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***Promising Partnership Practices, annual collection***  
**Monthly E-Briefs from NNPS Facilitators**  
**Ongoing technical assistance by phone, e-mail, and website**  
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**Research results, tools, and materials**  
**that help meet NCLB requirements for family involvement**

\*In collaboration with the Maryland Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC).

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# Promising Partnership Practices

Annual collection from the members of  
the National Network of Partnership Schools

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Johns Hopkins University

**2007**



*Edited by Mary Maushard, Cecelia S. Martin, Darcy J. Hutchins, Marsha D. Greenfeld,  
Brenda G. Thomas, Anna Fournier, and Gregory Pickett*

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# Introduction

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## Promising Partnership Practices 2007

Joyce L. Epstein, Director  
National Network of Partnership Schools

It is always exciting to read about excellent activities that are being conducted by schools, districts, states, and organizations in NNPS. This year, more members sent in their best practices than ever before. *Promising Partnership Practices 2007* includes 100 goal-linked activities for the six types of involvement. They come from 74 schools, 17 districts, and 1 organization located in 17 states, and from 3 leaders in state departments of education.

The activities show that members of NNPS are planning their programs, improving teamwork, and creating schools that welcome all families and students. They are working to increase the involvement of economically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families located in urban, suburban, and rural communities. They know that involvement activities must be linked to school improvement goals to help students reach their best potential. It is encouraging to see that educators, parents, and community partners are working together to develop comprehensive partnership programs that include all families and that contribute to student success.

The activities are organized in *four* Tables of Contents. Readers can find ideas for their programs by *goal*, by *type of involvement*, by *school level* or *leadership level*, and by *contributor*.

### Reach Results for School Climate and Student Success

The main Table of Contents identifies activities by school improvement goal.

- + Section I features activities that involve families and the community with students in **academic subjects**, including reading and literacy, math, science, and other academic areas.
- + Section II highlights family and community involvement activities that support **student attitudes and behaviors**, such as improving health and safety, increasing multicultural understanding, and planning for college or careers.
- + Section III presents activities that strengthen the **climate of partnership** and the **sense of community** in a school, so that all educators, parents, and other family and community members are welcomed as partners in children's education.
- + Section IV includes ideas for **district and state leadership** to improve policies and facilitate the work of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships.

See the other Tables of Contents to:

- + **Strengthen activities for the six types of involvement in the NNPS Framework:** *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.* One type is printed in the margin on each page of school activities as an initial guide, but readers should know that activities may fulfill *more than one type of involvement.*

- 
- **Explore effective practices at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and in districts and state departments of education.** Although grade levels are identified, many activities *can be adapted for use at other levels*. District, state, and organization leaders for partnerships will find ways to improve policies, sharpen leadership, and directly assist schools' Action Teams for Partnerships to develop school-based programs.

A comprehensive, goal-oriented partnership program will include age-appropriate activities for all six types of involvement so that all families can find ways to be involved at home, at school, and/or in the community.

NNPS thanks everyone who submitted practices for consideration in the 2007 collection. We wish we could have included all of them. We are inspired by NNPS members' spirit and hard work. We hope the selected activities help many schools, districts, and states to improve their partnership programs.

NOTE: This edition and all prior collections of over 600 involvement activities are on the NNPS website, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org), in the section **Success Stories**, along with an **Order Form** for additional print copies.

### **National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University**

Established by Dr. Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University in 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) guides schools, districts, organizations, and state departments of education to develop and maintain excellent programs of school, family, and community partnerships. Each Partnership School strengthens its program by using an Action Team for Partnerships approach, writing goal-oriented partnership plans, and selecting partnership practices from the NNPS research-based framework of Six Types of Involvement to engage all families in their children's education in meaningful ways. Districts, organizations, and states develop policies, provide leadership, and directly assist schools' Action Teams for Partnerships to strengthen their programs of family and community involvement. Members of NNPS continually learn from new research and from each others' examples to improve and sustain their partnership programs to increase student success.

For more information and membership forms to join NNPS, visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).

For details on the NNPS approach, see Epstein, et al. (2002). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.



## Section I: Academic Goals

---

### Reading and Literacy

Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July	3
Breakfast and a Book	4
Celebrating Reading (Summer Reading Program)	5
Celebrity Reading Night	6
Computing for Seventh Graders	7
Family Literacy Night Kickoff	8
Fast Start	9
Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)	10
Hooked on Books	11
Letters from the Heart	12
Meadow Glens Reads	13
Reading Can Be a “No Brainer”	14
Student-Led Conferences	15
The Point O’View Reading Prize Patrol	16
White Elephant Bingo	17

### Math

Fun with Math	18
Math Mardi Gras	19
Math Mates	20
Math Mornings	21
Math Seminar Parent Presentation	22
Reading and Math Mania	23
SMART Night (Science, Math and Relevant Technology)	24
Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night	25

### Science

Math and Science Family Fun	26
Science-It’s All Family Fun!	27
Student Showcase Night	28
Weather Academy and Family Involvement	29

## **Achievement in Other Academic Areas**

All the World's A Stage	30
Art Extravaganza	31
Art in the Classroom	32
Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club	33
Open House Technology Walk	35
Parent Pancake Data Breakfast	36
Turn Off the TV and Turn on Some Fun!	37
Turn Off the TV Family Game Night/Ice Cream Social	38

## **Section II: Nonacademic Goals**

---

### **Behavior**

Cary Kindness Chain	41
Community Partner/Side by Side	42
South Penn Family Fair	43
Student Mentoring Program	44

### **College and Careers**

Home Connection: Career Academy/Pathway Interest	45
Motion Commotion Truck Fair	46
Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program	47

### **Health and Safety**

Family Connection	48
Harvest Festival	49
Heart Hop	50
Information Fair	51
Parent-Child Book Club	52
Sources of Family Stress and Relief	53

### **Multicultural Awareness**

Cultural Experience Night	54
Cultural Night 2007	55
International Night "Around the World in 90 Minutes"	56
JES International Fair	57
Passport to Possibilities	59

### **Section III: Climate of Partnership Goals**

---

Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour	63
Beautification Day	64
Breakfast with the Principal	65
Caring Hands for the Caring Tree	66
Classroom Coordinators	67
Coffee with the Principal	68
Community Forum Series	69
Donuts for Dad	70
Drive-Through Breakfast	71
English as a Second Language for Parents	72
Fall Festival	73
Family Days at Barnum School	74
Family Resource Night	75
Fathers' Night Out	76
Grandparents' Day	77
Grill and Chill	78
Loaves and Fishes Food Drive	79
Lunchtime Gatherings	80
Parent Learning Walk	81
Pizza Open House	82
Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home	83
ROB TV - Digital Video Streaming to Communicate	84
Sentara Senior Readers	85

