

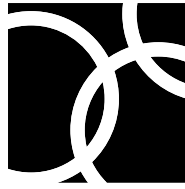
PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



An annual collection from the members of the
National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University

2023

Edited by Brenda G. Thomas, Joyce L. Epstein, and Zhe Zhao



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- » *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Fourth Edition*
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- » Annual evaluation of program quality (*UPDATE*)
- » Research results, tools, and materials to meet Title I requirements for parent and family engagement
- » Website: **www.partnershipschools.org**

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School of Education at Johns Hopkins University

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PHOTO CREDITS: Thanks to the following members of NNPS for photographs of partnership activities.

COVER and SECTIONS

Mini Miracles Learning Academy, Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-K/Starting Point, Euclid, OH

READING and LITERACY

A. C. Corcoran Elementary School, Charleston County School District, North Charleston, SC

STEAM SUBJECTS

Cypress Cove Elementary School, Calcasieu Parish School Board, Sulphur, LA

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Ladson Elementary School, Ladson, SC

DISTRICT and ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

Richland County School District One, Columbia, SC

PHOTOS WITH 2023 ACTIVITIES

READING and LITERACY

Western Hills Elementary School, Little Rock, AR

St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School, McClellanville, SC

A. C. Corcoran Elementary School, North Charleston, SC

A. J. Lewis Greenview Elementary, Columbia, SC

STEAM SUBJECTS

Brooklyn Preschool, Brooklyn, OH

Cypress Cove Elementary School, Sulphur, LA

Wade Early Learning Center, Cleveland, OH

North Charleston Elementary School, North Charleston, SC

Otter Creek Elementary School, Little Rock, AR

Mini Miracles Learning Academy, Euclid, OH

George Forbes Early Learning Center, East Cleveland, OH

Hawthorne Elementary School, Seattle, WA

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Columbia High School, Columbia, SC

Ladson Elementary School, Ladson, SC

Pinehurst Elementary School, North Charleston, SC

W. G. Sanders Middle School, Columbia, SC

Horizon Education Centers - Old Brooklyn, Cleveland, OH

DISTRICT and ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

Pasco School District One, Pasco, WA

Richland County School District One, Columbia, SC

Little Rock School District, Little Rock, AR

For more information:

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, www.partnershipschools.org

INTRODUCTION

Promising Partnership Practices 2023

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., Co-Director
National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)

In NNPS, we see that partnership programs across the country are becoming more creative, comprehensive, and aware of the important roles that students play in connecting home, school, and community. These qualities are important for continually improving partnership practices to engage all families—not just a few—in ways that support student success in school. Here are a few examples from the pages of *Promising Partnership Practices 2023*.

Creativity Counts. See *PJs and Pie*—an activity at the preschool level. Children designed, baked, and ate their pies with a family partner, and learned “gentle” math skills. They showed that there is not one way to design a top crust to personalize a pie. It may still taste delicious.

Comprehensive Activities Amaze. Read *Books on Parade* at the elementary school level. The activity combined reading, art, music, dance, construction, and parade marching for students to share their favorite books at each grade level with parents and with each other.

Students are the “Stars” of Good Partnerships. Throughout the 2022-23 school year, NNPS’s monthly *E-Briefs* featured activities that showed the important roles students play in partnership practices at all grade levels. We discussed how students may encourage family engagement by serving as inviters, presenters, guides, performers, participants, demonstrators, evaluators, and in other roles. By doing so, students build leadership skills, social skills, and confidence in learning.

In this collection, read *Seeing the Potential and Worth of All*. This initiative placed students at the center not only of partnership activities, but also as the center of the school’s organization. This middle school took the role of student leadership to the next level.

Also see *All Roads Lead Home*. This high school described how students may continue to be important partners even after they graduate and became alumni.

District and Organization Leadership. District and organization leaders have been sharpening their skills on two main responsibilities—*leadership* and *facilitation* of schools. They are improving direct communications with parents and community partners in all schools in the district. They also are becoming more effective in increasing the capacities of school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to communicate with their own students’ families and community partners.

As you read through this collection, see other examples of creative and comprehensive family engagement activities, and note the many roles that students play—at all school levels—in partnership programs and practices.

See two Tables of Contents (TOC) to find activities that interest you.

GOALS FOR PARTNERSHIPS. This TOC lists activities by specific goals to engage family and community partners with students in Reading and Literacy; STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math); and creating a Welcoming School Climate.

Also, see activities to strengthen District and Organization Leadership.

Each activity identifies one of the Six Types of Involvement in the NNPS framework: **Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community.** Remember—most practices activate more than one “type” of engagement.

District and organization activities demonstrate one or more leadership strategy guided by NNPS: **Create Awareness, Align Program and Policy, Guide Learning and Program Development, Share Knowledge, Celebrate Milestones, and Evaluate Progress.**

CONTRIBUTORS. This TOC lists the locations of contributors. There are over 25 activities from schools, districts, and organizations in five states. Remember—activities designed and conducted in one community (i.e., urban, suburban, or rural) may be adapted to other locations. Also, some activities implemented in preschools, elementary, middle, and high schools may be adapted for use at other school levels.

Promising Partnership Practices 2023 is posted at www.partnershipschools.org in the section Success Stories. Readers may print and distribute the full book to colleagues and supervisors in color or black and white, or share a link to the e-book at no cost. Members of NNPS have access to more than 10 years of prior editions of *Promising Partnership Practices* from 2010 to 2023 using the NNPS Member-Only-Code. NNPS reminds members of this resource and code in each month’s *E-Brief*.

National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University

Established by Dr. Joyce L. Epstein and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University in 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2021 and continues its important mission. NNPS provides professional development and on-going technical assistance to enable schools, districts, organizations, and state departments of education to implement research-based programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

- Each partnership school forms an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and writes an annual goal-linked partnership plan to engage all families in their children’s education at school and at home. ATPs work to ensure a school climate that welcomes all families. With the NNPS Framework of Six Types of Involvement, ATPs engage family and community partners in different ways and different places to support student learning and development.
- Each partnership district, organization, and state identifies a leader to guide the enactment of official policies on partnerships. These leaders directly facilitate school-based ATPs to organize, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their programs of family and community engagement.

All members of NNPS benefit from on-going research and development at Johns Hopkins University on school, family, and community partnerships. In annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices*, members share best practices to celebrate good ideas and learn from each other.

For more information, visit www.partnershipschools.org.



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THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Epstein's Six Types of Involvement



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 the 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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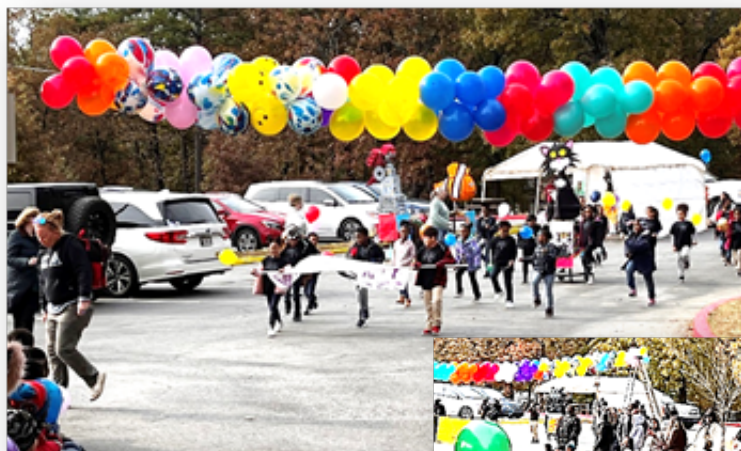
READING AND LITERACY



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet academic goals in reading and literacy.

Books on Parade
Western Hills Elementary School
Little Rock, AR

TYPE 6



READING & LITERACY

BOOKS ON PARADE

WESTERN HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR

It is possible to create a multi-media world around a book. We read a book, but we also may sing and dance about it, draw and paint about it, and think about its messages and meanings. Western Hills Elementary School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all of the reading teachers considered the cross-curricular, multi-media world of books in its family and community engagement activity, Books on Parade.

All students (K-5) read or listened to a read-aloud of the book *Balloons Over Broadway* by Melissa Sweet. Students at each grade level also read four other favorite books, and then voted on their favorite one. Students wanted to choose the right—the best—book for their multi-media story to share with others.

Then, the real fun began. In library classes, students conducted research on their chosen books, the authors, and the history of parades. In music classes, the teacher helped them learn a song and dance related to their selected books. In physical education, their coach helped them learn parade marching and how they would march with their floats through the community. In art, their teacher helped them create large cardboard sculptures of the main characters in their selected books to accompany their floats.

Parents volunteered to help teachers and students at each grade level in the art, music, and dance classes, and making parade floats. In addition parents and community partners donated items for the costumes of book characters that children wore as they marched in the parade.

Students could see that this was a big and worthy project. They worked together to make decisions and learned new skills and talents to share their favorite books with parents and the community. They were rewarded with a surprise prize. A community partner—a local bank—donated copies of the books selected at each grade level to every student.

Students were really committed to this complex project. Teachers noted that students learned many

new skills. They read and discussed several books to decide on their favorites. This required critical thinking and compassionate listening to their classmates' different ideas. Students even learned cardboard-construction skills to create movable floats. They worked together with teachers, staff, and volunteers to set up and conduct their parade.

See one report of Books on Parade as a YouTube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CsuNi9dythY>. See a story and photos of the bank's donation of books to all students at <https://www.rely.bank/community/our-community/our-involvement/blog-community-involvement/2022/11/21/relyance-bank-donates-books-for-western-hills-elementary-annual-character-book-parade>.

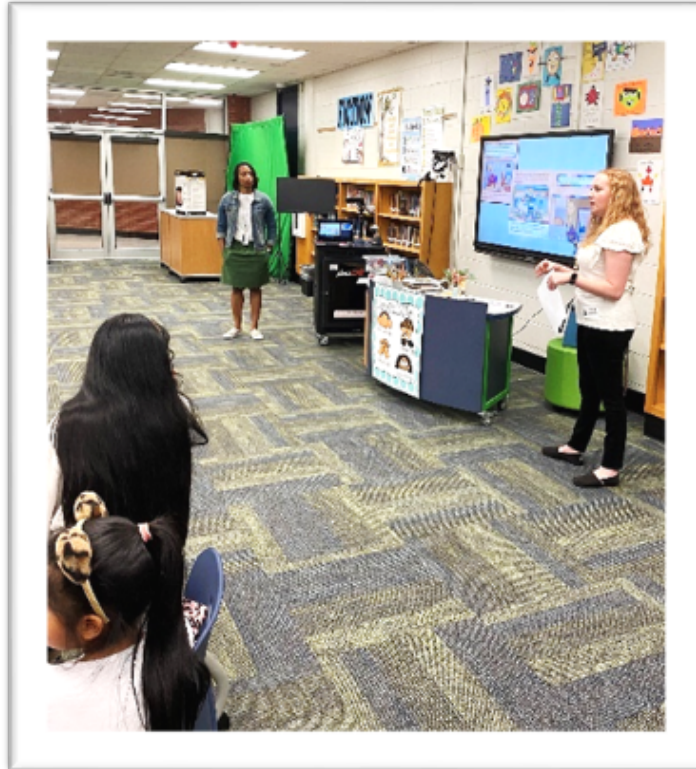
The planners gathered comments and suggestions from parents, community members, and teachers at the parade and via email. They checked the length and speed of the parade for future program decisions. They agreed that the parade was a unique culminating activity for lessons on reading comprehension and discussions about the joy of reading for pleasure.

