper reporter was on-site, along with parents and grandparents, who joined the fun of being interviewed.

At a signal from the principal, students walked around and found a person to interview—one they had never spoken to before. Students also could interview an adult—a teacher, staff, parent, or family member in the audience. Sample questions included: In what ways are you (or will you be) successful at Central Middle School? How do you spend quality time with your family? If you could step into the future, what would you want to see? What is one personality trait that you are proud of?

After about twenty minutes, students turned in their notebooks to their teacher. Social networking continued in less-structured ways with

basketball, hula hoops, and football games. This mix of interactions created new acquaintances and friends who could continue connections the next day and throughout the school year. According to the principal, interviewing new contacts "helped boost the self-esteem of many students who had never stepped out of their comfort zone. It brought smiles to faces in a big way!"

Before Mix It Up!, classroom teachers incorporated peer interviews and interview questions into their lessons. After the event, students wrote reports in their English classes on what they learned about the person they interviewed. One parent was so impressed by the interactions among students and adults that she volunteered to coordinate an end-of-year Mix It Up Picnic, at which rising 5th graders will interview 6th graders at CMS for information and advice about preparing for the transition to middle school.

Throughout the event, parents, grandparents, and families also networked with each other to develop new social ties. Over time, students' PowerPoint slideshows on Central Middle's efforts to implement non-traditional parent involvement and student interaction strategies were projected electronically in the school's lobby and cafeteria. That way, all guests to the school could watch the whole event. According to one teacher, Social Networking: Mix It Up created "a real sense of community on campus for all of us." At CMS, social networking is not just about social media—it's about people connecting face-to-face for day-to-day and long-term interactions.

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UNIQUE FAMILY NIGHTS: WELLNESS FAIR AND TECH FEST

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

Castlio Elementary School set a goal to improve the school climate and increase student and parent attachment to school. To meet the goal, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others held several family nights for students and parents to experience school in different ways. This year, two examples stood out: Wellness Fair was an important family night to promote student and family health and Tech Fest was designed to spotlight students' talents.

Wellness Fair invited students and families to school to engage in active games together. Parents also received information from teachers and community vendors about health resources in the community. Students and families learned about various ways to be active daily during the school year and through the summer. Information was presented by various camps and groups such as Boys and Girls Club, Junior Achievement, and Soccer Shots on summer activities for students. Health tips were provided on school lunch nutrition, eye-care programs, sugar content in cereals, self-defense, stress relief, and posture. Teachers demonstrated healthy practices such as handwashing. For active fun, families, teachers, and community members played a giant game of Ultimate Frisbee.

Community vendors participated at no cost, and teachers volunteered to set up tables that functioned as booths for groups to provide information to students and parents. The Wellness Fair extended information on local options for health and wellness all year round. Plans for the future include inviting local major sports teams (i.e., the Rams and Cardinals) to participate.

Tech Fest was a new family night planned collaboratively by the ATP, PTO, teachers, and others, with activities starring the students. Over 40 student-led presentations featured 90 students. The children taught their parents about various technologies and web resources that they use in

school each day. Community representatives also presented information on a technology topic such as internet safety, Twitter, and the pros and cons of various electronic devices. Local businesses donated giveaways for families, including tote bags, paper pads, pens, water bottles, and power banks.

Students benefited from their roles as leaders of Tech Fest. Their presentations showcased projects they completed and many "how-to" skills that parents need to know. To prepare students to make presentations, the librarian, district technician, and 21st Century program staff worked with students prior to the event. The student-presenter application form/permission slip specified that students would be following a specific format in their presentations: Introduction; demonstration; discussion of the advantages of using the technology; school projects and assignments using technology; and questions from the audience.

Tech Fest was successful due to weekly planning meetings of communication, logistics, and donations committees prior to the event. The committee meetings held between November and March ensured a well-planned, well-implemented event. Tech Fest showcased Castlio Elementary in important and positive ways to parents and the community. The district superintendent commented, "It is amazing what students can do and how the teachers have grown student leaders at every grade level. The students were poised and confident in subject matter and presentation skills."

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WOLCOTT ART SHOW

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

Type 2

The city of Torrington is alive with the arts. At Oliver Wolcott Technical High School, the Family Engagement Team planned and implemented the Art Show to showcase the creative work of the school's talented students and staff. The partnership team knew that the art-rich community would appreciate and support this effort. All shop and trade groups at the school collaborated to plan the event and display various art forms. Some talent was unknown or unrecognized until the time of the show.

In addition to the exhibits, there were art-related and shop-art workshops for attendees—young and old—to enjoy. These sessions offered hands-on creative activities, such as canvas painting, heat transfer T-Shirt designs, chromatography tie-dye, nail painting with art designs, and cupcake decorating. Some students and some faculty led the workshops or demonstrations for students and adults.

About 200 people came to enjoy the arts, live music, and refreshments at the Art Show one evening toward the end of the school year. Staff and students at Wolcott provided the entertainment throughout the evening. Many of the trades were represented including: Culinary, Carpentry, Hairdressing and Barbering, Auto Body, and Graphics. Some artistic work on display along with traditional paintings, drawings, and sculpture were a fender that the 9th grade Auto Body Shop completed and various sheet metal pieces. Hairdressing had mannequins on display with various haircuts and styles, and nail boards with numerous designs. The Culinary Arts group decorated cupcakes on display and participants were able to decorate their own. The Carpentry Shop had numerous wooden creations that were made on a lathe. The number of parents attending increased because of the participation by their

students' shop and trade groups.

In the lead up to the Art Show, the junior year students in the Graphics Shop created flyers and posters that were displayed at the school and throughout the town of Torrington. The partnership team sent invitations to many local art groups, businesses, City Hall members, State Representatives, and parents. Four faculty members appeared on the cable-TV program *City View* the evening before the Art Show to describe the good work on display and to invite the audience to attend.

Students not only benefitted by sharing their talents, but also built leadership skills by preparing for the event and interacting with attendees. They extended communication skills by leading demonstrations and workshops. Parents, faculty, community members strengthened their connections to the school, faculty, and students. Many people in the community had never been inside in the school before, and did not realize the knowledge and skills the students were acquiring through their trades. Local contractors were particularly interested in the school's shops and trades, with an eye to hiring interns and employees in the future. One State legislative representative reflected, "I hope you have the Art Show again next year—it was great for the community." The Art Show was an enjoyable and effective way to create new connections with families from the many towns that send students to Wolcott, spotlight growing talent, and celebrate the arts.

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OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

ALL PRO DADS

**GREENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

It has been said that any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a dad. In that spirit, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others at Greenwood Elementary School implemented All Pro Dads—a year-long series of activities in a variety of settings. The goal was to empower and enable dads to be more involved in motivating their children’s behavioral and academic success. The first group of dads was so engaged that they planned other ways to invite more dads to do the same.

All Pro Dads began with a series of three breakfast meetings with motivational speakers. In October, the former principal and superintendent of schools talked with over 125 dads in the school library. In November, the breakfast was moved to the cafeteria to accommodate a larger group. There, a former San Diego Padres shortstop spoke to about 300 fathers and their children. The sports theme continued in January, with a talk by a television wildlife and fishing expert.

The second component of All Pro Dads was Take Dad to the Library Night with the local professional, minor league basketball team. As 125 families arrived at the public library, they enjoyed refreshments and a PowerPoint presentation about reading comprehension strategies to use before, during, and after reading. Basketball players then read with students and practiced these strategies. Families also toured the library and applied for library cards. Each student received a bookmark and two children’s books to take home, along with chances to win door prizes of board games and basketball tickets.

In March, Bring Dad to School enabled students to bring their dads on one of two visiting days, decided alphabetically by last name. Fathers read to and with students,

attended class, ate lunch with their children, and helped out at recess. One happy boy commented, “This is the first time my dad has come to this school when I wasn’t in trouble.”

In April, one father felt so inspired that he wanted to expand All Pro Dads to reach more Greenwood fathers. He organized a fishing trip to a popular pond. Even in the rain, nearly forty dads went fishing with their children. A daughter noted that this was her first field trip with her dad.

Cookout with Dad Day rounded out the year with another event organized by the involved fathers. By grilling and playing kickball and baseball, dads bonded with their children and with other parents over good food and good sportsmanship.

Greenwood’s ATP recommends planning an All Pro Dads series during the summer to schedule speakers, contact local sports teams, arrange breakfasts, include other parents in the planning process, and obtain donations from local merchants. All Pro Dads yielded fantastic results. Not only did student behavior improve on activity days, but discipline referrals decreased 10% overall compared to the prior year. For some dads, this was their first time visiting school and engaging with their children in an academic environment. Greenwood’s dads hope all schools in the district adopt the idea because they know that All Pro Dads are better equipped to support and champion All Pro Kids.

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BULLY-FREE KINDNESS CHALLENGE

**WALLACE GREGG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

At Wallace Gregg Elementary, the Bully-Free Kindness Challenge included a series of on-going activities and special events that taught children that it pays to be kind. Via games, presentations, take-home checklists, and readings, everyone—teachers, students, parents, and community members—worked to strengthen relationships to foster a positive climate at school and in classrooms and to eliminate bullying.

A Kindness Challenge Pep Rally kicked off the Bully-Free series. Students, families, and community members filled the school's multi-purpose room. The guidance counselor and curriculum coordinator emceed. The Wallace Gregg Dance Team presented a dance representing how to deal with bullies. Students helped the counselor lead a Be Kind-Kindness Matters chant and the Wilson High School Tiger Pride Drum Line was bussed in to rally students to march forth and “Be Kind!”

Workshops for parents were held. Buddies not Bullies, Smiles not Frowns enlisted parents in supporting kindness over bullying. The behavioral health counselor gave a presentation to define and discuss bullying. Students and parents conducted role play activities to demonstrate anti-bullying techniques. A Bully Free Bingo Night in the cafeteria emphasized safe responses to bullies with each bingo letter called. Teachers set up the bingo activity, monitored cards, and guided family and school interactions at each workshop.

At Buddies Not Bullies, Part 2, the school hosted a Family Reading Night. At four stations, teachers read books on reducing or eliminating bullying and discussed them with parents and children. After the readings, parents and children designed family posters illustrating bully-free messages in the stories. Each family presented its poster and to the group.

Posters were displayed throughout the school and students chose a book to take home. Dinners of subs and spaghetti were provided at the family workshops to make it easier for families to attend.

Students received take-home copies of the Kindness Challenge Checklist from www.greatkindnesschallenge.org. Students were challenged to see how many of the 50 ideas for kindness they could accomplish. After two weeks, students turned in their checklists—with parent signatures—and received Kindness bracelets, coins, and stickers for their success.

Students and teachers also made Kindness Homeroom Chains, adding a link to each classroom chain when someone performed a kind deed. Students who returned Kindness Checklists received up to 50 links for their classroom chains—one for each kind deed they reported. At a Terrific Kids assembly, the classes brought their Homeroom Chains to create a school-wide chain to promote a culture of kindness.

The school won a Center of Excellence Outreach Project grant and used Title I funds to defray the costs of the workshops, refreshments, take-home books, and supplies. Teachers donated prizes for Bully-Free Bingo Night.

As one parent noted, “It is important [for us] to be positive role models and teach children how harmful bullying is.” The Bully-Free Kindness Challenge helped many families guide their children toward a kinder, bully-free school.

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COFFEE TALKS

**GANNON GIL PRESCHOOL OF THE TEMPLE-TIFERETH ISRAEL
BEACHWOOD, OH**

Parenting is the most important job of all, but does not come with “how-to” instructions. That is why the Action Team for Partnerships at Gannon Gil Preschool held an interactive Coffee Talk, also called Parenting with Intention: Discovering and Practicing What Matters Most to You Every Day. The program provided parents with helpful tools to support strong, values-based social and emotional development in their children.

At Parenting with Intention, parents were welcomed to the school library with refreshments. The guest speaker—a child development specialist and clinical social worker—led parents in a guided conversation about parenting strategies. She focused on practical parenting tips to bring out the best in the parents while also teaching children about values that mattered most to each family. An overall goal was to help children develop self-regulation of good behavior over time.

An important aspect of the Coffee Talk was how truly interactive the session was. Participants were asked to identify and apply their personal and family values to the talk. These values led to discussions about experiences with their children’s behavior at home. Parents were asked, for example, how they might apply their values to re-evaluate and improve behavioral scenarios.