### **Section IV: District and State Leadership**

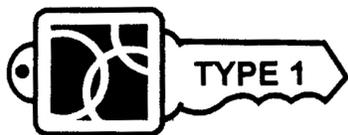
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#### **District**

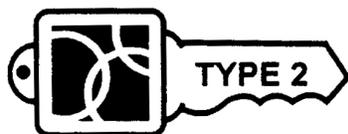
Added Value Activities	89
ATP Connection: A District Newsletter	90
Childhood Conversations Conference	91
Family Partnership for Math and Reading	92
Focus on the Future Showcase	93
Homework Assistance and Prime-Time Teen Alternatives	94
Kindergarten Festivals	95
MALDEF Parent School Partnership	96
Military Welcome Packet	97

One-Page School Snapshots	98
Parent Center Institute	99
Parent Volunteers Program	100
Pasco Notebooks for ATP Members	101
School & Family Partnerships District Training	102
Series of Partnership Handbooks	103
Transition to Middle School Program	104
Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through	105
Youth Net Programs and Youth Net Centers	107
<b>State</b>	
Data Collection	109
Hawaii Parent Guide: A Resource for Families	110
Keep the Website Simple	111
Maryland Parent Advisory Council	112
Quality Partnering	113
Wisconsin's REACH Initiative	114

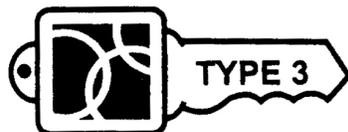
# THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS EPSTEIN'S SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT



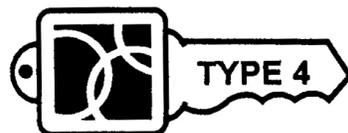
**PARENTING:** Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.



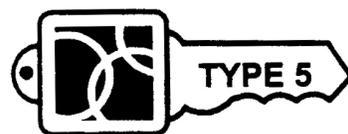
**COMMUNICATING:** Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.



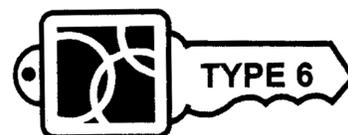
**VOLUNTEERING:** Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.



**LEARNING AT HOME:** Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and 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.

# Activities by Type of Involvement

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## **Type 1—Parenting**

Cary Kindness Chain	41
Donuts for Dad	70
English as a Second Language for Parents	72
Family Connection	48
Fun With Math	18
Information Fair	51
Lunchtime Gatherings	80
Open House Technology Walk	35
Reading Can Be a “No Brainer”	14
Sources of Family Stress and Relief	53
South Penn Family Fair	43

## **Type 2—Communicating**

Art Extravaganza	31
Coffee with the Principal	68
Computing for Seventh Graders	7
Cultural Experience Night	54
Drive-Through Breakfast	71
Fathers’ Night Out	76
Grandparents’ Day	77
Grill and Chill	78
Home Connection: Career Academy/Pathway Interest	45
Letters from the Heart	12
Parent Learning Walk	81
Parent Pancake Data Breakfast	36
Pizza Open House	82
ROB TV - Digital Video Streaming to Communicate	84
Student-Led Conferences	15
Student Showcase Night	28

## **Type 3—Volunteering**

All The World’s A Stage	30
Art in the Classroom	32

Beautification Day	64
Breakfast and a Book	4
Caring Hands for the Caring Tree	66
Cultural Night 2007	55
JES International Fair	57
Math Mates	20
Science – It’s All Family Fun!	27

### **Type 4—Learning at Home**

Celebrating Reading (Summer Reading Program)	5
Family Days at Barnum School	74
Family Literacy Night Kickoff	8
Fast Start	9
Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)	10
Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club	33
Math and Science Family Fun Night	26
Math Mardi Gras	19
Math Mornings	21
Math Seminar Parent Presentation	22
Meadow Glens Reads	13
Parent-Child Book Club	52
Reading and Math Mania	23
SMART Night (Science, Math and Relevant Technology)	24
The Point O’View Reading Prize Patrol	16
Turn Off the TV Family Game Night / Ice Cream Social	38
Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night	25

### **Type 5—Decision Making**

Breakfast with the Principal	65
Classroom Coordinators	67
Community Forum Series	69
International Night “Around the World in 90 Minutes”	56

### **Type 6—Collaborating with the Community**

Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour	63
Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July	3
Celebrity Reading Night	6

<b>Community Partner/Side by Side</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Fall Festival</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Family Resource Night</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Harvest Festival</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Heart Hop</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Hooked on Books</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Loaves and Fishes Food Drive</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Motion Commotion Truck Fair</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Passport to Possibilities</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Sentara Senior Readers</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Student Mentoring Program</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Turn Off the TV and Turn On Some Fun!</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Weather Academy and Family Involvement</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>White Elephant Bingo</b>	<b>17</b>

## Activities by Level

---



### **Elementary Grades**

Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour	63
Art Extravaganza	31
Art in the Classroom	32
Beautification Day	64
Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July	3
Breakfast and a Book	4
Caring Hands for the Caring Tree	66
Cary Kindness Chain	41
Celebrating Reading (Summer Reading Program)	5
Celebrity Reading Night	6
Classroom Coordinators	67
Cultural Experience Night	54
Cultural Night 2007	55
Donuts for Dad	70
Drive-Through Breakfast	71
English as a Second Language for Parents	72
Fall Festival	73
Family Days at Barnum School	74
Family Literacy Night Kickoff	8
Fast Start	9
Fathers' Night Out	76
Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)	10
Grandparents' Day	77
Grill and Chill	78
Heart Hop	50
Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club	33
Hooked on Books	11
Information Fair	51
International Night "Around the World in 90 Minutes"	56
JES International Fair	57
Letters from the Heart	12
Loaves and Fishes Food Drive	79
Lunchtime Gatherings	80
Math and Science Family Fun Night	26