This was an important community "happening." School leaders, teachers, and the ATP asked district leaders and the local news media to publicize and report Books on Parade. All students at all grade levels marched with their favorite books through the streets of the community and their parents, families, and community partners cheered them on.

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Fall Family Engagement Literacy Night
St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School
McClellanville, SC

TYPE 4



READING & LITERACY



FALL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT LITERACY NIGHT

ST. JAMES-SANTEE ELEMENTARY-MIDDLE SCHOOL
McCLELLANVILLE, SC

There are hundreds of ways to engage families with students on literacy learning. The St. James-Santee Elementary-Middle School planned a Literacy Night for parents and students that combined read-aloud stories and letter-and-sound puzzles, which children and parents could do at home. The ATP and teachers distributed flyers about the Fall Family Literacy Night in English and Spanish by student-delivery, email, phone, and at local churches.

The Fall Literacy Night started with dinner provided by a local business partner. Each family also received a bag of produce donated by the Lowcountry Food Bank. A story was read aloud for all to enjoy. After dinner, everyone journeyed to the media center for a workshop presented by a district leader and expert from the State Board of Education. These leaders helped parents see that they could serve as Learning Engagement Coaches to encourage children's reading at home. The group discussed ways to make reading and literacy fun, and talked over a list of ways to encourage students to read for pleasure during vacations and the summer months.

The leaders demonstrated how students learn about phonemes and other literacy skills in class. They guided parents to make a few take-home resources, such as word-letter-sound puzzles. For this game, parents copied short words on two index cards. One card was left whole, and the other copy was cut apart by letters. Then, the children demonstrated how to solve these puzzles by considering the sounds of the first, middle, and last letters to put the whole word back together. The activity reinforced ideas about letters and their sounds that help students read new words.

The dinner and workshop gave teachers a chance to meet parents in person and address some of their questions about their children's learning. A school counselor assisted at the workshop with information on how the school was addressing students' Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills across grade levels, and how parents could reinforce

those skills at home.

About 35 families and 28 students participated at the Literacy Event, along with 15 teachers. The mayor from nearby Awendaw also attended to support families and children from her town. Parents expressed appreciation for the tips they received about their child's reading and how to help at home. They were active participants at the workshop. They asked questions and shared ideas throughout the meeting. In their evaluations, they reported that the workshop was excellent, speakers were clear, and the content and resources would help them assist their children better than before. Students enjoyed coming to school with a parent, having dinner, listening to read-aloud stories, and showing parents how they solved phonics-related puzzles.

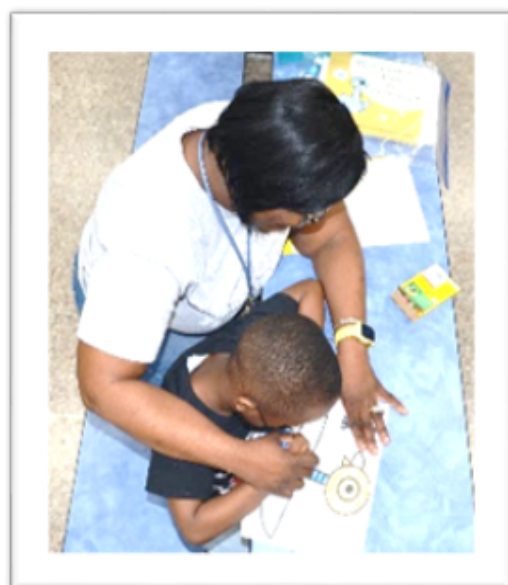
This was the first in-person family engagement activity after the COVID pandemic that had severely limited participation of families and visitors at the school. Parents were not in the habit of coming to school meetings. The ATP and teachers are considering providing families with the choice of attending future workshops in person or on *Zoom* to meet their schedules and to encourage more participation.

Teachers at St. James have long agreed that student-scholars and parents are the heart of all their work. The school's welcoming environment, helpful resources, books for children, and produce for parents at the Literacy Event put smiles on all faces.

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Make and Take Literacy Event

A. C. Corcoran Elementary School
North Charleston, SC



MAKE AND TAKE LITERACY EVENT

A. C. CORCORAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
NORTH CHARLESTON, SC

Make and Take has been a popular family engagement activity for decades, but Corcoran Elementary School added a twist to the design. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers wanted to help students in grades K-2 strengthen their reading and literacy skills. They also wanted to enable parents and students to work together on fun reading activities at home. The Literacy Event started with an in-person session at school. Every student received a book to take home along with follow-up reading activities to conduct with a parent. In this way, Corcoran's design became a Make and Take *and* Take and Make innovation.

Teachers worked together to create grade-level literacy activities for students in grades K-2. Corcoran serves a diverse population of Black, White, and Hispanic students, and a community of Portuguese-speaking families. Members of the ATP and others recruited parents to participate at the Literacy Event. Teachers sent ClassDojo messages to everyone. Others used Robo-Calls, text messages, fliers, and other communications to reach all families. School and district translators and interpreters spread the word to families in their home languages. Community volunteers served as "guest parents" for students whose parents could not attend.

At the Literacy Event, the featured story was *The Pigeon Has to Go to School*. A teacher read the book aloud in English and versions were read in Spanish and Portuguese. Students and parents completed a hands-on activity to design their own pigeons. Every student took home a copy of the book to reread and enjoy with a parent and to add to their home library. Parents received literacy tips and activities in their home languages to support their child's reading at home.

The Literacy Event was conducted twice—once in the morning and once in the evening to accommodate parents' schedules. Over 70 families, 10 community partners, and 100 students participated, along with teachers, staff, and administra-

tors. The district's Office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) supported the school by providing Chick-Fil-A meals for the evening session and Grab-and-Go breakfasts for the morning group. Title I funds purchased the books for students, and General Funds covered other costs.

The school's ATP, principal, and teachers are working together to continually strengthen the school's program of partnerships. They explained: "We want all families to feel welcome and have equal access to information at workshops." Parents evaluated the materials and activities. One parent summed up the reactions of many others: "I love coming to these events. My child enjoys it and it is cool that the kids read a book and get to take it home. Thank you so much!"

The read-aloud and follow up activities aimed to help K-2 students increase their vocabulary, find rhyming words, and practice sequencing story events. Students also benefitted from seeing their family's interest in reading and their work and progress at school, and by observing the connections of their parents and teachers.

Corcoran has improved its family engagement literacy activities over time. In the past, messages and materials were only in English. Now, as the school's demographics changed, the activities and presentations are multilingual for families that speak Spanish or Portuguese. The ATP is considering more innovations for greater equity, such as having parent leaders who speak different languages welcome families at the door and help them sign in and participate.

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Charleston County School District

We Both Read: Books and Blankets

A. J. Lewis Greenview Elementary School
Columbia, SC

TYPE 4



READING & LITERACY



WE BOTH READ: BOOKS AND BLANKETS

A. J. LEWIS GREENVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC

Think about curling up with a good book. If it's chilly, a blanket makes reading even cozier. Add hot chocolate and a cookie and you have a winning combination. Greenview Elementary School took these favorite things to the school level to improve students' reading skills and confidence about reading for pleasure. We Both Read with Books and Blankets was a new partner-reading activity for students and parents.

Because the school is very large—over 800 students—the activity was designed for about 40 selected students in grades 1-4 and their families. The Reading Intervention Specialist, Parent and Family Engagement leader, Action Team for Partnership (ATP), and teachers selected students who might benefit from extra TLC with reading.

The ATP and teachers worked to implement the activity successfully. Teachers introduced parents to the *We Both Read* book series. The principal and teachers demonstrated good read-together strategies. Community partners donated cookies, hot chocolate, and blankets, which each family could keep for cozy reading at home.

The published book series offers a shared-reading format in which parents and children take turns reading aloud to enjoy a story together. Parents read the left-hand page; students read the right-hand page; and they both talk about the illustrations and ideas. The series has six reading levels, so parents and students can find a good match of grade level and reading level—even for struggling readers.

We Both Read is supported by the district for all Title I schools. Topics include animals, bugs, dinosaurs, stories, rhymes, and more to make reading fun at home. Children build word skills, fluency, confidence, and interest in reading about things they want to know more about.

Parents were sent an email and personal flyer congratulating them on being selected for the program. A general announcement was posted on ClassDojo so that everyone knew about the activity as part of the school's full partnership program.

Chairs with blankets were placed at different spots around the school. Hot chocolate and cookies were provided. Parents and students selected a book from the students' identified reading level and chose a spot to enjoy the story together. They also were invited to borrow another *We Both Read* book to enjoy together at home, and to select new ones when they returned the borrowed copies.

Teachers planned to follow the selected students' progress in reading. The evaluation of Books and Blankets went further than most "exit evaluations." Parents were given a QR code to provide online reactions to Books and Blankets. They were asked if they gained at least one new way to encourage their child's reading at home, and if they thought they would follow up. They were asked if they knew at least one person at school to ask questions about their child's learning, and if they knew the school valued their partnership in their child's education. Students were asked about their experiences with Books and Blankets. One student commented, "I liked the hot chocolate and cookies." That was pretty predictable!

One of Greenview's school-wide goals is to keep improving all students' literacy skills and attitudes. This is a "forever" item on teachers' agendas at all grade levels. Books and Blankets added a family engagement strategy to support the importance of students' reading for pleasure at home.

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Richland County School District One

2

STEAM SUBJECTS

(**S**cience, **T**echnology, **E**ngineering, **A**rt, and **M**ath)



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet goals in science, technology, engineering, art, and math.