Some examples of the speaker’s questions to parents included: What do you do when, all of a sudden, you’re faced with the tantrumming toddler situation that we’ve all experienced? What can we do to turn that experience into a teachable moment, through the lens of what we most want for ourselves and our children? Parents were also able to ask questions about how they might identify

and apply their most important values to their parenting.

To provide a friendly setting, and to support the school goal of working with individual parents and families to support child development, library chairs were arranged in a half circle with two rows. The school budget covered the low cost of the speaker, refreshments, and materials. The school would like to turn Coffee Talk into an on-going series.

A survey at the close of Coffee Talk indicated that parents felt the program was worthwhile. In a typical comment, one father wrote, “Thank you for providing the opportunity to learn more so I can help my child.” A mother noted, “I was happy to learn new skills and tools with my child’s teacher.”

Coffee Talk was held on an evening in the fall. To advertise the event, the school team used flyers, social media, a community calendar, and word of mouth. Flyers emphasized that “All are welcome!” and requested that parents RSVP via e-mail to help planners with a head count, but also acknowledged that parents were invited to come at the last minute if they were able to do so. This helped encourage busy, employed parents to make arrangements to attend the session.

All in all, the Coffee Talk gave parents tools to help them connect family values with preschool children’s development and positive behavior. Against this kind of thoughtful parenting, a child’s temper tantrum doesn’t stand a chance.

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COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR LIFE'S LESSONS

AMISTAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA

Type 6

“How many 70-year-old men go to bed at night feeling good about themselves because they knew they made a difference that day? The best part is that this isn’t “work.” It is just [sharing life’s lessons]. I value my time at Amistad. I am clearing my calendar for next year so I can make an even greater commitment to this school. . . . I can’t think of a more worthwhile project in our community.”

These are the words of a Kiwanis Club volunteer at Amistad Elementary School. The Kiwanis Club met with the Principal and the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to learn if the school wanted the club as a community partner. Of course, they said, “Yes!”

The Kiwanis volunteers come to school several times a week to lead or participate in activities with students. One Kiwanis project is a flag football game for 4th and 5th grade students held during lunch recess. This activity was reported in the local newspaper at http://www.tri-cityhearld.com/2015/04/23/3524600_flag-football-lessons-pay-off.html. Students earn the right to play the game by demonstrating good citizenship on and off the field, participating in class, and completing homework.

At Amistad, more than half of the students are English Learners, and most are from families with low incomes. Teachers help students learn good citizenship, good sportsmanship, and good classwork. Students must take responsibility for the choices they make in the Make Your Day program. Teachers clarify that the school’s goal for students is not perfection—which is impossible for anyone to achieve. Rather, the goal is for students to be accountable for the choices they make, learn from errors, make better decisions the next time, and celebrate success.

One student reported, “We earn (flag football) by making good choices. And it’s fun. It’s not really about the score. It’s just having fun.” Good choices have good consequences. A 5th grade teacher at Amistad reported, “...Flag football ... has motivated the more aggressive boys in my classroom to think twice before reacting in a negative manner. They have worked diligently to solve their problems positively.”

Flag football is just one of many ways volunteers are making a difference at Amistad. To plan more options for community volunteers, two community volunteers are active members of the ATP and attend meeting and events. They continually identify ways that volunteers can make a difference at the school, matching needs of teachers and administrators with the talents and skills of eager volunteers. For example, volunteers have helped families establish homework centers, learn read-aloud strategies, and talk about math with their children at home.

Other community volunteers come twice a month to Mentor Lunches with a group of students who are struggling in school. These students, in need of positive adult role models, eat and talk with policemen, Kiwanis volunteers, firefighters, and others. Volunteers also assisted the school’s Book Fair and the Second Harvest food bank. The ATP at Amistad welcomes volunteers as valued partners in the education and success of students. The team reports, “Our volunteers have been amazing!” The volunteers at Amistad always find a way to help teachers, students, and families—because it matters.

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BEHAVIOR

GRATITUDE DAY

**LA GRANADA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RIVERSIDE, CA**

During National Parent Involvement Week, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and educators at La Granada Elementary School wanted to find a new way to celebrate and encourage parental involvement. They zeroed in on “gratitude” as a desirable trait in their Character Counts Program and safe-school plan. This led to Gratitude Day—a chance to thank parents for their contributions and support for the school and for student success. The school serves over 700 students, pre-K to grade 5, with 68% receiving English Language support and 96% eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

On Gratitude Day, over 350 parents attended the well-planned celebration. Refreshments were served in the multi-purpose room, which was decorated by the PTA and ATP. Then, families joined their children in their classrooms, where teachers had created activities connected to the concept of gratitude—focusing on the contributions that parents make to their children’s education. Children’s lessons and activities ranged from oral presentations and read-alouds to art projects.

Teachers worked to make sure the classroom activities were rigorous and supported California’s Common Core State Standards at each grade level. For example, kindergarteners through second-graders made gratitude placements, Thanksgiving retelling bracelets, and practiced poetry writing and presentations. Third- through fifth-graders created a Readers’ Theater, made thankfulness pumpkin crafts, created and presented thankfulness PowerPoints, and wrote poetry and essays starting with the phrase I am thankful...

In a closing ceremony in the multi-purpose room, administrators recognized parents for their commitments to their children’s educational success. Parent leaders discussed different ways that parents could get involved at

school. School board members and City Council support staff also attended Gratitude Day, extending the home and school partnership to the community.

To spread the word about Gratitude Day, students created personal invitations for their parents and family members. Bi-monthly newsletters announced the event, followed by reminders sent by Principal Coffee, the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC), and the School Site Council (SSC). All families also received phone calls and e-mail messages, and could see a reminder on the school marquee.

The ATP of teachers, parents, principal, and assistant principal and PTA collaborated to plan Gratitude Day. They also referred to NNPS books of Promising Partnership Practices for ideas. Grade level teachers met during their Professional Learning Community time to plan the standards-based classroom activities for students to show and share with their parents. The \$500 event cost was covered by Title I and PTA funding.

Gratitude Day allowed parents, teachers, students, and support staff alike to show their appreciation for people—the parents—who touch their lives every day. The activities created a great sense of pride, energy, and school spirit. One parent said, “Thank you for opening the classrooms to families.” Another added, “Thank you for making us feel so special.” Gratitude Day helped everyone in the school building feel appreciated and happy, including parents who became part of the school family. On this day of celebration, “thanks” became the buzzword heard all around school.

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MOORE LIONS CLUB

**JOHN W. MOORE INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

At John W. Moore Intermediate School, producing young men of character is a priority. That is where the Moore Lions Club came in. The club teaches, models, and gives at-risk 5th and 6th grade male students opportunities to practice essential social and communication skills. The club's goal is to decrease the number of students' office referrals and suspensions and to increase time spent in class. This year, the Lions Club met those goals and reported that its young Lions were becoming more engaged and more productive citizens at school and in the community.

With parental consent, seventeen students were invited to participate in the Lions Club. The boys met twice monthly to discuss social, behavioral, and academic topics that supported the school's ROAR (Respect, Opportunity, Accountability, and Responsibility) expectations. Male role models from the community came to club meetings to discuss character, positive behavior, and making the right choices in difficult situations. For example, a professional, minor league basketball team mentored Lions Club members and donated basketball game tickets. The student club members also participated in community service projects such as Toys for Tots and the International Lions Club Eyeglass Collection project.

Throughout the year, parents signed their child's log to stay aware of topics discussed at the Lions Club meetings and to reinforce what their child learned about good character and positive behavior. Parents also reported ways in which their children displayed these positive attributes at home.

To celebrate the achievements of the Lions Club, the students, families, and community members attended an end-of-year banquet. The youngsters' achievements were impressive. The original goal was a 10% decrease in office referrals and academic gains for 70% of the club members, based on the school's Measure of Academic Progress Percentage (MAPP).

By year's end, Lions Club members showed a 40% decrease in office referrals and 94% of the members showed academic gains. "It was an amazing experience," one proud young man affirmed. "I loved being a part of the Lions Club Elite Team."

To implement the Lions Club program, a committee looked at test data and discipline referrals to identify struggling students who would benefit from the project. Then, the committee invited the students' parents to an Orientation Meeting at school to share the mission and goals of the Club. Parents received a schedule of the twice monthly meetings, topics for the meetings, service projects for students, and community leaders who would mentor the students and make presentations at meetings.

The \$1300 year-long cost of Lions Club was offset by a grant from the Center of Excellence (COE), donations of snacks from local restaurants and educators, and funds from school and ATP. Button-down shirts—the club uniform—were purchased for each member. A local church donated bus transportation services so that students could attend after-school meetings and activities.

The Lions Club aimed to motivate, educate, and inspire its boys to strive for success, manage their behavior, interact with peers and adults respectfully, and complete their schoolwork to their best potential. With outstanding success on all of these goals, the fifth- and sixth-grade boys were ready to ROAR their way to the next grade level and the next challenge.

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YOUNG FATHERS' MENTOR INITIATIVE

**HAMILTON LEARNING ACADEMY
LITTLE ROCK, AR**

Too often the focus of teenage pregnancy, birth, and parenting programs is only on the mother. Although teen moms definitely need support, teen fathers also need guidance and encouragement. Many teen fathers have no role models or knowledge about how to care for a new baby or the mother of their child. They need assistance to become good fathers and to set a path for their own education and futures.

Hamilton Learning Academy in Little Rock provides alternative education for students who are not succeeding in their regular schools due to truancy or academic or behavioral problems. The school and community were aware of the need for programs to guide young fathers in a better way. The Christian Ministerial Alliance (CMA) stepped up to help young men in the city, beginning with young fathers at Hamilton Learning Academy. CMA leaders saw this as an opportunity to contribute to a need outside the walls of the church. A school administrator served as coordinator for the project.

CMA mentors met with young fathers, one-on-one. They started by building trust so the mentees felt comfortable talking with someone from outside the school. The pairs met once or twice a month at the school on a regular schedule. Although the sessions were closed and confidential, some topics were shared across mentors. These included helping each student set individual education and career goals, creating steps for attaining these goals, and discussing individual students' challenges and how and where to find help.

The session on long-term goals, called "Destinations," ended with an activity, "My Commitment," for students to outline specific actions to reach their goals. Mentors also provided tutoring and encouragement to help

their young fathers improve their grades, complete assignments, and pass their courses. Mentees of age were shown how to register for Selective Service. Others were given information on a summer college prep program.

Parents of the young fathers were asked to volunteer for three hours, which included a parenting class, training about edline to access their student's grades, and a visit to their son's classroom. A dinner was served to the parents, mentors, and mentees to reinforce their shared goals for student success.

CMA also hosted the young fathers at a Central District Luncheon for ministers in Little Rock and Central Arkansas. To encourage replication of the Young Fathers' Mentor Initiative, three of the mentees spoke about the power of the program and how it helped them to focus on graduating from high school and future plans.

This partnership was a positive force in the lives of the participants. Parents of the mentees reported that their teen had more positive attitudes about school. Teachers reported fewer disruptions by these students, and mentors reported many positive results in their interactions with their mentees. All of the first cohort of mentees transitioned back to their regular schools and one man registered for Selective Services.

The project makes clear that it is a serious mistake for schools and communities to ignore young fathers. By providing them with role models and a road map, the young men can take a place in their families and in the lives of their children.

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Type 6

BEHAVIOR

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 gymnasiums 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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BREAST CANCER AWARENESS FUN RUN

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

When the Ellis Technical High School Climate/Family Engagement Team wanted a school-wide activity that promoted cancer awareness, physical fitness, and school, family, and community service, it selected a Breast Cancer Awareness Fun Run. From PE to shop class, smartphone apps to photographers, the whole school and many families and community members dressed in pink and finished a health-conscious 1K race.

At Fun Run, students were decked out in predominately pink outfits and walked the one-mile course as a warm-up, just as they would in a real cross-country race. They observed the wooden markers on the softball field and noted the number of laps they had to run on the track. Each PE class and, then, at a culminating event after school, students, volleyball team parents, teachers, and an administrator took their marks at the starting line. PE instructors used a time-clock to record students' efforts. Teachers and parents cheered students on from the sidelines.

