

# PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



An annual collection from the members of the  
**National Network of Partnership Schools**

Johns Hopkins University

# 2019

Edited by

Brenda G. Thomas, Briana S. Bostic, Marsha D. Greenfield, and Joyce L. Epstein



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### MEMBER BENEFITS

- » *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Fourth Edition*
- » Monthly *E-Briefs* from NNPS Facilitators
- » *Promising Partnership Practices* (annual book)
- » *Partnership Awards* for national recognition
- » Leadership Institutes
- » NNPS Webinars
- » On-call technical assistance by phone, e-mail, and website
- » Annual evaluation of program quality (*UPDATE*)
- » Research results, tools, and materials that help meet Title I requirements for parent and family involvement
- » Website: [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

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Starting Point, Cleveland, OH/Climate Section**

**Rainier Beach High School, Seattle School District, Seattle, WA/District Section**

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# INTRODUCTION

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## *Promising Partnership Practices 2019*

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

Each year, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) looks forward to seeing the activities implemented by members to improve family and community engagement. We are confident that our research provides evidence of effective structures and processes that increase the quality of partnership programs. We are delighted that members of NNPS use the tools and guidelines in our *Handbook for Action* to plan goal-linked programs and practices. But, we know that YOU—leaders for partnerships in schools, districts, organizations, and states—are the *implementers*. Implementation takes research off the shelf and puts evidence-based practices into action!

This book is simply inspiring! The contents reveal how schools, districts, and organizations are applying evidence-based approaches (i.e., teamwork, written plans, implementation, and evaluation) to plan and conduct activities that welcome all families and increase student learning and development. There are over 60 good ideas in this book—52 practices from schools and 11 from districts and organizations in NNPS in the U. S. and in Scotland. The contributors are from economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities—in locations like yours!

This year, we see a few topics “trending” across the country. Here are three themes that weave their way through sections of *Promising Partnership Practices 2019*:

- **Transitions.** In sections on partnerships for student Achievement, College and Career plans, Transitions, Climate, and District Leadership, see how schools are helping students and their families make smooth transitions across the grades. There are well-planned activities to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten; help elementary students and families meet new teachers; move successfully from middle school to high school; and ensure that high school students and families know what it takes to graduate from high school with plans for the future. These are life-changing moments that require excellent school, family, and community partnerships. Our question for readers: How are you engaging parents, family members, and community partners to *transition with students* to the next school adventure?
- **Students as the “stars” of partnership activities.** We think a lot about how teachers, parents, and community partners communicate and collaborate, but *students* are the main actors in their own education. They are the reasons for strong partnerships. When students are “in charge” or “in the spotlight” or conducting interactive activities with parents, more families participate at school and at home. This is true across grade levels and in all communities. See examples in many sections of *Promising Partnership Practices 2019* where students show or share academic skills, good behavior, and noteworthy talents. By doing so, students help strengthen partnership programs. Our question for readers: How do you place students at the center of school, family, and community connections?
- **Co-constructed partnership activities.** Many engagement activities in this edition were suggested or requested by parents. Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) are using surveys, formal meetings, and informal discussions to learn what parents want to know and how parents want to contribute to school and district partnership programs. In one example, parents suggested having *fewer* engagement activities at the school building, but using those occasions for meaningful exchanges about how to help students at home. In several places, you will see that parents are contributing their time, knowledge, talents, and interests to enrich the school curriculum with presentations in students’ classes. Our question for readers: How do you *listen* to parents to hear their views about good partnerships and how they may help to improve a school’s program of family and community engagement?

There are many more good ideas in this edition of *Promising Partnership Practices 2019*. Consider adopting or adapting activities to strengthen your program of family and community engagement.

### **This Collection . . .**

Take a look! There are four Tables of Contents (TOC) to help you find goal-linked practices for your program of family and community engagement.

- 1. GOALS FOR PARTNERSHIPS.** This TOC lists family and community engagement activities by academic goal (i.e., reading, STEM, other subjects); behavioral goal (i.e., student behavior, health, multicultural awareness, transitions, and plans for college or career); and the goal to ensure a welcoming school climate for all partners in children’s education. **Also, see excellent activities from districts, and organizations** to strengthen leadership and guide schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs).
- 2. SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT.** This TOC identifies activities on **parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.** Although each activity is identified with one main type of involvement, each practice may activate more than one type.
- 3. SCHOOL AND POLICY LEVELS.** This TOC lists activities by school level—from preschools, elementary, middle, and high schools in NNPS. Remember—many activities may be used or adapted at other school levels. **Also, see activities for district, organization, and state leaders.**
- 4. CONTRIBUTORS.** This TOC identifies the contributors to this book by location, city/state, and title of activity. Note that activities developed in one community (urban, suburban, or rural) may be adapted to meet conditions and interests in other locations.

**Also see. . .**

**NNPS WEBSITE.** This edition of *Promising Partnership Practices 2019* will be posted at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org). One print copy of *Promising Partnership Practices 2019* is sent to each active member-site in NNPS. See the Order Form on the website for additional print copies.

**NNPS SAMPLERS.** NNPS *SAMPLERS* provide an easy way to review ten good activities from prior years’ books of *Promising Partnership Practices*. The *Samplers* focus on family and community engagement in **reading, writing, math, science, health, the arts, homework, attendance, behavior, career awareness/postsecondary planning, transitions to new schools, involving fathers, involving grandparents, involving families with students in summer learning, increasing family awareness of school tests/assessments, and for improving partnership programs in preschools, middle schools, and high schools.** Each *Sampler* includes a one- page summary of research on the featured topic. See all *Samplers* in the section Success Stories.

**MEMBERS ONLY.** Members of NNPS can access prior books of *Promising Partnership Practices* from 2009 to 2019 and **all Samplers using the NNPS Members Only Code.** The code changes each January for active members who renew membership from year to year. NNPS reminds members about the Member-Only Code in monthly E-Briefs.

## **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) provides professional development and on-going technical assistance to improve leadership for programs of school, family, and community partnerships. NNPS assists schools, districts, organizations, and state departments of education to develop and sustain research-based partnership programs that contribute to student learning and development.

- Each Partnership School forms an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), writes a goal-linked partnership plans, and conducts partnership practices using the framework of Six Types of Involvement to engage all families in their children’s education in different ways and in different places.
- Districts, organizations, and states are guided to develop policies, provide leadership, and directly facilitate schools’ ATPs to organize, implement, evaluate, and continually improve their programs of family and community engagement.

All members of NNPS benefit from on-going research at Johns Hopkins University. In annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices*, members share best practices with each other to improve the school climate, engage all families, and increase student success in school.

For more information, visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).



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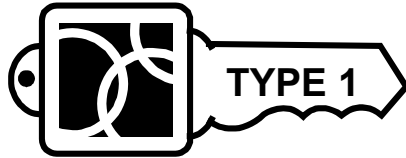
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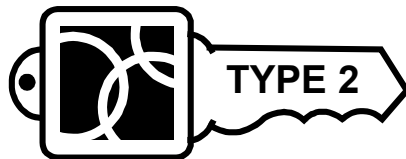


# THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

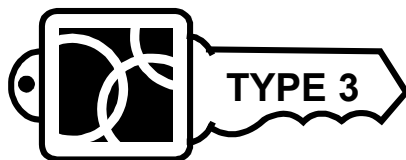
## EPSTEIN'S SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT



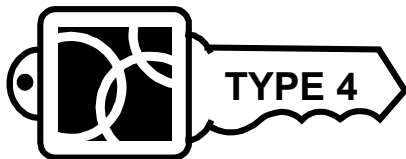
**PARENTING:** Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.



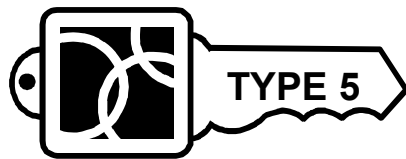
**COMMUNICATING:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.



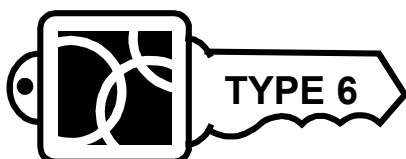
**VOLUNTEERING:** Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in other locations to support students and school programs.



**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 PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.

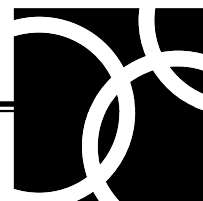


**COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY:** Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.



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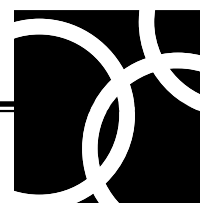
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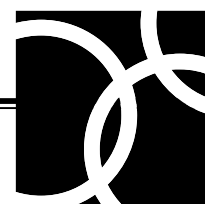
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# 1

## ACADEMIC GOALS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet academic goals in reading and literacy, math, science, other academic subjects, or multiple subjects.





## BOOKS AND BEYOND

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MOSS BLUFF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKE CHARLES, LA

**I**n good reading programs, students learn to read fiction and nonfiction books and materials. This includes fabulous stories and tales of fantasy, as well as biographies, science, history, and other informational texts. State achievement tests, like the *Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP)*, include questions for students to demonstrate their reading competencies and comprehension of diverse reading materials.

Moss Bluff Elementary School enrolls 975 students. Over 40% are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. About 80% of the students are white, over 12% are African American, and others are Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. To address a school improvement goal in reading, the school librarian, Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), reading teachers, and administrators included an activity in the One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships for parents to help students strengthen their skills in reading informational texts.

Books and Beyond enabled parents and students to work together to practice reading and interpreting non-fiction/factual information. This was a “trial” program for students in grade 3. Once a week for six weeks, third graders attended an after-school instructional program to learn more about non-fiction books, online research resources, brochures, newspapers, maps, encyclopedias, and almanacs. The librarian presented students with engaging content and fun activities related to reading informational texts and using good grammar and punctuation. Topics included owls, bees, map reading to travel the world, and other student interests.

Students—hungry after school—enjoyed a light meal before the program began. Administrators and staff found that food and door prizes were incentives for consistent attendance.

A number of community and school partners helped implement Books and Beyond. Teachers worked with the librarian to teach the after-

school lessons and prepare materials. The librarian wrote grants to obtain the books and materials for the program, and received over \$2000 from Grow Grant Junior League, Grumman, and the Louisiana Reading Association.

Administrators assisted in identifying students’ needs, scheduling, obtaining donations, and completing grant applications. In response to a letter with an itemized list of supplies and food needed for the students, several local business and community partners in education donated newspapers, door prizes, and food for the program. Community partners included The American Press, Walmart Neighborhood Market, Taco Bell, and Popeyes. They also attended some after school sessions, reinforced the importance of engaging parents with students on take-home activities, and distributed door prizes.

Every week, students completed a survey to report what they learned, whether they enjoyed each session, and how they would improve the experience. Each week, students took home an activity to practice with a family partner.

Parents and students completed a culminating survey at the end of the sixth week. About 30 students, 60 parents and or other caregivers, 15 community members, and 13 teachers, staff and administrators worked together on this program. One student reported, “I love using maps now.” Others also benefitted. Teachers and parents learned more ways to discuss nonfiction informational text with young students, especially on topics related to science and social studies. With the materials tested and improved, Books and Beyond could be implemented with all students as part of the school’s reading curriculum.

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## FORGING FAMILY LITERACY: BOOKS FOR BABIES AND ADULTS

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DELMAE HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC

**S**tudents build literacy skills and attitudes at home even before they are old enough to attend school. Delmae Heights Elementary School supported family literacy and a love of reading with two book-exchange programs. The school organized Board Books for Babies for infants and toddlers and Free Little Libraries for parents and community members.

The South Carolina State Department of Education set goals for all schools to promote preschoolers' reading readiness for kindergarten and family engagement in reading at all grade levels. Delmae's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) included Board Books for Babies and Free Little Libraries in its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships to improve reading skills and attitudes.

The culturally diverse school serves about 750 African American, White, Asian, Hispanic, and other students in grades K-4. Many families do not have extra funds to buy new books. There are books in all classrooms and the school library for students at varied reading levels and on students' interests and backgrounds, but two gaps in reading materials were clear.

To help preschool-age students enjoy books and read with a parent or older sibling at home, the ATP, teachers, and other partners collected Board Books for Babies in the month of February. Parents, family members, and community partners cleaned their shelves of sturdy, gently-used board books that their children had outgrown, and donated them for other families and children to enjoy. The call for donations came in a parent newsletter and in other communications from the school to families and the community. The shelves of Board Books for Babies were placed in the school entryway so

that families and current students could borrow them, read them with toddlers at home, and return them for a new title.

Also, two Free Little Libraries with books for adults were placed outside the school near two car lanes. Parents and community partners could access the books when they dropped off or picked up their children, or outside of school hours. The librarian remarked, "The Free Little Libraries add an extra touch of community outreach to increase literacy in the home." Parents were encouraged: "If you see an interesting book, you may borrow it, read it, and return it to the Free Little Library."

The school's Association of Parents and Teachers awarded a grant of about \$1400 for the shelves and labels for Board Books for Babies, and for the well-built units for Free Little Libraries. Teachers and administrators promoted the programs on the school's social media platform. The art teacher created a logo for Board Books for Babies showing diverse young'uns reading, as a way to welcome everyone as they entered the school and to ensure that books are returned for others to enjoy.

The principal and many teachers commented on how Board Books for Babies helped parents and older siblings read aloud with toddlers, which encouraged preschoolers to explore books, connect text with visual images, and get a head start on reading. The literacy coach noted that the program could be replicated easily: "All schools have parents, babies, and toddlers coming through the doors each day. This practice is inexpensive and supportive of our current and future Delmae students and parents."

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## GRANDPARENTS DAY AT THE BOOK FAIR

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BELL CITY SCHOOL  
BELL CITY, LA

**G**randparents and other family and community elders can play a big role in supporting children’s love of reading and improving literacy skills. Bell City School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators knew that grandparents and grandchildren would enjoy a book fair together.

Bell City School (PreK-5) serves just over 700 students. It is located in a rural section of the school district. Each year, the school hosts a Book Fair to encourage children’s reading for pleasure. Students’ grandparents had asked school leaders for ways to become more engaged in their grandkids’ school activities. This year, the ATP and school leaders linked the Book Fair to Grandparents Day—a “two-fer” that made good sense.

Parents on the ATP suggested this connection as a natural way for grandparents to have some time with their grandchildren at school on a purposeful activity. The students agreed. They decorated cards to invite their grandparents or “substitute grands” if grandparents were not nearby.

Grandparents’ Day at the Book Fair was publicized on the school website, monthly activities calendar, and school *Remind* system. Parents relayed invitations to grandparents and other elders in their families or community.

Families received information that there would be good books for students at all age levels, and for students with different interests and reading levels. Students could use the books as part of the school’s *Accelerated Reading (AC)* program. AC is a computer-based program that helps students strengthen their skills reading fiction or nonfiction books or materials, and enables teachers and parents to monitor students’ progress. Each student proceeds at

his/her own rate and takes a quick quiz to move to the next reading level. The individualized AC program lends itself well to selecting books at a Book Fair.

The librarian and teachers created a schedule for all classes to visit the Book Fair, and to ensure that there were not too many people in the library at one time. ATP members and Student Council volunteers greeted the grandparents as they arrived, and directed them to the library. A photo booth with handheld props was set up for the students and grands to pose for pictures using their phones or other cameras.

About 200 grandparents and elders attended, and nearly 360 students and 50 community members participated. One student commented, “I was so excited to show my grandma the library and she bought me two books. It will be so much fun to read them together.”

The ATP recognized that it was a challenge to have so many attending. They had to match classrooms of students with the arrival of grandparents, but it all worked out. Students and grandparents purchased new books at appropriate reading and interest levels. This should improve students’ reading skills and love of reading.

The school librarian remarked that everyone enjoyed celebrating books and reading on Grandparents’ Day at the Book Fair. Notably, the fair’s profits surpassed the total of previous book fairs. These funds support partnerships and other school programs. A school counselor commented, “It was heartwarming to see the students interacting with their grandparents and other invitees—simply enjoying the fact that they had visitors at school.”

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## LITERACY & LEARNING / DONUTS FOR DADS

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EDWARD E. TAYLOR ELEMENTARY  
COLUMBIA, SC

TYPE 4

READING & LITERACY

**M**ost children are introduced to reading at home before they start school. National data indicate that most parents read to their toddlers before they enter preschool or kindergarten. Taylor Elementary wanted to encourage that good habit through the grades. One school improvement goal was to share reading tips and strategies with parents that they could enjoy with their child at home at all grade levels. As they worked toward this goal, they aimed to bring more fathers and male role models into the school. They used the familiar Donuts for Dads format, but added an academic spin.

Taylor Elementary includes about 275 mainly African American students, PreK-5. Just about all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) developed a delightful Literacy & Learning/Donuts for Dads activity. Students received an invitation to come with dad, grandfather, uncle, older brother, or other male relative, caregiver, friend, or community partner. The activity also was publicized in flyers, the school newsletter, and auto-phone reminders.

The reading coach developed a clear and simple handout for parents of reading tips and strategies they can use at home to conduct positive conversations with their students about books and stories. In the auditorium, the reading coach modeled a read-aloud of *Pug the Pig*. She asked pointed questions that dads or moms could ask at home when they read aloud with their child. She also advised dads that it was important to read with their child for a short time each day or in the evening at bedtime.

A guest speaker from the Midlands Fatherhood Coalition, a community partner, was invit-

ed to present information on a number of topics of interest to the fathers and father figures attending. He spoke about the importance of positive role models in students' lives. He provided information on workshops available to fathers about job interviews, soft skills, and modern-day dress in the workplace. The Fatherhood Coalition's representative discussed strategies for keeping an open dialogue with children and supporting them in their education. One grandfather reflected on the presentation saying, "Mr. Jordan shared good information."

The ATP, teachers, and administrators also shared suggestions for how dads, moms, and other family members can become actively engaged in the school community. After the discussions, the guests visited their child's classroom.

Nearly 40 fathers and other male role models attended, and expressed interest in future activities and events at school. One dad admitted, "I need to come to more seminars." Another stated, "Please have more seminars like this."

Students stand to benefit by having dads and other members of the family informed about how to support them at school and at home. At Literacy & Learning, teachers and the guests met and talked with each other, and began to establish new relationships about their shared interest in each child's success in school. Teachers anticipate more frequent and more focused engagement from the dads and other family members who attended. One teacher shared her thoughts, "It was such a joy to see so many male family figures in our school." Taylor Elementary School's administrators will be working to keep the interest and energy of Literacy & Learning moving in this positive direction.

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## ONE BOOK-ONE SCHOOL

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ORCHARD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
RICHLAND, WA

Orchard Elementary, a culturally diverse school of students (K-5), has a meaningful mission—Grow Passionate Minds and Compassionate Hearts. This goal extends to school, family, and community partnerships to increase students’ love of reading and reading skills. Having had success with a One Book-One School experience in the past, teachers and administrators elected to engage parents and students in another exchange to develop students’ passion for reading.

A read-aloud book for students and parents in the elementary grades—was *The Bee Tree* by Patricia Polacco. In this story, a young girl learns about bees, honey, and other important lessons from her grandfather and neighbors.

Many partners worked together to select the book and implement the week-long program. Each day teachers, families, community members, and administrators focused on one section of the book to read aloud with students. Students were assigned vocabulary to learn in each section. Parents also read the assigned section each day, as did teachers. Community members came to the school library to read with some students. Students also read with fellow students who were “literacy buddies.” One parent noted, “*The Bee Tree* was the perfect fit for both my primary and my intermediate student.”

Each day following the reading of a section, a question of the day was read over the intercom by an administrator. Students at each grade level worked in class to answer the comprehension questions and log their vocabulary words. When students answered the questions, their answers were taken to the main office. Each afternoon, several students from each grade level were recognized by administrators for their efforts and received a small gift. Students were encouraged to go home and discuss the questions and vocabulary with their family before reading the next section of the book.

Teachers incorporated the messages of the book into their lesson plans for the week. Many classrooms wrote about the book, created art pieces, and used the book as a starting point to learn more about bees and other insects. At the end of the week, the librarian recognized students who wrote in their vocabulary logs each day. By the end of the week, the school foyer was filled with artistic representations of scenes and messages from *The Bee Tree*.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) purchased enough books for the school and community for a total of about \$500. Families either purchased or were gifted the book. In order to garner support for One Book-One School, parents received notes about the upcoming practice. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) held meetings with teachers and parent representatives to collect ideas about which book to select and to plan discussion questions. Information about One Book-One School was shared on the school website, reader board, Facebook page, and big screen monitor at the school’s entrance.