Bubble Bash
Brooklyn Preschool
Brooklyn, OH

TYPE 2



STEAM SUBJECTS



BUBBLE BASH

BROOKLYN PRESCHOOL
BROOKLYN, OH

Brooklyn Preschool’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) met to brainstorm ideas for a family fun and learning activity to conduct during school hours. The school conducts an active program of family engagement activities throughout the year. Some take place during school hours. Other gatherings are scheduled after school or as online and recorded sessions to reach all families. The ATP and teachers liked the idea of a Bubble Bash to support a science unit on The Ocean/The Sea.

Two Bubble Bash sessions were conducted in the morning and afternoon for parents to select a convenient time. The ATP and teachers advertised Bubble Bash in various ways, including flyers that students took home, reminders in weekly newsletters, messages on *Remind*—the school’s message system, and by talking with parents who brought and picked up their children at school.

Activities started in the children’s classrooms. Parents and students created an Under-Sea Treat using graham crackers, goldfish crackers, blue-water icing, and white and green sprinkles to represent bubbles and seaweed. They ate their creative water scenes.

In class, students danced to under-the-sea music played along with an active bubble machine. At activity tables, students and parents used ocean animal stickers to create an under-the-sea picture. They also took turns taking family photos in front of an under-the-sea backdrop to keep a record of their time together.

Parents and students moved on to the auditorium where visitors from the Great Lakes Science Center presented Bubble-Mania. The presentation introduced new information on the shapes and colors of bubbles, and different things that can be used to blow bubbles. The presenters involved children in blowing and catching bubbles, going inside giant bubbles, and making bubble beards. There was a lot of new things to learn about bubbles.

A small grant for family engagement activities

from the school’s guiding organization on partnership programs (Universal PreK-Starting Point) paid for the supplies and presenters that brought bubbles alive.

Over 90 parents and other family members came to support their children at school, greet teachers, and meet each other. The ATP and teachers created a Google Survey to evaluate the Bubble Bash. Families rated the different bubble activities and included comments about the experience.

The ATP discussed the results of the survey. One parent reported, “Loved how the woman from the science center had the children involved in her demonstration! The kids get very antsy with stuff like that. So, getting them involved was great!”

Teachers commented on parent-child interactions. Several commented, “Seeing the bond between parents and children is really refreshing and helps us better understand our students!” The evaluations also noted that some parts of the presentation seemed geared for older children. This information would be used to revise the program, or to consider other speakers in the future.

Students gained knowledge and skills about life under the sea. They experienced ways that bubbles are joyful in their own world and important in the ocean. Students also strengthened preschool skills of following directions, creating art, building small and large motor skills in cooking and dance, and showing good audience behavior. Parents also benefitted. They met their children’s teachers and saw how their children were taught and nurtured in a lively learning environment at school.

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Universal PreK - Starting Point

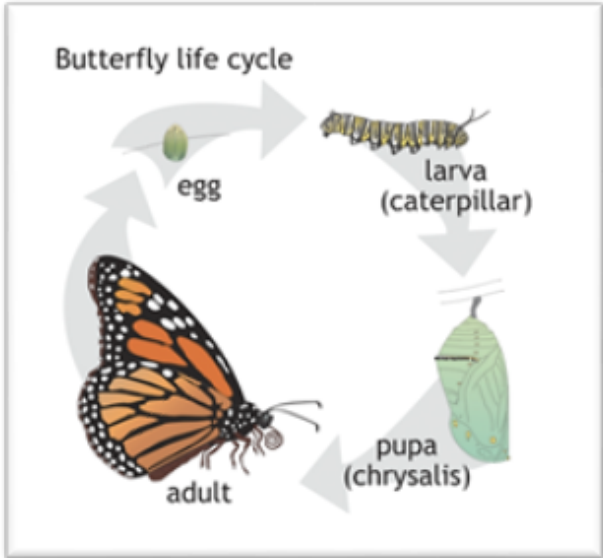
TYPE 2

STEAM SUBJECTS

Butterfly Release at the Cove

Cypress Cove Elementary School
Sulphur, LA

TYPE 4



STEAM SUBJECTS



BUTTERFLY RELEASE AT THE COVE

CYPRESS COVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SULPHUR, LA

Caterpillars become butterflies. That sounds like magic. At Cypress Cove, the metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly was a dramatic and wonderful science experience for students in grades PreK-5. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers knew that a butterfly project would broaden students’ science skills *and* create an opportunity for family and community engagement with students in science.

In early March, the ATP and teachers ordered butterfly kits and reviewed how to set up caterpillar habitats in each classroom. When the live caterpillars arrived they were distributed, along with books for students on butterflies, magnets that illustrated the life cycle of butterflies, and large charts for students to document the changes they observed in their caterpillars from day to day.

Students read books and pamphlets about the metamorphosis of butterflies, watched videos, and completed related science activities of observation, labeling, note taking, and more. They heard about other animals that go through the process of metamorphosis such as frogs, bees, and lady bugs.

For about three weeks, students and teachers recorded the growth and changes of their caterpillars. Students learned many new vocabulary words and applied them in their observations. For example, like every living thing, the caterpillars needed food. Students wrote that the caterpillars ate from their feeding trays —sugar water, sliced fruit. Not a bad diet!

Each stage of a butterfly’s metamorphosis looks completely different. Students watched their specimens change from caterpillar (larva) to chrysalis (pupa), and then emerge from the chrysalis as adult butterflies. The students gave names to their butterflies and prepared to set them free.

Parents were guided to listen to their child’s daily reports, ask questions to spark observation skills, and plan to attend the release of the butterflies as a celebration of “freedom.”

On the day of the butterflies’ release, families came to school. Each teacher prepared a spring

activity for students and families to do together in their classrooms. Some classes conducted butterfly-related crafts. Others read stories, saw films, reviewed things they had learned, talked about their favorite steps along the ways. Then, they took the habitats outside for the release. Each grade level went to a designated area on the playground to celebrate the project and set their butterflies free.

The biggest challenge was worrying about the weather. Butterflies take about 3 weeks to develop. They are released when the temperature is above 50 degrees. The children were hoping for nice weather. And, it was a beautiful day.

Over 500 students and more than 200 parents, all teachers, staff, administrators, and some community partners participated. Students, parents, and educators evaluated the experience in a new way. They were given a QR code that led them to a few questions. Reactions to the project were positive from beginning to end. Many children, parents, and teachers posted their own pictures and reports on social media.

Parents commented on the students’ excitement and how much their children learned from the project. A kindergarten teacher noted, “It was rewarding to see the life cycle of a butterfly come to real life right before our eyes.” Another teacher summed it up: “This has to be my overall favorite activity the Cove has ever done!”

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Chilling and Building with Dad

Wade Early Learning Center
Cleveland, OH



CHILLING AND BUILDING WITH DAD

WADE EARLY LEARNING CENTER
CLEVELAND, OH

Wade Early Learning Center is a 5-star early childhood program that has been strengthening its partnership program for several years. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and leaders wanted to engage dads and father figures in their preschoolers' education to show that the school was "father-friendly." They wanted dads to know that the school valued their efforts and wanted their input to continually improve their program of school, family, and community partnerships. They wanted to give a clear message that dads mattered in their children's education—starting in preschool and continuing across the school years.

The ATP brainstormed ideas about how to increase fathers' engagement in their children's education at school and at home. They reasoned that dads are known for building and fixing things, and that these roles and talents are highly valued in many families. They decided that a building/construction activity would be fun and interesting to the young students and their dads.

In their classrooms, teachers read aloud books on construction workers and their useful tools. They talked with students about building things—from building with blocks to building houses and skyscrapers. Children learned many new vocabulary words, and considered things they liked to build.

The ATP and teachers asked community partners to contribute children's building kits for an exciting hands-on activity. Home Depot—a school business partner—donated 50 workshop kits for preschool children to build Birdfeeders or Seed Starters. These seemed like fun and useful projects for students, dads, and classrooms.

The Center directors not only helped advertise the activity, but also purchased snacks to sustain the "workers." They organized a play list for good music while everyone worked.

On the day for Chilling and Building with Dad, students were eager to get to work. They were happy to "share" their dads with children whose

fathers could not participate that day. Nine dads (representing about 1/3 of the school's student body of 27 students) worked with 11 students on their projects.

When students and dads arrived at school together, they saw a display of the final products in the kits. Tools were set out on each table. They decided together which kit they wanted to build. The Center's teachers and staff circulated to assist each table of workers.

Students benefitted from spending some productive and fun time with their dad, granddad, uncle, or family friend. They talked together to choose their kits, tools, materials (tape, glue, etc.), and chatted as they made the final product. Students introduced their dads to their friends, and dads introduced themselves to each other. New friends were made, and a new group of dads was identified who were ready to assist the school and support their children's learning.

This was an activity for fun and fellowship. It was a good way to strengthen the school's mission to partner with all students' families in ways that supported student learning and development. Dads got the message that they were valued by the teachers and school leaders. Said one, "It was encouraging to see the school celebrating and encouraging fathers' involvement." The ATP, teachers, and leaders will continue to develop and implement father-friendly activities as they advance their program of school, family, and community partnerships.

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TYPE 3

STEAM SUBJECTS

Girls Love STEM

North Charleston Elementary
North Charleston, SC

TYPE 2



STEAM SUBJECTS



GIRLS LOVE STEM

NORTH CHARLESTON ELEMENTARY
NORTH CHARLESTON, SC

At North Charleston Elementary School, girls love STEM. Sometimes, people think that only boys are interested in science, technology, engineering and math—the STEM subjects. But teachers, administrators, and the partnership team at North Charleston ES knew better.

Last year, the school conducted several programs in school and after school to increase the number of girls who not only participated in STEM activities, but really l-o-v-e-d conducting them. This PreK-5 school designed ways to inspire, empower, and encourage girls to participate in STEM. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), Family Service Advocate, teachers, and principal added activities to the family engagement program to include parents as important partners in this effort.

One culminating activity was Girls Love STEM—a gathering for girls and their families. The principal invited a friend who works for NASA to participate. In addition, many community partners whose work connects to STEM fields set up booths to share resources, engage students and parents in hands-on experiments, and discuss college and career opportunities with them.

Teachers and students helped advertise and invite parents to participate. They took home flyers in English and Spanish, and requested parents to attend Girls Love STEM by email, text messages, and school reminders. One of the school's community partners—a local church—informed its congregation about the celebration of STEM. A caterer—also a school partner—prepared a spaghetti dinner for families to enjoy after they visited the STEM booths.

At Girls Love STEM, students were given a “passport” to check off the activities they conducted and information they gained. The girls and their parents visited each booth and talked with local female STEM professionals. Students participated in many activities that helped them see themselves as STEM stars.