At the finish line, a representative from the American Cancer Society congratulated students and thanked them for their support. Participants received their time, a medal, and a photograph of themselves on a podium. One tenth-grader said, "This is the first time I have ever done a 1K! I am so excited!"

To get such all-encompassing buy-in from students, and to meet the goal of generating purpose-driven enthusiasm for fitness and exercise, the lead-up to the Fun Run was just as important as the day itself. PE teachers worked together to create a series of lessons that taught students how to train for a road race and how to track their time, activity levels, and pace.

Students were encouraged to use tools such as smart phone apps, pedometers, and stopwatches to increase their running time and endurance and to strive for their personal best. Students also learned the importance of stretching before and after a run, and making healthy eating and drinking choices to remain hydrated and strong. Students trained on the track for two to three classes and were encouraged to train at home to prepare for the race.

The whole school's commitment went beyond gym class. PE instructors worked with the Carpentry and Collision Repair classes to create pink wooden ribbons, used as markers to define the race course. They also commissioned a tiered platform, painted pink by Collision Repair students, to represent first, second, and third place, and where all students could take photos and "selfies" if they completed the race. The American Cancer Society representative also met with students to discuss the importance of self-breast exams and of avoiding unhealthy activities such as smoking and drinking.

Medals were ordered for all participants. The \$275 cost was covered by a Family Engagement Grant. Parents were encouraged to assist with race setup and to participate in the after-school race.

The Breast Cancer Awareness Fun Run encouraged students and families to take active roles in physical fitness and health, and demonstrated that exercise can be fun for the whole community. In their transition to life after high school, many student runners will continue to appreciate service, exercise, health—and maybe even the color pink.

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HEALTHY ALTERNATIVES FOR FAMILIES ON THE GO

**NORWICH TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
NORWICH, CT**

At a time when many students and parents go from activity to activity, they often eat on the go or have limited time for meals. Norwich Technical High School conducted an educational, entertaining, and delicious evening filled with healthy eating tips and free food samples. Healthy Alternatives for Families on the Go was a unique opportunity to consider the challenges of eating healthy, design solutions, gather information to take, and take actions that could benefit whole families.

At Healthy Alternatives, students and families met at a local restaurant. There, the chef prepared and shared samples of healthy eating alternatives, discussed food to avoid when on the go, and suggested substitutes for unhealthy foods or empty calories. He listed “power foods” that can be eaten by people with busy schedules. Students in the Culinary Arts department helped the chef prepare and serve the samples, which were free to students, families, and teachers.

The menu of good choices was divided into three meal categories:

1. Breakfast—Protein smoothies with fruit, yogurt, and orange juice, and a low-fat version of the McDonald’s egg sandwich.
2. Lunch—Mediterranean grain salad and wraps.
3. Dinner—Chicken and rice, healthy buffalo-chicken mac and cheese, and roasted vegetables.

All attendees took home recipes, including food preparation methods, portion yield, and other cooking tips. A final information sheet titled Add These Foods to Your Diet!, recommended power foods like apples, berries, asparagus, squash, lentils, brown rice, and others.

The idea for Healthy Alternatives for Families on the Go arose from a discussion

between the school social worker and principal about how busy today’s families are, and how many of them eat in a hurry between sports and club practices, homework, and other school demands. To illustrate the situation, they scheduled Healthy Alternatives after sports practice time and prior to dinner time. In this way, a professional chef, students, and parents could discuss and taste quick and nutritious meals that are easy to prepare.

Norwich Tech’s Action Team for Partnerships used the school’s Family Engagement funds to cover the \$50 cost of food samples. The enticing flyer, which included RSVP information, featured colorful photos of fruits and vegetables, along with the message: “Come see Chef Bentley demonstrate dishes and sample them!” The workshop promised recipes and grocery lists of needed ingredients for all of the dishes that are demonstrated, and many good ideas for healthy eating. Attendees also were promised a list of power foods to work into your diet and a list of foods to avoid.” One parent attendee agreed, “This was a really good event. It opened my eyes to how to make healthier meals, quicker.” Another added, “[The] chef did a great job—he was entertaining and informative.”

When the activity is repeated, Norwich Tech ATP expects even more attendees, based on word of mouth. Plans may include other experts to share lifestyle information, such as mindfulness and exercise. At Healthy Alternatives for Families on the Go, even the busiest families took a few minutes to relax, share some good food, and chew on some good ideas. As the foodies say, “Bon appétit!”

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A WHOLE NEW WORLD: FAMILY READ NIGHT

LAGRANGE HIGH SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA

At LaGrange High School, an upcoming production of the musical *Aladdin* presented the perfect backdrop for linking the performing arts with cultural literacy. At *A Whole New World: Family Read Night*, students, family, staff, and the community met cast members in costume and expanded their understanding of the real world. The activity at the reading night also served as a marketing tool to spark everyone’s interest in attending the show.

In keeping with the theme of *A Whole New World*, each classroom featured a different country or culture. Faculty members from South America, India, and other countries invited participants to travel with them to their homelands by exploring books, artifacts, and cuisines. Community members who had been missionaries in China shared their experiences with the participants. A Holocaust writer shared his father’s experience, and students completed several activities he provided based on the Holocaust. Local Louisiana wasn’t left out, either, as locals shared traditional folktales from the area.

The multicultural exchanges throughout the school building emphasized reading. Each room contained books on a selected country or culture, with the goal of encouraging students to read fiction and nonfiction books to extend their knowledge and interest in a place and its people. The school serves over 1000 students, mostly African American. More than 400 students, parents, teachers, and others attended *A Whole New World* and were eager to visit the different countries in each room.

English literature teachers served traditional tea and scones. Other areas of the school featured a book fair, book exchange,

and a poetry slam. Students got the message. One commented, “I loved seeing the Indian dresses. Said another, “It was fun to have English tea.”

To make the event even more fun and to promote the high school musical, the cast of *Aladdin* wandered through the school and classrooms. Cast members interacted with students to generate excitement about each location, took pictures with students, families, and community guests, and walked guests from country to country in different rooms.

Title I funds covered the \$400 cost of *A Whole New World: Family Read Night*. Family reading nights are more common in the elementary and middle grades, but La Grange High School’s theme, focus on literature, plans for each classroom, and connections to the school musical made this reading night meaningful to all attendees. LaGrange recommends encouraging community restaurants and businesses to donate food and give-aways linked to the theme of a reading night, which also will bring community attention and support to the school, students, and parents.

To publicize the event, LaGrange made flyers for classroom doors and for students to bring home. They also called home using the school’s messenger service, and gave detailed information on the school website.

A Whole New World: Family Read Night gave students, families, and the community exposure to cultures and countries that they might not otherwise experience. Paired with the school musical, the evening of reading and literacy opened a whole new world for students to explore.

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CULTURALLY DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS

HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

SEATTLE, WA

Hawthorne Elementary School is located in one of the most culturally diverse zip codes in the nation, representing a rich tapestry of students whose families speak at least 17 different languages at home. One-third of the students are English Language Learners. Hawthorne’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers wanted to engage and support these children’s families—many of whom did not participate often in school activities.

Starting with families who spoke Chinese at home, the ATP, counselors, and others at Hawthorne organized a series of friendly, community-linked workshops to inform and engage parents as partners with the school and in children’s education, despite language and cultural differences. Graduate students in a school counselor program participated as volunteers. There was some urgency in connecting with parents, as some students were scheduled to move on to the middle grades, but not all families were aware of this important transition in U. S. schools.

The ATP scheduled a series of cultural- and language-based coffee chats to reduce barriers between parents and teachers or administrators at the school, and to encourage family support for student success. The team noticed that many Chinese-speaking families did not attend these chats. To meet the needs of these families, the ATP conducted an information night at the Chinese Information Center in the community. There, Chinese parents felt more at ease and translators were readily available. There were separate sessions for parents and for students, with contributions from the school’s counselors.

In the session for parents, Chinese parents were introduced to the U.S. school system, the district, and community resources for their children. The ATP and school staff wanted parents to know that they were welcome

as partners in their children’s education, and to understand the role of school counselors. Counselors invited parents to talk with them at any time about their children, future plans, and needed resources. A parent acknowledged, “I didn’t know that this support [school counselors] was available in elementary, middle and high schools. Now that I know, I will make sure to utilize this resource . . .”

The session for students focused on building positive peer relationships, friendships, resolving conflicts, and related topics. According to the Youth Development Supervisor at the Chinese Information Center, students also heard about and discussed academic, behavioral, and social changes to expect when they moved to a middle school. Hawthorne’s counselors also let students know that they were there to help them address challenges now or in preparation for transitions ahead.

Hawthorne’s partnership with the Chinese Information Center will continue with additional sessions, based on information collected from parents and students at the first workshop series. Students asked for ideas to smooth connections between home and school because they must bridge two cultures. Parents raised questions about the dangers of bullying and how to support their child’s social and emotional development.

Hawthorne reported positive results from its initial efforts to help ELL students and their families learn about the school, transitions, counselors’ roles, and available resources. Although language barriers still exist, they need not prevent effective school and family partnerships for student success.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY

PARK VISTA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OPELOUSAS, LA

At Park Vista Elementary School, teachers and staff believe that diversity is a strength. The school, which boasts a French-immersion program and a student body hailing from fifteen countries, set out to share that belief on International Day. By inviting parents, families, and the community to share their diverse heritages, Park Vista brought the world into the school building.

Parents from all of the countries represented in the student body were asked to join a planning meeting to design an exhibit for their country of origin. Their children got in on the fun by wearing traditional clothing and bringing objects and culinary treats to share.

Students and parents were greeted in the cafeteria with signs for International Day written in English, Chinese, French, Arabic, and other languages. Students were encouraged to view each nation's exhibition, and ask questions of their classmates and parents.

The displays were followed by an international feast. The principal welcomed everyone, saying, "In a school you have to learn, but it's not just the things you learn in books. We want to celebrate the backgrounds of all the children we have here." Representatives of each country opened their special covered dish, which students and parents sampled. The spread included Pakistani kebabs, Salvadoran pupusas, Vietnamese rice cakes, Mexican guacamole and tamales, and Palestinian baklava and hummus—all homemade by proud parents.

At each display, parent exhibitors discussed the name and contents of the dish, and how it is prepared. "This is a green sauce," said the father of a Pakistani third-grader. "You have got to eat it fresh. We use it in many different dishes." The children may have tasted cilantro, ginger, mint, mustard, cumin, and other delicious flavors when they tasted the authentic kebabs.

The educational and entertaining day underscored the importance of a diverse community as a way of life in Louisiana. The principal noted that when Louisiana's crawfish are used in Opelousas' Chinese restaurants, "we take a little bit of many cultures and make it one."

International Day helped address the challenges that sometimes arise among students of many languages, backgrounds, and cultures. A big challenge was convincing parents to become engaged. At first, parents from many nations just wanted to "blend in" with the rest of the community, and not celebrate differences. The principal explained to parents that a Cajun method of welcoming people involved sharing a meal with them. After that, parents joined in the festivities with enthusiasm.

At Park Vista, each parent group provided the food and some funds for their country's exhibit, which minimized the cost to the school. Others in the community advertised International Day. In the classroom, social studies projects evolved from the event, as students and teachers worked together to research more information about each nation that was featured in the exhibition.

International Day ended with students feeling proud of the unique qualities of their own culture, and excited to learn about the backgrounds of their classmates. At Park Vista, said one parent presenter, "people from different countries are being accepted." The whole day translated into a lesson on open-mindedness and appreciation.

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MULTICULTURAL FAIR

W.F. KAYNOR TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL WATERBURY, CT

At W.F. Kaynor Technical High School, the staff knows that an interconnected world begins with a well-connected school, where students, teachers, families, and members of the community work together to support student success. The Kaynor student body represents sixty-one different home countries. To recognize and celebrate these cultures, the ATP and others planned a Multicultural Fair. The Fair encouraged conversations about differences, similarities, misunderstandings, and agreements between and among cultures, which sometimes seep into the building. The Fair connected all partners in education to strengthen a climate that respects and values all cultures.

The Multicultural Fair featured a dynamic show in the gym and a delicious ethnic-food-feast in the cafeteria. Two students served as masters of ceremony of the show. Admission was free to all. Students danced, sang, and DJed; and community cultural centers and dance groups presented their talents. The dance show included an impressive array of cultural heritages: Dominican Ballet Folklorico, Irish dance, Caribbean-Afro-Cuban salsa, Haitian dance, Israeli hora, Puerto Rican bomba, Filipino tinikling, Ghanaian highlife, mid-eastern belly dance, and United States square dance.