Math Mardi Gras	19
Math Mates	20
Math Mornings	21
Meadow Glens Reads	13
Motion Commotion Truck Fair	46
Parent Learning Walk	81
Parent Pancake Data Breakfast	36
Parent-Child Book Club	52
Pizza Open House	82
Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home	83
Reading and Math Mania	23
Reading Can Be a “No-Brainer”	14
ROB TV - Digital Video Streaming to Communicate	84
Science-It’s All Family Fun!	27
Sentara Senior Readers	85
SMART Night (Science, Math and Relevant Technology)	24
Sources of Family Stress and Relief	53
South Penn Family Fair	43
Student Showcase Night	28
Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night	25
The Point O’View Reading Prize Patrol	16
Turn Off the TV and Turn On Some Fun!	37
Turn Off the TV Family Game Night / Ice Cream Social	38
Weather Academy and Family Involvement	29
White Elephant Bingo	17
 <b>Middle Grades</b>	
All The World’s A Stage	30
Breakfast with the Principal	65
Coffee with the Principal	68
Community Forum Series	69
Community Partner/Side by Side	42
Computing for Seventh Graders	7
Family Resource Night	75
Math Seminar Parent Presentation	22
Open House Technology Walk	35
Student-Led Conferences	15
Student Mentoring Program	44

## **High School**

Family Connection	48
Harvest Festival	49
Home Connection: Career Academy/Pathway Interest	45
Passport to Possibilities	59
Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program	47

## **District**

Added Value Activities	89
ATP Connection: A District Newsletter	90
Childhood Conversations Conference	91
Family Partnership for Math and Reading	92
Focus on the Future Showcase	93
Homework Assistance and Prime-Time Teen Alternatives	94
Kindergarten Festivals	95
MALDEF Parent School Partnership	96
Military Welcome Packet	97
One-Page School Snapshots	98
Parent Center Institute	99
Parent Volunteers Program	100
Pasco Notebooks for ATP Members	101
School & Family Partnerships District Training	102
Series of Partnership Handbooks	103
Transition to Middle School Program	104
Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through	105
Youth Net Programs and Youth Net Centers	107

## **Organization**

Fun With Math	18
---------------	----

## **State**

Data Collection	109
Hawaii Parent Guide: A Resource for Families	110
Keep the Website Simple	111
Maryland Parent Advisory Council	112
Quality Partnering	113
Wisconsin's REACH Initiative	114

# Alphabetical Index of Contributors



<b>Network Member</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Page</b>
Allegany County Public Schools, Cumberland, MD	Focus on the Future Showcase	93
Anoka-Hennepin School District, Coon Rapids, MN	Family Partnership for Math and Reading	92
Arrowhead Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	Sentara Senior Readers	85
Ballentine Elementary School, Irmo, SC	Caring Hands for the Caring Tree	66
Barnum Elementary School, Taunton, MA	Family Days at Barnum School	74
Bassette Elementary School, Hampton, VA	Beautification Day	64
Berendo Middle School, Los Angeles, CA	Breakfast with the Principal	65
Birdneck Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July	3
Bridgeton High School, Bridgeton, NJ	Home Connection: Career Academy/Pathway Interest	45
Bullard TALENT K-8 School, Fresno, CA	All The World's A Stage	30
Centreville Elementary School, Centreville, MD	Student Showcase Night	28
Cresaptown Elementary School, Cresaptown, MD	Heart Hop	50
Delmae Elementary School, Florence, SC	SMART Night (Science, Math and Relevant Technology)	24
Discovery School #67, Buffalo, NY	Art Extravaganza	31
E. Russell Hicks Middle School, Hagerstown, MD	Student-Led Conferences	15
Early Childhood Center #61, Buffalo, NY	Sources of Family Stress and Relief	53
Early Childhood Center #82, Buffalo, NY	Math and Science Family Fun Night	26
Eastern Elementary School, Hagerstown, MD	English as a Second Language for Parents	72
Elizabeth Pole School, Taunton, MA	Math Mornings	21
Elizabeth Terronez Middle School, Fresno, CA	Student Mentoring Program	44
Elmwood Elementary School, Naperville, IL	White Elephant Bingo	17
Community School #53, Buffalo, NY	Fathers' Night Out	76
Fort Worth Independent School District, Fort Worth, TX	Series of Partnership Handbooks	103
Fresno Unified School District, Fresno, CA	One-Page School Snapshots	98
Guilford Elementary School, Columbia, MD	Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club	33
Hawaii State Department of Education, Honolulu, HI	Data Collection	109
Hawaii State Department of Education, Honolulu, HI	Quality Partnering	113
Hawaii-Family Support, Student Support Services Branch, Honolulu, HI	Hawaii Parent Guide: A Resource for Families	110
Hawaii-Family Support, Student Support Services Branch, Honolulu, HI	Keep the Website Simple	111
Hermitage Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour	63

Highlands Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Cultural Experience Night	54
Horace Mann Elementary School, West Allis, WI	Letters from the Heart	12
Houston County Schools, Perry, GA	MALDEF Parent School Partnership	96
Isaac Stevens Middle School, Pasco, WA	Family Resource Night	75
James McGee Elementary, Pasco, WA	Math Mardi Gras	19
John B. Cary Elementary School, Hampton, VA	Carry Kindness Chain	41
John B. Dey Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	Grill and Chill	78
John F. Kennedy School, Windsor, CT	Pizza Open House	82
Jonathan Elementary School , Chaska, MN	JES International Fair	57
Joseph H. Martin Middle School, East Taunton, MA	Computing for Seventh Graders	7
Kennedy Junior High School, Lisle, IL	Open House Technology Walk	35
Ladysmith Elementary School, Ladysmith, WI	Fast Start	9
LAUSD-Local District 4, Los Angeles, CA	Transition to Middle School Program	104
LAUSD-Local District 8, Gardena, CA	Parent Center Institute	99
Leaphart Elementary School, Columbia, SC	Science-It's All Family Fun!	27
L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School, St. Paul, MN	Art in the Classroom	32
Lincoln Elementary School, Wausau, WI	Information Fair	51
Lincoln Elementary School for the Arts, Anoka, MN	Classroom Coordinators	67
Lincoln Junior High School, Naperville, IL	Coffee with the Principal	68
Lindbergh Middle School, Long Beach, CA	Math Seminar Parent Presentation	22
Long Beach Unified School District, Long Beach, CA	Kindergarten Festivals	95
Luther W. Machen Elementary School, Hampton, VA	Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home	83
Lynnhaven Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	Reading Can Be a "No-Brainer"	14
Maple Elementary, Cambridge, MD	Donuts for Dad	70
Maplebrook Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Celebrating Reading (Summer Reading Program)	5
Maryland State Department of Education, Baltimore, MD	Maryland Parent Advisory Council	112
Meadow Glens Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Meadow Glens Reads	13
Merrimack Elementary School, Hampton, VA	Reading and Math Mania	23
Middle Township High School, Cape May Court House, NJ	Passport to Possibilities	59
Middletown Public Schools, Middletown, CT	Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through	105
Mill Street Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Math Mates	20
Naper Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Turn Off the TV Family Game Night / Ice Cream Social	38
Naperville North High School, Naperville, IL	Family Connection	48
New Horizons High School / Discovery Middle School, Pasco, WA	Harvest Festival	49
North Penn School District, Lansdale, PA	Homework Assistance and Prime-Time Teen Alternatives	94
Northridge High School, Layton, UT	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program	47
Northwoods Elementary School, Eau Claire, WI	Weather Academy and Family Involvement	29