One Book-One School engaged all students, parents, and staff to foster student passion for and perseverance in literacy skill building. The principal reflected, “Parents stated they loved having time with their child to read the book, talk about it, and to know what types of comprehension questions to ask at home.”

Note: One Book-One School was designed and developed by Orchard ES as a one-week program to increase family reading and children’s interests and skills. An organization, Read to Them, has a guided program *One School, One Book* for those seeking guidance for similar programs.

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## ORGANIZE FAMILY NIGHTS BY HOME LANGUAGE

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AKI KUROSE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

**A**t Aki Kurose Middle School, a major improvement goal is to welcome and engage all students' families at the school and in their children's education. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) has a full plan to meet this goal. This group redesigned the school's Family Engagement Literacy Night to meet with families by home language.

Aki Kurose is located in southeast Seattle. The school serves a racially and linguistically diverse population of over 650 students in grades six to eight. About 20% of the students receive English Language Learning services. About half of the families speak languages other than English at home.

Prior family literacy and math nights were organized by grade level. With one bilingual staff member per language, it was not possible to have translators or interpreters for all families across grade levels at the same time. Although parents from all language groups were "present" and seemed to enjoy the Family Nights with their children, many could not fully participate by sharing their ideas or asking questions. It was clear that a redesign was needed to enable all parents to be active partners and communicators in all languages.

Administrators and teachers worked together with the district leader for partnerships to plan the "new" Family Engagement Literacy Night organized by home languages. Parents from different language groups suggested topics that were important to them. Community members added information on Washington's *Speak Your Language* campaign, which is sponsored by One America—a statewide immigrant advocacy organization, and the *Seal of Biliteracy*, which recognizes students with strong bilingual abilities. Bilingual Instruction Assistants (IAs) worked with the ATP and teachers on ways to present and conduct learning activities that were part of each session. Family Literacy Night

was publicized with multi-lingual posters, robo calls, website, Facebook, an information app, and individual calls to families in their home language.

After a warm welcome by the principal, everyone enjoyed dinner in the cafeteria. Then, students, families, and staff went to different classrooms, by language group, to talk about ways to support students in reading and literacy skills. Specific attention was given to the six most common home languages: English, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Oromo & Amharic (combined group). Parents who spoke other languages joined the group with which they felt most comfortable.

In each classroom, a Bilingual Instructional Assistant led the activity. Story picture books in home languages were checked out from the Seattle Public Library for each group session. A teacher led a fun learning activity for all grades and all languages. Parents and children described a favorite childhood memory and discussed or wrote about it in their home language.

Over 60 students and 50 parents attended. Parents evaluated their experiences. They reported that they felt welcome at the school, presentations were easy to understand, and they could use the ideas from their sessions with their children at home. The result of the redesigned Family Night was that more parents and other family partners were actively engaged in discussions with teachers, interpreters, and other families, and more were actively engaged with their child on the learning activities. One Vietnamese parent captured the views of many others: "This event is much better than last time. We can participate and get help in our own language."

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## READING & DONUTS WITH DAD

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STONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SAGINAW, MI

**S**tone Elementary School, PreK-6, serves over 300 students. Most are African American and there are small percentages of white, Hispanic, and Native American students. All receive free breakfast and lunch at school. The school website claims its motto: “Raise Students’ Expectations and Celebrate Accomplishments.” This is an ambitious goal—a combination of setting high standards and recognizing students’ hard work at all grade levels. In that spirit, the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) discussed ways to engage more fathers and father figures with their children on reading at school and at home.

The PAC worked with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), and other teachers and administrators in planning Reading & Donuts with Dad. They agreed that they wanted to welcome dads and other male role models at a breakfast meeting that was focused on students’ reading skills. Many schools have found that when parents and other family partners read with children, the youngsters are more likely to demonstrate and celebrate their reading skills and progress. The activity also introduced parents to ways to support their children’s reading and reading together at home.

The planning group organized the activity, selected grade-appropriate library books and other reading materials, and obtained the supplies and treats needed for Reading & Donuts with Dad. Many people helped make this a good experience. Teachers and others publicized the activity on the school’s social media, via robo calls, and in a special issue of the school newsletter. The school custodian assisted by setting a message on the school marquee. The planning group and others set up tables and chairs in

the media center and in the adjacent hallway in preparation for students and their guests. They selected books for students at all grade levels, reading levels, and interests.

Dads, father figures, and moms (who also attended) were guided to the media center. They were welcomed by the principal and assistant principal. Everyone had donuts and drinks. Students chose a favorite book from those placed on the library tables. For about an hour, the students and their guests took turns. Dads read to their children, and students read aloud to their dads. Then, they talked together about the stories.

About 60 dads and about 90 students celebrated reading, their love of good donuts, and their love of good books. At the end of the hour, each dad or guest filled in a Quick Post-It Survey to evaluate their time at school. Most of them extolled being with their child and participating at school. One stated, “I enjoyed spending time and reading with my child.” Another reflected, “I will be reading with my child more at home.” Some enjoyed meeting and talking with other parents for the first time.

Teachers knew that it was important to shine a spotlight on the school’s reading program and its goals for student success. They wanted parents to see that encouraging students to read at home and reading aloud with their children would support and advance the work that students do in class. Activities that involve parents in goal-linked ways—such as in reinforcing the importance and fun of reading good books—make the school’s partnership program more meaningful.

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## REAL MEN READ

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A. J. LEWIS GREENVIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
AND MEADOWFIELD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

**A**t Greenview Elementary, teachers are committed to providing a quality education to all students. Each year, the school selects a motivating theme. Last year's theme was Building Champions. Every Scholar. Every Day. Whatever it Takes.

This ambitious theme requires attention to school, family, and community partnerships. One activity, Real Men Read, aimed to help students increase knowledge, skills, and experiences to become confident and enthusiastic readers. In addition, the activity supported the school's goal to help fathers and male role models encourage students—boys and girls—to read to learn and to read for fun.

The district superintendent initiated a Male Mentor Initiative. Real Men Read fit right in with this intentional outreach to dads and others to read to students in class. The activity aimed to demonstrate strong parental engagement, community partnerships, and an active love of reading good books.

Real Men Read was publicized through weekly folders that go home to parents, school announcements on the morning news show, community outreach, and the school's marquee. In addition, male parents, guardians, identified father figures, and community partners were invited to read to a class.

Administrators contacted the readers for Real Men Read. Upon arrival, the men signed in, received their classroom assignment, enjoyed breakfast, and marched to classes in a Real Men Read Parade. At 8:30 a. m., the theme song from Rocky played throughout the school. Children lined the hallways holding banners and chanted, "Real men read!" They waved as 50 men walked in, waving and smiling.

Students from the school's Gentlemen's Club escorted the readers to their respective classrooms. The readers introduced themselves and read a book selected from the school library.

The selected books were appropriate for each grade level. The men took about 30 minutes to read and discuss the books with students. When they finished reading, teachers presented them with a token of appreciation—an autographed and framed photo of the students from that class.

Then, the men were welcomed back to the school media center to network with each other, and with teachers and administrators. They gave feedback on the activity. One reader's comments were echoed by others, "Please invite me again anytime."

The cost of implementing this promising practice was about \$300, paid by Title I funds. The school library provided many of the needed resources. The new relationships with men from the community strengthened the school's partnership climate. Best of all, students benefitted from seeing many male leaders from the community enjoy reading with their class. News personalities, parents, business owners, teachers, pastors, police officers, and former college presidents took the time to engage with the Greenview's students.

Meadowfield Elementary School in Columbia, SC, also conducted a successful Real Men Read activity. At Meadowfield, books were chosen for the readers. Participants included fathers, friends, community leaders, and members of the District's Board of Commissioners. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) reports that several readers began to serve as mentors to students and school volunteers.

Both Greenview and Meadowfield's activities proved to hundreds of students that all kinds of Real Men Read!

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## CASTLIO STEM DAY

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CASTLIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
ST. CHARLES, MO

**I**n this technologically advancing world, it is important for youngsters to be excited about STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math). Previously, Castlio Elementary conducted STEM Nights, but this year the ATP, teachers, and administrators scheduled a STEM Day so that all students, K-5, could participate with parents, family, and community partners in STEM activities.

The large school of nearly 800 students is always a busy place. It is strongly committed to school, family, and community partnerships. Prior STEM Nights were filled with activities for active learning and were well attended. But, as with any evening activity, not every student or parent could attend. At a daytime celebration of STEM, every student can participate, along with parents and community partners who are able to attend sometime during the school day.

Prior to STEM Day, the ATP sent home an e-News announcement asking parents if they had a STEM background, and if they would like to conduct an activity with students. Some technology experts at the district office volunteered to conduct a STEM station, as did some community members in STEM fields. The ATP and school leaders used a Google tool to keep track of volunteers, contact information, activities, needed supplies, and schedules.

Many consider it an important advance in the quality of a partnership program when teachers identify and include parent and community partners' skills and talents to enrich the school curriculum and students' experiences. At Castlio, all the STEM activities were set up at stations in the gym.

A second grade teacher and library specialist purchased supplies, scheduled participants, and made a map of the STEM activities. The ATP, students, teachers, and volunteers set up 21 activity stations. The ATP gave teachers a schedule to rotate groups of students through three STEM stations of their choice (about 10-15

minutes per activity) in an allotted time slot of about 50 minutes.

Parents, community partners, and ten students served as teachers/facilitators/coaches of the STEM activities. There were exciting and varied stations. They included: technology in flight and animation; science of health in creating a model of a lung and studying the simulation of a pig lung; math graphing; and engineering a tall structure with limited materials. Students experimented with circuits, coding, robots, magnets, Popsicle stick catapults, coding and activities with Sphero, and creating stop-motion animation. Students also could participate in a balloon tower challenge, stacking cups challenge, marble run, marshmallow-toothpick challenge, force and motion games, and other fun-STEM competitions.

Castlio STEM Day funding for supplies and lunch came from the Parent and Teacher Organization's Family Engagement Budget and from previous funds that the school earned at a book fair. Students, volunteers, and the custodial staff assisted with clean up.

In addition to the parent and community STEM experts, volunteers, students, teachers, administrators, and staff, STEM Day was attended by some district administrators. The ATP sent thank you notes after STEM Day to all participants.

All students participated, along with over 40 family members and 15 community partners. A kindergarten student confided, "I wish every day was STEM Day." A community group stayed beyond its 3-hour scheduled time because "it was so much fun." Clearly, it was full-STEM-ahead for Castlio students!

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## MATH NIGHT

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GREEN ROAD EARLY LEARNING CENTER  
HIGHLAND HILLS, OH

TYPE 4

STEM

**G**reen Road Early Learning Center is a Head Start Center serving mainly African American students and families. It is supported by the Council for Economic Opportunities of Greater Cleveland (CEOGC) and guided by the Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-K program. The school emphasizes the importance of education and family engagement starting in the preschool years.

Teachers and administrators at Green Road are always working to ensure that parents feel as welcome at the school as their children do. They believe that parents have important influence on their children's math-, reading-, and social-readiness for a successful transition to kindergarten. As one part of the program of family and community engagement, the staff explored ways for parents to understand and conduct math readiness activities with their preschool children to help prepare them to enter kindergarten.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the Parent Committee worked together on a Math Night that would spark parent-child interactions for learning early and basic math concepts. Teachers designed goal-linked math activities to conduct with parents and children.

They ordered the materials they needed, for a total cost of about \$150. They considered how their rooms should be arranged to accommodate parent visitors, and were assisted by the custodial and maintenance staff. They publicized the activity in the school newsletter, flyers, parent information board, and by word of mouth. Community members posted flyers in the neighborhood.

On the day of Math Night, volunteers arrived three hours before start time to set up materials on activity tables. Parents and students arrived

and worked together on math. Activities and games included number recognition; counting forward and backward; comparing sizes, shapes, and patterns; knowing more than and less than; and so on. Table leaders stamped children's Math Passports to record that students and families visited and completed the math game or activity at their tables. When students' Math Passports were complete, they received a follow-up art kit to take home. The kit included instructions and art supplies for students and families enjoy. There are, of course, some interesting links of art and math.

Parents also were encouraged to sign up as a school volunteer, specifying the hours they would like to assist at school and their talents or interests. Teachers at Green Road greatly value parent volunteers who assist them and the students. Each classroom has a poster that displays its growing cadre of parent volunteers and the hours they assist throughout the year.

Nearly 50 students and 60 of their parents attended Math Night. Parents provided reactions to Math Night on an exit survey. They reported they felt "very informed" and could see that math is just part of everyday life. One parent stated, "These were creative and easy ways to teach math at home and at school."

Many parents signed up to volunteer after seeing their child's excitement about having them there to learn math. The school staff and parent volunteers discussed more ideas for expanding Math Night to include light refreshments, gift card raffles, and volunteers dressed in STEM career costumes.

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## STEM NIGHT / MATH NIGHT INTEGRATED

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SAGINAW, MI

**S**ometimes people forget that STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) includes *math* as one of the key academic and career-linked subjects. To ensure that attention to math learning received its due, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and Parent Advisory Council (PAC) at Rouse Elementary combined the title of its STEM and Math Night.

Rouse Elementary is a Title I school serving about 250 students, PreK-6. About 70% of the students are African American and 20% are Hispanic, plus small percentages of other groups. Parents were polled on their preferences for engagement activities. They suggested that there should be fewer events with more substance to make their engagement with the school and with their children's learning more meaningful. Teachers were working hard with students to increase and improve math and science skills. The combined foci of STEM and Math Nights seemed to be a win-win for students and parents.

Math and science teachers planned, organized, and publicized the event using multiple communications and RSVPs. They also contacted several STEM and math partners in the community. The ATP contacted the public library, local colleges, and various businesses and associations to identify and invite science and math participants from the community.

The teachers and ATP were assisted by parent volunteers who helped set up and take down the activity stations in the gym and library where all of the action took place. The STEM experts from the community agreed to bring their own materials for active learning by students and parents. They arrived early to set up their stations with hands-on learning experiences that would be interesting and fun for

students at all grade levels.

For example, community scientists designed and planned an interactive plasma ball; electrical circuits; building/engineering activities; and other demonstrations and career-linked activities. Many grade-specific math games introduced parents to the skills that students were developing to attain math standards. Some community scientists were participating for the second year, which deepened their relationship with the school and their awareness of the school's interest in STEM connections.

Parents and students spent about 90 minutes exploring and interacting at the stations. The organizers periodically drew names of lottery winners who received \$10 gas cards. Childcare was provided by a classroom teacher who volunteered her time after school so that children did not have to take the bus home, and then return to school for the late afternoon event. This permitted 13 families including 24 students to meet at school and attend STEM and Math Night.

Parents filled out exit surveys. They noted that they were more aware of STEM and math connections, and knew more about what their children were learning in class. Some families stayed at school for a for-purchase-dinner in the cafeteria, which was served by other volunteers.

After the event, teachers, administrators, parents, and participants reflected on the quality of the implementation. Teachers reported that they observed greater student interest in STEM learning and related activities. One community partner who led an activity commented, "[This was] well organized. I enjoyed working with the parents, students, and the Jessie Rouse staff. Please have us back whenever you are doing something like this."

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# TAKE YOUR FAMILY TO SCHOOL WEEK—STEM EDITION

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ST. PETER'S CHILD CARE CENTER  
LAKEWOOD, OH

TYPE 3

**A**t the St. Peter's Child Care Center, the partnership team, teachers, directors, and PTA wanted to increase parents' engagement in the classroom. They explored options and created a way for all parents to participate in Take Your Family to School Week. They selected STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) as the theme for the week. Some see this kind of activity as an "advanced" partnership that brings parents' knowledge and skills to the school to enrich the curriculum and students' learning.

A flyer for families described how they could get involved in students' classrooms with STEM-related activities. Information was e-mailed to all parents, posted on Facebook, and displayed around the Center. Parents and other caregivers who were interested in participating completed a survey about how they wanted to be engaged and their availability. They could elect to assist a teacher with an activity or conduct an activity based on their own skills, talents, or hobbies. If they had a STEM activity in mind, they agreed to supply the materials for all children in the class. Parents signed up for a specific time to come to a classroom.

Teachers used the information to organize their schedules for the week's STEM activities. They selected at least one STEM activity for each day of the week. One teacher was impressed, "I was so excited to see how many families signed up to engage in the classroom."

When parents arrived, they were welcomed and introduced to the children. Then, they assisted the teacher or conducted their activities linked to STEM. For example, in one room, a father assisted with an activity for children to explore the interesting properties of magnets.

A mother assisted in making Cloud Dough (or Moon Sand) for a sensory play experience.

In other classrooms, parents presented lessons and activities about germs, physics, healthy snacks for math patterns, health snacks and nutrition, Lego building, and simple science experiments. One father shared 3-D-virtual videos. A mom brought in a large ramp and assisted students to drive their cars and trucks up and down this "simple machine." One day a mom, who was a pharmacist, helped students learn about her job and about safe handling of medications. It was a varied, rich, and rewarding agenda on STEM. Most importantly, parents' knowledge, skills, and talents were shared, and all students were active learners.

The teachers used materials that were already at the school. Some volunteers brought their own resources. During the week, 17 parents and caregivers assisted or presented activities. At first, parents were wary about teaching in class, but once they talked their plans over with the teachers and selected a convenient time of day to participate, they became comfortable and excited about coming to class. Students benefited from the variety of STEM activities. They enjoyed hearing from moms and dads who were in STEM careers or just interested in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Teachers were impressed with the children's level of attention and involvement. Parents realized the importance of engaging young children in hands-on active learning. A parent recalled, "I was nervous to volunteer, but had so much fun with the preschoolers! I will definitely do this again."

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STEM

## ARTS NIGHT

ELLA T. GRASSO TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
GROTON, CT

**A**rts Night is a collaboration of the visual arts, performance arts, and trade technologies at Grasso Tech. To cultivate a school community of artists, Arts Night featured students' work in the arts and the artistic components of the different trades that students study. There are artistic elements in the design and conduct of automotive, environmental, culinary, cosmetology, information, engineering, plumbing/heating, and guest services studies. The students' work represents the intentions of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math) activities.

Grasso Tech is a regional technical school serving over 450 students from more than 20 communities. It is part of the Connecticut-Technical Education and Career System (C-TECS). Arts Night supported school and district goals to: (i) Create a positive school climate that encourages students to support one another, (ii) Foster strong relationships between staff, students, and families, and (iii) Increase student engagement in school activities.

The Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and faculty across trades envisioned an Art Gallery and a Pops Concert to set the tone for the evening. Art and music instructors organized opening activities. Technology teachers facilitated the creation of art projects in trades classes. The Hospitality instructor promoted the event at school with flyers, posters, and on the school marquee, website, and social media. Parents received e-mail and phone invitations. Students spread the word to their friends and family members. Community members, including alumni, attended Arts Night to support Grasso Tech students' creativity.

The Parent Teacher Organization organized a bake sale and Music Boosters also supported arts programming for students and the Art Night celebration of talent.

The creative spirit gave the students space to take artistic risks in a supportive environment. Students from different grade levels and trades worked together to mount an extensive art show and to present a concert of varied styles of music. Each shop contributed a trade-related art display. The Auto Collision Repair instructor served as coordinator with instructors for the other trades in designing displays for the shop-art projects, which were created throughout the school term. The arts and music students began developing their projects and practicing for the "Pops" concert months before Arts Night.

Students volunteered as guides for visitors. The Culinary Arts instructor worked with visual and performing arts staff to create a special menu for the reception. Culinary students prepared hors d'oeuvres and displayed and served their artistic edible creations.

Costs for Arts Night were covered mainly by donations from parents, staff, and community partners. Planners also reused some materials from prior events. The school is scheduled to move to a new building that will have more space for displaying art and hosting performances. So, the many artistic talents of students at Grasso will go on and on.

Arts Night fostered a sense of community among students, parents, staff, and alumni. Parents enjoyed the artistic talents of the students and learned more about connections of the arts and their children's chosen trades. The assistant principal reflected, "From the creative sculptures, to the drumline, to all of the displays and presentations—this was a festive night. Parents thought it was great. And it was!"

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TYPE 2

OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

## BREAKFAST FOR DADS AND LITERACY NIGHT

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E. K. KEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SULPHUR, LA

**E**. K. Key Elementary has been working, step-by-step, for several years to build strong connections with all students' families. It always is a challenge to schedule activities that enable all parents to attend—including dads. This year, the school planned a two-step process: (1) welcome more and different parents, including dads and father figures, and (2) engage parents with students to advance reading skills and attitudes about reading.

At Key, just about all students in grades PreK-5 are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school has a whole-child approach through many clubs and other after-school activities to spark students' interests and talents, including Jr. Beta (youth leadership), drumline, chess, Legos, and science. The teachers and staff are committed to helping all students meet reading standards at or beyond their grade levels. They know that reading at home contributes to students' reading skills.