They also received STEM kits to take home

from the Liberty Hill K-12 STEM Initiative. This organization conducts activities and sponsors projects to bring high quality STEM programs to neighborhood schools at all grade levels. The goal is to provide students with rigorous and relevant academic activities and technical education to prepare them for high-skill, high-demand, and high-wage STEM occupations.

The fact that the Liberty Hill team was based at the North Charleston Elementary School made it easy for leaders to participate in Girls Love STEM. The group shared information and encouraged girls to participate in Robotics, Coding, STEM After School, Summer Programs, and other competitions and community projects.

Everyone at Girls Love STEM gained new knowledge about STEM subjects, programs, and occupations. The activities increased girls' participation in STEM activities at school and in the community. Some girls joined a STEM after school program and others concentrated on classwork to increase their science and math scores during the year.

Girls Love STEM helped the school fulfill a general goal to strengthen its welcoming climate for families. About 50 parents attended Girls Love STEM with their daughters. Their evaluations were uniformly positive, noting that the activity was well organized, informative, and fun. Several commented that it was important to provide girls with opportunities to talk with female professionals in STEM fields in and around Charleston—something that had not been done before. Girls Love STEM was an important girls' night out.

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TYPE 2

STEAM SUBJECTS

Hiking on Safari

Otter Creek Elementary School
Little Rock, AR



HIKING ON SAFARI

OTTER CREEK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LITTLE ROCK, AR

Otter Creek Elementary School is on a mission to create a strong program of family and community engagement and involve all families in their children's education. The school is activating the NNPS *Framework of Six types of Involvement* to connect with families and the community in ways that support student learning and that meet the needs, interests, and requests from families for useful information.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all teachers were eager to try something new to get students and parents engaged in an outdoor activity in and around the community of Otter Creek. They met to discuss and design an exploratory activity as part of their full partnership program. This took shape as a kind of "safari" —a hike through the neighborhood to reinforce students' learning about animals and their habitats. Activities guided students and parents to explore and discuss what they saw along an inventive community hiking trail.

As most schools in NNPS have learned, the ATP at Otter Creek used many ways to invite parents to join the hike including flyers, phone calls, social media, and word of mouth when parents dropped off and picked up students at school.

At Otter Creek, more than one third of the students are learning English as a second language. The information in school and on the hike was translated and shared with all students and families. It was evident that the efforts by teachers, administrators, school staff, and community members were essential for the success of this event. They planned activities, materials, and routes for the hike, and obtained various community approvals for learning stations and postings.

The ATP and many teachers wore safari gear, and each leader was ready to discuss their assigned animal. Along a hiking trail through the Otter Creek community, teachers set up stations with realistic photos of animals, posters of interest, recordings of animal sounds, stories, and other information. Teachers also provided questions for

students and parents to discuss, fascinating information, and photos to take home. Community partners donated items for the hike and participated in other ways.

Students and parents were given a hiking "map" to guide them from one featured animal to the next. They used compasses, activity books, and "passports" to keep track of the locations they hiked to and the activities they completed at each station. They were eager to learn about many fascinating animals and their habitats. At the end of the hike, students selected a favorite stuffed animal as a keepsake of their experiences. A photo-stop invited students and parents to become a lion or monkey in a picture to take home. A zebra also was there to share in the fun.

Over 100 students, 45 parents and other carers, and about 40 teachers, administrators, staff, and community partners participated on the hike. Even the Mayor of Little Rock came to talk and hike with students and parents.

The hikers agreed that it was possible to learn a lot while having fun. They also agreed that a hike through the community brought the Otter Creek community together. It is not often that there is a safari in Little Rock.

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PJs and Pie Day
Mini Miracles Learning Academy
Euclid, OH

TYPE 3



STEAM SUBJECTS

PJs AND PIE DAY

MINI MIRACLES LEARNING ACADEMY
EUCLID, OH

It is always a good day for pie. Pie and learning? Even better. Wearing PJs to school? Bake the pies? Wow—better still!

The Mini Miracles Learning Academy for PreK students is always working to strengthen connections with families. Last year around the Thanksgiving holiday seemed like a good time to celebrate Sweet Potato Pie—a tradition in the community. Families were invited to change things up with variations on this tradition in an edible learning activity.

The school's partnership team of teachers, parents, administrators, and community members worked together to plan PJs and Pie Day. They identified materials and ingredients, and advertised and publicized the activity in many ways to invite parents to join students for a treat.

Materials included aprons and chef's hats, individual pie pans, and pie dough to roll, cut, and place in new and interesting shapes. There was apple, blueberry, and other fruit and pie fillings for children and parents to choose for their pies.

The Mini Miracles Learning Academy's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) had a well-developed protocol for advertising family engagement activities. Flyers and first invitations went home about 30 days before the activity. Information was posted in the parents' room at school. Reminders were sent out periodically, including the day before Pie Day to remind parents to join their child for fun and learning.

A read-aloud period helped everyone enjoy the story *All for Pie; Pie for All*. The story not only showed Grandma Cat baking pies—just as the children were doing, but also introduced “gentle” math concepts. A whole pie was cut into equal slices for the cats. Friendly mice divided and ate pieces that were left. Then, hungry ants divided and enjoyed the crumbs.

What was left over? Numbers and fractions can be very interesting when it comes to sharing pieces of a pie.

After story time, parents and students took

turns at the baking stations in 1-hour time periods—just enough time to conduct three learning activities as they baked and ate their pies.

The organization that guides the school's development of strong programs of family engagement—Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-Kindergarten/Starting Point—provided a small grant to cover costs. Some families also donated pie fillings.

Parents and teachers strengthened their relationships as parents experienced their child's daily school space. About 65 parents and other family members participated with about 54 students and all teachers and administrators at the school.

One parent reflected on PJs and Pie Day writing: “This was very unique. I loved the concept and will do this at home with my younger children, too.” Another parent recognized the on-going nature of the school's program of partnerships, “Mini Miracle is always connecting families to the classroom—I always feel welcomed here.”

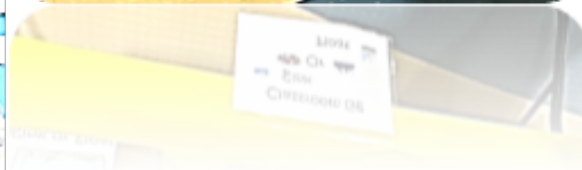
The ATP and teachers observed that students were fully engaged in all activities. They strengthened various academic and behavioral skills as they proceeded from story time to baking stations. Students and parents really enjoyed the fruits of their labor—and the fruits in their pies!

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Universal PreK - Starting Point

TYPE 3

STEAM SUBJECTS

Science and Math Carnival
George Forbes Early Learning Center
East Cleveland, OH



SCIENCE AND MATH CARNIVAL

GEORGE FORBES EARLY LEARNING CENTER
EAST CLEVELAND, OH

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers at the Forbes ELC wanted its annual Science and Math Carnival to be better than ever. Their goals were to engage students in important learning activities and encourage families to connect with the school and with their young children on these important subjects.

With their teachers, students in each class selected a favorite math or science activity that they learned and enjoyed during the year. They set up class stations that children could visit with their families to demonstrate their growing math and science skills. Each station included the materials and resources children needed for their demonstrations. For example, students in one class selected their unit on things that sink and float. They were curious about testing an endless set of items at school and at home to learn about their flotation properties.

At least one parent from each classroom volunteered to assist teachers and students on the selected science or math activities at the Carnival. They hosted the interactions and discussions, enabled students to show their families their skills, and led them in addressing interesting questions and follow-up skills. At each station, children and families received a packet to conduct and master the activity at home.

The ATP, teachers, and school leaders publicized the Math and Science Carnival with many communication tools—flyers, ClassDojo, social media, school website, in conversations with parents at the school. Of course, students took active roles in inviting their families to the carnival to see and learn about their work in math and science.

The Math and Science Carnival was conducted twice in the morning and afternoon to accommodate parents' schedules. Many parents at Forbes ELC worked full or part time, or were going to school themselves, or both. Some who had limited time walked through the carnival and picked up

resources to do with their child at home. Parents who could not attend picked up the packets of resources and instructions for children to demonstrate at home.

Children and families visited their own and other class stations. They experienced new and interesting skills and learned vocabulary words connected to various math and science activities. They also practiced key social skills for success in school including taking turns, being patient, and helping others.

Other important topics were covered at the Carnival. For example, a community partner shared information with parents and forms for registering their children for kindergarten. This contributed to discussions with parents about helping students become "kindergarten ready."

Teachers and school leaders were happy to meet and greet many of the children's families. Parents were happy to be welcomed so graciously at school. Many signed up to volunteer to assist teachers in various ways. About 40 students, their parents, and all teachers came to have fun at the Carnival. Parents agreed, "This was fun," and "this is something we can do at home."

Even at the preschool level, it was important for students to take charge of their own learning. In this Carnival atmosphere, students demonstrated their skills and knowledge for their parents or family partners. Preschool students gain confidence as they master skills and reproduce what they learned at home. Students are at the center of learning at Forbes ELC.

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Universal PreK - Starting Point

Visual Arts Showcase—A Multicultural Celebration
Hawthorne Elementary School
Seattle, WA

TYPE 2

STEAM SUBJECTS



VISUAL ARTS SHOWCASE—A MULTICULTURAL CELEBRATION

HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SEATTLE, WA

Hawthorne Elementary School has been working to engage all families as partners in their children’s education. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and school leaders conduct family engagement activities that convey the school’s goal to support the learning and development of students of color who, in the past, may have been denied equal education and educational justice.

Over the past few years, Hawthorne sponsored Group Coffee Chats for various cultural groups of families to meet school leaders and discuss their questions. During the COVID crisis, the school conducted a series of virtual activities—Family Quarantine Academy—to maintain connections with families when parents were not permitted to attend meetings at the school building.

Last year COVID restrictions were lifted. The partnership team planned a celebration to bring parents back to the school in person. They combined a Visual Arts Showcase to celebrate every student’s art work and the school’s ongoing focus on multicultural partnerships. Planners advertised the Visual Arts Showcase in many languages, including Amharic, Korean, Polish, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and English. Families were invited to wear cultural clothes to the Showcase.

Working with the art teacher, every student—grades 1 to 5—selected one of their best or favorite works of art completed over the year. A crew of parent and teacher volunteers posted every student’s artwork in the school hallways.

To increase group spirit, the planners added Performing Arts to the celebration. Parent volunteers met with students during recess to teach them dances of different cultural groups. These included Mexican, Filipino, and Korean dances. A local high school group performed a Lion Dance, representing Asian cultures.