Oltman Junior High School, St. Paul, MN	Community Forum Series	69
Pasco School District, Pasco, WA	ATP Connection: A District Newsletter	90
Pasco School District, Pasco, WA	Pasco Notebooks for ATP Members	101
Pasco School District, Pasco, WA	School & Family Partnerships District Training	102
Phalen Lake Elementary School, St. Paul, MN	Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night	25
Phalen Lake Elementary School, St. Paul, MN	Parent Learning Walk	81
Phoenix Academy, Fresno, CA	Lunchtime Gatherings	80
Point O'View Elementary School, Virginia Beach, VA	The Point O'View Reading Prize Patrol	16
Prairie Elementary School, Naperville, IL	International Night "Around the World in 90 Minutes"	56
Rains Centenary Elementary School, Mullins, SC	Celebrity Reading Night	6
Ranch View School, Naperville, IL	Parent-Child Book Club	52
Riverview Elementary West Side School of Excellence, St. Paul, MN	Family Literacy Night Kickoff	8
Roberts Elementary School, Wayne, PA	ROB TV - Digital Video Streaming to Communicate	84
Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center, Windsor, CT	Hooked on Books	11
Roosevelt Elementary School, St. Paul, MN	Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)	10
Ruth Livingston Elementary, Pasco, WA	Motion Commotion Truck Fair	46
San Fernando Elementary School, Los Angeles, CA	Grandparents' Day	77
Scott Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Loaves and Fishes Food Drive	79
South Penn Elementary School, Cumberland, MD	South Penn Family Fair	43
St. Paul Public Schools, St. Paul, MN	Added Value Activities	89
Steeple Run Elementary School, Naperville, IL	Turn Off the TV and Turn On Some Fun!	37
Strategic Learning Initiatives, Chicago, IL	Fun With Math	18
Tarrant Elementary School, Hampton, VA	Fall Festival	73
The School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA	Parent Volunteers Program	100
The School District of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA	Youth Net Programs and Youth Net Centers	107
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, Virginia Beach, VA	Military Welcome Packet	97
Wallace Gregg Elementary School, Florence, SC	Drive Through Breakfast	71
Walton Middle School, Compton, CA	Community Partner/Side by Side	42
Weller Road Elementary School, Silver Spring, MD	Parent Pancake Data Breakfast	36
Weller Road Elementary School, Silver Spring, MD	Cultural Night 2007	55
Whittier Elementary School, Pasco, WA	Breakfast and a Book	4
Windsor Public Schools, Windsor, CT	Childhood Conversations Conference	91
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Madison, WI	Wisconsin's REACH Initiative	114

# Section I: Academic Goals



Practices for Types 1-6 may be found in this section to meet academic goals of reading and literacy, math, science, and other academic areas.



# Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July

---

*Birdneck Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

**W**hat does Santa do in July? He goes to the beach, of course – Virginia Beach. And while he’s there, the jolly fellow takes some time away from sand and surf to visit students at Birdneck Elementary, along with their parents and teachers.

Knowing that Santa Claus is coming to their beach, the school administrators and its Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned Birdneck Celebrates Christmas in July, now an annual community celebration that stresses the importance of summer reading. This was Santa’s second summer visit.

Shunning his sleigh and fur-trimmed red suit, Santa arrived in a Jeep driven by the Grinch. Santa was played by the Birdneck principal, wearing an old-fashioned bathing suit, swim cap and flip flops. He climbed onto a mobile stage to the cheers of hundreds of students and the strains of Christmas carols.

Santa came to the children’s neighborhood. Two bus loads of students and summer school staff arrived at the Wadsworth Housing development, while other families poured out of their apartments. The Birdneck staff also invited 150 students from a nearby summer school at Cooke Elementary. Cooke’s principal jumped at the invitation: “This was something fun to break up the summer and to get children to read,” he said.

Santa led the students in singing “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer.” After reading “‘Twas the Night Before Christmas,” Santa praised the children’s accomplishments in school. He added how important it was to keep reading, even during the summer. Students then lined up for individual visits with Santa.

Each child received a book, which Birdneck teachers helped them select. Their younger siblings also received books to plant the seeds of reading early. The children cooled off with popsicles during the celebration. Before Santa arrived, members of faculty, staff and administration greeted families from the neighborhood.

Christmas in July resulted because the school’s ATP wanted to help promote summer reading by adding books to the students’ home libraries. The practice supports the school improvement goal of increasing reading and language arts scores on state tests, especially among minority students.

The event also strengthened school and family relationships, as the staff spent time in the children’s neighborhood. The fact that school teachers and administrators took time in the summer to decorate the stage, distribute treats and books, and greet students and families showed the community how much they care about their students and about reading.

ATP members joined the housing development director, Birdneck’s Parent Involvement Coordinator, and other faculty and staff members to plan and conduct Christmas in July. Advertising began at the end of the school year with a notice in the June issue of the parent newsletter. Organizers also mailed fliers to all Birdneck families, posted notices in the housing office and throughout the neighborhood.

The school used Title I funds to buy books, treats, costumes, and other expenses. The cost was about \$800.

The event was a great success. “I got to meet Santa,” said one 5-year-old, who added proudly, “I read 15 minutes every day.” Teachers expected to see the benefits of summer reading when the students returned to school.

Birdneck Elementary will continue scheduling Christmas in July and hopes to add something new and exciting each year. And what was that sound as Santa headed back toward the beach? It sounded a little like: “Happy summer to all, and to all a good book!”

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# Breakfast and a Book

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*Whittier Elementary School  
Pasco, Washington*

**B**reakfast is definitely the most important meal of the day for students at Whittier Elementary. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) turned a little morning downtime into a productive reading practice, aptly called Breakfast and a Book.