In the cafeteria, students and parents set up and served multiethnic food. Some parents signed up to share food from their home countries. Students in the Culinary Trade classes made ethnic pastries. Ethnic restaurants from the community donated food and teachers donated paper goods and utensils. The spirit of donation, giving, and volunteerism helped to unite all of the cultural cuisines.

The Multicultural Fair was not just a one-night celebration, but the culmination of several classroom-based multicultural

assignments. Early in the year, the administration sent parents surveys on their family backgrounds to learn the cultural diversity of the student population. Teachers developed lessons linking their curriculum with the multicultural fair. Art classes, for example, put students' multicultural-themed projects on display in the hallways and school walls on Fair night. Science classes researched scientists from every one of the 61 countries represented in the student body, and learned about their diverse methodologies and contributions to the world.

The Multicultural Fair was a welcoming, non-threatening environment for parents and family members, many of whom felt discouraged from attending other school events due to cultural differences and language barriers. At the Fair, parents and students shared their customs with great passion. Teachers and parents met each other, talked together, and established ties that would support other communications. The school counselor commented, "[This was a] very successful event bringing students, families, and staff together to share and embrace our commonalities as well as our diversity." One next step will be to work to increase the number of dads and other male family members and community partners at a future Multicultural Fair.

The Multicultural Fair celebrated student, family, and community diversity through song, dance, and food. By nurturing open minds, students were able to discuss and change preconceptions they had due to lack of understanding of other cultures. Multicultural understanding and collaboration is a vital skill for students who will live and work in a very diverse society.

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STUDENTS AND COMMUNITIES PARTNER ACROSS CONTINENTS

MAPLEWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SULPHUR, LA

At Maplewood Elementary School, technology connects students to the world. A French language teacher, who formerly taught at an elementary school in France, used that connection to create a pen-pal program between Maplewood’s 4th grade students and their counterparts in Marseille, France. The program, Students and Communities Partner across Continents, was about learning a new language and making new friends.

One clear goal was to encourage Maplewood students to practice their growing French skills and to enable students in Marseille to practice speaking English. Along the way, friendships formed and cultural exchanges occurred to help the international students understand each other. Throughout the year, students wrote to each other in their target-learning language. The students’ written language skills improved on both continents.

In the 21st century, however, a pen-pal is not limited to the written word. The two classes also interacted through Skype. For example, Maplewood students and their teacher make a slide show of photos of Louisiana for their pen-pals and families via Skype. Math teachers gave a math class in English to the students’ French pen-pals, and vice-versa, extending connections beyond the French language class. The music teachers in both locations Skyped a chorus-exchange. Maplewood also presented a lesson on the Seven Habits of Successful Students that the school uses to guide student learning and development.

On two occasions, Skype invited the two groups of students to special parties. During the December holiday season, the two classes celebrated Christmas via Skype. Students sang Christmas carols in English and French, exchanged small gifts that had been mailed internationally, and enjoyed a visit from a bilingual Santa Claus. Maplewood’s

school funds covered the cost of mailing pen-pal gifts to France and district funds paid for the school’s technology.

The final Skype gathering strengthened language learning and friendship. At a Cajun Gumbo Skype Party, the school, families, and local Maplewood community attended. Speaking French, the Maplewood students exchanged songs, information about their school, area, culture, and food with their French friends. Musicians and dancers from both communities performed. From Louisiana, the school’s musical principal and two local music groups—Sundown Playboys and Les Bon Temps Danseurs—came to school to Skype their talents.

Community involvement extended to include the mayors of both Sulphur and Lake Charles, LA at the party. In France, the mayor of Marseilles attended. The Consulate of France in New Orleans and the American Consulate in France were on Skype—all showing strong support for the pen-pal exchange. Maplewood’s families were invited to enjoy the international partnership. One grandparent said, “I have seen many great programs at this school, but I am very excited to get to see this!”

Teachers and students faced challenges in conducting some activities because of the time difference between Louisiana and Marseilles. For example, French students Skyped at the end of their school day, which was morning in Maplewood.

According to Maplewood’s principal, “The students learned more from their pen-pals and Skype experiences than . . . from a text...all the while embracing their newly-learned French language.” The Partnership across the Continents was *très bon!*

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PRE-K PARENT BREAKFAST

BELL CITY SCHOOL

BELL CITY, LA

The first day of preschool poses a difficult separation for many parents and children. To help ease the transition—and to begin a pattern of school and family partnerships across the grades—Bell City School hosted a Pre-K Parent Breakfast on the first day of school. Parents and teachers met each other; families met and received helpful resources; and the children were just down the hall in their classrooms.

The PTO welcomed Pre-K students' parents to the cafeteria for coffee and pastries. The Principal, counselor, and members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) mingled with the parents, allayed concerns, and answered many questions. Parents received information such as the PTO Calendar of upcoming meetings and ATP events, and forms to join the PTO.

The ATP prepared information on how are it is working to engage all families in their children's education at school and at home. The team distributed a form for parents to sign up to be a volunteer. They were asked to note special talents and abilities that they wanted to offer to support the ATP and classroom activities (e.g., baking, art, crafts, technology, career information).

The cost of the Pre-K Parents Breakfast was supported by the PTO. Organizers set up welcoming decorations and used plastic table runners to facilitate clean up. The ATP displayed trifold bulletin boards of photos of student activities and family and community engagement events from the previous year. PreK teachers send individual invitations to PreK parents to encourage them to attend the Breakfast.

The first day of school meeting for parents also benefitted students by easing the emotional first-day separation from their

parents. They knew that their mom or dad was with other parents in the cafeteria having breakfast. "We were made to feel very welcome as newcomers to the school," said one parent, "and we were glad to hear about the activities planned for the year."

School administrators benefitted from meeting the students' families at the start of the year in a better way than just seeing them drop off their children. A school counselor noted, "The Pre-K breakfast was a great opportunity to give our newest families a heartfelt welcome, and to have one-on-one time with each of them."

The Bell City PTO/ATP implemented the breakfast after hearing about the success of a similar event at a school in a different district. The team adapted the idea to distribute printed resources to parents on the first day of school.

In their evaluation of the event, the Bell City PTO/ATP noted ways to improve and expand the agenda. The team expressed plans to prepare a welcoming video, have a school walk-through, and increase coverage of school and family engagement activities from the prior year.

New Pre-K students and their parents enter the school every year and need to feel part of the school community. A Pre-K Parent Breakfast on day one shows parents that they are welcome partners in their children's education. Breakfast, it seems, starts the day and the school year off right.

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SENIORS AND PARENTS NIGHT

ELI WHITNEY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL HAMDEN, CT

At Eli Whitney Technical High School, the guidance counselor and many colleagues designed and conducted Seniors and Parents Night—an informal session for twelfth-grade students and their parents on strategies for the transition from high school to life as young-adults. With information and entertainment, the goal was to spur the soon-to-be-graduates and their parents to plan for postsecondary education or technical training, and to set long-term plans for the future.

About 150 parents and students came together in November for Eli Whitney’s first annual Seniors and Parents Night. The Principal welcomed everyone to school and conducted a Q & A period to discuss scholarships, financial aid, work-study opportunities, and career planning. Next, the social studies teacher talked about SAT college entrance tests and the guidance counselor spoke about graduation requirements.

Representatives from four colleges in Connecticut gave presentations about their programs and provided essential information for postsecondary planning. This included how to pay for college and details on financial aid; programs at vocational colleges; and the application and admissions processes.

The informational segments were followed by a showcase of twelfth graders’ talents. They performed song and dance routines for their families, faculty, administrators, and community guests. The evening concluded with a dinner prepared by the school’s Culinary Arts students.

Seniors and Parents Night benefitted both groups as they began paving a path from high school to college or careers. Parents generally agreed that this was “an excellent night” because they had opportunities to talk with the guidance counselor about requirements for students to graduate from high school on time, and ideas about postsecondary planning.

Students enjoyed sharing their talents and focusing on their futures. Both groups welcomed the opportunity to network with college and university representatives, and to consider whether these were the right places for them.

The teachers, guidance counselors, and speakers were able to assist students in planning next steps. As the school social worker noted, “Planning for life beyond high school can be anxiety-producing for students and parents. It was awesome to have partnerships with college/university representatives to assist with future planning.”

The activity succeeded because of good planning by the family engagement team, other teachers, and the students. The Graphic Arts instructor designed and produced the program; the Culinary Arts instructor helped students prepare dinner; and the ATP submitted a Family Engagement Proposal to the school leadership to fund the event.

Eli Whitney’s guidance counselor for seniors sparked the idea for the evening because he saw the need to accelerate students’ and parents’ actions to make postsecondary and future plans. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) worked together to publicize the event with automated phone messages, individual invitations, and personal phone calls to all seniors’ parents to emphasize the importance of the event.

When it comes to transitioning from high school to college and/or careers, Eli Whitney Technical High School designed an activity that could become a school tradition. Every year, seniors and their parents must give serious attention to plans for the future.

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BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

LEBLEU SETTLEMENT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CHARLES, LA

The holiday season got off to a festive start at the LeBleu Settlement Elementary School's Breakfast with Santa. The school redeveloped a fundraising activity to encourage families to enjoy a Saturday morning having breakfast, creating crafts, meeting Santa, hearing a book read aloud, and taking a family photo. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at LeBleu saw the activity as a chance to grow student leaders as part of the affordable and welcoming morning of service, fellowship, and celebration.

Families pre-registered for \$5 tickets for breakfast and supplemented that fee if they wanted to take a family picture with Santa. They could choose between a western or traditional holiday backdrop for their photos. Other activities also were conducted with students, parents, and other family and community partners. Mrs. Claus read holiday stories; students and their siblings crafted take-home ornaments; and families enjoyed cinnamon rolls and a drink.

Breakfast with Santa encouraged student leadership development. The students' Library Club read stories to children and adults who were waiting in line for their pictures. Students set up props for the photos with Santa, organized lines for pictures and activities, guided ornament-making, and helped serve refreshments. 4-H Club members greeted guests and assisted with cleanup. Much to everyone's joy and pride, an alum from the school—a former student with special needs—dressed as Santa and distributed candy canes.

To accommodate parents' different schedules, Breakfast with Santa was conducted twice, the first session from 8-9:30 a.m. and the second from 10-11:30 a.m. Local community members donated food, and the PTO, ATP, and school faculty and staff volunteered to help

out, along with the student leaders. The cafeteria staff organized how breakfast would be served to over 150 parents, 330 students, teachers, and community members. All partners in students' education met, talked, and enjoyed the school as a festive climate of partnership. The school supplemented donations with about \$430 for supplies and equipment. The \$3000 raised at Breakfast with Santa was returned to the PTO to spend on teachers' requests for classroom supplies that would boost student learning.

Because Breakfast with Santa is designed as a morning of fun for the whole family, the faculty and staff conduct positive communications with students, parents, and other family members. There are no "conferences" about students' academic or behavioral problems on this day. Rather, teachers welcome all families in the spirit of partnerships and holiday cheer.

This was the first family and community engagement activity at the school at which students were given serious responsibilities. The students needed to understand the expectations for the roles they took, and needed some training to complete their assignments with distinction. Several tasks required older students to learn how to work with or assist younger children.

One parent described Breakfast with Santa as "an event for the entire community. We celebrate our pride in the school and enjoy one another's company." The smiling family photos are a lasting testament to holiday cheer, engagement, and community.

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BUILDING TEACHER CAPACITY FOR PARENT ORIENTATIONS

**HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Type 2

At parent orientation meetings, families seek information on school-year academics, activities, and expectations. To help teachers reach out to parents in ways that will strengthen school, family, and community partnerships, Hawthorne Elementary School implemented Building Teacher Capacity for Parent Orientations. This activity helped teachers create and share a body of knowledge in visually appealing and easy to understand presentations that all teachers could use at orientation sessions with their students' parents.

Members of the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed the approach with teachers during their weekly team meeting time. The ATP gave a short presentation about the importance of two-way communications between teachers and parents. Then, the group moved to the computer lab. There, each teacher worked to develop a content-full, grade-appropriate PowerPoint presentation. The teachers received help, as needed, in using PowerPoint software.