Students in the after school African Drumming and Capoeira (Brazilian dance) groups added their performances. Other students demonstrated mindfulness. Students served as MCs for the

performances and greeted attendees in English and Spanish.

Parents spotlighted their cultures at a potluck dinner for hundreds of guests. With ingredients purchased by the PTA, parents volunteered to cook quantities of culturally favorite foods (e.g., pancit—a Filipino noodle dish, rice and beans, and other specialties).

The Visual Arts Showcase and multicultural activities combined to celebrate students’ emerging talents and the richness of students’ and families’ diverse backgrounds. Families with limited English were active as volunteers and dance teachers. There were many opportunities for families who spoke the same language to meet each other. Many families participated who had not attended more structured family engagement activities over the past two years.

There was a huge turnout—hundreds of parents, students, teachers, and others—because every student’s artwork was featured. Families who could not attend could watch a recording of the Showcase on YouTube. On evaluations, parents commented that they were delighted to see their children’s work and to have cultural foods and talented student performers at the same time.

Sometimes we forget that art enriches the collection of STEAM subjects. Here, art was front and center. Said the art teacher, “It was wonderful for students to share one of their masterpieces with their families and to hear them explain things they learned in art class.”

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TYPE 2

STEAM SUBJECTS

DREAMBOX CHALLENGE – MARCH MADNESS

EDWIN MARKHAM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA

DreamBox is an online resource designed for students to learn math at their own speed and monitor their own progress. The program claims to help students at each grade level significantly increase math skills. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and math teachers at Markham Elementary School selected DreamBox to give students extra practice on math toward the end of the school year, and to gain confidence about their math abilities. All skills had been taught by teachers in class and practiced by students during the school year.

The ATP and math teachers created a game—a kind of March Madness—to encourage students to practice math skills before they took state achievement tests later in the year. The game came with incentives. Students who completed 25 DreamBox lessons received soft serve ice cream. Those who completed 50 lessons enjoyed ice cream with one topping; 75 lessons earned two toppings; and 100 lessons or more came with unlimited toppings and a free 15-minute recess period. These are valuable prizes for students across grade levels. The treats were supported by the school’s community partners and family donations.

The ATP and teachers communicated with parents about the DreamBox Challenge with flyers, ClassDojo, SchoolDojo, and Facebook. Students were given tracking sheets to list the skills they completed over six weeks, including time over the spring break. Parents were guided to encourage their children to complete DreamBox lessons, and to celebrate students’ accomplishments.

DreamBox lessons cover major mathematical domains at each grade level. These include counting; comparisons & ordering; addition & subtraction; place value; measurement; multiplication & division; geometry; ratios & proportions; expressions & equations; and functions.

Math learning is sequential and “spiraled” to move students from easy to harder skills and problems across the grades. This helps many students recall, practice, master, and extend

specific math skills from year to year.

In the DreamBox Challenge, Markham’s teachers put each student in charge of their own progress. They had to decide how many skills to practice in order to earn ice cream and the number of yummy toppings.

There were some advances and some “glitches” in using DreamBox. For example, some teachers promoted the use of DreamBox more than others. Some students did not have access to a computer with adequate internet connections. Therefore, students’ uses of DreamBox were uneven. These factors will affect analyses of results of the program for student learning.

Preliminary reviews suggested that students who completed many lessons had increased math scores on the spring *Star Test*, but more formal analyses of changes in scores from winter to spring of the year are in progress. Teachers want to know if students (and which students) increased their math skills if they used DreamBox exercises or not, and to what extent.

At the end of the DreamBox Challenge, teachers invited parents and community members to come to celebrate with students who took the DreamBox Challenge and earned rewards. At the half-way mark, there were about 70 students working on DreamBox lessons. By the end of the time period about 200 students participated. These students and over 200 parents and other carers celebrated with ice cream and toppings. Some students kept on because they found that math was fun, profitable, and tasty!

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3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help create a welcoming, family-friendly school. These practices aim to reach out to involve all families and the community.

All Roads Lead Home

Columbia High School
Columbia, SC



ALL ROADS LEAD HOME

COLUMBIA HIGH SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC

It is challenging to establish lasting partnerships with “the community,” which may include all places and all people near and beyond the school. Columbia High School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), Parent and Family Engagement Specialist, and other school teachers and leaders had a good idea. They focused on their alumni community and found that there wasn’t an organized way to contact all of the high school’s alumni. They added this as a goal in their *Action Plan for Partnerships*—to establish a strong and active Alumni Association at the school. This group would recognize the value of the school’s past graduates and support current and future students.

The chairperson of the CHS School Improvement Council was a successful graduate with connections to other alumni. A working group planned a kickoff activity to invite alums from all graduating classes to come to the school to recall memories, celebrate the school, and plan improvements.

Everyone at the school pitched in to help contact the alums. Current students talked with their parents, family members, and neighbors who attended CHS in the past. Students also set up a yearbook display, and ROTC students provided security for the activity. The principal and assistant principal served as advisors to the emerging Alumni Association. Teachers contacted alumni they knew, including some prior faculty at CHS.

The kickoff event—All Roads Lead Home—included many activities. There was a display of past yearbooks, past band uniforms, and other memorabilia for alums to reminisce about; a photo booth to make new memories; and a *One Team* activity to retire the numbers on the jerseys of successful athletes on past CHS teams. The gathering included a basketball game to maximize school spirit. The kickoff also served as a fund raiser for the school with the sale of CHS items and souvenirs. A local business partner helped by giving the school discounts to produce CHS items.

Alumni registered in advance to enable planners

to prepare food and space requirements. The goal was to get 100 alumni to start the Association, and there were over 90 by the end of the kickoff activity. The new Association created a *Facebook* page, and a short time later there were over 1000 members of the CHS Alumni Association.

The group designed and conducted opportunities for alumni to serve as volunteers at the school; supported a scholarship fund for future graduates; identified mentors for students; and developed networking opportunities for students and alums. The Association sponsors the CHS Honor Roll Ceremony and leads a Career Fair. Alumni also assist students with items to attend the senior prom (e.g., gowns, suits, shoes, and services), and sponsor school beautification projects. These activities are expected to improve student attendance, achievement, graduation rates, college and career plans, and more.

Now, the new Alumni Association has a full set of officers and a growing agenda of good ideas. The organization helps strengthen the school climate—one of the goals in the CHS *Action Plan for Partnerships*. The kickoff and resulting reunion helped celebrate a culture of diversity at CHS with so many alumni from years ago ready and willing to offer support to help improve and strengthen their alma mater. The ATP and school leaders are sure that an Alumni Association is an important—maybe imperative—part of any school’s program of school, family, and community partnerships.

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Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging Our Hispanic Families

Ladson Elementary School
Ladson, SC

TYPE 2



CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



CELEBRATING, EMPOWERING, AND ENGAGING OUR HISPANIC FAMILIES

LADSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LADSON, SC

Ladson calls its diverse community of families with different racial and cultural backgrounds “a place of beauty.” The school is always working to strengthen school, family, and community partnerships with all of its families. In the past school year, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Family Advocate worked to ensure that the school’s Hispanic families were welcome, respected, and felt a sense of belonging.

Knowing that good partnerships contribute to students’ academic and behavioral successes, the ATP and colleagues planned a celebration of the school’s diversity. They wanted to highlight the strengths of Hispanic families, and, at the same time, learn what these families wanted from the school to feel more welcome and to create a more collaborative school climate.

They planned Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging Our Hispanic Families. Teamwork was key to the success of this activity. The planners sent home letters in English and Spanish to invite parents and family members, and advertised the celebration with emails, texts, phone calls, *Zoom*, and in-person meetings.

The ATP and Family Advocate knew there were untapped talents and strengths among the school’s Hispanic families. These parents could help the school’s partnership program strengthen mutual understanding and trust between educators and families.

To help Hispanic families feel welcome, respected, and important to the school, the celebration was conducted entirely in Spanish. The ATP and planning group worked closely with their district-level leader for partnerships, who served as MC, hostess, and translator for the activity. Students participated, too. One student read a poem in Spanish. Others assisted with sign in. A student and family danced the *Macarena* and taught everyone to dance along. The principal and district leader shared information with parents about what it means to be a Title I school, parents’ rights to be involved in school decision making,

and what programs and resources are available to their children.

A highlight of the celebration was a performance by a community dance group—*El Grupo de Dance-Viva Mexico!* The reaction? “They were awesome—asombroso!” This group also owns Mexican Cuisine, a local restaurant, which provided delicious food for the event. Other parents also contributed Hispanic specialties for the celebration.

A Community Engagement Specialist from the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office read-aloud a book in Spanish and played the Hand Pan (i.e., a version of a steelpan played by hand) for a musical treat. An officer spoke about how the group called Hispanic Families and The Community affected her, personally, since the beginning of the COVID crisis. Each family took home backpacks and gift bags containing books, reading packets, and ideas to encourage children’s reading and learning at home.

Over 70 parents and family members, more than 40 students, and 60 teachers and community partners participated in the celebration of school diversity. Parents completed a Spanish language evaluation and noted their satisfaction with the event. They mentioned feeling more comfortable at school. One parent gave a comprehensive response: “We feel more at ease knowing the school is communicating with us and celebrating our culture. We loved the performances, food, and decorations. We are looking forward to more events and resources to meet our needs!”

Lots of meaning and lots of fun—a winning combination. Say it again? “Asombroso!”

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Charleston County School District

TYPE 2

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Clothing Store—Reuse and Recycle

Pinehurst Elementary School
North Charleston, SC

TYPE 1



CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



CLOTHING STORE—REUSE AND RECYCLE

PINEHURST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
NORTH CHARLESTON, SC

What do families need and want from the school and its family engagement program? That question is an important starting place for any discussion about how to improve a program of school, family, and community partnerships.

Pinehurst Elementary School's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) considered requests from students' families. In fact, the Parent Advocate—a leader on the ATP—and the school's social worker visited students' neighborhoods on a regular schedule. They brought boxes of food, books, and goodwill with them to meet students' families and listen to their stories.

They learned that many families wanted assistance with basics—clothing and food. They also saw that families had “stuff” in their backyards that could be discarded or recycled. In response, the ATP and school leaders added an activity to their *One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships*. They planned to open a Clothing Store for one day in the school cafeteria with free clothing for parents, students, and other family members. They also wanted to promote recycling and environmental awareness at the clothing event.

The planners and many dedicated volunteers collected as much clean, new, or gently-used clothing as they could. They collected donations from colleagues at school, churches, businesses, and other parts of the community. They also helped prepare the items for families' selections with labels and sizes. The planners advertised the Clothing Store in several ways—flyers, posters, *Facebook*, website, emails, and other notices.