During an ATP brainstorming session on ways to improve parental involvement, a team member reported that several parents sit in the cafeteria each morning with their children until the morning bell rings. The team decided to make use of the time that parents were already investing in their children to involve them as guest readers. ATP members believed that this new practice would engage parents and improve children's literacy skills.

Whittier turned part of the cafeteria into a reading haven with round tables, tablecloths and a new selection of books each week. Every Thursday, from 8:15 to 8:35 a.m., students, parents and school and community volunteers gather to read. Two teachers, who are also ATP members, donate their time to supervise the reading after the children finish breakfast. A variety of English and Spanish-language books enable children and parents to read together in their preferred language.

Even though some parents stayed with their children, the ATP found it challenging to enlist enough parents to read with all of the children at breakfast. ATP members filled in as surrogate parents, and community members also enthusiastically volunteered. Police officers, fire fighters and a photographer have all supported Whittier's Breakfast and a Book. Sometimes, fifth graders take over and read to the younger children and adults.

Whittier's ATP suggested that advertising was one reason for the strong support of Breakfast and a Book. Every month, the team sent an events calendar to parents highlighting

the practice. It also used posters and a bulletin board in the cafeteria to publicize upcoming guest readers. One ATP member made phone calls to personally invite parents and community members to volunteer as readers.

More than 50 students, 50 parents and caregivers, 6 teachers and 6 community members participated this year. Many children came to Breakfast and a Book every Thursday because they simply wanted someone to read to them. Teachers observed that many students who participated in the practice became more fluent readers.

While the practice was academically beneficial for students, it was also fun. One second-grade student commented: "I love Breakfast and a Book. I love being read to!"

Community members and parents responded as enthusiastically as the students. A police officer commented that he enjoyed reading and discussing a story with the students. Several parents noted that having books in both English and Spanish provided an opportunity for non-English speakers to read with their children. Perhaps the most noteworthy outcome of Breakfast and a Book is that teachers, parents and community members saw first-hand that "the kids of Whittier are great!"

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## Celebrating Reading (Summer Reading Program)

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*Maplebrook Elementary School  
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The School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) Committee at Maplebrook Elementary turned those “lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer” into a learning opportunity with its Summer Reading Program.

Research indicates that students who struggle with reading tend not to read at home over the summer. To encourage summer reading, the SFCP committee gave a book bag to each of the school’s more than 500 students before school closed for summer vacation. Packed into each bag were a book, a bookmark, a coupon from a local bookstore, suggested reading lists, a magnet and a beach ball. The SFCP also included ice cream coupons from one of the school’s business partners, as an incentive for students and parents to complete the summer reading activities.

Initiated through a grant from the Naperville Education Foundation, the practice supported the school’s improvement goal of increasing literacy skills while instilling in students the love of reading. The program cost \$3,000, paid for by the education foundation grant and a Home and School donation.

The SFCP and other volunteers worked with the teachers to pick the appropriate books for each grade level and to prepare the bags. They also solicited donations and assembled materials. To help promote the activity, Maplebrook’s administrators announced the Summer Reading Program in the school’s monthly newsletter.

Although the Maplebrook staff initiated the activity, parents and community members contributed to its success. The local librarian gave a presentation about summer reading programs offered in the community. Parents took time to read at home and to go to the library with their children.

The school did not set a quota for the number or type of books that students should read. They wanted students “just to read” and enjoy reading without any pressure. A local pizza restaurant rewarded students with a Celebrate Summer Reading luncheon during the first week of school last fall. All the students needed to qualify for lunch was a slip of paper naming one book they had read during their vacation.

Maplebrook Elementary evaluated the practice with a follow-up survey of parents in the fall. The responses were overwhelmingly positive.

If the school implements the practice next year, it will delay some of the incentives and rewards until after the summer reading has been completed. The organizers also hope to improve the practice by adding other community partners and by holding a celebration of students’ reading achievement in the middle of the summer to keep the students excited about reading.

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## Celebrity Reading Night

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*Rains Centenary Elementary School  
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**R**ains Centenary Elementary found a new and exciting way to promote reading among students, teachers, parents and members of the community. They invited some famous faces from their area to a Celebrity Reading Night in September.

For many years, many students at Rains Elementary were reluctant readers, and reading scores declined. This prompted the school to set a goal to help students improve reading fluency, reading skills, and attitudes about reading. The school needed to find a way to put the fun back into reading and show students the connection between success in reading and a successful life.

Celebrity Reading Night kicked off a series of reading activities in the 2006-07 school year. The principal suggested the event after attending a similar evening at another school. The English Language Arts Team and the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) collaborated in planning the event. They invited local celebrities to show students that people they admire enjoy reading and have favorite books. Among the participating celebrities were local news anchors, college basketball and football players, judges, disc jockeys, teachers, pastors, team mascots and cheerleaders. Sparky, the NASCAR Speed Park mascot, helped host the event.

Students in Grades K-6 had a chance to spend time with several celebrities who read their favorite children's books. While students were doing this, their parents attended workshops on helping their children read at home. After the workshops, parents and students were treated to a pizza dinner.

More than 100 students and 50 parents and caregivers attended. About 30 teachers, administrators and school staff also participated, along with a dozen community members. The school's business partner, Vulcan Industries,

helped to underwrite the \$300 cost of the dinner.

Fliers were sent to parents, who were asked to RSVP so the committee would know how much food to prepare. There were also television and newspaper announcements and additional fliers distributed at churches, daycare centers, and through other community organizations.

Organizers said the event allowed students to see a clear link between the success of celebrities and adults in their community and reading. This generated excitement for the school's reading program. Parents said the event was wonderful and energizing, and community members said that more schools should sponsor Celebrity Reading Nights. The school hopes to have a reading night every year. For next year, they are aiming for a larger space and more celebrities.

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# Computing for Seventh Graders

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*Joseph H. Martin Middle School  
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The Massachusetts Department of Education and the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law identified the Joseph H. Martin Middle School as being in Need of Improvement, because students in two subgroups did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The groups were students with special needs (16.2%) and low-income students (35.4%).

The district applied for and received a \$50,000 state grant that provided laptop computers and subsequent training for teachers at Martin. The school was able to get two mobile wireless laptop carts, each containing 30 laptops. The school also began a partnership with Bridgewater State, a local college, which oversees the grant, provides professional development, technological know-how and feedback to teachers.