The presentations were designed to inform parents about specific math, science, reading, writing, and behavior standards for each grade level. The teachers used templates that guided them with headings such as "Math content we will cover this year." For ensuring parents are informed about the importance of student attendance, a heading was "What to do if your child is sick." Teachers were able to share their work to help each other improve their presentations. They also built in time for parents to ask questions and provide comments. The suggested starting points helped teachers plan their presentations, and ensured that parents with students at all grade levels would receive similar, important, detailed information.

After one hour, about 80% of the teachers completed attractive presentations,

and the others received help finishing from a computer-savvy member of the ATP. One teacher suggested repeating the activity next year for new teachers and enabling experienced teachers to tweak or update their presentations.

Building Teacher Capacity really paid dividends at the start of new school year. Teachers made their presentations to parents at the Orientation Meeting. Parents learned about the academic and behavioral goals that were set for their child, which enabled them to discuss these expectations with their child at home. The school gave a clear message to parents that communications would be key for teachers, parents, and students, and that everyone was actively involved in the school's culture of success. The good presentations helped emphasize Hawthorne's "working together" relationship between parents and teachers at the very start of the year.

Hawthorne learned that it was a good idea to bring all teachers to the computer lab at the same time and to have PowerPoint experts on hand to assist or guide them. The general template on various topics was helpful, but also could be customized with specific information on each grade level. Several teachers gave similar evaluations, "Giving teachers time to work together to complete useful PowerPoint Presentations is a great idea."

With this professional development activity, teachers became tech-learners so that they could, then, present information that would enable all parents to support their children in the new school year.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNITY & FAMILY RESOURCES CARNIVAL

**MARCUS WHITMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
RICHLAND, WA**

The PTA at Marcus Whitman Elementary School has conducted annual fundraising carnivals with families every spring for many years. In the past, about 150 people attended the Carnival for games, food stations, raffles, and a silent auction.

Last year, a community partner, Communities in Schools of Benton-Franklin Counties (CIS of BFC) placed a Site Coordinator at the school. This representative became the Co-Chair of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). The team met with the PTA President and others to discuss new partnership opportunities. The group agreed on a new mission and new design for the next PTA Carnival.

The representatives from PTA, CIS of BFC, and the ATP agreed to retain many of the same elements of past Carnivals, but focused more heavily on recruiting community partners to host booths of interest to the parents of children at Marcus Whitman. A good plan emerged that divided tasks evenly so that all partners on the committee shared the load of planning, conducting, and evaluating the Carnival.

The PTA was responsible for all food stations, a bouncy house, and some raffle and auction items. CIS of BFC recruited community partners to host booths that provided information on community resources for families, or that donated items for the raffles and silent auction. The ATP identified the space needed for the Carnival, recruited volunteers, and made sure everything was stored away after the event.

The Carnival committee brainstormed to create a list of community agencies and services to host the booths that could conduct Carnival games and distribute helpful information to parents and students. CIS of BFC had connections to local non-profit organizations with programs for families with low incomes, for

children, and for schools. These included groups with programs and resources for physical & mental health, food, housing, health and hygiene, and clothing for children and families. Some games were educational and fun. For example, one game involved a spinning wheel to get a prize, but it required the student to read nutritional information. Another required children to read and follow directions to make a wooden tool box, which they could then keep.

The Carnival was advertised in and around the Tri-Cities area, as well as to the families of students at Marcus Whitman. This introduced the school to many families in and around the community.

At the Carnival, 16 new community partners hosted booths and/or donated prizes. An estimated 300 people participated. School staff were impressed with collaboration that grew to conduct the Carnival as well as the turnout. The principal raved, "...We had a great turn out and all of the new organizations that participated were wonderful!" A teacher agreed, "Awesome job on this year's Carnival! It was such an improvement from [the past]. Bringing in community partners and programs is such a great idea!" The PTA president evaluated, "I'm glad we changed [the Carnival] this year.

Everyone was very receptive to the new design." It was clear from reviews that although people say two heads are better than one, in this case three heads—PTA, ATP, and Communities in Schools of Benton-Franklin Counties—are even better than two!

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Type 5

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

FACULTY VISITS THE COMMUNITY

**CHIAWANA HIGH SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

Type 1

Most agree that you cannot really know people until you walk in their shoes and understand their points of view. Chiawana High School aimed to follow this precept to better understand its students and families. As in many schools, many teachers at Chiawana lived in different communities from their students. To bridge that gap and to give teachers insights into their students' experiences, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and colleagues developed Faculty Visits the Community. About 150 teachers, administrators, and school staff members paid friendly visits to students' communities and families. At each location, student ambassadors took the lead in welcoming school staff to their communities and homes.

About half of the students at Chiawana High travel more than 8 miles to school. It is, often, difficult for parents to come to meet teachers and participate at school. This limits a sense of community for the school and its families. Faculty Visits the Community could help establish relationships with students' parents to encourage their involvement at school and at home in their teen's education.

The school chartered three buses to take the staff to three communities, selected by the student ambassadors. At each location, staff members were greeted by a student and a PEAK community partner. The students led a walking tour and described the area. While walking, students talked about their experiences in the neighborhood, shared strengths and problems in the area, and answered staff questions. For example, the staff visited a 10-foot wide mobile home and heard a student describe how ten family members managed life in that location. With guidance from instructional coaches, the student ambassadors and community groups designed short presentations about area resources that Chiawana High School could tap to improve

students' education and experiences.

Teachers and administrators sent postcards, earlier, to let parents know they would be in the neighborhood to meet them and to welcome them to the Chiawana High School community. They dropped off potted plants created by Chiawana students for each family, and left posters of student athletes. PEAK (community) partners brought cookies and candies to students, parents, and staff.

The Chiawana buses spent a certain amount of time in each community and visited the three locations in one day. The staff returned to the school to discuss what they learned from the visits. According to the Dean of Students, "Teachers were asked to attend with an open mind, ready to listen and learn [about] where our students come from and what they have to deal with on a daily basis." The visits extended teachers' understanding of a book they were reading, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, by Eric Jensen. The cost of the trip was shared by the school and Washington State University's Tri-Cities Latino Outreach program.

It was a challenge to take a bus trip away from school, but Faculty Visits the Community was very worthwhile. Students saw that teachers and administrators wanted to learn more about students' lives. The faculty, administrators, and staff gained crucial insights about their students and communities, and initiated important connections with parents. The eye-opening visits opened new options for more student success.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

FESTIVE HOLIDAY WRAP

**FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL
WELDON SPRINGS, MO**

At Francis Howell Middle School, parents get to say thanks to their students' great teachers and contribute to a climate of partnership during the holiday season. For its fifth year, the Festive Holiday Wrap invited parents to school to creatively wrap gifts for school staff, create a festive atmosphere for students, and set an example of gratitude and giving back.

Volunteerism is the name of the game for this event. Each December, one parent volunteer and the Parent Involvement Team (PIT) chair selects three dates for wrapping gifts and decorating areas of the school from 8:30 a.m. - 2 p. m. The days are divided into two shifts. Parents sign up for a half-day or full day of holiday spirit. On each day, a lead-parent comes in early to set up work tables and supplies. The school also offers coffee and lunch to the volunteers, and provides holiday music as a backdrop to the work to be done.

Staff members may leave up to ten items marked with their names in bags or boxes in the main office. Each volunteer is assigned to assist one teacher at a time and the number of gifts left for wrapping. The volunteer uses school-appropriate wrapping paper, tape, and wire ribbon donated by families earlier in the school year. When they have finished wrapping, they deliver the gifts to the assigned teacher before moving on to the next assignment. About 6-8 parents volunteer per day, assist up to 50 teachers, and wrap an astounding total of at least 400 gifts.

Festive Holiday Wrap is always a hit with everyone in the building as the holiday spirit envelops the school. Students talk to parents and staff and may sing a few songs as they pass the Wrapping Area. The parent

volunteers meet each other and establish friendships as they wrap gifts. The teachers express their appreciation for the generosity of the parent volunteers with thank you notes, e-mails, and in-person thank you conversations. One teacher said, "I don't think you realize how much we appreciate that our gifts are wrapped."

The Festive Holiday Wrap program helps Francis Howell Middle School achieve one goal linked to Type 3-Volunteering of inviting parent volunteers to school during the day when students and staff can see and appreciate their involvement in the school community.

To prepare for the Festive Holiday Wrap, the partnership team (PIT) sends an ENews call for supplies at the beginning of the school year. In late November, approximately a month before the first wrap date, a decorative flyer goes into every staff mailbox. To assist parent preparation, e-mail correspondence and Signup Genius are used to coordinate the dates and times for the volunteers to participate.

At the Festive Holiday Wrap, students see parents giving back to the teachers who give so much during the year. The busy month of December can be stressful to teachers who must continue to teach and still get everything done for the holiday. Parent volunteers who conduct the Festive Holiday Wrap take one task off each teacher's to-do-list in a true spirit of giving.

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INNOVATIVE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

PATTERSON PARK PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BALTIMORE, MD

The Innovative Volunteer Engagement program at Patterson Park Public Charter School (PPPCS) embraces the diversity of its families' backgrounds, cultures, and education levels. The school requests each family to serve 20 hours of volunteer time per year. It has designed ways for families to meet this request by offering a broad range of meaningful volunteer opportunities and by recognizing families for their contributions. Volunteer activities call for a wide array of talents in health and wellness, academic enrichment and tutoring, economics, and many others.

The Gifts & Talents survey is the hallmark of the Innovative Volunteer Engagement practice. It enables the school to recruit volunteers on the basis of their unique interests, skills, and abilities. Offered in English and Spanish at the beginning of the school year, the survey asks the volunteers about the talents that they would like to share with the school. The survey also lists many specific volunteer opportunities at PPPCS. Examples include laundering team uniforms; assembling bookshelves; chaperoning field trips; tutoring in the classroom; aiding lunch and recess; fundraising; being a reading buddy; translating and interpreting; and more. The survey lets families know that, whatever their talents, they can support the school.

The Gifts & Talents survey also asks about parents' work and personal affiliations that may enrich the school's Career Day, field trips, or fund raising activities. Families are asked to note their ideal time to volunteer (during the school day, after school, on weekends, or at home) and their contact information. Parents also may list topics they want to learn about such as back-to-school night, career day, open house, teacher appreciation, and other school programs.

All of this information is entered into a database and used throughout the year to recruit volunteers. Teachers can, for example, sort the list to find only the families who are interested in tutoring students in particular subjects during the school day. The numbers of volunteers and their hours of service are tracked throughout the year.

PPPCS officially recognizes volunteers' contributions in the school's monthly newsletter. Those who complete the 20-hour commitment are invited to the Volunteer Appreciation Banquet at the end of the year. There, at a bountiful breakfast, the principal and executive director thank the families with certificates and thank you gifts presented by their children. Gift cards donated by local businesses and staff are raffled off.

The \$500 cost of the program is supported by school funds and donations from staff, local businesses, and organizations. A member of the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) or others can serve as the Volunteer Coordinator to process the data from the Gifts & Talents survey, and organize the Banquet.

The school appreciates its families. One PPPCS reading specialist noted, "The impact [of reading volunteers] on [students'] literacy development is powerful." Students are likewise proud of their parents, and the families know that they are valued by their children, the school, and other families. Some parents have found employment at the school via volunteering, and others have built skills that led to employment elsewhere. It is clear that the Innovative Volunteer Engagement project that matches parents' talents with staff needs improves school programs, school spirit, and student success.

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MONTHLY DINNER AND A SHOW

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

Park Middle School's partnership program provides parents with useful information about the school and offers opportunities for parents to meet teachers, administrators, and other parents. The school serves a diverse group of students. About 65% of the families are Hispanic and over 90% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The principal and ATP knew that many parents would be well served by monthly events that provided dinner, a food bank, and a topic of interest to parents. The team added Monthly Dinner and a Show to its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.

The ATP selected monthly themes for these occasions based on parents' responses to a survey conducted at the start of the year. Parents asked for more information about several topics that would help them support their students in the middle grades. Each month, teachers, staff, parents, students, and ATP members met at school for a friendly dinner and for a discussion of a topic requested by parents.

One month the theme was Figuring GPA. Teachers, staff, and ATP members explained the schools' online grading system and how grade point averages (GPAs) are computed. They took families, step-by-step, through procedures for using the school's online system to review their child's grades. Teachers also designed an interactive homework assignment for students to complete with a family partner about how students earned their report card grades.