### **Step 1. Monthly Breakfast Meetings.**

Once a month, the school served informal breakfasts to welcome parents, including dads, to the school. Parents had breakfast with their child, met informally with teachers, and discussed a character-building topic. The staff considered these gatherings as a first step toward more productive parent-teacher conferences, and a way to help students see that their parents and teachers were talking with each other.

Parents reserved space for breakfast via surveys sent home by teachers. During the year, one of the school's business partners donated breakfasts for over 300 parents and students. Other partners contributed milk, juice, plates, cups, and utensils. A teacher's aide approved, "It is absolutely wonderful to serve the kids and their dads or other male role models, and to watch their smiling faces as they walk in with their grown up in tow. It truly makes my day."

**Step 2. Focus on Reading.** The ATP, teachers, and parents conducted Literacy Night to share ideas with parents on how to encourage students to read for pleasure at home. This year, topics combined reading with STEM content to extend students' reading to both fiction and nonfiction materials. On Literacy Night, families first took a family photo and received a raffle number. Throughout the evening, lottery numbers were called for free books for students.

Students and their parents conducted word searches and art projects based on the theme of space exploration. At the NASA Touchdown booth, students and families built replicas of a shock-absorbing system using paper, straws, and mini-marshmallows to protect a spacecraft and astronauts when landing.

During Story Time from Space, families watched a video of astronauts at work. Books about space were available for all to read. One parent reflected, "It was an exciting night full of well-organized activities."

The ATP and staff included Literacy Night on the school's monthly calendar and used the *Remind*, website, Facebook, and Twitter for multiple invitations and reminders.

The team and tech colleagues shared photos from Literacy Night with everyone on the school's social media platforms. Over 270 students and 250 parents attended, along with over 70 teachers, administrators, and community partners. The staff reviewed: "Parents seemed pleased and students were enthusiastic about the theme and activities."

Both welcoming breakfasts and stimulating reading nights are key to a bright future at Key.

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## COMMUNITY ART NIGHT

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PARK LODGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKEWOOD, WA

One school improvement goal at Park Lodge Elementary is to conduct a mix of culturally responsive and enriching academic and recreational engagement activities and events. Community Art Night invited students and their families to make and view different types and styles of art that are found in their community. Families met artists and creative local business people with two goals in mind. They were encouraged to create art in a learn-by-doing setting, and then conduct similar activities at home or in the community during the summer.

Park Lodge serves students in grades K-5, with most eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. There are Hispanic, African American, white, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and other students and their families at the school, creating a dynamic and diverse environment. About one third of the students are English Language Learners (ELL).

Community Art Night included hands-on activities for students and families, and displays and demonstrations to see how people in the community make art. The families also learned about places and programs for children and for families to go during the summer to make and experience art together.

Teachers took charge of art stations. They were compensated for their time to supervise activities, and were given supplies to share with parents and students. Community members, including local artists and creative businesses, had stations where they showed their work and provided supplies and instructions for parents and students to try their hand various art or craft techniques. It was a night for hands-on creative activities.

Families and students selected activities to make scrapbooks, flip books, comic books, murals, stop-motion videos, and magnet art. They could select fashion design, theater arts (e.g., improvisational acting), attend a session on art therapy, or contribute to a wishing tree. Local businesses donated materials for a glass gallery, an art and clay studio, comic books, raffle items, and a slideshow of artwork.

The experiences were aligned with National Arts Standards of creating, connecting, and responding to art. Over 100 students and 60 families interacted with community and family artists, produced various art forms, and learned some new skills. For example, some gained coping skills at the art therapy station; others honed fine-motor skills in fashion jewelry, painting, and magnet stations. They all learned that all artists work very hard to create their work.

Families learned about Community Art Night via flyers, e-mail, morning announcements, and the on-line school calendar. Parents suggested artists they knew in the community or in their families. Each participating artist displayed 3-5 artworks at Community Art Night. One parent evaluated, "I love that you included the community. That brought so many different people here in the building!"

Families were given a resource packet to take home with suggestions for making art that was featured at Community Art Night. The packet also included information about businesses connected to the arts, community programs for elementary students, and coupons for "free" days at local museums. Most of all, students learned about talents they may develop at school and in the community, with their parents supporting them along the way.

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TYPE 2

OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

## FAMILY GAME NIGHT

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HERIG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SAGINAW, MI

TYPE 3

OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

**F**amily bonding may take place at school if an activity is fun and interactive.. Family-school partnerships also can grow when parents and teachers have informal and unstressed time to talk. Herig Elementary School's Family Game Night opens options for good connections. The Game Night is always popular with parents and students because everyone gets to relax, have fun, and use math, reading, and thinking skills at the same time.

All students at Herig receive free breakfast and lunch through a community eligibility schools grant. Demographically, Herig serves about 50% African American, 25 % white, and 18% Hispanic students and families in grades PreK to 6.

Game Night is, itself, a partnership. Parent volunteers helped organize and set up materials for game night. They guided families to sign in, and helped clean up at the end of the evening. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators also organized and set up materials, served snacks and drinks throughout the night, and kept the evening running smoothly. They took time to meet and talk with families, and answer parents' questions.

Community partners set up tables for games, and some set up tables to distribute information about their products or services. Some community partners donated snacks for all attendees. Others donated items for students to take home. The informal setting was the right place for friendly meetings and exchanges.

The ATP distributed flyers about game night, including an RSVP form to guide planning for attendance. Notices, reminders, and verifications were on Herig's Facebook page, the school marquee, and in school/classroom newsletters.

Years ago, for the first Family Game Night, Herig purchased some games and materials with Title I funds. Other games were donated by a local store. Replacements are made and catalogued so that there is an on-going inventory of available games, which are stored for subsequent use. On Family Game Night, a long table is set with the games that families may choose to play. Two teachers volunteered to keep things organized and to assist families as needed. Families could play one game for as long as they wished. Then, they clean up and may try a different game.

The games are more than just fun. They are designed for students at different grade levels and with different interests. There are games that require students and families to use math skills, logic, strategy, critical thinking, construction, and exercise. All games require players to read instructions and use different social skills with every turn. Most have options to keep score, pay fines, and outwit the others. One parent observed, "This helped my children learn to follow directions."

This year, 50 students and 32 family partners came to play and learn together. One parent reflected, "Our children have so much fun and we love the quality time." Inclement weather was a challenge, but the hearty souls who attended were happy that they did. A survey of parents asked for information and reactions, including how many and which games they played, and "What have you learned about your child(ren) from Game Night?" Some reported that new information was revealed. One parent remarked, "I found out that my daughter loves to be challenged."

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## GETTING AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE IN FAMILIES' HANDS

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PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF  
PHILADELPHIA, PA

**H**istorically, the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf (PSD) is the third school of its kind in the U. S., founded in 1820. The school is a leader in the field of deaf education. Its mission includes “collaborating with families and communities in a nurturing, dynamic, and language-rich environment steeped in cultural awareness of deaf, hearing, and worldwide diversity.” In practical terms, teachers and administrators want to help families support the learning and development of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.

PSD is a day school with a population of about 200 students, PreK-12. Because they are learning American Sign Language (ASL), all students are considered English Language Learners. The students commute daily from 26 school districts and communities. Their families reflect multiple cultures and speak at least seven different languages at home.

ASL and English both are essential to students who are deaf, hard of hearing, have cochlear implants, or use other assistive technology. All students come to PSD to build their literacy skills and knowledge of the world. The school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) includes family members, staff, administrator, two student representatives, and community partners. Last year, a small committee of the ATP sought to obtain and distribute a family-friendly resource to help students’ families gain skills in using ASL to expand their range of signing abilities.

The ATP was responding to a request from families to provide an ASL phrase book and DVD. Many parents spoke to the sign language teacher, counselor, classroom teachers, parent liaison, and others about the need for a useful

tool to help them master more ASL vocabulary and phrases. The school identified a text used elsewhere in family sign classes. Some parents purchased the book at a discounted price of \$15. Also, books were gifted by drawing names from a bowl at all family meetings and events at school. Other books were distributed at no charge if students requested a book for their parents.

The DVD content matched the format and content of the ASL phrase book, which made it easy for parents to master skills and communicate with their children. The most appreciative people connected to this project were the students. Indeed, when the ASL books were used at home, the students were the “teachers” and the fun was in helping parents learn to sign.

In addition to the ASL books and DVD for parents, the school conducted a Parent Workshop Series, American Sign Language classes, and online video tutoring for parents at no cost. The activities and services, which are essential for parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children, were paid for by the ATP’s budget, and with donations and fundraising activities.

About 35 families acquired the ASL phrase book and DVD. The PSD website claims, “Language is the key to opening the world of learning to every child.” Because many deaf students have hearing parents, it was important to find a way to get ASL into families’ hands. All families of PSD students face a common challenge. They wonder if they can make a difference in their child’s development. This resource helps to assure parents of students at PSD that yes, indeed, they can.

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## GRANDPARENTS DAY

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PARK VISTA ELEMENTARY  
OPELOUSAS, LA

**P**ark Vista Elementary School has been celebrating grandparents in various ways for several years. The day of welcome aims to strengthen school and family partnerships. Last year, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) added a new-and-improved emphasis—to connect grandparents with their grandchildren on accomplishments in academic subjects and the arts.

Park Vista serves over 800 students, PreK-6. The students are diverse, with families speaking seven languages. The school’s ambitious mission is to ensure high quality instruction while working collaboratively with families and communities to maximize every student’s potential. Interestingly, the school includes a French Immersion enrichment program, which figured prominently in presentations for grandparents.

Planning for Grandparents Day began at the first Parent and Family Engagement meeting of the year, when committees were formed, school-wide activities were planned, and activities were scheduled on the school calendar. The committee for Grandparents Day included representatives from all grade levels. They planned topics, presentations, and an essay contest for students in the older grades. About 60 teachers, parents, and community members assisted in planning and conducting the program.

To publicize Grandparents Day, the committee sent home notes and used the *Remind* program. In most cases, students’ parents were responsible for inviting grandparents and providing transportation to the school. Guests signed in at a welcome table. They enjoyed cookies and coffee. The program featured student performances and presentations at each grade level. In particular, students shared written work in English Language Arts and French.

A group of second and third graders led the Pledge of Allegiance in English and French. Third and fourth graders read original poems in English and French. Three student essay winners

in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade presented their essays on the theme “Why Grandparents Are Important to Me.”

A highlight of the day focused on the grandparents, themselves. Special awards recognized some unique features of those in attendance, including: Oldest Grandparent Attending; Youngest Grandparent Attending; Longest Distance Traveled to Attend; and Most Grandchildren Attending Park Vista. The grandparents took these accolades with good humor.

In addition to the children’s presentations, school leaders shared information about the Park Vista community. The principal and assistant principals gave closing remarks to tie the many parts of the program together with warm and welcoming words for grandparents.

Nearly 600 grandparents, parents, and other family members attended Grandparents Day. Students volunteered to escort the visitors to their grandchildren’s classrooms. There, they were welcomed by teachers and students. In each classroom, grandparents viewed and enjoyed their grandchildren’s classwork, artwork, and other accomplishments.

Many grandparents told the children and teachers that they look forward to Grandparents Day every year. One grandparent flew in from the Middle East to celebrate with her grandchildren. One of the teachers noted, “I’ve attended many programs at my grandchildren’s schools, but have never been to one that equals this day at Park Vista.” That is high praise for the teamwork required to plan a full day, and for the commitment of the children to their roles as presenters on the program and hosts in classrooms.

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## NACHO ORDINARY AVID NIGHT

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W. S. SANDEL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

**T**eaching students to communicate effectively with their parents means that more students will be supported on learning at home. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers at Sandel Elementary continue to work on strengthening relationships between school and home and creating a welcoming climate for all parents. They wanted to increase parents' understanding of the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) program, which is very important for student success. They also wanted students to take charge of discussions with parents about their work in AVID.

The school's creative approach to this goal was Nacho Ordinary AVID Night, which focused on AVID concepts that students and teachers developed together. At a series of activity stations, students demonstrated for parents how they are learning logical reasoning, critical thinking, and creative expression. Students and parents worked together to solve problems at each station. It was an "eye-opener" for parents, and a time of pride and skill for students.

Sandel, a Title I elementary school, serves over 650 students (PreK-5). Just about all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The AVID program contributes to students' self-direction in learning. Students took home flyers about the Nacho-AVID Night, and parents received information and reminders in the car-rider lane and by e-mail.

Students were the stars of the evening. They demonstrated AVID skills and strategies, while everyone enjoyed plates of nachos. The students—as "teachers"—taught their parents about the STAR column method of goal setting and note taking. This is a systematic way to learn new vocabulary and subject content by recording key words, definitions, examples, and illustrations in side-by-side columns of notes. They demonstrated how they learn in Socratic

Seminars by discussing open-ended questions, thinking in new directions, and using evidence to support their ideas.

At each station, students demonstrated and engaged parents in content-specific learning strategies in reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and social-emotional learning. For example, students showed how they organize their work, write "one pagers," and reflect on what they learned. They discussed with parents the process of setting an academic agenda and personal learning and behavioral goals. In this way, parents could see how their child was taking responsibility for their work.

The school strategies link to activities and discussions at home. Parents received a handout on how to use a child's STAR note-taking page to have a conversation about what the student is learning. They were guided to realize that it is never too early to talk about going to college or identifying interesting careers. After attending, one father stated, "I'm glad I came out to this event, I really enjoyed working with my son at all the different stations. . ."

Teachers also provided parents with usable information on AVID tips and resources for summer learning and enrichment. Over 170 parents, family members, and community members gained a greater appreciation for students' work and teachers' instruction in the AVID program. School leaders agreed that this was an opportunity to create a shared vision for school transformation and for student learning. All parts of AVID night emphasized the necessity of positive relationships and communications among students, teachers, parents, and members of the community.

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## PAINT AND SIP

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MCMILLAN EARLY LEARNING CENTER  
CLEVELAND HEIGHTS, OHIO

TYPE 3

OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

**M**cMillan Early Learning Center serves over 80 children, aged 6 weeks to 5 years old. The school leaders and teachers set an improvement goal to conduct creative and enjoyable opportunities for parents to meet teachers and other parents at the preschool. They want to ensure that parents feel welcome at the school, and that parents know that they are not alone in facing challenges in early childhood development.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at McMillan planned Paint and Sip as a new way for the staff to meet families, and for parents and children to have a unique learning experience. The children used colors, identified shapes, honed fine motor skills, and engaged in conversations about their work. All of the children were eager to describe their artwork. One parent said, “The whole atmosphere was a great way to bond with your child.”

Parents and teachers made a list of items required for Paint and Sip: paint, paper, water cups, paint brushes, tables, table covers, Velcro to hang pictures, fruit and juice, and paper goods. The event was publicized through flyers, posters throughout the school, phone calls to parents, and word of mouth. Some classrooms created individual invitations for each parent. Teachers talked with their students about coming to Paint and Sip with a parent. The family engagement budget and school discretionary funds covered the cost of supplies.

At the end of a school day, parents and teachers set up tables, chairs, and art supplies in the school’s large-motor-skills room. A table was set up for fruit and juice.

If you walked into the room, you would have heard conversations, laughter, and some children humming or singing songs as they painted. Teachers engaged in brief discussions with all of the parents and students to connect personally with each one.

The ATP chairperson also came to get to know the families, and to talk with them about their artwork and their questions about the school or students. Members of the community volunteered to refresh art supplies and juices. They assisted parents, students, and teachers as needed.

Paint and Sip—a simple concept—was a great success. For two hours, children and parents ate fruit, sipped juice, and talked together about paintings and other things. In doing so, they were conducting good conversations, which are essential for building young children’s literacy skills. Many children’s pictures included letters, lines, color mixing, and a story.

About 30 students and over 40 parents and caregivers attended. A parent noted, “This was a chance to be creative with my kids and get to talk to other parents.”

At the end of Paint and Sip, children and parents talked about and selected titles for their pictures, which were hung on a McMillan Showcase Wall for all to see for several days. The children felt good about seeing their pictures posted and were excited to share their work. One child remarked, “Look! That’s mine. I made a Lego picture.”

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# 2

## NON-ACADEMIC GOALS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help students meet non-academic goals for positive behavior, post-secondary education and career planning, health and safety, multicultural awareness, and successful transitions.



## DINNER WITH DIVAS

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GROLEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
OPELOUSAS, LA

**G**rolee Elementary, a school of over 400 students, wanted to encourage its female students to do their best in school, and to encourage moms and women in the community to become more involved in students' education. Previously, the school hosted An Evening with Grolee Gentlemen, which was successful in welcoming dads and other male role models in the community. A fitting follow-up was Dinner with Divas.

There are well-documented "nitty gritty" tasks for school meetings and events. Here, the Parent Educator, teachers, administrators, parents, and staff assisted with decorating, purchasing, and picking up supplies, inviting special guests, and distributing door prizes. Each student who attended with a parent received one "dress down" pass to use on a day of their choice.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) used social media and flyers to promote Dinner with Divas. School administrators were involved, too. The principal contacted parents about the dinner through the school's communication system. He invited guests, helped serve meals, and gave closing remarks. The Assistant Principal facilitated a panel discussion. She also designed t-shirts for the staff to wear at the activity. Family and community partners donated food, sodas, and water for the dinner.

Dinner with Divas was held in the school cafeteria. About 120 girls in grades 3 through 6 attended along with more than 130 mothers, grandmothers, older sisters, aunts, women guardians, women staff members, and members of the community.

The District Superintendent welcomed guests. The Mayor of Opelousas, a member of the School Board member, and district supervisors served the meal. Men in the audience served dinner to the "divas," and commented on the

importance of the event.

One student served as Mistress of Ceremonies. Three guest speakers shared their perspectives on the role of women in education and society, and views on empowerment. The three invitees were a former Grolee student currently attending college; a young politician and businessperson; and the wife of a pastor who is involved in the community.

A teacher introduced the student panel consisting of female students in grades 3 through 6. They presented questions to the audience for group discussions. For example, they asked: "What advice would you give us? Have you ever felt unloved or unwanted? What did you do to conquer that feeling?" Members of the audience were wise and willing to share their views. Students attending volunteered to participate on next year's panel.

In addition to the student panel, there was a panel of parents and community members. All of the participants received praise for their insights and honesty, and for their commitment to helping female students proceed successfully through school. The presentations, questions, and discussions were informative and rewarding for all attendees.

Parents, guests, students, and educators talked freely about how much they enjoyed Dinner with Divas. Many parent and community participants continued to assist the school and students in the days that followed. The activity created a buzz in the community. People saw so many cars at the school for Dinner with Divas that they asked, "What's going on?" That is a good way to start a conversation on school, family, and community partnerships.

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TYPE 6

BEHAVIOR

## ORDERLY, WISE, LOYAL, LEADERS OF SOCIETY (OWLLS)

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WATKINS-NANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

TYPE I

**T**he Watkins-Nance Elementary School is always working to engage families in ways that support students' academic, social, and emotional development and success in school. The school is a nurturing place. Although just about all students are from families with low incomes, parents want the best for their children—boys and girls, and are good partners with teachers at the school.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), Parent Engagement Specialist, and other teachers noticed that many girls walked to school with their heads down. They seemed to avoid eye contact with others and demonstrated troubled behavior. The ATP and school and community partners formed a new student group for girls: Orderly, Wise, Loyal, Leaders of Society (OWLLS).

The groups worked together to develop a mission and agenda for the OWLLS that would spark girls' positive attitudes, self-awareness, and confidence about learning and being a leader. They promoted the new group with letters, phone calls home, and personal conversations with parents to permit their daughters to become one of the OWLLS. The group leaders helped girls solve problems that arose from time to time. A number of community members assisted the OWLLS. One found items for girls to wear to specific activities at the clothes closet—a swap shop—at a local middle school.

Activities guided girls to strengthen their communication skills and to participate in positive and constructive conversations. This included interactions with teachers, staff, bus drivers, and activities in the community. The South Carolina Governor's School, one of Watkins-Nance's community partners, invited students to visit the campus for a discussion on planning for the future, thinking about college, learning about college life, and preparing for nontraditional careers. Cultural activities

included attending a ballet for the first time. The program also required girls to present a culminating project linked to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), which included a written reflection about their experiences in OWLLS.

These activities and attention from caring adults helped many girls at Watkins-Nance try new things and gain confidence. Although many OWLLS did not have resources for field trips, the Parent Engagement Specialist worked with community members and neighboring schools to donate needed funds and materials. Costs were shared by Title I and community donations.