The school's seventh graders now use laptop computers daily in the new program called Computing for Seventh Graders. With Vantage Learning's web-based MyAccess software, students develop their writing skills by responding to prompts generated either by the computer program or by their teachers. Students have time during the school day and from home to resubmit their work (up to five revisions are possible) to reach higher achievement levels on a rubric designed by a teacher. The students' work can be accessed from any computer with an internet connection.

This new and integral part of the curriculum affords parents the opportunity to review their child's progress at home. Families who do not own a computer receive letters generated by the MyAccess program, which keep them updated on their child's progress and needs.

In addition, teachers use the Department of Education's MassOne teacher's resource website (blog) to communicate with each other and to share successful strategies and practices. So far, 187 students and an equal number of parents have participated. Eleven

teachers, administrators and other staff members are also involved.

The goal is to improve the writing abilities of seventh graders, while providing parents with a way to examine their child's work. The school chose seventh graders because they are required to write a lengthy essay as part of a state assessment. The school plans to continue using the program when the students are in eighth grade, and expand it to more seventh-grade classes in the second year of the grant.

The Action Team for Partnerships was instrumental in implementing the practice. Its members helped apply for the computer grant. In addition, they talked to parents at PTO/PTA meetings, demonstrated the program and reported on its implementation. They continually provided support to help parents use the program at home. The parents are very enthusiastic and would like all students to have laptop access.

Joseph H. Martin's principal said that the introduction of laptop computers contributed greatly to the school's effort to make AYP and to engage parents in their child's education.

"This will truly prepare students for the 21st Century," said one teacher. Others noted that students are more enthusiastic about writing, and much more interested in self-improvement. "I wish I had this when I was younger," commented a student.

At first, some teachers were not comfortable with the technology, but this challenge was short-lived. Professional development seemed to ease their fears. In the future, the school hopes to integrate this practice into mathematics instruction.

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## Family Literacy Night Kickoff

*Riverview Elementary West Side School of Excellence  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

The flier for Family Literacy Night at Riverview Elementary School proclaims, “Today a reader, tomorrow a leader!” The school is trying hard to create those future leaders, if its annual celebration of reading is any indication. This year, Riverview launched a school-wide literacy program in October, kicking off the year with an evening that included dinner, guest readers, clowns, hands-on activities, a sing-a-story and a chance to win a book bag full of goodies.

For three years, Riverview has conducted literacy nights to generate excitement and support for the school’s reading program. With more than half its students speaking a language other than English at home, Riverview has some extra challenges in tailoring activities to the needs of its families. For literacy night, liaisons from the Hmong and Spanish communities worked as interpreters for families who speak little or no English. To be sure that transportation was not a problem, the school counselor and social worker arranged cab rides for families who needed them.

This year’s theme, “Reading . . . Anytime, Anywhere,” produced some interesting reading stations. Three different areas were decorated as good places to read – one was a cozy living room with a fireplace; another was a bus stop and the third was a campsite. There, families could listen to stories read by local actors who volunteered through an organization called Book Pals. They not only shared good stories, but also modeled for parents how to read to children and how to build literacy skills. The stations also had a variety of children’s books for families who preferred to read on their own.

The event offered many other activities. A free lasagna dinner was served throughout the two-hour event. There were ten make-and-take activity tables where children could do literacy-related projects. For example, they could make a puppet of a favorite book

character such as Clifford, The Big Red Dog, create bookmarks, use letters to design name necklaces or bracelets and make buttons that advertise reading. All families who stopped at their children’s homerooms received a ticket for the bookbag drawing. All students received a free book of their choice and parents got a Tip Sheet of home activities that promote literacy.

Saving the best for last, the night’s final activity was the performance of family sing-along stories, featuring favorites such as “Bingo” and “Baby Beluga.” Then came the drawing and five lucky families went home with a bag full of wonderful children’s books and activities.

The Action Team for Partnerships and school staff joined forces for the event – planning, making materials and carrying out the many activities. Students participated, too, by making posters, bringing home fliers and making announcements on the Morning Message video program. AmeriCorps volunteers and a local clown club were among the community groups lending helping hands.

The timing of this event is a challenge because it needs to be early in the year – an extremely busy time for the staff. The school has met this challenge by forming committees at the end of the previous school year for staff members to choose the projects on which to work. The date is announced well in advance, at Meet Your Teacher night in August.

Over 127 students and more than 100 parents and caregivers attended, getting the school off to another year of good reading.

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## Fast Start

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*Ladysmith Elementary School  
Ladysmith, Wisconsin*

Ladysmith Elementary School did not reinvent the wheel when it decided to implement a program that involves parents in their children's early literacy experiences. Instead, Ladysmith leaders adopted and enhanced Fast Start, a commercial program published by Scholastic, Inc., which encourages families to participate in children's first steps on the road to reading.

Fast Start is research-based and grounded in the principles of effective fluency instruction. It is a set of poems and word-play activities that engages parents and children in word recognition and comprehension, and promotes fluency. Every week parents receive a set of activities on phonemic awareness, word families, decoding and sight vocabulary. The classroom teacher monitored the families' work on these activities, and the reading specialist produced Fast Start Family Reports to give parents regular feedback.

The school made Fast Start available to all first-graders and their families. Each Monday the classroom teacher sent home a poem, a series of activities relating to that poem and a log sheet. Families were asked to spend 10 minutes each night on the activities.

Ladysmith enhanced Scholastic's program by adding its own after-school component. Community members served as volunteers to assist students who needed extra reading support. These additional reading sessions took place twice a week after school, especially for students whose parents worked evening hours or were otherwise unable to be involved in the at-home portion of Fast Start. Current and retired classroom teachers volunteered to help with the after-school program.

Many school leaders and teachers contributed to planning and implementing Fast Start. The school's reading specialist proposed the program to first grade teachers,

who were instrumental in setting it up. All teachers received introductory information to share with parents, mid-year family letters, assessment of progress for parents and end-of-year surveys.

Teachers not only promoted the program at parent-teacher conferences and through newsletters, but also encouraged and supported participating families in the year-long process. The school's reading specialist monitored progress, provided incentives and made a variety of weekly lessons available for families.

The goal of the practice was to involve families in their children's literacy learning. It supported several school improvement goals, including promoting partnerships with parents and enhancing early literacy skills.

Implementing this program cost about \$1,000. Costs were covered by a 21st Century Grant and by the Ladysmith-Hawkins School District. In total, 60 students, 120 parents, 6 teachers and 5 community members participated in Fast Start during the 2006-07 school year.