A small Recycling Education Grant from the State Department of Health and Environmental Control enabled the school to obtain needed supplies, including hangers, racks, tags to note size, gender, and type of clothing, and a mirror for people to check out their choices.

A speaker from the Charleston County Environmental Management Office shared information with families on the *Dos and Don'ts of Recycling*.

That representative brought recycling schedules for families and fun activity books for students.

The day for the Clothing Store was a no-school day. Planners made sure to have a place for games and activities for children. They could make a T-shirt with a message about recycling to take home. Also, a local vaccine clinic came to give free vaccinations to students and families. A taco truck was on campus for those seeking snacks.

About 64 families and their children came to the Clothing Store throughout the afternoon. The event was so successful that the ATP and school leader plan to make it an annual sustainable event for school families.

For about three years, Pinehurst's plans for family engagement were disrupted by COVID-19. Parents were not able to come to the school building. The Clothing Store was a “restart” that promoted family participation at school and increased awareness of the school's commitment to partnership activities that were requested by families.

Students learned about their connections to the environment, and how their actions positively or negatively affected their family and their futures. One student evaluated the benefit of the Clothing Store for her well-being: “I am so excited to find my new princess dress.”

The project leader noted that in the future she will work with an active team. Each team member will be responsible for a different task—there are so many! Her take-away was perceptive: “This is not about personal gratification, but about the impact of the event on the community.” These are wise words that can be recycled!

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TYPE 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Donuts and Dreams with Deputies and Dads

Ladson Elementary School
Ladson, SC

TYPE 6



CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



DONUTS AND DREAMS WITH DEPUTIES AND DADS

LADSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LADSON, SC

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Family Advocate at Ladson Elementary School met to discuss how to increase the participation of students' dads and other key male figures in their education at school and at home. This is a "forever" agenda item in most schools. To strengthen these partnerships, Ladson's ATP designed Donuts and Dreams with Deputies and Dads—a worthy and tasty activity.

The activity had several goals. First, the ATP, teachers, and administrators wanted to meet students' dads. They also wanted to welcome these visitors with useful information on how to become more active partners at school and at home in their children's learning and development.

Ladson is a large school with over 800 students. The planners agreed to identify students who were in need of extra family support. The Family Service Advocate on the ATP contacted the parents of these students and asked them to select a key male figure to attend Donuts and Dreams. A bilingual colleague contacted the Spanish-speaking families. Teachers were concerned about support for students whose dads were not at home or not available to come to school. The invitations, then, were open to dads, grandfathers, uncles, and other important male figures in students' lives. The planners titled the session carefully, citing a well-known quote: "Any man can be a father, but it takes a real man to be a Dad."

Some community partners presented information, stories, and advice to the dads. These included a local pastor, deputies from the Charleston County Sheriff's Office, and an expert on financial planning. A guest speaker inspired the father figures to build positive relationships with their children to make a difference in their lives. Students participated, too. They gave the welcoming address in English and in Spanish, and read a poem about the student-dad relationship. The selected students attended the sessions with their dads. The event was informative and emotional. One dad who worked as a truck driver surprised his

son, who jumped into his arms. It was a moment that melted hearts.

Community groups and the school district set up tables with information about their services. They also donated resources for dads and school supplies for students. These included backpacks, pamphlets, dictionaries, Bombas socks, school supply kits, and gift bags with two books to encourage students and dads to enjoy reading together at home.

The school already organized a dad's group called Ladson Elementary Dads. This group shared their experiences, joys, and challenges with the visitors, and welcomed new partners to their group.

Doughnuts and Dreams was successful. About 95 dads, grandfathers, uncles, and others attended along with 131 of the selected students, and about 50 educators and community partners. The evaluations were positive. One parent noted, "My heart was so full to be able to spend time with my children at their school. I will make it my business to visit the school more and stay in contact with the teachers."

Teachers expect the selected students will improve their classwork, complete homework, and study for tests. They expect them to have more positive attitudes and behaviors, feel less stress, and have stronger self-esteem and social skills. The messages from dads indicated that more of them will volunteer to help the school, and more will attend student activities through the school year.

Doughnuts and Dreams was more than a feel-good event. It was a well-planned do-good activity.

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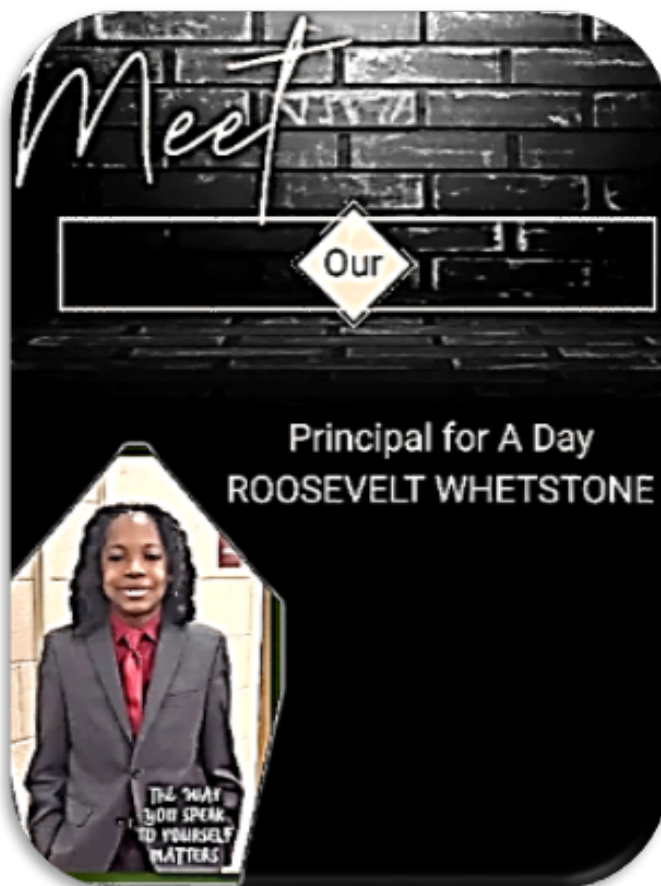
TYPE 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Seeing the Potential and Worth of All
W. G. Sanders Middle School
Columbia, SC

TYPE 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



SEEING THE POTENTIAL AND WORTH OF ALL

W. G. SANDERS MIDDLE SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC

The principal of Sanders Middle School was meeting with students after a senseless killing. One student—a member of the National Junior Honor Society asked: “What do people see when they see me?” Another student answered the question: “You are black and a male with dreads. They see you as a threat to their safety.” This exchange led in a new direction: “How do we want to be seen? And, how can we make that happen?” The students concluded. “We need to show that there is potential and worth in each and every student.”

This was the start of a transformation to make student leadership central to all aspects of the school program—not for one student leader, but for all students. Parents supported student leadership in Richland 1 CHAMPS (Caring Hearts Making Positive Shifts). This service-learning project focused on enabling students to support people with needs at home and in the community.

Teachers gave students greater voice and choice in leadership activities, and helped them showcase their talents and family cultures with pride. Business and faith-based partners supported students’ service-learning projects in the community. One group provided students with leadership training and feedback on their ideas and activities. Another supported other leadership activities, and sponsored a team for a student leadership competition in Las Vegas.

Two 8th grade students were selected as co-chairs of the initiative. They invited students from all grade levels to apply for many leadership roles, including student principal, assistant principals, supervisors, monitors, office aides, administration assistants, and others. There are many opportunities for leadership in a large middle school. All student leaders received training to conduct their roles. The goal was to recognize the potential and worth of ALL students, not just a few from one or two programs.

To celebrate their hard work last year, student leaders invited community and business leaders,

parents, and others to a culminating event. This celebration focused on how student leaders were working to improve the quality of the school, and what they were learning in leadership on bus duty, fire drills, discipline sessions, class observations, and other leadership assignments. Students also worked to solve school problems, help peers resolve conflicts, improve relationships with teachers, and celebrate the diversity of families and students at the school. Students even provided feedback to teachers on instructional practices. Many service learning projects included working with others to solve food insecurity in the community.

To assess progress, the leadership team surveyed students and found that, over the year, they increased self-confidence, motivation to come to school, attendance, and report card grades. The school is waiting to receive achievement scores to review more formal results of this transformation. The activities brought students full circle back to the original question with a new answer. One student leader noted: “When you look at me, I want you to see my worth and potential so clearly that you believe in me. I want you to see a leader.”

The process of growing student leadership skills is not a one-and-done activity. Now, student leaders and group chairpersons are selected in advance for the new school year. A room was dedicated as the students’ leadership office. There will be leadership planning areas in each hall. One business partner reflected on the year’s work: “I believe our future is in good hands.”

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Sip 'n' Paint

Horizon Education Centers - Old Brooklyn
Cleveland, OH



SIP 'N' PAINT

HORIZON EDUCATION CENTER - OLD BROOKLYN
CLEVELAND, OH

Sip 'n' Paint has is a favorite activity in many preschools, including at the Old Brooklyn Center. It's so nice, the school conducted it twice during the school year!

The Old Brooklyn Center has been strengthening its partnership program over time. One key goal is to continue to "grow" the number of parents who participate in activities and who volunteer to assist teachers at the school. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) surveyed parents to check their interests and the activities they like to do with their children. Of course, Sip 'n' Paint was on the list.

Previously, the ATP and teachers hosted the activity. This year, a parent, who had attended previous sessions, volunteered to serve as host. The ATP and teachers agreed that parent leadership would encourage more parents to volunteer their time and talents at the Center.

Everyone helped to advertise the activity with colorful flyers, conversations with parents when they brought or picked up their children, and text messages. Students reminded their parents to sign up because they loved to see and share the results of Sip 'n' Paint, too.

The host parent met with the ATP to discuss the essential details for planning and conducting a successful activity. They selected a theme, time of day, and materials needed. Parents signed up in advance to ensure there were enough art materials, refreshments, and time to participate.

Parents attend Sip 'n' Paint with their children. Sipping juice and painting together is a fun activity that is both thoughtful and exciting. Parents and children think and talk together, and see what others in the class are creating. Each parent-child team decides how to present their ideas on the theme for the day.

This year, the host selected Spring Flowers as the theme. Students and parents considered how they would show shapes and colors of spring flowers.

Tables were set with easels, canvases, paints, paint brushes, paper towels, and water to clean brushes. For sipping, the Center provided juice with a few snacks to enjoy while painting. Butcher paper on each table made it easy to clean up when the painting, sipping, talking, and sharing were done.