Over 180 students and their parents benefited from their association with the OWLLS. Over 30 parents and community members served as volunteers and active partners. Teachers reported a noticeable reduction in disciplinary referrals for female students, and observed that the girls were becoming more confident.

Administrators assigned the girls new leadership responsibilities at the school. Parents reported improved behavior at home. One student's parent saw a near-immediate change, "Thank you all so much for OWLLS. I always knew she could be a leader." Another parent reported, "[My daughter] talks about going to college and becoming an engineer—she never talked about college before."

When students are actively encouraged to grow in positive directions, teachers, staff, and parents see the results. Now, younger girls at Watkins-Nance are interested in joining OWLLS. They view the older girls as role models. Overall, the school climate seems more welcoming because so many girls feel that they are "part of" the school community.

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BEHAVIOR



## POSITIVE HOME VISITS

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NEW HORIZONS HIGH SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA

If parents receive only negative communications about their child's academic or behavioral problems, they may think that the school does not understand their child's positive qualities, and they may stay away from partnership activities. At New Horizons High School, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, counselors, and others knew this truism. They shifted the purpose of some home visits to focus on students' accomplishments.

New Horizons is an alternative high school for students in grades 10-12. Most students are Hispanic, some are teen parents, and just about all are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school focuses heavily on students' credit recovery to help students graduate from high school. This includes encouraging and supporting good attendance, and recognizing the many talents that students bring to the table. Success in school is not only academic, but also is about demonstrating integrity, strength of character, contributions to the community, and taking purposeful steps to complete high school and plan for the future.

New Horizons' Phoenix Award for Excellence was the focus of home visits to celebrate students' progress and achievements with their families. Teachers, counselors, ATP members, and family members met each other, and the educators learned more about the communities in which students lived.

Positive Home Visits were appreciated by all families, especially parents and family partners who, due to work schedules and other conditions and responsibilities, could not attend award ceremonies and meetings at the school. The ATP's annual budget and donations from community partners paid for certificate frames

for the awards and related materials.

In the past school year, 30 teachers, administrators, and other staff members met with about 40 parents and caregivers for Positive Home Visits and presented 20 students with the awards. All teachers, administrators, and staff can nominate students for and present them with the Phoenix Award for Excellence. The nominating teacher also writes a personal message on a card, which is presented to the student with the official award.

Teachers and staff at New Horizons schedule and conduct many home visits as part of their work as an alternative school, but the Phoenix Awards are designed to come as a surprise to parents and students. Most parents are amazed and proud of their teens when staff members arrive at their homes with an award in hand. One parent remarked, "Thank you so much for recognizing that my child is trying to do better and better."

The students who have been honored tend to build on their accomplishments with good academic and behavioral decisions, and by striving to improve attendance. In many cases, students who were quiet or reserved at school have talked with the educators who nominated them and with those who visited their homes. Students reported that Positive Home Visits have shown them that people at the school cared about their progress and noticed their efforts.

Positive Home Visits are one way for teachers to strengthen relationships with students and open lines of communication with families. One teacher reflected, "I couldn't think of a more rewarding way of spending a couple hours of my evening."

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# WAKE UP BASELINE

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BASELINE ACADEMY  
LITTLE ROCK, AR

TYPE 1

**I**n many schools, mornings set the tone for the day. To start each day as a welcoming school, Baseline Academy implemented Wake Up Baseline. This activity enables parents to bring students to school earlier than the official start time to meet their work schedules. Other students interested in enriching activities to start the day also are welcome.

Baseline Academy is an elementary school in southwest Little Rock, serving mostly African American and Hispanic students in grades K-5. Most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and a large percentage of students are English Language Learners. Several parents spoke with the principal about needing to bring students to school early, due to their shifts at work.

After a staff discussion, the ATP, teachers, and administrators designed Wake Up Baseline to meet the families' needs and to strengthen their program of school, family, and community partnerships. The activity was adapted from another school in the district and expanded to include all students and families. Baseline Academy also added a student leadership component called the News Crew.

At Wake Up Baseline, students came to the cafeteria for free choice of creative learning activities before the start of the school day. STEM activities piqued students' interests, as did activities using math manipulatives, arts and crafts, building models, card games, board games, computers, and more.

To encourage students' social and academic development, a News Crew of student reporters presented school-wide news and current events each morning. Also, a team of students served as "community helpers" to assist students who needed materials or guidance on their activities.

Some students came to school on an early bus. Many parents brought their children. Others stayed with younger siblings for the

activities and to hear the News Crew report the daily news. The school was moving toward its goal of becoming a learning community.

The ATP, teachers, and PTA held several planning sessions to tailor Wake Up Baseline to parents' needs and students' interests. With discretionary funds, the planners ordered games and materials to ensure that students at all grade levels and with varied talents would be engaged in enjoyable learning activities. The students and teachers agreed on rules for good behavior in the cafeteria. Teachers monitored the morning routines and helped the student-reporters prepare their news presentations.

City Year—community members who work in schools nationwide and serve as role models for students—supervised students in grade-level clusters with their selected activities and reinforced the school's positive behavior norms. District security guards guaranteed safety for students arriving before school officially opened. High school students participated to complete community service requirements. Parents and visitors from the state and district observed that students looked happy and engaged during the morning sessions.

Parents were contacted with flyers and other communications explaining Wake Up Baseline. Students heard about the program and activities at a special assembly. Over 300 students participated in Wake Up Baseline, often joined by parents and community members who were interested in helping with the routine. Teachers participated often, talked with students about their activities, and encouraged them to take leadership for several tasks. The principal summed up everyone's views, "Wake Up Baseline provides an important safe and creative space for our students."

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BEHAVIOR

## CODING WITH KIDS

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PORT BARRE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PORT BARRE, LA

**T**o make a lasting impression on students, schools must conduct learning activities that captivate and motivate them, and point them in the direction of tomorrow. Port Barre Middle School took this path with Coding with Kids—an activity for fifth and sixth grade students and their families.

Students were introduced to coding and explored technology-linked career opportunities associated with coding. The activity aimed to make computational technology come alive for students and to engage parents with students in learning. One student caught the bug, “I love coding. This could be something I would like to do.”

Parents and students were greeted by teachers and administrators. A lead teacher demonstrated how to create a key chain of different colored beads by learning a coding sequence. Students and their families teamed up. At each table were key rings, strings, and separate sets of white, red, and black beads.

To introduce coding, a PowerPoint presentation showed that coding is a computer language that tells the computer exactly what steps to take to create apps and other software. Teachers gave some background and examples of tech-related jobs that use the skill of coding. For example, they discussed how Steve Jobs, co-creator of Apple and Pixar, experienced many failures before having great success in computer science. This story linked to a sixth grade unit in English/language arts on the theme of success and failure.

Teachers explained that binary coding was one of the first computer languages. A YouTube video demonstrated step-by-step instructions to create binary code for specific letters—each letter is an 8-digit combination using only 0s

and 1s. For example, to “speak” to a computer, the capital letter A is 01000001; B is 01000010; C is 01000011; D is 01000100; and so on. Lower case letters are coded: “a” = 01100001, and so on.

Each parent and child team used colored beads to code the first initial of their first name on a key chain. The white beads stood for 0s in code; the red beads served as 1s; and the black beads represented a space between letters. For example, a student named Ann would place white, red, white, white, white, white, white, red on her key ring for her initial A, followed by a black bead for a space. If time permitted, students and parents could add other initials to their coded key chains.

Teachers invited parents to the activity, created the presentation-lesson, and obtained the materials for the coding activity with Title I funds. The ATP, teachers, and administrators circulated through the room to talk with parents and students, and to see that they understood how to use the beads and a coding guide to create their key chains. Students and parents left with knowledge about coding and a keepsake. A parent commented, “I had never heard of coding before. This was definitely an event to remember.”

In STEM classes (science, technology, engineering, and math), students were learning that it was important to be “tech ready” by understanding computing and other aspects of technology. In high school, they will learn computational thinking and advanced programming, which may lead to interesting careers. In the middle grades, they started by sharpening their thinking and problem solving skills. Besides, learning coding to create games and websites was fun!

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## GRAD PLAN AND FAFSA NIGHT

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ARTHUR HILL HIGH SCHOOL  
SAGINAW, MI

**A**rthur Hill High School, a large urban high school, set an important goal for all of its students to be prepared for college and/or careers. This goal can be met only if it is addressed at all grade levels, by all teachers and staff, and by students and their families.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, counselors, and others knew that students' parents and family partners needed and wanted good information to help their teens succeed in their classes, graduate from high school on time, and move on to postsecondary education. In addition to knowing more about graduation requirements, they wanted information about financial aid that was available to support college and other training after high school. The school has a high graduation rate, but leaders wanted to give more attention to preparing students for life after high school.

GRAD Plan and FAFSA Night are, now, annual events. Invitations and information are on the school website, and publicized through e-mail and other messages. Parents and students come with questions about graduation requirements and financial assistance. They leave with a clear, individual, signed graduation plan and information about options and financing for postsecondary education.

Teachers and counselors participate voluntarily and continue to advise students through the school year to help them complete course credits required for high school graduation. College and financial advisors from the community offer information and assistance on the FAFSA.

The district implemented GRAD Plan and FAFSA Night several years ago. Now, all high schools conduct a Grad Plan Parent Night. All 12th grade students are required to attend, and

11th graders and their parents may choose to attend for advanced planning. Because parents and students attend together, they are aware of the student's standing in terms of credits earned or needed for high school graduation and they work together on plans for the future.

Counselors meet with students throughout the month of October to review and audit student grades and transcripts. This helps students and their counselors determine which courses are needed for graduation, in keeping with state and district policies and required high school exams. Together, they draw up a contract specifying what courses students still must take to graduate from high school on time.

At GRAD Plan and FAFSA Night, the meeting begins with parents and students reviewing their own graduation plan, and by asking questions about the senior year. Future college and career plans, and potential hurdles and challenges, then, are discussed.

Before the meeting, the College Career Coordinator reviewed financial aid information from Lumberjack University and Delta College to make sure the information about FAFSA for parents and students was up to date.

This year, 160 students with their parents or guardians attended GRAD Plan and FAFSA Night. It is a challenge for everyone to attend, but strong publicity and a growing reputation of quality information and the importance of planning helps increase attendance every year.

By the end of the evening, everyone knew what students must do to graduate from Arthur Hill on time. And, they also knew the action steps that must be taken by students with parents' support to prepare for the future.

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## HOME BUILDERS AND STUDENTS: CAREER CONNECTIONS

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J. M. WRIGHT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
STAMFORD, CT

**V**ocational training is one way to introduce students to the basics of a chosen career and to expose them to many options if their interests change. At Wright Technical High School, all students are working to specialize in a trade. Some go directly to work after high school. Others continue with postsecondary education at 2-year or 4-year colleges, or in other education or training. The school, part of the Connecticut Technical Education and Careers System (C-TECS), offers 10 technical education programs. It has an over-arching goal to improve the school climate through partnerships with community organizations and by engaging parents in activities focused on student success.

Wright Tech serves diverse students in a socioeconomically- and culturally-mixed region in lower Fairfield County, CT. The school includes 50% Hispanic, 25% white, 20% African American, and other students, most of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

School administrators and carpentry trade department developed an active partnership with the Home Builders and Remodelers Association (HBRA) of Fairfield County. HBRA is a not-for-profit association of members involved in all skills for constructing single family and multi-family residences. HBRA leaders and Wright Tech instructors co-conducted workshops for students to increase their connections with adults working in their trade area of interest.

Students in grades 10 to 12 met with potential mentors and employers at joint HBRA-Wright Tech meetings to further their trade education, ask questions, and explore opportunities for apprenticeships and internships. The trades include carpentry, electrical, plumbing, heating, digital media, and informational technology. HBRA experts conducted workshops on building science, quality, durability, and risk management. Along with students, workshops were attended by builders, remodelers, land developers, manufacturers, subcontractors,

architects, and other industry professionals.

Student volunteers gave HBRA visitors tours of the high school, and demonstrated skills in various trade classrooms. The Lead Instructor for Trade Programs at Wright Tech reported, “The equipment we are installing definitely makes our students more marketable. Multiple contractors stated they would hire every student trained on this equipment.”

About 20 teachers and administrators worked with community partners to prepare and present the workshops. Along with the construction trade students, others also participated. For example, Culinary Arts students provided breakfast for attendees; Hospitality Trade students staged the rooms for the meetings; and students in Digital Media took photos of the workshops to post at school. One teacher remarked, “I heard lots of compliments from members of HBRA and prospective members about our students. The connections we made will lead to other opportunities for our students in work-based learning and future careers.”

Parents were involved by encouraging their teens to network with potential employers and to seek information about opportunities in the trades. They supported students’ efforts to serve as apprentices, schedule work-based learning, and gain employment in their chosen fields.

Overall, 95 students and 90 experienced trades people attended the HBRA-Wright workshops. More than one student received a job offer or a promise of future connections as a result of the meeting and the school’s on-going programs. Wright Tech teachers and staff hope to use the HBRA meetings as the basis for developing similar meetings with other trade groups.

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## PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS DAY

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SAGINAW CAREER COMPLEX  
SAGINAW, MI

TYPE 6

**K**nowing how to interview and dress professionally are important skills for high school students who are heading for summer jobs, internships, college, and employment. Saginaw Career Complex (SCC) offers Career and Technical Education (CTE) in over 15 trades. Junior and senior students in Saginaw may spend half days at their home school and at SCC for career education. The staff at SCC organized a Professional Business Day to help students think about their appearance, attitudes, and actions at upcoming interviews.

Parents received information about the workshop for students along with a set of questions for “mock interviews” to practice at home. They also received tips to discuss with their teens, such as giving complete answers to questions, making eye contact with an interviewer, and not fidgeting.

On Professional Business Day, students were interviewed by community business people who volunteered to participate. In the interviews, students showcased their portfolios and discussed their skills. For many, this was an exciting opportunity to experience an authentic job interview designed to enhance their employability.

An English teacher and program leader taught students about dressing professionally for an interview. Young women were guided to wear a dress or skirt at the knee, or dress slacks, flat or low-heeled dress shoes, and conservative jewelry. Young men were advised to wear dress slacks, a button-down shirt and tie, and dress shoes. The school conducted a dress rehearsal for teachers to approve the clothing that students intended to wear to their interviews.

About 338 students at SCC attended Professional Business Day, along with 110 community partners and 24 school staff. Professional Business Day interviews and seminars were conducted at Davenport University in Midland, MI, which gave students an opportunity to view

the campus.

The 25-minute interviews were generic so that the questions asked could apply to any type of job. Questions included: (i) Tell me something about yourself; (ii) What are your greatest strengths? (iii) What would you do if you were asked to perform a task you’ve never done before? (iv) What are you learning in your class that will help you succeed in this position? (v) Tell me about a challenge or conflict you have faced at school or work and how you dealt with it; (vi) What kind of personality do you work best with and why? (vii) Do you have any questions for me?

The interviewers could ask for a copy of a student’s resume if they were interested in speaking with the student about an actual job opportunity or internship. Students were evaluated on four criteria: introduction, non-verbal communication, general interview skills, and interview and document content. Within these categories were standards for posture, enthusiasm/interest, and overall quality of resume. Teachers graded students on their top two interviews and for participating in the dress rehearsal. Grades ranged from 1 to 5 for Novice, Developing, Maturing, Experienced, and Professional.

The business leaders were impressed. One commented, “I interviewed really great kids this morning. It was exciting to see them in action.” The students clearly benefitted from the comprehensive and authentic opportunities to test their job candidacy skills on Professional Business Day. A Graphic Arts student noted, “I learned that when you carry yourself in a professional manner, you get a lot of respect.”

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS

## SCIENCE AND ARTS SHOWCASE

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ROWENA CHESS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA

**I**ntroducing young learners to various careers is one way to help students appreciate their classes and develop new interests. Rowena Chess Elementary serves over 550 students. Most are Hispanic and most are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The school has a clear improvement plan and specific goals for increasing students' opportunities to learn about science and art, and related careers.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned a Science and Arts Showcase to help students experience fun in learning, and to become more aware of college and career paths in these subjects. The activity featured the work that students at each grade level are doing in science, art, music, and language arts. School leaders invited community members to exhibit products and information from their STEM-focused careers (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math), and conduct learning activities with the students.

The ATP publicized Science and Arts Showcase in several ways, including flyers and reminders. Students created invitations for their parents. The Public Affairs Department contacted all local media. Three Robocalls in English and in Spanish invited families to the Science and Arts Showcase. Community and school board members received handwritten invitations.

Over 160 parents, 70 teachers, and 17 community members came together to make the Showcase a positive experience for students and families. Students displayed their subject-area projects and explained them to parents and community visitors. The students' projects varied by grade level. For example, all grades had science units on the life cycle, but higher grades had more advanced requirements. Kindergarten through second grade students displayed diagrams and discussed plants they were observing. First graders created habitats for insects and wrote stories or poems about their specimen. Second graders created books to explain the life

cycle of butterflies. Third graders explained their understanding of forces that affect plant growth and development. Fourth graders studied and reported on how the body structure of salmon related to their environment. They completed dissections and displayed the labeled body parts of salmon. Fifth graders displayed terrariums and sixth graders created informational posters about famous scientists. A Principal's Award was given to one student from each class whose work was exemplary.

For the arts, the art teacher had students conduct Doodle for Google projects. The creations were on display in the hallways with stickers so that families passing by could vote on their favorite doodles. The honor choir of the music program sang twice during the program to share their talents.

Community members came to view and celebrate students' work. Some facilitated hands-on activities with the students to demonstrate how STEM subjects are part of their own work. For example, a mechanical engineer provided a tabletop demonstration of erosion that affects the supply or quality of public utilities (e.g., water, electricity, gas). An astrologer from the planetarium engaged students in studying the stars, and Master Gardeners from the university showed and discussed local bugs and their contributions to the ecosystem. Community members who conducted activities with students provided their own materials.

Teachers shared information with parents and community members about what students were learning at each grade level. Parents were particularly interested in their children's projects and in STEM and Arts, and the grade level standards in all subjects.

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## SHARE YOUR SHOP DAY & TAKE YOUR PARENT TO SHOP

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VINAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL, MIDDLETOWN, CT  
HOWELL CHENEY TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL, MANCHESTER, CT

TYPE 2

**E**ven at the high school level, family and community engagement contributes to student success in school. Vinal Tech has over 400 students from 27 surrounding towns. The school offers intensive training in clusters of trades (i.e., architecture and construction, hospitality and tourism, transportation distribution, manufacturing, human services, information technology) and prepares students for college and other postsecondary education. The school wanted families to experience and understand the interesting work that students do to prepare for their trades, so they arranged for parent to attend shop classes.

Parents and family members participated with their teens on class projects. Vinal Tech's Shop Day has improved every year, as the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), instructors, and others reviewed evaluations and consider how to invite and attract more and different families. This year the planners extended information to parents of students at all grade levels, 9-12.

The school's social worker took a leadership role for Shop Day. Faculty, staff, and students sent out invitations to all parents. They improved the RSVP form to better anticipate attendance. Parents also received automated messages on their phones, with reminders about the date and time of the event. In addition, an announcement was published in the school newspaper, which all students, families, and teachers receive.

Student volunteers greeted families, and directed them to the Library/Media Center. The principal welcomed them, made introductions, and explained the various events and sessions for the day. Staff members distributed safety glasses to all parents. Students escorted parents to their selected trade classrooms. In class, parents worked with their own student to plan, conduct, and complete activities assigned by the shop instructor. Other student volunteers took photos of participating families and thanked families as they left the building.

Share Your Shop Day was scheduled on two different days in March to enable parents to find a convenient time to attend. Attendees were sent a follow-up Google Survey for feedback. Parents reported that it was fun for them to participate in students' classes and that they learned a lot about shop environments.

Teachers and staff at Vinal Tech enjoyed meeting families and conducting the class projects with parents and students. Over 110 parents and caregivers participated in Share Your Shop Day. One parent conveyed the reactions of many: "I really enjoyed listening to the presentations by the students in the shop class. I enjoyed hearing students' future plans and seeing the excitement they have for their projects."

Howell Cheney Technical High School, also part of the C-TECS (Connecticut Technical Education and Career System) also conducted Take Your Parent to Shop Day. The school had similar goals as Vinal to improve family and school partnerships and increase parents' awareness of the education that their students are gaining in their selected trades.

Cheney Tech focused on the 9th grade to introduce families new to the school to the work their teens do in shop. After breakfast at school provided by the Culinary Arts students, parents spent about 1½ hours touring their student's and other shops. Students demonstrated their skills and explained the projects they were completing. Parents' pride was clear as they videoed their students' demonstrations.