"Family involvement in this program goes a long way toward helping the entire class become successful readers," said a first-grade teacher. Children enjoyed learning to read. That, in turn, helped them develop positive attitudes toward reading in general and about themselves as readers.

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# Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)

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*Roosevelt Elementary School  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

FRED was popular at Roosevelt Elementary this year. FRED is Fathers Reading Every Day, a program of the Minnesota Humanities Commission that encourages men to read at home and to get more involved in their children's education.

At Roosevelt, FRED was a month-long initiative featuring two family reading sessions in December and January, which combined food, storytelling, guest readers, free books and camaraderie. Working with the commission, the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) welcomed FRED and worked hard to make it a successful undertaking. The team even arranged and paid for taxis for families who did not have transportation.

The result was that large groups of men and some single mothers and their school-aged children attended both sessions. Dinner was followed by a storybook reading session. Among the guest readers were the school's custodian, librarian assistant, and a "live" Cat in the Hat.

After the reading period, children went to another area for activities and parents had the opportunity to discuss different types of literature and storytelling. They learned more about the Success for All reading program used at the school and received suggestions about reading with their children from a literacy teacher.

The parents also received *What Daddies Do Best*, a book that, when turned over, reads *What Mommies Do Best*. The families saw a great many parents reading with their children. They clearly understood how important they are to their children's education.

Parents and children also participated in a choral reading. Before leaving, children selected two free books to take home. Through FRED's influence, students saw their parents show more interest in listening to them read at home, and in reading themselves. Some of the children enjoyed the evening so much that they

wanted to know if there would be another "dad thing."

Improving student achievement through reading instruction is one of the school's and the ATP's priorities. Targeting activities to male caregivers was a need that was identified when the school completed the NNPS annual UPDATE evaluation. Although FRED specifies "fathers," the program also welcomed single mothers. Next year, the school will change the name to include both groups. More than 50 parents and 80 children attended the FRED sessions.

The school principal endorsed the program in collaboration with the ATP. The team's facilitator ordered food, arranged for taxis and childcare. School staff members and parents volunteered as readers. Teachers developed and supervised activities for the children.

FRED cost about \$885, including the food, taxi fares, door prizes and interpreters for Hispanic and Hmong families. Title I funding covered these costs, and the humanities council provided the books.

"Because of this program my children remind us to read, even if I'm busy," said one parent. Other participants agreed that the program helped them to become more involved in helping their children read, forging happy memories in the process.

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## Hooked On Books

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*Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center  
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Looking for a fresh way to hook children into reading and help them catch the literacy bug? Hooked On Books caught on as a reading incentive program for beginning readers at Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center. It involved real fish, paper fish, a contest, some science lessons and books, books, books.

During May, children at the preschool and kindergarten center were encouraged – even more than usual – to read books at school and at home. Each time students read a book or were read to, they wrote their names on a paper fish. At the end of each week, the fish were caught and the class that netted the most was declared the week’s winner. The prize: an opportunity to take care of the center’s pet fish, “Hook 1 and Hook 2.” These two Beta fish share a tank in the Family Resource Center (FRC) when not visiting a winning classroom.

The FRC leader, who organized and promoted the incentive program, asked the owners of a local pet store to supply the fish – four in all, two in each hallway during the contest. The owner agreed and even offered to replenish the supply, if needed. Teachers kept talking up the reading program. The FRC leader visited each class to build interest and encouraged parents to read with their children. The baskets of “caught fish” were displayed in the school foyer to kindle more interest.

Parents helped by reading to their children at home and by volunteering to supply the paper fish to meet the children’s demand for them. The pet store staff got caught up in the spirit of this program, too, and shared tips for taking care of the donated fish. The pet store now proudly displays a certificate of appreciation from the Wolcott Center for its contributions to Hooked On Books.

One family at the school donated a children’s book for each teacher about the care

and feeding of fish. The FRC leader read it to each winning class, as she delivered the fish. Of course, every classroom had a chance to win.

Hooked On Books became a school favorite as it was publicized with fliers, in the monthly newsletter and at a book fair display, where the FRC leader played word games with students and their families. She gave away books that the PTO bought for prizes. The Action Team for Partnerships played a critical role in recruiting volunteers and helping to implement this project.

By constantly reinforcing the idea of reading, the children remained involved and excited about reading. Making it a game added to the fun. Teachers not only saw children’s interest in reading growing, but also had an opportunity to teach those science lessons – about fish and their habitat.

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# Letters from the Heart

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*Horace Mann Elementary School  
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The idea came from the “Absolutely Incredible Kid Day,” a day set aside for parents, teachers and community members to write a letter telling a child how wonderful he or she is. Horace Mann Elementary, a school in suburban Milwaukee, gave the national day a new twist, creating the Letters from the Heart event – a letter exchange that turned into a very special evening.

Letters from the Heart involved not only teachers and parents writing letters to children, but also students writing letters to their teachers and parents. In this way, the project helped students work on their writing skills. This related closely to one of the goals of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP): Help all students write proficiently on grade level.

The event also addressed the challenge of increasing parental leadership and involvement at the school. The school has a diverse population and more than three-quarters of its students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The ATP hoped that a good experience would make parents more willing to be involved. Writing letters allowed parents to interact positively with the school.

The activity proved good for everyone. The adults and students expressed feelings in their letters that they might not say in person. People were not shy about participating – more than 400 students and 400 adults wrote letters.

Letters from the Heart was also a learning experience. Beginning in February, teachers worked with their students on letter-writing skills, and gave them the opportunity to finish their letters in class. Parents, too, got help with their writing. For two weeks before the event, several ATP and staff members, including the librarian, held letter-writing workshops for parents, both before and after school. These workshops offered writing tips, computer access and a quiet space to work.

On the evening of the March PTA meeting, Letters from the Heart began with a pizza dinner sponsored by the PTA. After dinner, each family had its picture taken. Parents and students worked together to make a frame or card to hold the photo. The school also set up a reading room and encouraged families to enjoy reading a book together. These activities paled, however, to the evening’s big event – the letter exchange in the cafeteria.

“It felt as if time stopped and the world slowed down during this exchange,” said one organizer. “Seeing the smiles on each person’s face as they read their letter was a humbling and joyful experience. Hearts opened wide that night and the letters will stay with each child and parent forever.”

The event’s success was due in part to good publicity. Several letters were sent home to parents introducing the project, welcoming them to attend letter-writing workshops and the exchange. The PTA paid for the food and the Family Resource Center provided materials for the art project and the camera for family pictures. The cost was less than \$400.