At the After-School Program dinner and show, the staff for the 21st-Century Program introduced the afterschool program to students and parents to encourage student attendance. Four stations were set with activities like those offered after school, including making holiday ornaments and creating winter celebration pictures.

For the Online Scavenger Hunt evening, students and parents were guided to explore the school's new website to find information specific to the student's grade level. They searched for and found online textbooks, links to homework help, school announcements, calendars and activities, and other useful sections. The 10th task in the hunt was "Go enjoy dinner with your family."

Park's citizenship and behavior program, Make Your Day, was featured at a Monthly Dinner and Show. Members of SALT (Student Advocate Leadership Team) explained the program and performed a skit for families to see how the behavioral process worked at school.

Monthly Dinner and a Show succeeded due to good planning and many able volunteers. The survey of parents at the fall Open House ensured that parents' suggestions and requests were included among the monthly themes. Teachers and administrators planned, attended, presented, and emceed at monthly events. Each month, the local Second Harvest Food Bank provided fresh produce and other pantry staples for parents to take home. Student leaders greeted families at the monthly dinners and helped with childcare.

Monthly Dinner and a Show events were well advertised in bilingual flyers, the Reader Board, e-mail, daily student video announcements, and personal phone calls to targeted families. Title I funding covered costs of dinners and supplies. According to one parent, Monthly Dinner and a Show "always feels casual, engaging, and welcoming." An ATP member added, "These events help build relationships with our families."

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PARENTS' NIGHT OUT! WORKSHOP SERIES

BROOKLYN CITY SCHOOLS - PRESCHOOL BROOKLYN, OH

Every parent enjoys a night out once in a while. With that in mind, Brooklyn City Schools-Preschool hosts Parents' Night Out! The workshop series gives parents opportunities to meet teachers, meet each other, and gain ideas for promoting students' learning at home. The preschool, just outside of Cleveland, is associated with Universal PreK of Cuyahoga County. It serves students and families with diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. About 30% of students are English Language Learners. All students are preparing for a successful transition to kindergarten.

At the Parents' Night Out! Workshops, families share a pizza dinner and, then, head in different directions. Parents attend a 1½ hour workshop in the auditorium. The children head to a classroom with a teacher for a special activity. In the parents' workshop, a teacher introduces a guest speaker—such as the neighborhood librarian, the district's kindergarten team, or other community experts—and describes how the speaker relates to the Preschool. The guest speaker presents useful information for parents for 30-45 minutes and invites parents' questions.

Each year the workshop series covers various topics. This year, one focused on conscious discipline at home, featuring strategies to help young children self-regulate and problem-solve. Another workshop featured early reading readiness and story comprehension. One called The Scoop on School offered parents strategies for preparing pre-K students for kindergarten.

In planning the series this year, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and colleagues addressed the challenge of parents' attendance. Surveys were sent to parents who attended and did not attend the first workshop. Questions asked about

parents' satisfaction with workshop content, topics of interest for future workshops, and situations (e.g., lack of transportation or need for childcare) that limited parents' participation at Parents' Night Out!

The results prompted adjustments to the workshops to increase attendance—notably, providing dinner and childcare. The planners also added entertainment and activities for the children who came with a parent, such as Frozen Pajama Party in the classrooms.

Clear and frequent advertising also increased attendance. Teachers told parents about the workshops in-person, during conferences, and when the parents brought and picked up their children. They also created and distributed postcards to preschool families about the workshops. The postcard for The Scoop on School requested "Please join us..." and explained "Pre-Kindergarten students and parents are invited to meet the Kindergarten team as we share information and resources to prepare for the next school year. Students will have the opportunity to interact with their new teachers in the classrooms, while parents will meet the elementary principal, and participate in a Q & A session. No RSVP required. See you there!"

Costs of the workshops varied by topic and event, some with and some without a speaker's fee. The Parents' Night Out! workshops helped parents strengthen parenting skills for healthy child development. That means that, on Parents' Nights In, their children were learning, behaving, and growing better than ever before.

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WEEKLY WORKSHOPS

**SAN PASCUAL AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES, CA**

The Parent Engagement Team at San Pascual Avenue Elementary School believes that when educators and parents exchange useful information, children do better in school. As the principal noted, “When parents are aware of what their children are learning in class, they are more likely to help with assignments and become involved with learning activities at home.”

Weekly Workshops were added to the ATP’s One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. Every Wednesday morning at 8:15 a. m., parents and other family members met with teachers and administrators to gather useful information and usable strategies to help their children on academic and behavioral goals for success in school.

The first two Wednesdays of each month focused on academic topics, followed by one week on community resources, and one Wednesday per month as a Coffee with the Principal—an open forum for questions and discussions of school and district issues. Coffee and pastries were served at all workshops. The partnership team contacted parents to identify topics of interest. Academic workshops included such topics as: Reading Skills—Sound, Sight Words, and Strategies; Math Skills—How to Help Your Child with Basic Math; Citizen Science—Hummingbirds at Home Project; Common Core Standards—Reading and Math; English Learning; I-Pad Basics; Nutrition; Raising a Well-Adjusted Child; Managing Behavior; Psycho-Motor Skills and Exercises; Communication Skills.

Community Resource Workshops featured topics such as: Applying for Insurance; Free Dental Care at School; and Outdoor experiences at the Audubon Center. The Coffee with the Principal discussed High School Graduation Requirements, A Safe School Plan, and meetings with middle school and high school principals. In all, given holidays and other realities, about 25 Weekly Workshops were conducted in the first year.

The workshops involved knowledgeable

leaders. School staff included the speech therapist, psychologist, adapted P.E. teacher, nurse, computer teacher, resource specialist, English Language Development coordinator, and classroom teachers. Community speakers included professionals from the public library, medical clinic, dental clinic, counseling center, Audubon Center, and middle- and high-school principals.

Weekly Workshops grew from an NNPS meeting where team members explored the six types of involvement and considered how to use the model in this predominately Hispanic, high-poverty school in ways that would benefit parents and students. A community representative updated the school’s website to include Weekly Workshops. Others made flyers, arranged for translators, provided refreshments, and prepared workshop sign-in sheets, equipment, and packets. The PTA covered the \$100 cost of refreshments for the workshops. Speakers volunteered their time and the school and district provided translators.

The partnership team conducted an end-of-year evaluation of Weekly Workshops. Five parents shared their experiences and reflections on the workshops. One parent said, “At school, the teachers instruct the children. The workshops gave me the tools to help my child [at home].” The evaluation suggested changing the schedule to conduct two rather than four topics per month, with morning and evening sessions so that parents employed during the day could attend.

Weekly Workshops engage some parents at the school building each Wednesday. The rich information should be available on line and/or distributed to all students’ parents to make the most of a good thing.

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Type 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

ALVORD PARENT INVOLVEMENT WEEK

**ALVORD UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
RIVERSIDE, CA**

During Parent Involvement Week, banners flew at all schools in Alvord School District proclaiming, “Parent Involvement Matters: Forging Partnership with Parents, Students, and the Community for Better, Stronger Schools.” School-based ATPs were new in Alvord two years ago. The Leaders for Partnerships wanted to create awareness about the goals of ATPs to engage all families in ways that increased students’ academic and behavioral success in school. They also wanted to strengthen links between the District’s PTA, the District’s Leaders for Partnerships, and the ATPs in all schools.

District leaders gave their schools some choices. In the first year, half the schools agreed to establish ATPs to see how they worked and whether they could increase positive and productive connections with parents and others. By the second year, all schools had ATPs. The Superintendent expressed the expectation that all principals understood that family and community engagement was a district priority.

Parent Involvement Week put the district’s and schools’ commitment to partnerships in the spotlight. District leaders built on Project Appleseed’s history of encouraging National Parent Involvement Day in conjunction with American Education Week in November. In Alvord, each school selected one day during that week to welcome its families, conduct an engaging activity, and to encourage parents and community members to become school volunteers.

The District Leaders for Partnerships shared a planning packet for Parents Involvement Week with all ATPs, including a planning schedule and a selection of activities from NNPS books of Promising Partnership Practices that schools’ ATPs could adopt or adapt. At ATP network meetings, chairpersons shared their ideas with each other and submitted final plans in October to the Parent Engagement Office.

Six-foot banners were provided for festive flying at each school. All ATPs used flyers, marquee messages, and other strategies to invite parents to the school during Parent Involvement Week.

Each school planned unique activities such as: Classes or workshops for parents on grade level topics; a Principal’s Coffee for discussions and questions about the school; the start of Family Fridays for parents to serve as reading buddies for students or groups; lunch picnics with books for parents and children to read together; Gratitude Day with an assembly, breakfast, and art activities focused on the theme of thankfulness; and many variations of presentations to introduce parents to Common Core State Standards. Morning, noon, or evening—one day or more—schools announced in their own way that they were becoming partnership places.

The Parent Engagement Office and other district leaders attended as many school events as possible. Students were excited to have their parents and others at school. Teachers took pictures and wrote news articles highlighting their events. The Director of Teaching and Learning, members of the School Board, teachers, and others expressed delight at the high parent participation rates at every school. District Leaders for Partnerships reported that over the past two years of introducing ATPs to the schools in Alvord, parents now expect to be welcomed and are participating more in their children’s education at school and at home. It seems that Parent Involvement Week is becoming an every-day event in Alvord.

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BILINGUAL PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC) CONFERENCE

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT

PASCO, WA

The Annual Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) Conference was conducted in January at Pasco High School by district leaders for all stakeholders in children's education. Attendees included PAC team members, administrators, teachers who were presenters for adults and who taught classes for PreK-5th grade students, and many volunteers who helped plan and implement the conference.

The conference aims to ensure that families whose children receive bilingual services are aware of these programs and are active partners in their children's education. The date was chosen to match the availability of many bilingual parents who are seasonal farmworkers. Also, because it was a 3-day holiday weekend, more teachers were willing to participate on Saturday knowing that they were off from school on Monday. Varied strategies were used to invite parents to attend the conference, including personal phone calls to 20 families by the Home Visitor Team.

The event was a family affair from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Parents and children had breakfast, collected information from community groups, and enjoyed the Pasco High School student mariachi band. Then, they went in different directions.

Parents were welcomed and introduced to the PAC committee representatives. This year's valedictorian at Pasco High School spoke to parents about their importance for children's success in school. Parents selected two sessions in the morning, ate lunch, heard from a Keynote speaker, and selected one more session in the afternoon. They chose from a range of topics on students' academic programs in school and the social and emotional aspects of parenting—all conducted in Spanish. Sessions included health services in the community, steps to a college education, preventing drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents, and moving parents'

dreams for children's education and careers to action. For the first time in the conference's 15-year history, sessions for parents discussed STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects by grade level.

The Keynote speaker was an assistant professor of Bilingual/ESL Education and the Latino Community Liaison for the College of Education at Washington State University-Tri-Cities. He discussed how parents can support children, K-12, so that they are prepared to enter college after graduating from high school.

Students from grades PreK to 12th went to classes led by teachers and volunteers.

The younger students' sessions included academics, STEM activities, and art. The students sifted through owl pellets for animal remains, made beautiful snowflakes and valentines, and used engineering skills to work with gears and build vehicles. Middle and high school students' sessions focused on leadership development and planning for college.

Families were reunited at the end of the day. The school's folkloric dance club performed for students and for parents. Families received boxes of food from the 2nd Harvest mobile food bank to take home. Local restaurants and business partners provided breakfast, lunch, and refreshments at a reduced rate. Funds from Title III were used to pay for the conference.

The conference, which improves every year, is always positively evaluated. It offers families opportunities to gather ideas on parenting and how to support children's learning at home, meet teachers, and work with other families. It is known as a must-attend event!"

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BUILDING ON STRENGTHS: UNDERSTANDING YOUR TEAM

KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT KENNEWICK, WA

Kennewick School District's Leader for Partnership knew that the chairpersons of each school's Action Team for Partnerships had unique strengths and talents. If their true colors were identified, then the district leaders could tailor ways to engage the school leaders and their teams. The ATP chairs found the strategy so enlightening, they used the same technique to learn the strengths and talents of their own team members. Two principals used the same strategy to learn the strengths and talents of their teachers and staff. And, the superintendent of elementary education used the strategy with principals. Clearly, it is important to learn the best features of colleagues at all school and district levels.