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COLLEGE AND CAREERS



## CALLING ALL DADS

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TREMONT MONTESSORI SCHOOL  
CLEVELAND, OH

**T**remont Montessori's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators have a goal to enable all students' parents to understand the important roles they play in their children's social-emotional development. They also want to help parents walk the way with their preschool children to a successful transition to kindergarten. This requires academic and social readiness for elementary school.

Tremont Montessori is a public preschool located in a public elementary school. The school in a large urban district serves a high percentage of African American students, and smaller numbers of Hispanic and white students. Almost all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Over the past few years, the school has addressed and met specific recommendations set by its guiding organization, Universal Pre-K, to be father-friendly. As in all schools in NNPS, there always are challenges that arise and improvements needed in programs of family and community engagement.

Each year, Tremont invites parents—with extra outreach to dads—to volunteer for a school trip. Last year, many dads and students visited Hale Farm and Village, an historic area and museum dating back to 1810 featuring the lives of early settlers in Ohio. This year, fathers and father figures were invited to join the children and teachers on a trip to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Information was shared about a month prior to the trip. Parents' permission slips were required for children, and RSVPs identified dads and other volunteers.

Fathers and community partners who volunteered as trip chaperones enjoyed discovering new exhibits at the museum with their own and other children. This included a discovery room with many learning activities and exhibits about

animals, which were students' favorites.

Students had many questions about how animals live and why the live animals they saw moved away when the students came through their areas. Students learned, first hand, that staying quiet was important for not scaring animals away. The connections of students with the dads on the trip created opportunities for social interactions, connections with helpful adults, and sharing emotions and curiosity in seeing new and unusual exhibits.

A Universal Pre-K grant provided funds for transportation and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District provided lunches for the children. The Museum offered the school a discount on admissions. Tremont Montessori's ATP and teachers scheduled the trip so that the school's six classrooms could attend—two at a time on three different days. They ensured that there were no conflicts with other activities on the school schedule.

Parents, teachers, and community members came together as a team to plan and conduct successful trips. In all, 120 children and nearly the same number of fathers and father figures went to the Museum. Some dads were encouraged to attend by other dads who had signed up early.

The ATP and school staff were delighted to have so many fathers and men from the community on the trip. One father confirmed, "I has so much fun spending time with my daughter. This was a great idea!" Many photos were taken at the museum and posted on social media. After each group returned to school, students, dads, and teachers enjoyed discussing the exhibits they liked best and the most interesting things they all learned.

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TYPE 3

HEALTH AND SAFETY

## E-CIGARETTES & VAPING: WHAT ARE KIDS UP TO?

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HAND MIDDLE SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

**E**-cigarettes and vaping are becoming a health hazard for many students in middle and high schools. At Hand Middle School, the School Council addressed this issue by conducting a discussion as part of its Parent University—E-Cigarettes & Vaping: What Are Kids Up To? The presentation and discussion was held at the middle school, but was open to parents from elementary and high schools, and the community.

Hand Middle School, with 850 students, is in a racially and socioeconomically diverse attendance area. In collaboration with the School Improvement Committee, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and parents planned to bring together parents from schools in the area to start a conversation about e-cigarettes. Several vaping shops opened in surrounding neighborhoods. Many parents, teachers, and community members were concerned about the health consequences of vaping and their roles in guiding students about this fad or phenomenon.

The discussion was publicized via e-mail, phone messages, social media, website, and flyers that students took home. The middle school shared the information with the elementary and high schools, and with a cluster of local churches to publicize and encourage families, neighbors, and students to attend.

The invited presenter is a parent of a middle school student and a professor of health, education, and behavior at the University of South Carolina. The South Carolina Tobacco Free Collaborative worked with the presenter and teachers to develop materials to share with parents at the meeting and across the state.

At the workshop, parents, students, and teachers were shown the different vaping devices that students could use and easily hide (e-cigarettes, e-pens, vaporizers). They discussed

the physical and mental health concerns associated with vaping and e-cigarette use. There is growing evidence and concerns about the nicotine and flavoring in e-cigarettes, and marketing to middle and high school students. The school's technology teacher and students recorded the event to share online.

Following the presentation, other agencies, programs, and schools realized that concerns about vaping needed to be addressed. They reached out to the speaker to conduct presentations for their students, families, and communities. LRADAC, a non-profit organization that works to combat or treat drug and alcohol abuse, invited some of its members to attend the discussion to learn more and to frame their own workshops and programs.

School staff, who saw that vaping pens and other devices could look like computer flash drives, expressed gratitude for the information. One attending parent, who recently discovered that her son was vaping, was particularly appreciative of the sessions. She noted that she was now prepared to have a more informative discussion with her son.

Only a few parents and students attended this session the first time it was offered at Hand Middle School., but many may have "attended" online. The planners made progress: content was framed, materials developed, and lessons were learned about outreach to parents about discussions of sensitive topics. The problems with e-cigarettes in middle and high schools are not going to go away any time soon. Therefore, important discussions will continue with parents, students, and community members about vaping and students' health and mental health.

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## SUICIDE PREVENTION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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FRANCIS HOWELL MIDDLE SCHOOL  
ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

**S**tudents' mental health contributes to their academic success in school and to their leading happy and healthy lives. In the middle grades, early adolescent development can be something of a mystery to many parents. A good partnership program helps parents understand key stages of children's development, including early adolescence.

Francis Howell Middle School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) includes administrators, teachers, parents, and student representatives. It is known as the Family and Community Engagement Team (F.A.C.E.). The team follows a strategy of organizing discussions and presentations on topics that are of interest and importance to parents, students, and teachers.

One student member on the team suggested the importance of parents being able to understand suicide prevention strategies and to identify the signs of teen depression. Parents on the team and other parents agreed. Many wanted to know more about how to identify, prevent, and address signs of depression and thoughts of suicide in their children. Some questions concerned how to talk with a middle grades student about these sensitive topics.

The F.A.C.E. Team, administrators and counselors, organized a Parent Speaker Series to address parents' interests in and questions about their middle school students. Monthly meetings of the Parent Speaker Series focused on topics requested by parents.

The F.A.C.E. Team advertised each session with flyers, school social media, and the school marquee. Additional electronic advertisements were sent in a digital newsletter, online district advertising, and e-mail. Presenters included a school counselor and two experts from community organizations that address issues of community health and suicide prevention.

The F.A.C.E. Team surveyed students in their Character Connection class to determine

the relevance of the topic to parents. The survey found that 43% of students reported feeling very sad some of the time; 21% of students reported feeling hopeless about the future some of the time; and 4% reported considering suicide at some point in time. The student surveys revealed the importance of helping parents know more about how to discuss these topics with their early adolescents.

Parents attending the Speaker Series wanted to improve their knowledge and skills to identify and prevent suicide and thoughts of suicide in their teens in middle and high school. This is a difficult topic to discuss, but parents knew that the school was a good, safe place to learn more and ask questions. Over 25 parents and caregivers attended this topic session. F.A.C.E. Team funds (about \$50) were used for materials and refreshments.

The counselors and parents discussed many resources that were available in the school, district, and community that could help families help teens discuss problems and find solutions to problems that they face in growing up. The presentation helped to destigmatize the sensitive issues of teen depression and suicide. One attending parent said, "This presentation opened doors for me to be able to have a conversation with my child should I ever feel a concern."

Although results for students of a workshop and discussion with parents cannot be directly measured, the organizers of the Parent Speaker Series believe that starting conversations on suicide prevention and other important issues in early adolescence is one way to strengthen the bond between school and home and promote the mental health of students.

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## ABRIENDO PUERTAS (OPENING DOORS)

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WILLARD F. PAYNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
EL MONTE, CA

**A***abriendo Puertas (Opening Doors)* is a workshop series that prepares parents of preschool-aged children to support early childhood education, and to help their children with reading readiness skills. The goal is to empower parents to take an active role in preparing children to enter kindergarten.

Payne Elementary School, K-6, hosts several Head Start classes of students who will enroll in the school's Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs. Almost all students at the school are Hispanic, as are 80% of the teachers. The school's bi-literacy initiatives were recognized by the California Department of Education and are a source of pride at Payne.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators at Payne wanted to increase parents' confidence in encouraging and interacting with their children on early reading and literacy skills in Spanish and/or English. Students make more successful transitions from Head Start to Kindergarten if they have been exposed to reading and literacy activities in their home language and/or in English. This is important because students' success in Kindergarten is an early indicator of likely progress through the grades.

Payne set an ambitious target in its School Improvement Plan to meet Title III requirements for English learners to meet the same academic standards in reading, math, and other subjects at each grade level as other students. This starts by helping Head Start and other preschoolers with reading readiness activities. Countless studies confirm that, regardless of socioeconomic or linguistic backgrounds, parents can help preschool students enjoy stories, books, poems, songs, and other literacy-linked activities that prepare them for reading in Kindergarten.

A community foundation (La Promisa) recruited the school's Community Liaison as a partner to bring *Abriendo Puertas* to Payne's parents. She attended a 3-day workshop to learn to conduct the program. Then, she, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), principal, teachers, and community partners collaborated to conduct the 10-week series of *Abriendo Puertas* workshops on Saturday mornings for parents of preschool students.

The program was publicized with flyers in Spanish and English, through Ed Connect, by word of mouth, on the parent calendar, and at parent meetings. Breakfast and childcare were provided. The team also made hard copies of the workshop materials and provided families with the handouts and binders to organize the resources they collected.

Topics across the workshop weeks included recognizing that parents are the child's first teacher; children's growth and development, birth to 5 years; the power of words; social and emotional development; count with me—math readiness; how to stay engaged in your child's education; and more. In its first year at Payne, 18 parents and caregivers attended *Abriendo Puertas*. At the end of the series, parents earned certificates of completion.

The graduates praised the workshops, which were conducted in Spanish. Said one, "No me queria faltar ninguna session." ("I did not want to miss any session.") A grandparent attending noted, "Me dio mucha esperanza por el future de mis nietos." (It gave me a lot of hope for the future of my grandchildren.) The ATP believes that parents who experienced *Abriendo Puertas* will spread the word to other parents next year.

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## DIA DE LOS MUERTOS (DAY OF THE DEAD)

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HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

**H**awthorne Elementary continues to strengthen its partnership program to engage more and different parents at school and at home in supporting their children’s education. In recent years, the school’s partnership team launched a series of cultural and language-based coffee chats, meetings, and activities to understand the specific needs of groups of students and families at the school. Hawthorne also conducts engagement activities that bring all families together as a school community.

At the Spanish-Speaking Coffee Chat a few years ago, parents suggested celebrating Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), also known as All Souls Day. The holiday is celebrated in Latin America for families to remember and honor the lives of deceased relatives and family history. This celebration supports Hawthorne’s goals to help students with different backgrounds understand each other, engage all families, and reinforce school and family connections. Over the years, the celebration increased the engagement of diverse families and extended content for student learning. The agenda, decorations, and food service are largely led by parents.

Hawthorne ES is located in a culturally diverse zip code. Over 20 languages and dialects are spoken by students and families, and nearly half of all students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

As in most schools, teachers are working to close achievement gaps in learning by groups of students with different backgrounds. By ensuring a safe and welcoming school, challenging classes, and strong connections with families and the community, more students should master school skills and attain proficiency on standardized achievement tests.

Last year, teachers improved the classroom projects related to Dia de los Muertos. Art projects, poetry, songs, and dances created by students were presented at the celebration. The

art teacher prepared students with information on the holiday, including the tradition of sugar skulls. Students in kindergarten through second grade created sugar skull collages. Drawing upon culture and history, students made Penacho (feather and flower) headdresses and decorated paper skull masks—a positive symbol for Dia de los Muertos. Parents made traditional sugar skulls for students in grades 3-5 to decorate and display.

Students served as program emcees. The principal welcomed everyone to the celebration. Video clips introduced the history and culture of Dia de los Muertos. The school librarian read aloud a book about Dia de los Muertos. Students performed the songs they learned in class. Students and parents recited poems, and parents led dance routines for all attendees. A public librarian provided resources, addressed parents’ questions, and funded a guest artist to conduct art activities with students and parents.

At the event, about 680 tamales were sold, yielding over \$1000 for the school’s fund for partnerships and programming. Everyone enjoyed a free potluck dinner including rice and beans, hot chocolate, and pan de muerto—a traditional soft sugary bread.

Families learned of Dia de los Muretos via flyers in multiple languages, the newsletter, phone messages, the *Remind* app, and intercom announcements. Parents took responsibility for many activities. Over 120 students and 165 family members attended. It was clear that all students, teachers, and families were happy to learn about and celebrate this important part of Hispanic culture. The attendees agreed, “This would not happen without our Hispanic parents. It was just beautiful!”

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TYPE 5

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

## FAMILY OUTREACH THROUGH STUDENT AFFINITY GROUPS

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CLEVELAND HIGH SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

TYPE 5

Cleveland High School (CHS) set a goal to increase the engagement of families who were not able to participate in the student-led conferences that were conducted in the fall. A review of data on attendance at Back-to-School Night showed that many families of color were unable to attend. To help these families feel welcome at the school and part of the CHS community, the Family Engagement Action Team (FEAT) organized targeted activities for parents and family members linked to student affinity groups that had strong identities, shared interests, and common goals.

CHS serves about 870 students in 9th through 12th grades. Most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Some are English Language Learners or Differently-abled. Large percentages of students are Asian- and African-American, and small percentages are Hispanic and white students. Of students who attend CHS for four years, 82% graduate from high school on time. This percentage is going up, but the partnership team and other school leaders knew that the graduation rate will improve even more with age-appropriate family engagement at the school and at home.

The partnership team's mission is to increase family engagement in student learning with activities linked to student success, and by amplifying the voices of historically marginalized families. The team includes students, family members, teachers, administrators, and community partners who meet monthly to discuss students' needs and school programs.

This year, the FEAT scheduled engagement activities with demographic and affinity groups. For example, for Latinx Family Night, 20 family members came together to learn more about how to monitor their students' academic progress. Parents discussed their experiences

as new or long-term immigrants. They learned about how their teens' participation in project-based learning at school was related to options in higher education.

At the Black Family Engagement Brunch, about 65 family members discussed the importance of involvement, role models for students, and how CHS might improve its policies and practices by obtaining more input from African American parents, students, and community members. During a follow-up Chew & Chat, parents spoke about how much their children had grown as members of the CHS community.

Nearly 70 families attended a Filipino Night that included performances by students, families, and community members. During the event, families also learned about the provinces in the Philippines.

At a College Knowledge activity, over 200 students and parents from all backgrounds selected workshops on: (a) exploring college and career options after high school; (b) tips for success on ACT/SAT tests; (c) scholarship information; (d) summer internship opportunities; and (e) how to apply for financial aid.

The group activities conducted at CHS throughout the school year cost about \$3000, paid for by a grant from the Engaging Families in High School (EFIHS) project to improve student and family transitions from middle to high school. Students who were members of the FEAT reported that they gained leadership skills and strengthened their sense of belonging in the CHS community. In this high school, culturally responsive engagement activities are helping to create a more welcoming climate for all partners in education.

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MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

## FOOD FOR THE SOUL: AN INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION

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CAUGHMAN ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

**F**ood and families go hand in hand. With this in mind, Caughman Road Elementary's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), and other parent and teacher groups focused on the influence of African American ancestors on southern cooking. The history of southern cooking is fascinating and has had a profound influence on the taste of the nation—north, south, east, and west. The team also recognized that other families' foods, cooking, and cultures are equally delicious and worthy of attention.

Over 650 students attend Caughman Road ES in grades PreK-5. Most are African American, but small percentages are white and Hispanic, creating a diverse population of students, families, and favorite foods. The school includes a popular Montessori program and is known for having teachers who care deeply about their students' learning, progress, and success. The spirit of Caughman prompted the ATP to celebrate Black History Month, make room for other cultures, and bring students, families, and teachers together.

At Food for the Soul and International Celebration—a mega-potluck gathering—everyone at Caughman ES shared histories, ideas, options, and examples of recipes, spices, and flavors. By starting with a plan to celebrate Black History Month in a new way, the school's ATP and other teachers and parents wanted to spotlight the fact that enslaved chefs created new dishes and used new ingredients and spices that were not previously considered “edible” in the U. S., and now are celebrated as “cuisine.”

Some foods came directly from Africa to feed the captured slaves on their voyages. These included rice, okra, red peas, black-eyed peas, cassava, yams, lima beans, cornmeal, and many others. Slaves developed new ways to plant and

use corn, sweet potatoes, watermelon, papayas, sugar cane, and other foods. Spices gave new flavors to various stews. (See more via Google: Foods Originally from Africa.)

Parent volunteers brought homemade dishes. Also, teachers and some community partners cooked their ancestors' favorite foods. Staff at the school from Jamaica and Colombia brought distinctive specialties. Southern fare included homemade lemonade, peas and rice, and sweet potato poon. There also were displays with information on various countries and cultures to accompany the food.

In addition to dinner and an appreciation of the school's diversity, the Parent and Family Engagement Specialist distributed information to all families about helping students succeed in school. She shared a “connecting fact” that children do better in school if families eat dinner together—as they were doing at that evening.

Students provided much of the entertainment. There was a step show, hip-hop performance, African dancing, and a drumline ensemble. The school's chorus sang a few selections. A guest dance artist performed with the children and drumline.

Schools that conduct multicultural potluck dinners to introduce diverse groups of parents and students to each other are following the dictates of many food authors who agree that one of the best ways to respect and revere your ancestors is through the food they cooked, ate, and shared. Over 300 students and 400 family members attended the celebration, along with 24 teachers, administrators, and staff members. Everyone at Caughman Road ES enjoyed a night of food, folk, fun, and fulfillment.

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TYPE 1

MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

## VIDEO INVITATIONS

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EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA

**S**tudents are more likely to do their best in school if their parents are aware of school programs and have high expectations for their child’s attendance, classwork, and good behavior. For the past two years, Emerson Elementary School has used *ClassDojo*—a free communication system for school and family exchanges to connect with parents as partners in children’s education.

Usually, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators use *ClassDojo* to post written invitations to meetings and events. To increase parent participation, the co-chair of the ATP suggested posting a video invitation on *ClassDojo*. In the past, video invitations resulted in more parents attending meetings and events. One parent explained, “[The videos] add a personal touch to the invitation and make me feel like I am needed and am an important part of Emerson.”

Emerson is a K-6 school that serves mainly Hispanic students, most of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The video invitations aimed to increase the number of parents attending monthly ATP meetings; improve communications of staff, parents, and students; and “grow” parent leaders at the school.

The school set an ambitious goal in its School Improvement Plan for 100% of students to meet expectations for good behavior. Teachers knew that they needed parents’ help for students to attain this behavioral goal. By connecting with some parents at ATP meetings, they believed that there would be many good ideas about how to connect effectively with all parents.

A day or two before each monthly ATP meeting, two teachers and/or team co-chairs recorded a video invitation in English and Spanish encouraging parents to attend the

scheduled meeting. The video, posted on *ClassDojo*, included the meeting time, location, snacks provided, topics on the agenda, and guest speakers. Often administrators and other guests presented useful information at the monthly meetings and answered parents’ questions. The ATP scripted and posted the invitations, and included a “hook” to leave families wanting to attend to learn more and to contribute to the discussions.

In return, parents could send questions on *ClassDojo* to clarify points or obtain more information. The videos also were e-mailed to all Emerson staff to share with students in their classrooms. One teacher reflected, “I like to make sure that my students’ parents know they are a needed and welcomed voice. We know the value that our parents add to our school and our students!” ATP meeting topics focus especially on the school’s mission, vision, expectations for behavior, curriculum, programs, and how to support students at home. At all meetings, parents are encouraged to contribute to the discussion.

The ATP found that the video invitations increased attendance to 50 or more parents at each monthly ATP meeting. Parents related to the video invitations, but it was still true that the practice relied on parents checking their *ClassDojo* accounts. Video invitations can be used along with other technologies to increase the number of parents who meet with teachers and staff to support the school and contribute to student success. When everyone is on the same page about the school’s programs, problem solving, and openness to new ideas, then parents and teachers see that they are, together, partners in students’ education.

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## 9TH GRADE HIGH SCHOOL SUCCESS FAMILY ACTIVITIES

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RAINIER BEACH HIGH SCHOOL  
SEATTLE, WA

**R**ainier Beach High School's partnership team is working to increase family engagement to smooth 9th graders' transition to high school. The team knows that families make the transition from middle to high school *with* their children, but many parents are not sure they are welcome as partners at the high school level. Further, the transition to high school is a process that continues until students' promotion to grade 10. Family engagement remains an important source of support for students through high school.