The host parent demonstrated how she paints spring flowers. Some chose to paint their own family's favorite flowers or creations. There was a lot of dialogue between parents and children, and by parents with other parents. Some new friendships developed. As a bonus for the day, teachers conducted meet-and-greet and mini-conferences with parents who were waiting for their turn in the activity space.

One challenge was that some families came to participate even though they had not signed up in advance. Experience taught the ATP and host parent to have extra supplies available to keep from having to turn anyone away.

As the children talked and made choices about form and color, they were building important speaking and reading skills. Many of the children's pictures included letters, lines, color mixing, and a story. Some selected titles for their pictures and were ready to share the story behind the painting.

About 30 students and over 40 parents and caregivers attended. A parent noted, "This was a chance to be creative with my kids and meet and talk with other parents." The results were posted on the school's *Facebook* page for everyone to enjoy. Wrote one parent, "We love family painting times." Many wrote, "Let's do this again!"

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PULL UP AND POP YOUR TRUNK

LET'S MAKE A CHANGE ENRICHMENT CENTER
SOUTH EUCLID, OH

During the COVID-19 crisis, Let's Make a Change Enrichment Center developed a toy, health, and food drive in response to their families' needs. The school's business partners—Bite Creole Kitchen and Making the Change Foundation—continued to support Pull Up and Pop Your Trunk last year, after the COVID crisis eased.

The ATP and colleagues promoted the drive by sending flyers to students' families and in other ways (e.g., emails, text messages, radio ads, social media). They also posted flyers in many parts of the community. On a school outing, students passed out flyers to passers-by.

Leaders contacted local businesses and organizations to request donations of goods, services, and funds. The planners placed collection bins at various businesses and restaurants in the community to collect new or gently-used toys, children's winter coats, food, and new items for children's and adults' personal health and hygiene. With monetary donations, the planners shopped for extra toys, hygiene and cleaning products, coats, and food items.

Students at the Center include preschoolers and older children up to 12 years old in various after-school programs. The program emphasizes engaging families to support preschool students' readiness for kindergarten and older students' learning and development through the middle grades. The Center's philosophy makes students active participants in their own learning and gives them roles in special projects. In Pull Up and Pop Your Trunk, students learned to organize and pack the health and hygiene bags with deodorant, body soap, dish soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and other useful family care items. Planners pre-sorted the toys for easy distribution according to the students' age and gender. Coats were labeled by size. Students helped distribute these items at the drive.

School administrators consulted with others and prepared a list of families to receive the goods,

noting each family's demographics (e.g., gender, ages of family members) to personalize each bag. BITE Creole Kitchen and their mentees prepared hot food as a special treat at the drive.

In addition to the ATP, teachers, and students at the Center, over 250 parents and caregivers participated or were served by this activity. The Center also benefited. Some educational toys were delivered to the school for use in its programs. Some new families learned about the good work by the Center and planned to enroll their children.

Evaluations indicated that the drive strengthened the community, sparking feelings of both giving and gratitude. Teachers received cards and emails of thanks from many families. The families who received the items were grateful for goods they could not otherwise afford. Because the activity was conducted before the winter vacation, the items helped families with the holiday. A parent confirmed, "I don't know how I would have done Christmas for my kids without your help." One teacher shared her feelings clearly, "I've never been a part of something so beautiful before!"

It is important to note that the Enrichment Center not only serves its Ohio community, but also reaches out to other communities—near and far. For example, the Center previously conducted a drive to assist over 200 hurricane victims in New Orleans. The ATP and school leaders explain that Pull Up and Pop Your Trunk supports a school goal to help create a strong sense of community by increasing families' confidence and health at home. It is a formidable community service project.

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4

DISTRICT AND ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP





Practices in this section help facilitators in districts and organizations strengthen leadership and assist schools in developing effective programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Enhanced Communication: Kick It Up a Notch!

Pasco School District One

Pasco, WA






ATP Radio Update

Gracie Valle-Chimal: Community Outreach Supervisor

ATP Radio Spot gvalle@psd1.org
Ext 7412




Thank You!

ATP Radio Spots:

- **English** recorded by Jason O'Leary-NHHS & Christopher Babinski-Curie
- **Spanish** recorded by Martha Koestner-Longfellow & Nerida Hernandez-Pasco High

FACTS:

- Pasco Phone lines March 29-April 15
- 64 Radio spots will air from April 12-18
- La Raza 100.1 FM, Fire 104.9 FM, KZHR 92.5 FM, & 98.3 Key



Where Bright Futures Are Made.
See Us Shine!

www.psd1.org



Make your trifold engaging

Capture your audience (parents) by sharing about your school, ways they can become partners, how they can be involved, volunteer opportunities, and decision-making teams: ATP, PTO, etc.

ATP Exhibit Opportunity!

- **Bilingual PAC Conference**
◦ Pasco High, Sat.-Dec. 2
- **District Winter Carnival**
◦ Chiawana, Thurs.-Feb. 23




Due 11/23

We can pick up your trifold at your November ATP meeting or by scheduling it with Kassie or Esmeralda.

Ideas to include:

-  Contact Information
-  ATP meeting schedule
-  Upcoming events
-  Parent Involvement Opportunities
-  Pictures
-  School pride & mascot
-  Volunteer Opportunities
-  Other: sign up sheet, postcard with meeting details, etc.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION: KICK IT UP A NOTCH!

PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE
PASCO, WA

This year, Pasco's partnership theme was *Enhanced Communication* with print and audio media. District leaders wanted to provide schools with tools to help them communicate with all students' parents about their partnership in their children's education.

Terrific Trifolds. District leaders for partnerships distributed trifold display boards to every school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to showcase their partnership programs—pictorially, graphically, and creatively. To help ATPs visualize a good display, district leaders created their own trifold showing the district's scheduled family and community engagement activities for the year.

The ATPs got the message. They decorated their trifolds with school colors, mascots, event photos, ATP meeting dates, volunteer opportunities, and their schedule of partnership activities for the school year. Some schools posted QR codes for families to link to the school's website, teachers, and administrators. One school added a video recording of the principal's welcome message in English and in Spanish.

District leaders made good use of the schools' trifolds. They collected and displayed them at two large district meetings during the year. This was a dramatic and clear way to share the breadth and scope of elementary, middle, and high schools' activities to engage all students' families as partners in education.

Awesome Audio Message. District leaders and school teams worked with the district's Community Outreach Supervisor to create and produce an audio recording about the work of school-based ATPs. They collaborated with a local radio station's DJ to create a 60-second message in English and in Spanish—a conversation between a teacher and parent about the work of school-based ATPs.

The leaders and ATP chairs wrote a script with the information they thought would "sell" their message about the work of school-based ATPs. Then, district leaders, the radio DJ, and ATP chairs

practiced the script and selected the spokespeople to present the audio message. The radio DJ edited and produced the final audio. The recording has aired more than 60 times on local English, Spanish, and bilingual radio stations. Now, the recording can be used by every school on its website, phone, ClassDojo, and other communication platforms. The goal is to ensure that all parents are aware of their school's ATP, its members, and how they can be engaged in the school's partnership program in ways that support their children's success in school.

District leaders estimate that about 12,000 parents and other family and community partners benefitted from both the visual and audio communications on the work of schools' ATPs. Over 18,000 students could benefit from their parents' connections with their schools over the school year. Even the radio DJ was impressed. She noted, "This project motivated me to learn about the ATPs at my children's schools and get more involved. ATPs are a great part of school organization. I hope more parents get the message and become more engaged."

It is a real challenge to ensure that every family is aware of their school's partnership program and how they can participate at school and at home. New families enter every school every year, so the need for clear communications is on-going. Pasco's terrific trio of leaders for partnerships addressed this challenge with two useful tools—renewable trifolds that schools can use to display their partnership plans and activities, and a "timeless" audio recording on the work of ATPs.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LUNCH AND LEARN

CENTER OF EXCELLENCE TO PREPARE TEACHERS OF CHILDREN OF POVERTY

FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY, FLORENCE, SC

The Center of Excellence (COE) to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty at Francis Marion University is a partnership place. Last year, COE leaders reviewed its programs that guide districts and schools to improve their plans and practices of school, family, and community partnerships.

One series of monthly workshops—Lunch and Learn—provided basic information on each of the Six Types of Involvement in the NNPS framework. The sessions focused, in turn, on the theory, research, and exemplary practices for Type 1-Parenting, Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at Home, Type 5-Decision Making, and Type 6-Collaborating with the Community. COE leaders distributed responsibilities for workshop development including writing and preparing presentations, marketing services, presenting activities, recording sessions, and managing registrations.

COE is partnering with about 30 school districts in South Carolina ranging in size from small (3 schools) to large (50+ schools). All districts serve students and families with diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, financial, and educational backgrounds, and a wide range of social-emotional, physical, and spiritual resources. The Center also maintains a contact list of over 10,000 educators and FMU students who are interested in improving and sustaining programs of family and community engagement.

COE conducted a survey of attendees at the prior year's professional development workshops. They reported that lunchtime was the most convenient time for them to attend live-online sessions. COE leaders recorded all sessions for on-demand access that others could "attend" at their convenience. About 400 state, district, and school leaders, teachers, family liaisons from five states attended Lunch and Learn sessions. COE built incentives into each workshop to encourage attendance and sustain interest. Door prizes (or Zoom prizes) included books, gift cards, and free registrations for FMU and COE services.

COE advertised the monthly series on *Twitter* and *Facebook*, by email, and in other communications. An infographic listed the topics for the series and provided easy links for registration. Additionally, the Center announced the availability of these sessions at other meetings and events. The Center director included participation as a component of her concurrent graduate course: Family and Community Engagement in High Poverty Schools.

A final celebration at the end of the series invited participants to make presentations by sharing their own slides illustrating up to 10 best practices that linked to the monthly Lunch and Learn session topics. Attendees reported on activities they implemented, challenges they faced, and whether or how they improved their school program or district leadership on partnerships.

Every session was evaluated by attendees, with an eye to improving future COE professional development activities. A typical response explained, "The time slot was perfect for me, and the recordings filled in for the session I missed. I planned several events that were well-attended." Some also reported that they increased knowledge on how to organize more effective partnership programs: "We never considered goal-based planning as you presented. This may make a big difference for us moving forward."

Lunch and Learn sessions elevated attendees' understanding of the six types of involvement and how activities for all six types can be designed to reach families in different ways and different places—at home, at school, and in the community. For resources, see the COE "on demand library" of professional development sessions on family and community engagement at <https://www.fmucenterofexcellence.org>.