What is this interesting and useful practice? True Colors, used at a National Migrant Conference was explained in a book, *Showing Our True Colors* by Mary Miscisn (2010). In this activity four personality-types or colors are listed: Green (Conceptual); Blue (Compassionate); Orange (Spontaneous); and Gold (Responsible). People do not fall clearly into these four characteristics. Indeed, everyone has all four characteristics, but some people are particularly strong in one way or another in contributing to a team activity.

At the district's ATP retreat, district leaders asked the schools' chairpersons to select one color that best described the role they take as a team chairperson. The groups were asked to design a winter party for their school. After about 10 minutes, the groups presented their party plans. Amazingly, each group's plan reflected the personality trait they selected as their "true color." For example, the Gold (Responsible) group was the only one with a complete schedule of party time, activity segments, and potluck assignments for all members of the group. The Blue (Compassionate) group wanted to ensure that everyone felt included in their party, including children and pets. The Green (Conceptual) group established a budget and delegated planning to people who most enjoyed that task; and the Orange (Spontaneous) group

planned a white water rafting adventure.

The district leaders explained how this kind of activity can help any group develop plans and practices that make use of individual strengths, talents, and preferences in how they work with others. They developed a chart that listed many ATP duties and matched the duty with the true color that might be most happy and successful performing that task. For example, people who are Blue (Compassionate) might enjoy being greeters, inviters, and consensus builders for ATP activities and meetings. Those with Gold (Responsible) talents might enjoy being in charge of the detailed plans for scheduled activities, signing in parents and community members, or collecting data. The Orange (Spontaneous) types might like generating new ideas, being an Emcee for an event, and lightening the mood of a workshop. Those with Green (Conceptual) skills might like to develop a project budget, head a sub-committee, or solve problems.

District Leaders for Partnerships noted that everyone was a rainbow of colors, but the activity produced interesting insights in the value of knowing team members likes and preferences. The important thing is to learn these talents and figure out ways to make the best use of people's talents. The ATP chairs noted that they benefitted by learning something about themselves and about others—noting that, although they may be a mix of all four characteristics, they were able to choose one—which gave them an insight to their interests and actions. One ATP chairperson—who is most assuredly mostly Blue (Compassionate)—said, "The color personality part was so much fun! I'm excited to share it with my ATP at our next meeting." No matter what color you are, it is clear that this practice has much to offer to bring to light personalities of team members.

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CELEBRATING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS BROCHURES

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

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

District Leaders for Partnerships and the Core Team of advisors in Naperville Community School District 203 understand that students and their families bring multiple and complex cultural characteristics to school every day. These diversities are challenging, but offer many opportunities for enriching student learning and development. A Cultural Diversity Subcommittee of the Core Team was created to share knowledge on the countries of origin and cultures of the families of students in Naperville’s schools. This team developed a set of brochures for the district to welcome families to its schools and to help schools learn more about their families.

For content, the Core Team (leaders for partnerships) contacted the Chicago Field Museum Science & Education Department to access its Cultural Connections Guide to Teaching Diversity. The team also used information from an NNPS workshop linked to its book, *Multicultural Partnerships Involve All Families*. For format, the team followed a useful design that was posted at <http://michaelfavuzzi.weebly.com/cultural-diversity-brochure.html>.

Naperville’s district committee developed Celebrating Cultural Connections-2-sided trifold flyers divided into six sections. The project began with three brochures on China, India, and Mexico—countries with the largest number of English Language Learners in the district. Additional brochures are planned—next for Lithuania and Korea. The sections in each brochure present general information about the country; cultural practices; tips for interacting with people from the country including culturally specific customs; and the educational system of the country. Two sections address education in Naperville CUSD 203 with information to help parents become partners in their children’s education.

Initially designed as a resource for teachers to learn about the countries from which students’ families originated, the final colorful and comprehensive brochures were valued as a general resource for educators, parents, students, and the community. They will be available in print and on line. Said one parent, “It is the true spirit of our district that makes me so proud to be part of this community. . .” She noted that the committee progressed from a blank page, to focus group meetings with parents from different countries, to multiple drafts and improvements, and to the final brochures— Celebrating Cultural Connections.

The Director of Community Relations collaborated with building principals to recruit parents from each country. They participated in focus groups, gave reactions to drafts, and suggested ways to revise the content of each brochure. The Superintendent’s Diversity Advisory Council and all schools’ partnership team chairs and co-chairs also reviewed and commented on the brochures.

The brochures will be shared with staff and in print at the Welcome to 203—Back to School Fair in August. Electronic versions of the brochures will be posted for all families’ attention. The designers want all students and parents to know that their country of origin is important to the district and its schools. It is expected that the brochures will encourage more families to participate in school activities, knowing that teachers and others understand their origins. The Diversity Advisory Council Parent summed it up best by saying, “Thank you. This [brochure] says “WELCOME.”

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KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS BACK-TO-SCHOOL BASH

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT (LRSD)

LITTLE ROCK, AR

Starting a new year of school is exciting and challenging for students and their families. To alleviate some “first day jitters,” Little Rock School District leaders encouraged and supported geographic clusters of school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to combine efforts on a Back to School Bash in each area. The cluster teams were guided by the District’s Leaders for Partnerships to individualize their plans, introduce families to their own schools for on-going partnerships, and identify neighborhood and community resources and services that would be useful to parents.

Central-East Cluster Teams called the day Parent and Community Involvement Back-to-School Bash. Participants were greeted at the host school by the National Historic Central High School Color Guard. This Bash started with an opening ceremony, after which participants were invited to attend concurrent workshops to become more familiar with school topics that would support their children’s success. These included: Homework; Parent-Teacher Conferences; Standardized Assessments (PARCC); Academic Expectations; School Attendance; and Edline (grade posting).

Southwest Cluster Teams titled the day Back-to-School Keys to Successful School-Family Partnerships. This event was held at a popular neighborhood venue – Playtime Pizza’s parking lot. There was a unique gallery walk for parents to visit a booth for each school in the Southwest Cluster Team. Parents and students could make and take items, gather information on grade level subjects, and meet each school’s parent involvement team. Playtime Pizza provided each family with discounted admission into its play area and pizza buffet.

West Cluster Teams conducted Prepared to Succeed Expo—Back-to-School: Are

You Ready? Participants were captivated in the host school by a display of college banners and mascots on the cafeteria walls. The goal was to motivate families and students to begin thinking about college and careers early on—even in elementary school. Over 15 community organizations provided information, resources, and incentives for parents and children. Presentations were emceed by 2014 Miss Teen International, an alumna from a district high school. Students performed songs. The owner of a local automobile franchise spoke to parents about his childhood experiences, the challenges of parenting, and how to help students persevere in school for success as citizens.

At each cluster’s Bash, participants received a homework kit of school supplies for students. Refreshments and door prizes were provided. Childcare was available for anyone needing it. Each cluster also raffled off a refurbished desktop computer, donated by the LRSE Computer for Kids Program.

There were many benefits of the back-to-school connections. Parents, teachers, administrators, and community organizations agreed, early on, that it was important for them to collaborate to support student learning, attendance, and behavior. Parents who met each other agreed, “I love being able to talk with other parents. It makes me feel like I’m not alone.” It is clear that the all across the Little Rock School District, educators, parents, and community partners worked hard to welcome everyone to the new school year and to pave a path for student success all year long.

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OUR TIME TO SHINE – CTHSS REGIONAL MEETING

**CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEM
MIDDLETOWN, CT**

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Time is always tight in the 17 busy schools in the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS). District Leaders for Partnerships continually explore ways to make the most of the time they spend with schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs), including how they organize time at district-led workshops and activities on family and community engagement. The district leaders also know that ATPs are particularly interested in practical, useful, and tested practices that will help them improve their own school's partnership program.

Chairs and co-chairs want their ATPs to be efficient and effective in how they use valued resources—time, money, people, and skills—to plan and conduct practices of family and community engagement that will help their high school students meet school goals for success each year and on-time graduation. ATP members also appreciate time to share their practices with each other, and to discuss challenges and find solutions to engaging more families in productive ways.

The CTHSS system receives students from 18-25 towns. Each school offers students dual curricula to meet all academic standards required for a CT diploma and all trade industry standards (OHSA, competencies, licensing and contact hour requirements, safety standards, and industry assessment requirements). The geographic distances between the district and its schools means that meetings must be well planned on important topics to make travel worthwhile to all participants. One district-led regional gathering—Our Time to Shine—fulfilled these criteria. At this regional meeting, school ATPs discussed challenges and celebrated important milestones and accomplishments.

At Our Time to Shine, each ATP designed a visual presentation or display (e.g., poster, tri-fold, slide show) on one of its most promising practices. For example, several high schools

shared family and community engagement to encourage students to improve reading skills and attitudes—still very important at the high school level.

All presentations were compiled and distributed to all attendees. A guest speaker addressed the group on the topic of ensuring modes of communication with diverse populations of parents in their school catchment areas. The Culinary Arts department at the centrally-located host school prepared and served refreshments. Technology experts at the school arranged for the electronics needed for the ATPs' presentations.

Positive comments on the exit evaluations for Our Time to Shine validated the leaders' expectations for the meeting. ATP members were glad to have time to share specifics with colleagues, opportunities to ask questions and discuss solutions to challenges, and a chance to hear a good speaker whose message complimented the purpose of the meeting. ATP members wrote, "Tonight was wonderful, I learned so much!", "The sharing was great!" and "Lots of ideas to integrate in our school's Action Plan for Partnerships! – Sharing has been great- we need more of this!"

CTHSS Leaders for Partnerships also benefitted by hearing about the schools' practices and by obtaining feedback on plans for future meetings of all schools' ATPs. They will continue to base meetings on the needs and interests of the schools' ATPs. Our Time to Shine gave the technical high schools located across the state an opportunity to highlight their good work, learn from each other, and improve their on-going partnership programs.

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PARENT AND FAMILY CENTERS TO SUPPORT STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

**LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (LAUSD)
PARENT, COMMUNITY, AND STUDENT SERVICES (PCSS)
LOS ANGELES, CA**

School principals, teachers, and instructional staff want and need support from District Leaders for Partnerships to improve school-based programs of family and community engagement. In LAUSD, data on parents' participation and parents' requests for information showed that the district needed to take new approaches to increase the capacities of all schools to organize family engagement programs that would contribute to student achievement and success in school.

One of several new directions in LAUSD is using the schools' Parent and Family Centers to serve as "Parent Classrooms" for workshops for parents on how to support children's learning and development at home, and for improving two-way communications between parents and teachers.

The staff in the district's Parent, Community, and Student Services Office identified topics, planned training for school Coordinators, developed materials that all schools could use, recruited schools, and conducted trainings. Principals of 100 schools were invited to send a team of one certified staff member and one Parent and Family Center staff as their Workshop Coordinators. The Coordinators would share information from the district's trainings with the principal, teachers, and other Parent and Family Center staff before starting workshops for parents. Principals also agreed to support the Coordinators after the training in conducting workshops for parents.

To help schools encourage parents' participation, district leaders also obtained infant, toddler, and preschool educational materials for each school's Parent and Family Center to use with the young children whom parents brought to workshops. Title I funds were used to purchase some materials.

Six workshops were developed in the first year. One focused on family engagement with their children on early literacy skills. Books in

English and Spanish were purchased. The Workshop Coordinators guided parents in ways to encourage children's reading readiness and early literacy skills, which would prepare young children for kindergarten and the primary grades. Another session introduced parents to students' language development with attention to the needs of English Learners.

One teacher Workshop Coordinator commented, "The training and materials will help us change the focus of our Parent and Family Center to a more academic one. Thank you [district Leaders for Partnerships] for developing the presentations for us to use with parents. We just don't have the time to develop them ourselves."

Parents who attended the workshops gained strategies and tools to use with their children at home. The workshops also gave parents information about their school and the system so that they would feel comfortable about communicating with their children's teachers and accessing school, district, and community programs and services that would support their children's progress. New workshops on instructional technology, planning college and careers, and understanding Common Core State Standards in math are planned for the first cohort of schools and additional schools.