Rainier Beach is a racially and culturally diverse high school of about 700 students, most of whom are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The partnership team, teachers, and administrators planned a series of activities for the families of 9th graders during the 2018-19 school year to support student success. This included an initial orientation, 1st quarter parent-teacher-student conferences, and 3rd quarter conferences. A school goal called for at least 90% of students at each grade level to earn the requisite credits for promotion to the next grade and 24 credits for on-time graduation.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) used robo calls, advisory class announcements, 9th grade e-newsletters, and advisors' phone calls home to promote parents' attendance at the three main family engagement activities. Teachers of 9th grade students managed the logistics of the meetings by setting the agendas, organizing space, and interacting with families. Community members also hosted tables to provide information to families about their programs, summer school, health services, college/career field trips, and scholarships. The district's Bilingual Instructional Assistance program served as interpreters for families, as needed.

At 9th grade Family Orientation Night, each family received a folder with information on school programs and people to contact. Everyone enjoyed a dinner of Mexican food. The principal and vice principal welcomed families and encouraged parents to remain engaged at school and at home throughout their child's high school career.

Dinner tables were set by language (i.e., English, Spanish, Somali, Vietnamese, and Chinese) for families to meet and talk with each other. Then, families were assigned color-coded groups to cycle through four stations on (a) the school's counseling, restorative justice, social emotional support services; (b) how to help students graduate from high school on time; (c) how to use the online parent portal (Source/Schoology) for information on their child's attendance, grades, and missing assignments; and (d) the school's International Baccalaureate (IB) program and how to become an IB student.

The school used a grant focused on family engagement at the transition to high school to cover costs of the family meetings. More than 100 family members and 50 students attended. Later in the year at the 1st- and 3rd- quarter parent, student, and teacher conferences, attendees continued to discuss the importance of on-going school, family, and community partnerships to sustain students' good attendance, behavior, and course performance.

At the Finish Strong 3rd Quarter Conferences, staff prepared a BINGO game based on ways that teachers, parents, and students can communicate about students' progress and success. Teachers reported that more students passed their courses after the early intervention (1st quarter) conferences, and that the full sequence of events made teachers and families more able and willing to connect with each other.

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TYPE 2

TRANSITIONS

## FRESHMAN PARENT NIGHT

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A. C. FLORA HIGH SCHOOL  
COLUMBIA, SC

**T**he transition to high school is both exciting and challenging for students. At Flora High School, leaders created a plan to provide parents of incoming freshmen with important information about the school's policies, procedures, and expectations. They wanted to ensure that new freshmen and their parents understood the importance of Algebra I and English I courses and the End-of-Course exams that "count" for success in grade 9. These requirements and assessments were different from the students' and parents' experiences in middle school.

Students' success at Flora HS is largely determined by the academic and social supports that rising 9th grade students receive at the time of transition from middle to high school. Studies show that students who adjust well to high school, pass their classes, and are promoted to grade 10 are more likely to graduate from high school.

About 1400 students are enrolled at Flora High School, which was rated the 15th best high school in the state of South Carolina. It boasts high student participation in AP courses (62%). Just about all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Freshman Parent Night addressed the school's goal to increase the percentage of freshmen who passed both Algebra I and English I. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), Parent and Family Engagement Specialist, and Assistant Principal wanted to welcome new families and students and set a strong trajectory for parents' participation at school and at home through high school.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) worked hard to generate buzz about Freshman Parent Night by posting the information on the

school's website, distributing flyers, sending auto-dial messages, and distributing E-blast announcements to parents. They also prepared an agenda for the evening and an exit survey for families.

At Freshman Parent Night, the assistant principal gave a PowerPoint presentation on the expectations for freshmen in grade 9, and an overview of the End-of-Course Exams in Algebra I and English I. He offered suggestions and resources for students and their parents about how to prepare for success throughout the year and how to study for the tests at home. The team created a multiple choice trivia game modeled after *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*. The game featured questions to reinforce the content of the presentation.

Parents and students were divided into teams of six to play *Who Wants to be a Successful Freshman?* Questions asked how much they learned and understood about school rules and End-of-Year Course Exams. Every table was supplied with dry erase paddleboards and markers. At the end of the evening, the team with the most points won prizes.

Freshman students learned about their responsibilities to put forth the effort needed to attend school every day on time, participate in class, complete homework, study for tests, and prepare for the mandatory exams. About 40 parents and their new freshmen gained insights into high school on Freshman Parent Night. One parent's comment proved the point, "I did not know the Algebra I and English I End of Course Exams were 'must pass' tests. I learned so much today." The information will be shared with all parents and students, including those unable to attend Freshman Parent Night.

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## MUSTANG MOTIVATION: START FROM THE BEGINNING

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KROTZ SPRINGS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KROTZ SPRINGS, LA

**S**tarting the school year on the right foot is an important step toward academic success. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Krotz Springs knew that if parents and family members knew about school rules and expectations, and common challenges as students proceed from one grade to the next, they would be able to help students adjust quickly to their new school and begin learning to their full potential. One teacher said of Mustang Motivation, “This approach reduces some of the first-day anxieties that all students feel as they move on to a new grade and new teacher. Many students will have their school supplies, so we can focus on more interesting content right away.”

Krotz Springs Elementary School, PreK-8, is located on the banks of the Atchafalaya River. Parent engagement is valued at the school, and parents have been interested and involved at school-sponsored events and meetings. Although there has been a strong bond with parents and community partners, the school leaders and teachers wanted to ensure that all parents and students were aware of and supported the school’s goals for student behavior and good citizenship through the new school year.

The school’s mascot—Mustang—activated Mustang Motivation to remind students and families of school supplies needed at each grade level, the Krotz Springs Town Newsletter, school website, social media platforms, and other ways that parents and teachers can stay connected throughout the school year.

Mustang Motivation started in August at the beginning of the academic school year. Parents and students came to meet their new classroom teachers. They discussed important information about what students will be learning in

the new school year. After a general session for all parents to reinforce the concept of a school community, parents had time to pay school fees and order school uniforms.

Parents and students moved on to the child’s classroom. Teachers created individual presentations and discussions by grade level. For example, teachers in the upper grades discussed expectations for students in English and Mathematics, positive behavior and student support programs, extracurricular opportunities, requirements for grade promotion, and the importance of the school’s Action Plan for School, Family, and Community Partnerships.

Parents and students had a chance to see sample standardized tests and try some questions to learn more about the assessments that their children would take during the year at each grade level. Most parents remarked about the challenging curriculum at each grade level, noting, “Much harder than when I was in school.” They could see that it was important for students to do their best. Teachers and administrators answered parents and students’ questions and concerns about the upcoming school year.

Before leaving, parents took a short survey to share their ideas about how to make the school year successful for students, and their suggestions for family engagement activities. Students who attended with their parents were rewarded with passes to wear denim on the first Friday of the school year—a welcome incentive instead of the required school uniforms.

Nearly 250 students and their parents attended Mustang Motivation. They agreed that there is power in school, family, and community partnerships for students’ success. And, they were ready, able, and eager to start the year.

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TYPE 2

TRANSITIONS



# 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.



## BASKET BINGO

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EMMETT O'BRIEN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
ANSONIA, CT

**E**mmett O'Brien Technical High School needed to raise funds to support student learning and enrichment. Typically, the Parent Family Organization (PFO) raises money for scholarships for graduating seniors. Also, various clubs, classes, and committees may go to the PFO to request contributions to supply students with special materials, money for trips, and other activities. The PFO treasurer, who previously ran a bingo night for a nonprofit organization, suggested hosting monthly bingo nights at O'Brien Tech.

The school serves over 500 students from several nearby towns in many programs that focus on career preparation. Over the past few years, the school made extensive renovations to the gymnasium, cafeteria, and state-of-the-art trades classrooms, but the staff and students wanted funds for classroom materials and for extra activities for student learning. After reviewing local bingo laws, the PFO, Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and student representatives learned that students could be involved in bingo nights and basket raffles, as long as they received no cash prizes. The PFO paid about \$600 for bingo liability insurance and a small sum for rolls of tickets, instruction sheets, double-sided game cards, other game materials, and baskets for holding and displaying prizes.

Teachers helped promote the event by creating and distributing flyers. The cost of attending Basket Bingo was \$20 per person for all bingo game materials, and \$1 per extra raffle or \$5 for 10 raffle tickets. Some parents with the PFO helped plan Basket Bingo. Many parents, teachers, and community members contributed by

donating products, gift cards, and services for the impressive baskets that were awarded for Bingo, and for the raffles that occurred throughout the night.

Students in the Culinary Arts program participated as cooks and servers of refreshments. Students in other career prep programs volunteered for various jobs. To prepare for Basket Bingo and to encourage family participation, the principal, administrators, chairperson, ATP, and PFO sent out notices, updated the school website with alerts, and made school wide announcements to students and parents.

A number of people were instrumental in making Basket Bingo possible, including two Bingo callers, five kitchen volunteers, four people serving food in the dining room, and one person delivering prizes. All volunteers were supervised by a teacher or advisor.

A Master of Ceremony awarded prizes, organized the evening agenda, and asked trivia questions throughout the evening. Basket Bingo took place a few times during the school year. Some nights were based on a theme, which guided the trivia questions, bingo games, and prize baskets. As many as 1000 students, parents, community members, teachers, and administrators attended at least one Basket Bingo session.

A teacher served as Chairperson and worked with others to distribute the funds collected to benefit a variety of student needs in many teachers' classrooms. The principal found the well-planned Basket Bingo events remarkable, "PFO does an incredible job with this event. Students get to work on a community-centered project, and people really enjoy themselves." The school

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## EVENING OF THE ARTS

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A. I. PRINCE TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL  
HARTFORD, CT

**S**tudent creativity and community outreach can go hand in hand. Every year A.I. Prince Technical High School hosts Evening of the Arts. On this occasion, students, families, staff, and the community are invited to attend an art show and performances of music, dance, and drama by students and staff.

Prince Tech is an urban high school of over 650 mainly Hispanic and African American students from 20 towns—part of the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS). The school’s courses cluster in architecture and construction; hospitality and tourism; transportation and distribution; agriculture and natural resources; manufacturing; human services; arts/AV technology; marketing and sales; and information technology.

Students at Prince Tech not only prepare for future careers, but also develop many other talents. Evening of the Arts puts their talents on display and aims to strengthen the school’s welcoming climate. The diverse students, parents, and folks from the broader community come together to support and celebrate students’ achievements and talents.

At Evening of the Arts, attendees enjoyed light refreshments as they viewed an art gallery of work by students, teachers, and staff. Participants could speak with the artists about their work. Family and community visitors completed make-and-take art projects during the evening. For example, students helped them create original artistic buttons.

The Visual Arts Department issued an e-mail to invite students, academic instructors, and staff to submit their painting, weaving, carving, drawing, photography, collage, sewing, and other projects. Trade instructors submitted art-related projects made in shop.

Students were the masters of ceremonies of the shows in the school’s multi-purpose room. Sound production trade-technology students managed the lighting and stage set up. The

school’s chorus opened the show, followed by a student Dance Troupe that performs dances from around the world at school and other community locations. Then came a staff musical performance. Students showcased their talents in piano, card tricks, drama, singing, and dance routines. Crowd participation was encouraged with sing-a-long and dance demonstrations. All trades at the school were represented, as were students from all grade levels.

A Q & A period enabled attendees to ask questions or comment on the program. The finale was a sing-a-long with all members of the production carrying balloons with messages on the string. The balloons were distributed at the end of the night to all attendees to celebrate the community building that occurred throughout the evening.

To publicize Evening of the Arts, flyers were posted on the school’s website. Every household received a phone call invitation to the event. Family engagement funds (about \$500) were used for refreshments for student performers and props for different performances. About 85 students, 45 family members, 10 community members, and at least 10 teachers and staff attended.

Overall, the planners were intentional about making sure that all staff and students were able to participate in the event, either by contributing to a display or performance, or helping to organize and conduct activities. Students were pleased with the audience’s cheers, and were satisfied with a job well done. Parents took pride in seeing the students put their passions on display. One parent remarked, “Wow, I loved it!”—which neatly summed up reactions to Evening of the Arts.

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## FALL CARNIVAL

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RUTH LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA

**T**o foster a climate of good partnerships, Livingston Elementary held a Fall Carnival. The goal was to welcome families and students to the new school year. Games and activities spread through the hallways, gym, cafeteria, library, and outside on the playground.

Livingston enrolls about 800 diverse students in grades K-6, including 55% white, 35% Hispanic, and 10% students with other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Over half of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The PTO, ATP, teachers, and administrators invited students and their families to explore the school, meet teachers and other families, and participate in fun and learning activities. All partners were invited to volunteer, set up booths, facilitate games, provide prizes, and donate treats. Parent and teacher volunteers ran the activity booths and games in shifts. Community members donated supplies and prizes. Food trucks came for families who wanted to buy dinner. Students helped set up and clean up the event.

Students took flyers home, and distributed information in the community for donations. There was wide publicity on the school app, *ClassDojo*. Students also took home registration forms to learn how many people from each family planned to attend, and who could volunteer to help with the activities.

The entry fee to the carnival was \$2 per person or up to \$10 per family, for access to all games and activities. Families could take pictures in a photo booth; get a balloon animal from the balloon clown; get their faces painted; enjoy complimentary popcorn; and participate in many games. These included candy corn bowling, pirate hook toss, dunk tank, cake

walk, Minecraft corn hole, Nerf gun shooting, pumpkin sweep, pumpkin pond, rubber chicken toss, and other games donated by community members and the local church.

The PTO purchased some large, outdoor activities that can be used for years, including a Knockerball Connect Four and Knockerball soccer dart board. The dunk tank was the most popular attraction, with teachers volunteering to let students and family members try to dunk them. This produced great school spirit! There were modest costs for outdoor lights, popcorn and food, face painting, and the balloon clown. Overall, the carnival costs of about \$1000 were just about matched in admission and school spirit sales.

Parents and teachers evaluated the carnival at the next ATP meeting. Over 400 students and siblings, 170 parents and community partners, and about 30 teachers and administrators attended. One student said simply, "It was really fun!" A parent observed, "One of the most fun things was seeing the teachers and students interact. It was apparent just how much these kids love their teachers." A teacher noted, "I liked that there were activities for all ages. There were even activities for my two-year-old. Space was a factor, but the outdoor activities were a huge hit and helped spread the love."

With this experience behind them, the ATP and others now know the steps for a successful carnival: Contact businesses; organize teachers, parents, and students to assist in many ways; gather supplies and donations; organize space and set up; and clean up. Carnivals are a lot of work, but also are a good way to celebrate school spirit and good partnerships.

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## GRANDPARENTS DAY CELEBRATION

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HOPKINS MIDDLE SCHOOL  
HOPKINS, SC

TYPE 2

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

**W**hen we think of engaging parents in children's education, we sometimes forget that other family members also contribute to student success. Grandparents play a vital role in the lives of many students. This is true at Hopkins Middle School, which serves about 500 students in grades 6-8, most of whom (over 90%) are African American.

Grandparents Day was dedicated to acknowledging and celebrating the important contributions made by grandparents to the well-being and education of their grandchildren. It was an occasion, too, for families to show gratitude and respect for the older generation of adults in the community, as well as to recognize an inter-generational connection through the love of reading. This was a morning activity and breakfast was served.

Student ushers greeted the grandparents who came to school, helped them sign in, distributed programs, and escorted them to the cafeteria. The Parent and Family Engagement Specialist spoke with the visitors and offered a one-page handout from the Legacy Project entitled, *12 Tips: Bring the Generations in your Family Closer*. This included ideas for grandparents and grandchildren to cook, read, share family stories, create scrapbooks or albums, interview each other, and conduct other activities and conversations. Said one grandmother, "Thank you for the tips. I will be using these."

Students were in charge. A student Master of Ceremonies introduced the presentations. A student keynote speaker delivered a message entitled, "What Grandparents Are For." Another read a poem dedicated to grandparents, which was also printed on the program. Student groups and clubs performed including the dance group, band, and orchestra. There may never be an audience more appreciative of children's

many talents.

Welcoming grandparents to the school created a warm atmosphere. The turnout demonstrated that these family partners were eager to be part of their grandchildren's lives and learning. Over 50 grandparents and family members and more than 50 students participated in Grandparent's Day Celebration. Teachers recorded an unexpected observation that, with grandparents present, students were especially well behaved.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, students, and others helped advertise Grandparents Day with flyers, the school website, and an auto-dialer phone system. Students took home invitations that included RSVP forms to help predict attendance. Some parents and grandparents provided support, resources, and transportation to help others attend. Administrators managed and supported the efforts of students and teachers to make the program a success.

Some grandparents shared stories about what it was like when they went to school. For many, there were no middle schools like Hopkins. For some others, at one time they were denied a right to attend the school in their neighborhood. Students were learning things about their family members that they had never heard before.

Many grandparents are still young at heart, active, and employed. Some signed up to be mentors to students at the school. Others took advantage of a unique partnership activity. They were invited to describe their businesses and services by purchasing an advertisement in the school newsletter. Not only did this give attention to their businesses, but also helped the school generate funds for the next celebration.

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## KIDS NIGHT OUT

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FOUR HEROES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
LAKEWOOD, WA

Schools across the country are working to improve student attendance and on-time arrival. Four Heroes ES implemented an incentive program for students and families to improve and maintain good student attendance. Students with 96% or more average daily attendance each month earned a “night out,” and their parents gained free time in recognition of their part in ensuring their child’s good attendance.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and staff introduced Kids Night Out to over 700 students (K-5) at a school assembly. They explained that students who had good attendance (96% or more) each month would celebrate with their siblings at school. Parents received flyers about the program and discussed it at a regularly scheduled meeting of Coffee with the Principal.

The principal explained, “By including the whole family in this activity, we immediately saw a dramatic increase in the number of students who were at school every day. The families saw the importance of attendance because teachers and administrators contributed their Friday nights to celebrate with students and to give parents three hours of child care.” About 60 teachers volunteered over the year. Some parents also volunteered to work with teachers, administrators, and community members to conduct activities with the students.

Could coming to school on Friday nights be exciting? The answer is “Yes!” The planners considered many activities—mostly low cost or cost free—that would appeal to students at all grade levels. At each Kids Night Out, students gathered in the gym to discuss ground rules, expectations, and available activities. They received a school map of the available activities and made their choices.

Students had about two hours to participate in an activity of their choice. For example, in the school’s technology room, students played math and coding games on computers. An arts and crafts activity and two movie screenings were scheduled at each celebration. In the gym, students could exercise and ride big bikes. There also were board games, bubble blowing, and dance sessions. The staff learned that the games and art activities were more interesting to students when the Night Out followed a fun-theme. For instance, a Star Wars theme included a photo booth and pool-noodle Jedi swords. Other themes were Polar Express, Dr. Seuss, and Summer.

For the last part of the celebration, students gathered in the gym for a movie and snacks. On average, over 350 students with 96% attendance for the month enjoyed a Kids Night Out sometime during the year. Teachers shared photos of the fun that everyone had at the all-school assembly on Mondays after the events. The goal was to motivate all students to attend school regularly in the next month to join the fun.

Kids Night Out is a unique approach to improving attendance. The ATP observed that students *wanted* to come to school. They connected with many teachers and improved behavior, overall. It has become so successful that the school budgeted \$1000 of Title I and Parent Teacher Organization funds to host the practice in the coming year. A parent reported, “Kids Night Out is not only great for students, but gives parents a bit of free time with peace of mind that their children are safe, learning, and having fun.”

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## NOW WE'RE COOKING WITH THE ARTS!

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GREENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
FLORENCE, SC

TYPE 3

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Everyone knows that children do better in school when their parents are engaged in their education and have positive relationships with teachers at the school. Greenwood ES, located in a rural area, enrolls over 750 students in grade K-6. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and all teachers, administrators, staff, and families at the school share a goal for a safe and welcoming environment that encourages positive school and family communications.

Now We're Cooking with the Arts! aimed to strengthen family and school connections and enable parents to meet and interact with teachers and with each other. The ATP, teachers, and others built on a previously-tested successful activity and changed its theme. This year, they paired the favorite Chili and Cookies Contests with art and music activities for all attendees.

Parents and other family members took several roles in addition to simply attending the event. Some judged the chili and cookies contests. These were serious (but friendly) competitions. The judges had official score sheets that referred to specific qualities of taste and presentation. One of judges gained confidence, "This was great fun, I want to enter my chili next year!"

While the judging was underway, other parents, teachers, and students selected an art or music activity. Students and parents could make a pitch-pipe in music and learn about its tones, or make a clay pot as an art activity.

When "the best" recipes were announced, everyone came together to celebrate and snack on the contest entries. The first, second, and third place winners in the chili and cookies contests were honored. Winners received George Foreman Grills, pots and pans, crock-pots, or

kitchen caddies. All also received trophies to mark their accomplishments. A local trophy company that is a community partner with the school designed the contest awards. The winners and judges also answered questions from all attendees about their recipes.