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING BOOSTER SESSIONS

OHIO STATEWIDE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CENTER
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, COLUMBUS, OH

Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center (OhSFEC) hosted two half-day Professional Learning Booster Sessions on Zoom in October and January. The OhSFEC leaders shared responsibilities to develop content, make presentations, and manage communications and registrations. They invited five Ohio district leaders to present information on their most effective leadership strategies. The meetings were designed for regional coaches, district leaders, and school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) in the OhSFEC project. The sessions were publicized on the Center calendar and were included in the agreements with school districts that elected to be part of the OhSFEC network.

Topics for the booster sessions were suggested after the prior year's workshops. Leaders wanted to know more about:

- (1) how to raise awareness of all families about their school's work on family engagement;
- (2) how to redesign family engagement activities so that they remain fresh and relevant; and
- (3) how to conduct feasible evaluations of partnership practices that are implemented.

Awareness. District leaders and school ATPs reported that many families and teachers were unaware of their work to increase and improve family and community engagement. OhSFEC leaders knew that research shows that family awareness of school programs is critical to encourage parents to become engaged in their children's education at school and at home.

Redesign. District leaders and school teams wanted ideas on how to redesign engagement activities, because most efforts for school improvement are not perfect on the first try. Also, new students and families enter schools every year. Engagement activities need to be reviewed and "tweaked" to meet the needs and interests of families and students in attendance.

Evaluations. It is challenging to evaluate the quality and progress of partnership practices because time and funds for evaluations often are limited. OhSFEC has surveys and other tools

that leaders and teams can use to assess different components of their partnership programs.

The three topics are interconnected. Regions, districts, and schools must communicate clearly to build awareness, redesign activities to personalize—or individualize—practices for their own students' families, and evaluate the quality of activities that they implement. One recurring piece of advice is to design or redesign activities so that they may be conducted at home—not only "events" at the school building. OhSFEC leaders shared sample survey items that may be used to evaluate aspects of elementary, middle, and high school partnership programs.

The five district leaders who were invited to share best practices included ideas on how they increase awareness of partnership programs, redesign activities to improve them each year, and evaluate progress. Attendees had time, then, to think about how the information and examples could help them adjust and improve their own programs to engage all students' families in ways that support specific goals for student learning and success in school.

All sessions were evaluated using *Survey Monkey*. Participants indicated that they benefited from the district leaders' descriptions of their challenges and successes with partnership practices. One noted, "[This was] valuable. [My school] has faced many challenges to engage families at the high school level." Attendees suggested a few topics for future sessions including how to make ATP meetings more engaging, and how to tailor partnership practices for families in urban, high-poverty communities.

See OhSFEC's website for copies of the evaluation questions from the booster sessions, and for other useful resources: www.OhioFamiliesEngage.osu.edu

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Mission to Literacy
Calcasieu Parish School Board
Lake Charles, LA



MISSION TO LITERACY

CALCASIEU PARISH SCHOOL BOARD
LAKE CHARLES, LA

Calcasieu Parish School Board is on an important mission—a Mission to Literacy. The district is revising and improving its curriculum and instruction to help all elementary school students meet or exceed reading and literacy standards at each grade level. At the same time, leaders for partnerships are working to engage all families to help students reach these reading goals.

Last year, the District Literacy Team of directors, supervisors, coaches, principals, teachers, and others worked together to revise the reading curriculum, instruction, and materials to help students continually improve their reading skills and attitudes. They explored new books for each grade level, connected books to specific character traits that contribute to student behavior and success, and provided professional development for all teachers to join the Mission to Literacy.

The Literacy Team joined forces with Calcasieu's leaders for school, family, and community partnerships to ensure that students had support from parents and other family partners to strengthen reading skills and attitudes. To help families understand the new reading program, district leaders conducted a series of monthly District Literacy Nights.

Each month, from November to May, a different elementary school was randomly selected to host a District Literacy Night. The school provided space for many "stations" that families visited to learn more about the new reading program, materials, and goals for the Mission to Literacy. Teachers and staff at each host school earned stipends if they worked to bring the meetings for families alive.

At each station, parents and students reviewed and enjoyed featured books for each grade level. They were actively engaged in fun activities (e.g., reading puzzles and games) to build student comprehension, vocabulary, and other reading skills. Middle and high school students also participated in costumes of characters who were encouraging reading.

For example, one station guided by the district's family engagement leader introduced parents to

the PBS-TV program *Molly of Denali*. The show features a native Alaskan girl, her dog, and friends. On their daily adventures, they read "informational texts" such as maps, guidebooks, websites, weather reports, interactive games, and more. The program takes students on reading adventures through Alaska.

Families were excited. Registration filled for each month's meeting. Everyone took home grade-specific books linked to character education, and fun activities to build reading skills at home. Community and business partners were active, too. They provided refreshments, donations, and gift cards for door prizes.

The Mission to Literacy meetings also brought parents back to school to meet and talk with teachers and district leaders after COVID restrictions prohibiting parent meetings were lifted. Over 350 parents and 450 students participated in the monthly meetings, along with about 100 school and district educators.

One educator reported, "District Literacy Nights brought reading alive for students and parents! It was great to see the families have fun learning about the different components of reading comprehension at the various stations." A parent explained, "We most enjoyed the different stations. They were fun-filled and exciting, and encouraged parents and children to interact while learning."

In addition to those attending the Mission to Literacy meetings, all families at all schools were informed about the new literacy curriculum, advances in instruction, and the roles they can play to join the Mission to Literacy.

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Parent Pep Rallies: Motivating and Encouraging Families

Richland County School District One
Columbia, SC



PARENT PEP RALLIES: MOTIVATING AND ENCOURAGING FAMILIES

RICHLAND COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE
COLUMBIA, SC

There is no more exciting time than the start of a new school year. Last year, Richland County School District's seven high schools and their "feeder" middle schools planned how they would welcome families and students back to school. At the request of the district Superintendent, each high school hosted a Pep Rally to help its families and their incoming ninth graders make a successful transition to their new high school.

Each Pep Rally had a full agenda. The Parent and Family Engagement Specialist (PFES) was master of ceremonies. The Superintendent, School Board Chair, host principal, and various parent leaders on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), School Improvement Council (SIC), and PTA participated. They all offered encouraging messages about the importance of family engagement and examples of many ways for parents to volunteer at their child's school, serve on school and district committees, and encourage their child's learning at home. Other leaders and district departments also participated, including translation services, safety and security teams, IT squad, custodians, theater services, and others at each high school.

A Pep Rally needs "pep." This was provided by each high school's band, cheerleading squad, dance club, and ROTC. The students welcomed parents and students at the entrance to their high school and performed prior to the main session.

The guest speaker at each Pep Rally was Ako Kambon, President of the Visionary Leaders Institute. Kambon is an active public speaker on how to help students succeed in grades K-12. At each Pep Rally, he shared tips for parents to be engaged in positive ways to support their children's academic, behavioral and social emotional success in school. One of his main messages was, "Parents must be hands-on participants in the educational process—active partners with teachers and administrators." He is a strong supporter of Richland County's programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

Community and business partners donated

school supplies, new tablets, and other items to support student learning. A "tip sheet" in English and Spanish on how to maximize high school students' success in school was distributed, along with educational games for families to play at home.

Costs for district-level gala activities like the Pep Rallies are usually covered by Title I funds for speakers, books, and materials, along with donations from community and business partners for door prizes, refreshments, and family take-aways.

The district's office of Federal and State Programs created a flyer in English and Spanish for all schools to post on their websites and distribute widely. Partnership leaders at each school sent emails and text messages to all families. The planners wanted everyone to be excited about the new school year, and they succeeded big time. Nearly 600 parents and over 800 students participated, along with more than 300 teachers, administrators and district leaders. These celebrations aim to set the tone for school, family, and community partnerships for the new school year.

QR code sheets helped parents evaluate the Pep Rally they attended. Many families praised the guest speaker, "Please have more events with him or others like him. My family really enjoyed this event!" Another summed things up in a big way, "This was phenomenal!"

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Story Time with Pastors Little Rock School District Little Rock, AR



STORY TIME WITH PASTORS

LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT
LITTLE ROCK, AR

With good stories and some encouragement, children increase their positive attitudes about reading. This leads children to read more stories, which leads them to improve their reading skills. This chain of effects is well known in Little Rock School District (LRSD). District leaders designed a program of community connections—Story Time with Pastors—to reinforce the district’s goals to improve elementary school students’ reading skills and attitudes.

LRSD serves a large percentage of historically underserved students and families. About 80% are African American, over 70% are economically disadvantaged, and over half of the students live in single-parent households. These factors often create challenges for young students. LRSD is working to resolve the challenges with excellent teaching and an emphasis on goal-linked family and community engagement.

The idea for Story Time with Pastors emerged in the community. A local radio show features interviews and discussions with pastors in Little Rock. The host of the show—a volunteer in her child’s school—saw some potential in encouraging the pastors to volunteer to bring stories, wisdom, and good will to the children in LRSD. The district’s department, Volunteers In Public Schools (VIPs), championed the connection and began to work with district leaders for partnerships to set Story Time with Pastors in motion.

On a regular schedule, pastors visit elementary schools to read stories with students. The pastors also represent much needed participation of African American males with students in school. To reinforce the importance of this partnership, the LRSD superintendent attended many sessions with the pastors.

The volunteers’ activities were reported in the local press and on social media. Principals began requesting pastors come to their schools to read aloud with their students. Teachers selected books for each grade level that focused on character traits and behaviors that contribute to student success in

school and in life, such as kindness, tolerance, and eliminating bullying.

More than 95 pastors volunteered to participate. Over time, many of them have read stories with more than 2,000 students in over 100 teachers’ classrooms. One teacher welcomed a volunteer, “What a blessing to have you at our school today. This was an incredible experience for our students and staff.” Said another, “We need you in our schools. . . . Thank you for giving your time to our students.”

Some questions were raised about the connections of schools with pastors. LRSD leaders made clear that the volunteers did not talk about religion or their churches at school, and did not wear religious symbols or clothing on their visits. Everyone honored the separation of church and state.

School teachers, administrators, and others were excited about the program. They referred their own pastors to the program and encouraged them to volunteer. Often students recognized their pastors from their neighborhoods and were excited to see them in school. The volunteers helped bring the joy of reading to many LRSD classrooms.

Connections with the community to support school goals for student learning are important. LRSD’s leaders for partnerships are considering connections with other professional groups including leaders of Hispanic organizations, women business leaders, college students with diverse racial and linguistic backgrounds, elected officials, and others. There are many groups in every community who are ready to read and ready to inspire children to read.

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