District Leaders for Partnerships have important roles to play in helping all schools improve their programs of family and community engagement. This includes Type 1-Parenting activities such as Parent and Family Center Workshops. With attention to all components of goal-linked partnership programs, more families will be knowledgeable partners in their children's education and more students will succeed in school.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

SUSTAINING & IMPROVING COMMUNICATION IN THE SECOND DECADE

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT PASCO, WA

Communication is key to building strong programs of school, family and community partnerships. Good communication skills enable leaders to share and gather ideas and, over time, become true experts on partnerships. Pasco School District is completing its 10th year of membership in NNPS. Every year, the Leaders for Partnerships set goals to improve programs at the district and school levels. They are showing how districts can establish sustainable partnership programs, despite inevitable changes in district and school leaders.

As they help all schools' ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs work effectively with their teams, district leaders have developed tools or adapted NNPS templates for well-planned meetings, goal-linked plans, and accomplishment reports. Here is a short catalog of some of the tools:

Practice Evaluation helps teams evaluate their partnership events and discuss them at monthly ATP meetings. One school took this tool a step further. All students give feedback to activities they attend with parents. Teachers tally the responses and enter the information in a data base for the ATP Chairperson to discuss at the next team meeting.

Event Planning Checklist guides chairs and committee leaders to plan the details for upcoming ATP activities, listing exactly what needs to be done, when, and by whom.

District Brochure shares information about NNPS and how it is implemented in Pasco. Updated yearly in English and Spanish (and soon in Russian), it includes photos of partnership events, and recognizes schools with activities published in NNPS books of *Promising Partnership Practices* and those that won NNPS Partnership Awards.

District Update is a monthly e-mail communication in English and Spanish to all

ATP chairs, principals, and team members on upcoming events, reminders, calendars, and extra Tidbits for ATP success.

ATP Meeting Agenda Planning Guide suggests items for team chairpersons to discuss at monthly ATP meetings.

The ATP Chair Task List is a guide for the discussion at an annual meeting of district Leaders for Partnerships with each school's principal and ATP Chairperson on ways to support and improve their program.

ATP Connections Newsletter offers monthly tips for teams, useful resources, upcoming events, and information to celebrate school and district activities on family and community engagement. It also spotlights one school's partnership program each issue.

ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs Key Contact List increases communications among ATPs.

ATP at a Glance is a one-pager for ATP Chairs at the Summer ATP kick-off with dates for all ATP trainings, cluster meetings, district and NNPS due dates, and for the annual individual meetings with principals and chairpersons.

Parents, teachers, administrators, district leaders, PEAK! (Partners in Educating All Kids!), and others benefit from using all of Pasco's tools so that their programs run smoothly and improve each year. If the district Leaders for Partnership are accused of "over-communicating," they say, "Guilty as charged and proud of it!" Now, moving into its second decade with NNPS, Pasco School District continues as one of the nation's leaders with the district and all schools on a clear path to partnerships.

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NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR (N2N) PROGRAM

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SEATTLE, WA

Families are empowered when their opinions are sought and respected as part of the decision-making process. In Seattle Public Schools, the Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) Program is strengthening family and community engagement by fostering trust, two-way communications, and collaboration of families, educators, and community members. The District Leaders for Partnerships see N2N as a way to engage the ethnically and linguistically diverse families that make up about 60% of the student population.

In N2N, all stakeholders in education may participate in informal small-group discussions led by others who have been trained by the district to know and speak about important school and district initiatives. With a diversity of trained facilitators, N2N discussions can take place anywhere—at families’ homes, community centers, libraries, workplace lunch areas, and/or schools. Seattle’s process was adapted from one that the Parent Advisory Committee learned about in Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland.

Last year, one of Seattle’s School Family Partnerships Coordinators led N2N. Multiple Train-the-Trainer Workshops were conducted throughout the five regions of the district. The participants, including parents, educators, and community representatives, learned to lead policy discussions and to make sure that attendees all had a chance to participate. The resulting community discussions give all families and interested community partners a way to contribute their opinions and suggestions for policy decisions that may affect the whole district.

This year’s N2N discussions focused on Bell Time Changes. District leaders provided information and three options for families to consider or provide alternative ideas. The

School and Family Partnership Office partnered with the Department of Communications and TV Studio to create a video as the foundation for all N2N discussions. This video was dubbed and translated into the top nine languages spoken by families in the District. Facilitators in the training workshops received a guide to conduct a discussion, toolkits for each participant at a discussion, a FAQ form, and a survey for each participant to complete after the discussions were completed. Flyers in multi-languages announced each N2N discussion, and stressed that everyone was welcome to participate. The surveys were collected and responses compiled for a report prepared for the Superintendent to consider in a final recommendation to the Seattle School Board. Clearly, a consensus across regions would affect the Superintendents’ recommendations for policy change.

N2N works because it is a very simple concept: families trust and listen to other families, in discussions on important decisions, not just to district staff. N2N procedures include all families, regardless of racial, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds. One parent of an elementary school student shared, “It was awesome to have a voice at the table for decision-making.” A leader commented, “I am proud that families can finally be engaged [on important issues], especially families of color, who [school] policies sometimes inadvertently affect the most.” Seattle’s Leaders for Partnerships will continue N2N discussions each year on one or two district initiatives or policy decisions. With Neighbor to Neighbor, district leaders can increase the engagement of families and community members in school decisions and build relationships and trust at the district and school levels.

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CHILDREN AS PARTNERS AT PRIMARY SCHOOL

PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS IRELAND

DUBLIN, IRELAND

Partnership Schools Ireland believes that true change in education can be realized only if students' voices are included in plans and practices for school improvement. The organization sees that the school-based Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) is an important structure for ensuring that students' views are part of family and community engagement.

As a new member of NNPS, Partnership Schools Ireland received basic training in leading school teams, but customized team membership to require students on the first eight elementary school ATPs in the project. This has been a successful adaptation and will continue as the organization scales up the number of schools in its network.

School principals and other team members identified students who could interact with adults and contribute to ATP plans and practices, and obtained parental consent for their child's participation. After one year, teachers in the eight schools agreed that students on their ATPs provided unique insights into the quality of school life, designs for family engagement, and for increasing student satisfaction and success in school.

The schools used different methods to add students to their ATPs. For example, St. Louis Girls' National School of 250 students (grades 2 to 6) in Northern Ireland was working to make the school more welcoming for all students' families and strengthening literacy skills. SMART goals—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timed—were set for each goal in the Action Plan for Partnerships. Two girls each from grades 4 and 5 joined the ATP. After team training, these students gained confidence in sharing ideas and implementing planned activities. The next year, the school established a committee with one student from each grade level that met with the

student ATP members. Among many ideas generated for goals in the Action Plan for Partnerships, the students helped design a literacy activity. The committee members and their classes created a list of their favorite authors and books at each grade level and distributed the list to all students' families. Some parents donated some of the books to the school library, which benefitted all students' interest in reading.

The ATP in another school tackled the issue of bullying on the playground. The student ATP member commented that bullying was not the biggest problem. Rather, the school yard was used for soccer during recess, but those who did not like soccer were frustrated with no space to play during break time. The ATP opened a secure roof-top garden, invited senior citizens in the community to plant and care for a garden as school volunteers. The area provided valued space to many students during recess.

Students on other schools' ATPs told adults when a planned activity would be boring for student attendees, whether parents would be interested, and when changes were needed in plans and practices.

The leaders of Partnership Schools Ireland are monitoring the contributions and challenges of students on elementary school teams. They noted that although this is a challenge in other schools, the ATPs made it possible to give children a meaningful voice in school decision making and partnership program development. After ATPs have student members, the adults wonder how they ever managed without them.

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COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO MAKING PARTNERSHIPS WORK

FMU CENTER OF EXCELLENCE TO PREPARE TEACHERS OF CHILDREN OF POVERTY
FLORENCE, SC

How will you know what someone thinks if you do not ask? Many educators assume that parents and others in the community are happy with their children's schools, but do not check these assumptions. Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence (COE) provides professional development and on-going technical assistance to schools' Action Team for Partnerships (ATPs) to help them continually improve programs and practices of family and community engagement.

At a One-Day Team Training Workshop conducted by COE last spring, two Early Childhood Education (ECE) Centers set a goal to increase family engagement by communicating with parents to learn about their satisfaction with and expectations of their schools. The ATPs planned to survey parents as one activity on page 4 of their One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships—Creating a Welcoming Climate.

COE's Associate Director sent samples of surveys to the ECE Centers, including the NNPS evaluation tool Measure of School, Family and Community Partnership. A school nurse chaired the committee, which included representatives from the two schools to discuss the surveys. All ATP members reviewed the sample surveys and discussed how to obtain parents' open and honest answers on the anonymous surveys. They selected questions to learn parents' views about the school climate and what they wanted to know to be more involved in their children's preschool education.

COE formatted the questions and returned the draft survey to the committee for review. COE printed the final version of the surveys for distribution to parents at both ECE Centers, and arranged for each parent who returned a survey to receive a small thank you gift.

The ATPs at the ECE Centers distributed the survey for parents at two popular events. One Center administered the survey at its End-of-Year School Program. The other gave parents surveys at its Field Day. COE will compile, process, and report results to the two Centers.

The baseline information will enable the two ECE Centers to write their next One-Year Action Plans with activities that will inform and engage parents in ways that meet their interests and needs. By using the data from parents, the schools aim to demonstrate their trust and respect of parents' views, and strengthen connections and collaborative activities with all parents.

The ECE Centers know that a survey is just a first step in improving and increasing parental involvement to ensure student attendance, learning, and good behavior at the preschool level. One teacher on an ATP expressed this expectation, "[We hope that] the feedback from parents will help all of us develop closer relationships so we can work better together to help the children."

The COE Associate Director reported, "A survey is an excellent way to reach out to parents. ... The next step will be making sure the information collected will be used to strengthen relationships with parents." Both ECE Centers are already taking next steps to survey and recruit volunteers to assist the schools and the students based on parents skills, talents, and time. These schools are, again, following important advice: You won't get what you don't ask for.

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EVALUATING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION (RCOE)
RIVERSIDE, CA

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

Educators know the saying, “What gets measured gets done.” In California, state policy mandates evaluations of eight priority areas for school improvement, including programs of school, family, and community partnerships. The state is developing rubrics and guidelines for some improvement topics, and is encouraging districts to develop or identify other evaluation tools.

The California Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) for school improvement directs districts and local agencies to use resources that will meet students’ educational needs. The goal is to improve outcomes for typically-under-served populations (e.g., students in families with low-incomes, English Learners, and foster youth). To meet these goals, school, family, and community partnership programs are needed.

Riverside County Office of Education’s (RCOE) partnership program is the Parent Engagement Leadership Institute (PELI). In PELI, leaders disseminate research on parental engagement and on state PTA resources, and help schools implement the NNPS Six Types of Involvement, create Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs), and write One-Year Action Plans for goal-linked partnerships for student success in school. RCOE leaders know that only with good data can educators learn whether their partnership programs are meeting the needs of students and their families, and producing positive academic and behavioral outcomes.

The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) supported by LCFF must be evaluated each year for the quality of implementation and progress. Each district must engage parents, students, educators, administrators, and community partners in developing, implementing, and evaluating LCAP. At this early stage of work on LCAP, district leaders want to know what should be evaluated on family and community engagement and how to do that.

RCOE’s Assessment and Accountability Services Unit shared the evaluations of PELI with the districts’ Project and English Learner Directors (PELD), who are involved in evaluating LCAP priorities. With input from NNPS and other colleagues, RCOE developed two presentations on evaluating school and district partnership programs for PELD leaders.

These sessions provided PELD directors with information on districts’ current evaluations of parental engagement and topics that could be evaluated in the future. Measurement tools in the NNPS manual, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, 3rd Edition*, were shared. The PELD directors not only obtained good information, but also networked with other leaders about evaluating parental involvement and conducted hands-on activities to see how measurement tools could be used in their own district and schools. They discussed the kinds of data they wanted in the future.

Attendees appreciated the research-base that showed how measurement tools go from simple evaluations (such as exit evaluations at workshops) to complex and costly evaluations (such as longitudinal research on results for students of family and community engagement in specific subjects). One district leader noted, “This information is an extension of the family engagement training we received from PELI. It certainly will help as we begin to evaluate the work we are doing.” RCOE will continue to match California’s legislation with available resources to help districts and their schools keep improving their programs of family and community engagement.

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