Now We're Cooking with the Arts! was publicized with posters throughout the school, Blackboard messages, social media, the school's Morning Show, marquee, district website, district calendar, and timely reminders. Flyers were sent home to parents inviting them to participate in the Chili-Cookie Bake Off contest, music, and art activities.

About 30 participants entered the Chili and Cookie Bake Off contests. Over 70 parents, 90 students, and many teachers participated. Some students worked with their parents to cook the treats for the contests. One mom remarked, "Thank you for a fun evening. My daughter enjoyed helping me make the cookies."

Each child who attended chose a free book to take home and parents received suggestions for encouraging reading at home. Lights, music, and signs added to the celebration. The tables held cheese, sour cream, and crackers to complement the chili, so attendees could prepare their dishes to taste.

A small grant for partnership projects from the school's partner—Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence—paid for the art and music supplies, paper products to serve the treats, books for students, and the prizes for contest winners. This was a good use of time and funds for teacher-parent-student connections to strengthen school, family, and community partnerships.

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## PARENT LEADERSHIP COMMUNITIES

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HOLT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
TUSCALOOSA, AL

**L**ike all schools in NNPS, Holt ES is always working to strengthen school and family relationships. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and others created the Parent Leadership Committees (PLC) series of workshops to increase parents' participation in and leadership of meetings about their children's success in school. They especially wanted to increase the participation of parents of English Language Learners (ELL).

The school serves students in grades PreK-5, and just about all students (95%) are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. About 60% of the students are African American, 20% are white, and 20% are Hispanic. Most of the latter speak Spanish as their home language.

Parents selected the discussion groups that interested them in the language of choice (English or Spanish). Topics focused on reading and math in the older and younger grades; challenges and solutions for ELL student success; and school behavior for success. Math was one of the most popular topics, as parents had many questions about math standards, instruction, and feasible ways to help their children.

The meetings included an icebreaker, discussion of an article for parents facilitated by a teacher or community member, and positive conversations among parents about concerns and ideas about ways to assist their children. To publicize the PLCs, the ATP scheduled phone-call reminders, sent notes home, broadcast information on the electronic bulletin board, and promoted the events through students. Pizza, BBQ, and chili dinners and door prizes were incentives for parents to attend. Childcare was provided with dinner for children, along with STEM and other fun activities, which enabled parents to enjoy dinner and build connections with other parents and teachers.

The PLC series culminated in a ceremony to recognize parents' participation and to increase

interest for the next school year. Many parents sent their students to the stage to accept the certificates on their behalf. The chaplain of the University of Alabama's athletic department was the guest speaker at the ceremony. Representatives from United Way attended to share information about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and other initiatives.

Catering was provided for a few hundred people through the fundraising efforts of Leadership Tuscaloosa, the Parent-Teacher Leadership Academy Scholarship, Leadership Tuscaloosa Community Fundraiser, and Title I. About \$2500 of donated funds covered all costs.

Over 100 different parents attended one or more PLC meetings. The ATP expects that PLCs will promote parent leaders who can facilitate other groups of parents in discussions, and having teachers provide resources on the topics of meetings. Parents were enthusiastic about the PLC. Although some were initially apprehensive about sharing ideas, they grew to be open and helpful to each other. The parents' conversations also helped teachers better understand families' needs and interests. Teachers observed that the students of parents who attended the sessions improved academically and behaviorally.

The Spanish-speaking parents told the Assistant Principal that they felt the PLC sessions gave them a voice in the school. One wrote that next year she wanted to go even deeper in discussions of: "El aprendizaje de mis hijos y en cómo podemos involucranos y ayudarlos a ser mejores academicamente y en lo personal . . ." (The learning of my children and how we can get involved and help them to be better academically and personally. . .)

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TYPE 5

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

## PARENTS & TEACHERS COLLABORATION NIGHT

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JOHN MCCLELLAN HIGH SCHOOL  
LITTLE ROCK, AR

TYPE 2

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

**W**hen parents and teachers work together, their children do better in school academically and socially, even at the high school level. McClellan HS conducted Parent & Teachers Collaboration Night to strengthen the school's welcoming climate, increase the number of family volunteers, and build greater trust between parents and teachers.

At the beginning of the school year, a survey of parents indicated that many were wary of participating at school based on their own memories of high school and concerns about communicating with teachers about their teenagers. The school serves mainly African American students, and most students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Parents wondered whether they could relate well to teachers who had different backgrounds from the families, and whether teachers would relate well with them.

To reduce parents' anxieties, which were clear in the survey responses, teachers and administrators discussed the challenge, parents' suggestions, and ways to improve home and school connections in the next school year. One approach was Parents & Teachers Collaboration Night. This was publicized with flyers, morning intercom announcements, and scheduled phone calls to all students' families.

Parents and students were invited to attend. A business partner provided sandwiches. Administrators welcomed everyone. Then, students performed. The entertainment included the school choir and the winner of the Best Talent Contest, who recited a unique monologue. The participants at Collaboration Night became a leadership group of about 15 parents, 16 students, and 5 teachers and administrators. They discussed ways that more parents could volunteer their time and talent at the school and for the students. Another conversation focused on creative ways that parents, teachers, and students could communicate with each other

about school activities and how students were progressing toward on-time graduation.

The attendees used the gathering to share ideas about specific school and family connections that would help more parents—indeed, all parents—feel welcomed and valued. The planners reflected that more parents and family partners might attend school meetings and events if there were door prizes and other incentives. They agreed that student participation—like the evening's entertainment—is a “plus,” especially at the high school level.

Some parents who attended became more actively engaged at the school and in their children's education. One explained, “I would like to volunteer more. Just let me know how I can help.” Students who participated also noticed benefits of good communications of teachers and parents. One student stated, “I wish we had more events like this one.”

An unexpected benefit was that, after seeing their peers perform, more students were inspired to become active in the choir and in other extra-curricular activities. Parent & Teachers Collaboration Night—itself a collaboration of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), parent association, principal, and teachers—contributed to a positive school climate and a culture of good partnerships among teachers, students, and families. The activity demonstrated an awareness and commitment to school, family, and community connections beyond the usual parent-teacher conferences. By extending outreach and adding incentives, Parent & Teacher Collaboration Night demonstrated that it is possible to overcome communication barriers and allay parents' fears about becoming active partners in their teens' education.

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## SOCKTOBER

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JAMES MCGEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WA

**A**s winter approached and temperatures dropped, McGee Elementary School increased attention to some children's need to stay warm with a sock drive for foster children. This partnership activity aimed to create a climate of caring at McGee, and to engage elementary school students in meaningful acts of kindness. Parents appreciated that their children had an opportunity to be generous and helpful to others. Said one, "This is great for my son. He was able to think about other's needs besides just his own."

McGee Elementary serves about 600 students, K-6, from diverse backgrounds. More than half of the students are Hispanic, and small percentages are white or have other racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. Many are English Language Learners.

Students at McGee work hard to improve academically. For example, over the past five years McGee was recognized as a School of Distinction by the Center for Educational Effectiveness for being among the top 5% of improving schools in the state.

The October sock drive—Socktober—asked students to contribute a new pair of socks that would fit themselves, which ensured diverse sizes across all grade levels. The collection was donated to Beautiful Threads, a local nonprofit organization. Among many services, that organization enables foster families to obtain clothing at no charge to fit their growing children. Beautiful Threads lets schools know the kinds of clothing on their most-needed list—such as socks.

Grade levels competed on which one(s) brought in the most pairs of socks. A teacher created giant sock posters that hung in the school entry hall. Each grade level graphed their

donations. Students could read the graphs and watch the socks accumulate. The prize was 15 extra minutes of recess for the winning grade level.

Parents, teachers, and community members also were invited to donate socks to their child's classroom. Administrators reminded students about the project and gave weekly updates on the totals. A lead teacher collected the socks from each class.

The foster children at the school were helped to understand that they were not being singled out, and the sock collection was for foster families that were served by the collaborating organization. This was a sensitive but very important communication. Foster children at McGee joined all students to donate socks to benefit others.

Socktober was promoted through flyers, reminders from teachers, and parent communication apps such as *ClassDojo* and *Bloomz*. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and school leaders expected about 650 pairs of donated socks—one pair from each student. However, students and families exceeded expectations with 1,181 pairs of socks donated in Socktober. A teacher observed, "I loved how my class came together and counted how many pairs of socks they contributed. It was their goal to fill the collection box every day."

The event raised students' awareness that during cold months, some people who lived in their community did not have everything they needed to stay warm. Many students got the message through the Socktober slogan—Warm Feet, Happy Hearts. They understood that it is not difficult to help others feel cared for in the community.

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## SWAP NOT SHOP

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FUNDAMENTALS CHILDREN'S CENTER  
BEACHWOOD, OH

TYPE 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

**I**n every educational setting, generosity creates connections and yields benefits. FUNDamentals Children's Center (part of the Cuyahoga County Universal Pre-Kindergarten / Starting Point network) wanted to help families, staff, and neighbors of the Menorah Park Senior Living Community to share a happy and joyous holiday season.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and administrators developed Swap Not Shop to meet a school improvement goal of "giving back" to the community. The school leaders wanted their young students to know that if someone is in need, it is a wonderful idea to help if you can—and everyone has things to "swap."

The preschool serves students 6 weeks to 5 years old. The non-profit organization is based at the Senior Living Community and is the child-care center for the employees, as well as for others in the community. FUNDamentals is a 5-Star Step Up to Quality Center, a Healthy Ohio Center, and a U.S. Department of Agriculture Child and Adult Care Food Program. Its program emphasizes developmentally-appropriate active learning experiences for children, with hands-on and minds-on activities at all age levels.

The Center takes pride in its family and community engagement activities. Each year, the school conducts over 100 intergenerational programs with family members, residents, and clients on campus, and others in the community.

A few weeks before Swap Not Shop was scheduled, the ATP and other teachers invited families to donate new or like-new children's toys, stuffed animals, and clothing. At holiday-time, many families, including new immigrant families in the area, cannot afford to buy gifts for their children.

Parents encouraged each other to find gently-used items to donate. Students reminded their families to donate and volunteer at the event. School administrators helped by finding space, advertising, collecting items, and washing or cleaning clothes and toys.

According to one of the Center directors, the outpouring of donations was amazing—enough to fill an entire office. At the three-hour event in the auditorium, all items were set up for display. Parents and community members came in and could swap items or just "shop for free." Over 50 family and community members—moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and employees of the senior center—came to find a gift for someone in their families. Students, teachers, and staff also participated.

One grandmother in a wheelchair who was suffering from dementia found a reason to smile when she saw a stuffed bear and leopard. Said her daughter, "This is the happiest I've seen my mom in a long time." A single dad—happy to participate—commented, "Man this is great!" At the end of the day, all that remained was one small box of items that was donated to Goodwill.

Throughout the activity, children helped carry bags of clothes and toys for shoppers. Some children showed shoppers how to play with particular toys or select books that they knew another child would like to read. In so doing, the young students at FUNDamentals learned, first hand, about the good feelings that result from giving back to their communities. Swap Not Shop was evaluated using a Family Engagement Survey provided by the school's guiding organization, Starting Point.

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## WELCOME TO OUR HOUSE

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WESTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
WESTLAKE, LA

**F**or many students, school is a second home. At Westwood Elementary, Welcome to Our House was a new-and-improved Back to School Night where parents and students could visit the school and classrooms with ease. This was a first step in introducing a new House System to create a welcoming school climate and to strengthen connections of students, teachers, staff, and families across the grades.

Westwood Elementary serves about 400 students in pre-K to grade 2. Every year, about 25% of students are new to the school. As a result of a professional development workshop, teachers were inspired to implement a mixed-age House System. In Westview's version, the school formed 4 "houses." Students and teachers were randomly assigned across grade levels to each House. All school staff, including cafeteria workers, custodians, and bus drivers also were assigned to one of the 4 Houses.

The school set climate goals for all students as the 3-Bs: Be Kind, Be Safe, and Be Respectful. Each House had its own team color, team cheer, team bracelet, and t-shirt in the house color. When a staff member observed a student holding the door, picking up trash, or modeling good manners, the student was given a House Point, which was placed in a pocket chart in their classrooms.

Every Friday, House Points were counted and the House with the most points had its team flag flown on the flagpole in front of the school. At the end of each quarter, the House that had flown its flag the most times had a House Celebration Party coordinated by parents and school staff.

Parents were enthusiastic about the House System, which they learned about at Welcome to

Our House. Many parents become involved with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and administrators in developing events and activities for the House System's program throughout the year. Some wanted matching t-shirts in their student's House color.

Welcome to Our House was supported by funds and donations of food and materials from Partners in Education, Title I, Family Involvement, and community partners. The ATP, teachers, and community members publicized Welcome to Our House and subsequent House events in newsletters, flyers, reminders sent home, the school marquee, webpage, and social media platforms.

Over 400 parents and caregivers, 325 students, and over 70 teachers, administrators, staff, and community members attended the opening-of-school meeting. Teachers conducted grade level activities in each House, and got to know all families throughout the evening. Some community partners had information booths at Welcome to Our House to distribute information to families about their services.

Students and their families began the school year by strengthening relationships with teachers, and by learning about the school's organization of Houses with mixed grade levels. The information and guidelines shared at Welcome to Our House enabled many parents to encourage their children to practice good character traits at home—those 3 Bs, and to meet expectations for good behavior at school. The early evidence suggests that the House System is helping children and their family partners to focus on kindness and learning as two requirements for student success in school.

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# 4

## DISTRICT, ORGANIZATION, & STATE LEADERSHIP



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



## ATP IN THE MIRROR

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PASCO SCHOOL DISTRICT  
PASCO, WA

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**I**t is essential to evaluate the quality and progress of programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships. There are “built in” evaluations in the NNPS *Handbook for Action* to help schools and districts assess progress. Also, NNPS conducts an annual, end-of-year evaluation with all sites as one of the benefits of membership. In addition, some districts and organizations design local tools to help their schools reflect on outreach to engage all families and results of partnerships for student success in school.

In Pasco, district leaders for partnerships developed local evaluation strategies for the schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). ATP in the Mirror guided Chairs and Co-Chairs of school-based teams to reflect on whether they were getting closer to or further from goals set at the start of the school year for family and community engagement. By looking in the mirror, so to speak, a school’s ATP could identify strengths, areas for improvement, and ideas to solve emerging challenges. These reflections should help school teams write better One-Year Action Plans for the next school year.

Pasco School District serves nearly 19,000 students and families from preschool through high school. Many students and families speak Spanish at home, and about one third of Pasco’s students are English Language Learners. Engaging all families and helping all students succeed in school and graduate from high school on time is an on-going challenge that Pasco takes seriously. The district leaders for partnerships often use cluster meetings of ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs to demonstrate an activity that the team leaders can use at their own schools when they meet with their full partnership teams.

At one cluster meeting, district leaders guided ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs to see their ATP in the Mirror. Pasco’s Partnership Coordinator designed a “bulls-eye” activity for the ATP leaders to estimate progress in reaching their school goals for good partnerships. The target was designed to look like a dartboard. ATP Chairs used color-coded indicators to estimate progress (e.g., red = very far from goals, black = far from goals, green = some progress made, and blue = goals were met).

The ATP leaders placed “Xs” on the target to show if their ATP was hitting targeted goals for partnerships or if their team was missing the mark and still had work to do to improve its program and practices. The group discussed whether activities in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships were reaching all families, or whether and how to redesign activities to meet the needs of their students and families

The bulls-eye board also identified four topics for team improvement: recruitment, engagement, organization, and inspiration. The ATP Chairs rank ordered their schools’ priorities for improving teamwork, plans, and practices. District leaders explained that they would conduct workshops on topics the ATP Chairs selected to help them improve their team’s functions and productivity.

Several ATP Chairs and Co-Chairs said that it was useful to “look in the mirror” and reflect on their teams’ progress and challenges in family and community engagement. They planned to conduct the bulls-eye activity with their own ATPs at a team meeting to examine the near- or distant-attainment of school goals for excellent and equitable partnerships for student success in school.

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## BEAT THE SUMMER SLIDE

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LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT  
LITTLE ROCK, AR

**D**uring the summer, students can get academically “rusty” if reading, math, and other school skills go “on vacation.” This is known as the *summer learning slide*. District leaders in the Little Rock School District (LRSD) communicated with parents on ways to help their children combat the summer slide by thinking and using school skills on enjoyable learning activities during the vacation.

Beat the Summer Slide was one way to introduce students and parents to on-line resources in literacy, math, and ACT preparation during summer months. The Title I Department partnered with Imagine Learning, an on-line learning organization, to provide parents and students with individual software licenses for friendly and fun materials that children could work on at their own summer pace. One teacher noted the potential, “The opportunity is really great for students and parents to continue to engage with each other about learning during the summer.”

LRSD is an urban district serving over 24,000 students. More than 70% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The District’s Parent & Family Engagement Committee, which guides schools on partnerships, includes an administrator and facilitator, as well as clerical and other district support staff and services.

Parents were contacted in English and Spanish about the workshop, Beat the Summer Slide, via personal invitations, flyers, and telephone calls. Parents used Survey Monkey to pre-register with their student for the district-led session. Students who were not enrolled in other district summer programs were given priority.

At Beat the Summer Slide, presenters explained Imagine Learning kits and online

resources. Students took grade-specific pretests to make sure that their summer learning materials in math and literacy matched their skill levels. High school students were given a college and career kit, too. In this program, each student and parent received official permission to use the Imagine Learning materials at no cost.

Students and parents could use the summer materials from June 1 to August 1. Imagine Learning distributed prizes for work completed and well done. Gift cards were awarded to students who reached high levels of participation and performance.

The district’s Parent & Family Engagement Specialist coordinated the orientation workshop and resources for Beat the Summer Slide. Colleagues in the Title I Department assisted with registration, materials, and refreshments. Imagine Learning’s on-line resources cost \$200 per license for students, but the company provided a discounted rate to the district.

Over 75 parents and caregivers and their children participated in the workshop, along with district leaders. Five teachers from LRSD schools attended to address parents’ and students’ questions. One parent stated gratefully, “Many times, I am not able to help my child with math. I really love the fact that a certified teacher from Imagine Learning will be available during the summer online program.”

Although students may not want to study during the summer, some resources are so interesting, fun, and profitable that students actually enjoy the challenge. The students’ commitment to learning in the summer can help them avoid remedial work when they return to school. LRSD found that an organized program with grade-specific content was worth the investment.

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## DISTRICT RESOURCE BOOK

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MOUNTAIN VIEW SCHOOL DISTRICT  
EL MONTE, CA

**D**istrict leaders in Mountain View School District (MVSD) are strengthening district, school, and family capacities to work together in supporting student learning and development. To create a unified initiative, district leaders for partnerships compiled a local *Resource Book* for schools to share successful practices of family and community engagement. This is akin to the NNPS book of *Promising Partnership Practices*, which is shared with schools, districts, organizations, and states across the country. NNPS advises district leaders to create local collections to help their schools appreciate the good work that is in progress throughout the district.

Mountain View School District is a small district of elementary schools (PreK-8), serving about 7,000 students. Preschool students attend Head Start and Children's Center programs. Just about all of the students are Hispanic. Many students are English Language Learners, and many families' first language is Spanish. Other families speak Vietnamese or Mandarin. All students in the district receive free or reduced-price lunch.

As they guided schools to evaluate the quality and progress of their programs of family and community engagement, district leaders found that many schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) were conducting creative, useful, and successful practices. In most cases, one school did not know what the next school was doing. Many good ideas were being hidden behind school doors. By sharing best practices, ATPs could read about practices that worked in one place, which they could adopt or adapt to match their own School Improvement Plans.

For the past few years, district leaders have been sharing best practices of one school or another in a periodic Family Engagement

Newsletter. This was one way to spotlight notable partnership activities, and helped parents learn about schools' efforts to engage families and community partners in ways that contributed to student success in school.

For the *District Resource Book*, all ATPs submitted brief write-ups of activities that had worked well in the past school year. Many schools focused on family engagement with students on literacy skills and good behavior. Some described creative literacy nights, math workshops, and family bi-literacy activities.

ATPs measured the quality of activities in short exit surveys of parents after a meeting or workshop, and in ATP reflections, such as in the NNPS *Annual Evaluation of Activities* in the *Handbook for Action*. A parent participating in a math workshop at one elementary school said, "Participating . . . helped me understand how to support my child at home. It was interesting to see how standards and expectations in math change across grade levels." Some schools monitored the results of family engagement activities to support or improve behavior by graphing the rate of disciplinary referrals or responses on school climate surveys.

The Community Liaison for the district collected the schools' write-ups of partnership activities, along with photos of these events. District staff compiled the book for printing. Each school received a print copy. Costs for production were covered by the Local Control Funding Formula. With its own *Resource Book*, MVSD is helping schools strengthen the breadth and depth of goal-linked activities of family and community engagement. This should help ATPs continually improve their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships.

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## ESTABLISHING LEADERS FOR SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS

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RICHLAND COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE  
COLUMBIA, SC

**I**t takes the whole school community to ensure that the important work of school, family, and community partnerships is developed and sustained as a “regular” and “expected” component of good school organization. Shared leadership at the district and school levels is essential. District leaders and school teams include members with unique talents and skill sets that can contribute to the design and conduct of effective and equitable programs of family and community engagement.

Richland County School District One is one of the largest and most diverse school districts in South Carolina. Its 52 schools and centers serve families in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Its families and students speak 26 different languages and dialects. The district adopted a “nested” leadership model. That is, Parent and Family Engagement Specialists are assisted by Cluster Leaders who guide school-based ATPs. As the district leader explained, “the days of the old model of one person leading [all partnership activities] are past.”

The district’s connections with NNPS helped frame this work. All schools (1) form partnership teams; (2) use Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement to write annual plans with goal-linked practices of family and community engagement to contribute to student success in school; and (3) evaluate their work, and keep improving every year. By working in “clusters,” leaders can guide many schools’ ATPs efficiently, and the teams will learn from each other by sharing successes and by solving challenges. This multi-level, well-orchestrated plan, with its focus on continuous improvement, is now part of the district’s five-year Strategic Plan.

Richland One’s leaders believe that all members of school ATPs share leadership for their team’s efforts. ATPs are encouraged to draw upon the strengths and talents of team members to organize, publicize, participate, and evaluate the results engagement activities linked to goals

for a welcoming climate and student learning. With shared leadership, ATPs ensure that their plans and programs will continue to improve even if leaders change over time. District leaders not only encouraged the formation of ATPs, but also organized various workshops to build knowledge and skills.

Professional development for Specialists included: Culturally Relevant Family Engagement; ACES: The Science of Adverse Childhood Experiences; and Effective Action Teams for Partnership Plans. They also attended family engagement conferences and read research on effective partnership programs. Workshops for ATPs focused on connecting school, family, and community partnerships to student achievement and success across the grades.

As they build skills, ATPs more effectively ensure that schools are welcoming places for all parents, family members, and community partners. With good guidance, ATPs will work with teachers, counselors, and other school staff to provide assist families of students who were not demonstrating grade-level proficiencies. With broader knowledge, ATPs will increase the capacities of all parents to guide their children’s learning and take leadership and participation roles at their children’s schools.

The district’s Parent and Family Engagement Specialists, Cluster Leaders, and school ATPs also help families obtain information about how to help their children on schoolwork at home. One Specialist reflected, “As I gained knowledge and leadership skills, I developed a different mindset when working with families. With NNPS research-based approaches, I felt more prepared and confident to guide ATP leaders and teams in their school-based processes and procedures.”

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

## FAMILY TOOLKIT: 8TH TO 9TH GRADE TRANSITION

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SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
SEATTLE, WA

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**R**esearch shows that if students have good attendance and pass their courses in grade 9, they are more likely to graduate from high school on time. This means that a successful transition from middle to high school is especially important for setting 9th grade students on a path to success. It also is important for middle and high schools to recognize that when students transition to the 9th grade, their families transition with them. However, studies indicate that many parents and family partners are poorly prepared for the transition to high school and for continued engagement in their child's education.

District leaders in Seattle are working to ensure a smooth transition to high school for all students and their families. They developed a toolkit for parents as part of a grant with Johns Hopkins University--*Engaging Families in High School Success (EFIHS)*. The goals of this project are to increase outreach to engage more and different families in students' transition to high school, with the long-term goal of encouraging on-going partnerships to improve or maintain student attendance, achievement, and on-time graduation.

The *Transition and Beyond Family Toolkit* has three purposes. First, increase the capacity of middle and high school educators and partnership teams to provide useful information to enable families to support their students as they transition from the middle grades to high school. Second, provide clear information for parents to know and guide their 9th graders about the importance of good attendance, studying and passing courses to gain credits required for on-time graduation. Third, make the information accessible to families in English and six of the most widely-spoken languages in the district—Spanish, Somali, Chinese, Vietnamese,

Amharic, and Tigrigna.

Seattle Public Schools (SPS), a large urban district, includes students and families who speak over 140 languages and dialects at home. Although the district is pleased with a graduation rate of 82%, leaders know that the percentage of graduates is lower for students of color, with special needs, and who are English Learners. The district leaders found that families at different middle and high schools received different information about the transition to high school. Not all information was translated for families who do not speak or read English. These facts influenced the design and content of the *Toolkit*.

District leaders worked together on the *Toolkit*, including staff in the Partnership, College and Career Readiness, Communications, Advanced Learning, English Language Learners, Special Education, and Assessments Departments. They also connected with teachers and administrators from middle and high schools for their ideas. Families of children in SPS provided ideas and feedback about the content of the *Toolkit*, as did the Principal Investigator for the grant at Johns Hopkins.

The *8th to 9th Grade Transition and Beyond Family Toolkit* includes information for families on language and social support services in high schools, important school events for parents, a graduation requirements checklist, strategies for supporting homework completion, and tools and services for students with special needs. The district distributed electronic copies of the *Toolkit* to the 24 middle and high schools that participated in the EFIHS project. The information also will be shared with community organizations that work with non-English-speaking families, and posted on the district website.

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## LINK FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO STUDENT SUCCESS

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RICHLAND COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT ONE  
COLUMBIA, SC

**F**amily, school, and community partnerships contribute to students' college and career readiness so that high school students are prepared to compete in today's global economy. Richland County School District One attended the Summer Institute sponsored by Francis Marion University's Center of Excellence (FMU-COE). FMU-COE is a partner for improving family and community engagement in South Carolina, along with its focus on teaching children in poverty. The Summer Institute is an annual program to help educators (e.g., school leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, community members) gain practical, evidence-based information on the potential of all learners (particularly those in under-resourced settings), and the importance of good partnerships for student success.

This year, Richland One's Coordinator for Parent and Family Engagement and three Parent and Family Engagement Specialists from the district conducted a workshop at the FMU-COE Summer Institute entitled, *Linking Parent, Family, and Community Engagement to Student Success*. This is one of the most challenging topics for all districts and schools as they develop their partnership programs. Schools design and implement goal-linked activities that they hope will measurably improve students' academic skills and attitudes toward school. Some activities directly affect student learning; others are more indirect or long-term in their influence. It is a challenge to monitor the connections of family engagement activities and results for students without elaborate and expensive research studies.

The District Coordinator recognized, however, that well-designed engagement activities can influence student achievement, attitudes, and behaviors in the short term, as well as set up dramatic improvements in the long term. NNPS approaches, tools, and templates help schools set this influence pattern in motion. Goal-linked plans and reflections on implemented activities, enable ATPs to see direct and indirect effects of family engagement activities on student learning

and school behavior.

Richland One's workshop set three goals for attendees: (i) identify the purpose of family and community engagement and its theoretical impact on student achievement, especially for under-resourced learners; (ii) identify connections of school, home, and community that may work together to reinforce student attendance, behavior, and achievement; and (iii) create a "draft" plan for their own schools with goal-linked engagement activities for specific student outcomes. Attendees addressed these questions in small groups. They also worked in pairs to discuss what good partnerships look like using the six types of involvement. They learned, then, to write a comprehensive plan for partnerships, based on their school improvement goals, taking into account their school's demographics, community resources, and other indicators.

Richland One's presenters were realistic in their guidance of others. They emphasized that programs of family and community engagement required on-going energy, effort, and commitment, along with a vision, policy, and framework for action. They described how the exclusion of some parents was often due to school attitudes, communications, and messaging. They emphasized that educators must recognize and value family diversity. The "take-away" message was clear. When schools, parents, family members, and community partners work together, they can build a strong partnership program that supports student success through the grades.

About 35 teachers, administrators, school staff, and community members attended Richland One's workshop at the Summer Institute. They evaluated the session positively, and appreciated the detailed and useful discussions and activities.

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

## NEW ATP CHAIR ORIENTATION

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KENNEWICK SCHOOL DISTRICT  
KENNEWICK, WA

**K**ennewick School District's leaders for partnerships aimed to improve school-based partnership programs by hosting an orientation for new chairpersons of Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs). In the past year, over half of the schools in the district changed ATP leaders. The district leaders knew it was important to give new ATP chairpersons guidance to ensure their success from the very beginning of the school year.

Looking back over several years, the district's leadership team reviewed strategies for successful transitions with new ATP leaders, and discussed practices of effective teams. They worked together to plan the New ATP Chair Orientation to include information for chairs and co-chairs and hands-on activities to help them gain confidence about their leadership.

This year, the ATP Chair Orientation started with a reflection activity. New Chairs were asked to consider why family engagement is important, share their ideas with a partner, and then with the whole group. The district leaders provided the group with current research about the effects of strong family partnerships. They reported the confirmed finding across many studies of significant, positive correlations of well-designed and well-implemented family engagement activities with improved student grades, attitudes, and test scores. Further, positive connections of teachers and parents have been linked to improved student behavior, higher self-esteem, and better school attendance.

After discussing the "why" of family and community engagement, the group moved on to the "how" of developing effective programs in each school at all school levels. New chairs and co-chairs reviewed the basics of successful ATPs as described in materials from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) including: Who should be on an ATP? How often should meetings occur? What does a good One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships look like?

How can every chairperson plan a good agenda and run an effective ATP meeting? One new ATP chair commented, "After this training I feel more confident going back to my school and leading my ATP."

The district leaders created ATP binders for all chairpersons, with materials on: Epstein's Six Types of Involvement; Flamboyan's research on the association between family engagement and student learning; the NNPS template for a goal-linked One-Year Action Plan; meeting notes; event planning; contacts; fellow team members; resources; and strategies for evaluation.

The district leaders and new team chairs discussed some "nitty gritty" topics including how to estimate family engagement funds needed for events and activities. The chairpersons learned about their budgets, stipends, and responsibilities for accepting the role of ATP Chair. One chairperson assessed the experience stating, "I really liked seeing all of the examples and resources. I didn't know of [all the resources and assistance] that was available."

Not every new ATP Chair was able to come to the orientation, but 20 attended. They left with a fuller understanding of the purpose of an ATP in each school and their important leadership roles. The district leaders followed up with each new chairperson who could not attend by meeting them individually at their own school. As the school year proceeded, the ATP Chairs were more confident about their responsibilities and the leadership of their school-based teams.

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## PARENTING PARTNERS DISTRICT GRADUATION CEREMONY

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CALCASIEU PARISH SCHOOL BOARD  
LAKE CHARLES, LA

**W**hen parents complete an 8-week leadership training program, a celebration is in order. Calcasieu Parish School Board (CPSB) and its schools hosted Family Leadership/Parenting Partners Program. The sessions were conducted at each school by its own trained facilitators, so it was convenient for parents to attend. District leaders planned a Graduation Ceremony to recognize the successful participants.

In addition, the festivity also served to show appreciation to all school Facilitators for their on-going commitments to improving family and community engagement for student success in school. To make full use of time, the Graduation Ceremony also showcased successful partnership practices that were implemented in Calcasieu's schools.

CPSB—with 32,000 students—is a large district located along the gulf coast of Louisiana. The leader for partnerships, superintendent, and many district, school, and NNPS colleagues have been working, over several years, to scale up a high-quality, results-oriented program of family and community engagement in all schools.

The Federal Programs Coordinator, who also oversees and guides the district's work on family and community engagement, organized the Graduation Ceremony. She asked all of the school-level Facilitators to send the names of those who completed the Leadership/Parenting Partners program, along with photos of family members participating in activities. Parents and other family members from 6 Head Start centers, 11 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 high schools, and 1 community church partner were invited to the District Graduation Ceremony.

This was a collaborative district leadership activity. The Federal Programs Office provided decorations and graduation certificates. The Early Childhood department provided refreshments.

Parents who attended seven of the eight leadership sessions qualified as “graduates.” Workshop topics included positive parenting at home; two-way communications of home and school; supporting student achievement, and academic and behavioral success in school; and parents' partnerships with their children's schools at each school level. Parents who had perfect attendance earned a \$100 cash award, donated by community partner, Lake Charles Education Collaboration. If more than one family member attended, the award could be divided among family members.

Students from the choir and band at LaGrange High School and Washington-Marin High School performed several musical selections. They played Pomp and Circumstance as graduates arrived. A local church partner gave the invocation. The district superintendent welcomed everyone. The Federal Programs Coordinator presented the families with their certificates as each school Facilitator called their names. The Federal Programs Director and Early Childhood Director offered closing remarks. Sulphur High School's TV Production leader filmed the event.

Costs were covered by Title I, Lake Charles Education Collaboration, and other federal funds targeted for family and community engagement. The leadership course and closing ceremony encourage CPSB's parents and family partners to become active members of school-based ATPs. Over 55 family members and more than 120 students participated in the District Graduation Ceremony. The parents were honored by dozens of school staff, school leaders, and community members. The superintendent remarked, “Congratulations! It was beautiful! You did a great job bringing it all together.”

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DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

## PARTNERING FOR EXCELLENCE: HOME & SCHOOL CONNECTIONS

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LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT  
LITTLE ROCK, AK

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

**D**istrict leaders for partnerships in Little Rock School District (LRSD) continue to work with parents to help them feel comfortable about advocating for the best and most responsive programs for their children. Even as they continue to assist school teams with their partnership programs, district leaders want to have some direct connections with parents to share information and to show support for parents' important roles in guiding their children's success in school.

Partnering for Excellence is a workshop in two parts: Know Your Rights and Test-Taking Tips. Parents need to know about school programs that are available and the options they have to advocate for their children by asking important questions at parent-teacher conferences, school meetings, and in other communications. For example, LRSD administers annual standardized tests to students, and offers many resources to parents to help prepare students for these assessments. However, many parents are unaware of how to access the district's materials.

Partnering for Excellence workshops, coordinated by the Parent & Family Engagement Specialist, were publicized on the district's website, via social media, local television ads, Parent Link, Blackboard, school e-mails, and announcements at school events. Title I staff assisted with registration, materials distribution, and refreshments.

Parents and family members across schools came to the Instructional Resource Center on a Saturday morning. The sessions were conducted twice so that parents could attend both sessions. The District Communications Director took pictures of the occasion and interviewed parents about their reactions to the information provided. Parents understood the importance of these workshops. Said one, "The information provided today was very beneficial! I called my wife to come to the second session."

At the session on Knowing Your Rights, parents gathered information on district policies and their rights and responsibilities to advocate for their child. This included knowing about and opting in or out of special education and other programs and services, and routes of communication.

At the session on Test Taking Tips, parents learned more about the various tests administered to students at each grade level, and how test scores are used to measure school quality and students' progress. Presenters discussed how to help students prepare for tests to increase students' confidence and reduce test anxieties. Workshop leaders conducted hands-on activities to enable parents to read test results for their own child's scores and to interpret summaries of scores for the school and district.

About 70 parents and caregivers attended Partnering for Excellence along with 10 teachers, 4 district leaders, and 4 community members. The day was sponsored by Title I and Family Engagement Funds. The budget (about \$500) covered stipends for district presenters, refreshments, brochures and pamphlets. Gift cards donated by business partners were awarded to the two community presenters who conducted the workshops.

Parents, family members, and others asked questions about their children's programs, district and school services, and standardized tests in a friendly and safe environment. A special education teacher reviewed the workshop, "The information today should be presented multiple times throughout the year and/or posted on the website. All parents should be able to obtain the information and materials presented."

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## PARENT LIAISON CERTIFIED TRAINING

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RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION  
RIVERSIDE, CA

**W**hen parents are involved, students do better in school. This well-accepted mantra was the starting place for the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE). County leaders for partnerships worked with the University of California-Riverside (UCR) to develop a comprehensive curriculum for a Parent Liaison Certified Training (PLCT) program. The goal was to ensure that districts and schools hire Parent Liaisons who are well prepared to take leadership roles in local programs of family and community engagement.

RCOE reasoned that parent liaisons needed training and support. PLCT provides classes, extra information, resources, and on-going support to help liaisons conduct research-based approaches on parent and family engagement programs at the district and school levels. A graduate of the program reflected, “The foundational parent liaison training helped me to understand my role as a School Community Liaison.”

In California since 2013, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides districts and schools with resources for school improvement. Educators are, then, accountable for students’ academic performance and improvement. Districts must have a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), which identifies goals, services, and actions for all students. This includes district and school programs of family and community engagement.

Some districts hired family engagement leaders, community liaisons, and school-based parent liaisons. Some districts opened Parent Centers to provide training and resources to parents and families. Others helped district leaders and school ATPs develop goal-linked partnership programs to ensure a welcoming school climate and to increase students’ academic and behavioral success in school.

RCOE built PLCT in partnership with UCR based on RCOE’s PELI program, which is based on Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement,

Action Team for Partnerships, and Action Plan for Family and Community Engagement. PLCT prepares parent liaisons, but also welcomes parent leaders, community liaisons, members of schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships, parent council members, and others. The course is publicized on the RCOE website, at PELI meetings, trainings, and by UCR.

PLCT is taught by RCOE and PELI leaders. Two main topics are covered in classes scheduled over four months: Leadership Enhancement for School, Family and Community Partnerships and Connecting the Pieces. Each topic includes two classes on “the basics” of family engagement, research-based strategies, and the California context. This includes an overview of state and federal policies and requirements for parent and family engagement.

Each participant receives a copy of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Fourth Edition* by Epstein and her colleagues. This ensures PLCT students gain an understanding of the research, structures, and processes that have been shown to improve district and school programs of family and community engagement. Students also learn Tableau software to create useful graphs and charts to record and study their data on partnership program development.

An initial group of 30 leaders participated in the first PLCT training. Participants pay a registration fee (\$500) for the materials and resources in each of the two course segments. Sessions stress the importance of good planning and monitoring progress to develop, celebrate, and continually improve partnership programs that engage all families and community partners in students’ education.

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## WELL-BEING IN THE ACADEMIC LIFE OF A HIGH SCHOOL

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PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS SCOTLAND  
EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

In the fourth year of Partnership Schools Scotland (PSS), leaders are working to extend meaningful family engagement to the high school level. Although it is easier to guide elementary schools to engage families in students' education, PSS wanted to learn if and how secondary schools could engage families in age-appropriate ways that improved and maintained students' mental health and feelings of well-being.

An inspection report of one high school commended its nurturing and inclusive environment. The report noted that students had a strong sense of attachment and belonging to the school. However, the school needed to improve family and community engagement so that all partners in education were working together to help all students maintain good mental health to cope with the stresses of adolescence and the pressures of high school classes.

PSS is part of *Connect*, an organization of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council. PSS helped the secondary school establish a partnership team and organize its first team meeting. The school identified people interested in students' well-being who would serve on an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). Now, the team includes senior students, sports coaches, parents, a local college representative, local chaplain, member of the school canteen staff, senior school staff, a member of the school's pastoral care team, people from local charities, and the senior Family Learning Worker.

The ATP set goals to improve two-way communications with families about students' well-being. At two discussion dinners, other parents and community members joined members of the ATP to ensure that plans reflected their needs and views. They set a broad agenda of partnership activities to positively impact students' mental health. The plan included: Increase vocational

and other opportunities for students and add mindset, comedy, and confidence modules to courses; Identify Well-Being Ambassadors as counselors for students and families; Create a local Parent Support Network; plan and conduct a community Well-Being and Parental Engagement Conference with 8 other schools in the area; and Schedule healthy-cooking and nutrition classes for students and families. The discussion dinners and plans were reported in a local newspaper.

The school's Parent Council bid for funding and grants to support the ATP's agenda. Local businesses helped with healthy cooking sessions and nutrition coursework. Over the past school year, more than 300 people attended discussions, dinners, and participated in events to strengthen students' well-being.

PSS continues to provide support and guidance to the school's ATP by attending its meetings and events, and by sharing evaluation tools to assess the quality and outreach of engagement activities. PSS worked with the school's Family Learning Worker to see that good guidance was ongoing.

As a result, students have a safe space at the high school to talk to others about mental health questions and concerns. More students expressed interest in healthy food options. Teachers and staff participated in professional learning on high school students' well-being and on their own mental health. Parents have a Parent Support Network to communicate and work with educators and each other on ways to support their teens' mental health and well-being through high school. PSS is taking the lessons learned to other secondary schools in Scotland to help them organize, implement, and evaluate family and community engagement activities linked to important goals for student success.

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