Overall, the practice was a resounding success, according to everyone involved. Parents were positive about the practice and expressed their hopes that the school would repeat the event. The principal was thrilled. The teachers were proud to be a part of helping adults and children connect so meaningfully.

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# Meadow Glens Reads

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*Meadow Glens Elementary  
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Families that read together learn together! In the fast-paced society in which we live, slowing down to enjoy a book seems to be getting more and more difficult for many families. Meadow Glens Elementary's reading initiative brought children closer to their parents, allowed families to interact with other families, strengthened the home-school connection and involved the larger community in celebrating literacy.

Meadow Glens' School, Family, Community Partnerships (SFCP) team developed Meadow Glens Reads based on its community's reading program, "Naperville Reads." During a regular SFCP meeting, the team identified four goals:

- Educate parents about reading strategies;
- Encourage family members to read together and learn from each other;
- Connect reading to enjoyment and life-long learning; and
- Build school-community connections through literature.

The month-long event kicked off at the school's Open House. SFCP leaders introduced the school's 2006-07 theme, "Expand Your World." Families visited a booth with additional information about Meadow Glens Reads and signed up to participate. Parents received a list of appropriate books supporting the theme, which was compiled by a local bookshop. The school's Learning Resource Center (LRC) director previewed some of the multicultural books with each class to generate students' excitement about the activity.

During Meadow Glens Reads, participating families read a book from the designated booklist. Afterwards, they created a "book jacket," made from pizza boxes that SFCP members gave each family. The jackets highlighted the culture depicted in the book.

Meadow Glens Reads culminated with teachers, families, students and community members celebrating at a multicultural extravaganza! This event included dinner, a storyteller, teacher-led book discussions, and an interactive computer-based scavenger hunt. And of course, families displayed their pizza box book jackets.

Many stakeholders helped make the reading initiative a success and held the school's cost to \$375. Community members compiled the booklist, offered books at a discount during Open House, provided pizza and salad for the celebration and donated raffle prizes that were awarded during the evening.

More than 150 students, 160 parents and 12 community members participated. Students benefited from reading with their families and learning about other cultures. Parents became knowledgeable about the process of analyzing and discussing a story. Many will be better able to help their children talk about the stories they read in the future. The event also provided an opportunity for teachers to interact with families outside of the formal classroom setting.

Because the practice is an annual event, the SFCP relies on participant feedback from surveys to plan for the next year. Parents' responses this year were overwhelmingly positive: "This was the best, very well organized. Please do it again next year!" That parent's wish to again participate in Meadow Glens Reads will come true as the school already received a grant for next year's event.

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## Reading Can Be A “No Brainer”

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Lynnhaven Elementary School  
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The staff at Lynnhaven wanted to promote literacy and introduce parents to new information from the latest brain research in education. The goal was to discuss how new information could be applied to improve parent/child relationships and to promote student learning. The school decided to dedicate the annual Family Literacy Night to these dual goals, and expand the activity that had been limited to families of students in the primary grades to include the whole school.

Offering to support the project, one of the school’s Partners in Excellence, GEICO, arranged for a United Way speaker from the Raising a Reader program to talk with the parents. The school planned parallel literacy activities for the students and the Partners in Education Committee contacted other partners about providing dinner. School staff pitched in to monitor the children’s activities and provide childcare for younger siblings.

“We invited the whole Lynnhaven family – all students and their parents – for dinner and a speaker to have a less stressful school event,” said one of the organizers. “The families could all come, be fed, informed and entertained.”

Thanks to hard work and generosity, that’s what happened. The partners really came through. GEICO paid for pizzas; Chick-fil-A sent chicken sandwiches; Zero’s Subs discounted sandwiches and donated potato chips; McDonald’s provided juice, cookies and paper products. Not only did the families enjoy a feast, but they were also treated to visits from GEICO’s Gecko and the Chick-fil-A Cow, who posed for photos with the families.

The coordinators from the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) designed invitations and fliers and distributed them twice. Teachers wrote letters home inviting parents to the activity, stressing the importance of the

program. ATP members decorated the cafeteria with balloons and brightly colored tablecloths.

After dinner, a storyteller entertained the children in the library so parents could concentrate on their program. A staff member read to the children when the storyteller finished. Children also selected a book to take home.

The parents found the speaker fascinating. She talked about brain development, reading development and how parents can better help their children reach their potential. She had color handouts of brain scans that clearly illustrated how a child’s brain can be stimulated. She also spoke about how to interact effectively with children.

“This really changed how I will speak to my children from now on,” said one parent.

A teacher said “I thought we might lose the parents in the theory, but the speaker explained things beautifully. You could hear a pin drop while she spoke.”

The PTA president called it “the most effective presentation ever at the school.” She added, “Many parents have never heard that what they say to a child can help or hinder brain development. It really makes you stop and think. It was fascinating. When can we have Part II?”

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## Student-Led Conferences

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*E. Russell Hicks Middle School  
Hagerstown, Maryland*

Who says that parental involvement decreases in middle school? Certainly not the staff at E. Russell Hicks Middle School! More than 750 parents attended the school's Student-Led Conferences! During this annual activity, all students share their academic progress and success in an individual presentation for their parents or another supervising adult.

Not only did the conferences afford students an opportunity to review and showcase their year's work, but they also helped students develop their organizational and speaking skills. Preparation was key for the conferences' tremendous success. Students prepared by compiling a portfolio of noteworthy assignments for every subject throughout the school year. Teachers helped students assemble and organize their portfolios and worked with students on their presentations.

Each grade, six through eight, was assigned a day toward the end of the school year for its conferences. Parents came to school to attend the meeting and visit their child's Language Arts class. For 20 minutes, the student shared his or her successes in every subject. The school gave all students binders in which to keep examples of the activities and assignments they were particularly proud of and wanted to share.

Once the conference was finished, students and their parents enjoyed refreshments provided by the school. Every student conducted a conference. If a parent was unable to participate, a teacher who the student is comfortable with, district leader or other community volunteer attended to hear about the student's progress.

The middle school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) recognizes that a strong home-school connection is crucial for students' success. Student-Led Conferences enabled students to serve as a bridge from school to home.

Another benefit of Student-Led Conferences was that they became a community affair. A number of businesses, such as Sam's Club, Wal-Mart, Sheetz, McDonald's and Rocky's Pizza, donated cash and food and offered discount coupons to participants. Others also stepped up. The Board of Education helped promote the event. The county television station publicized it and other community members sat in as substitute parents. Additional publicity included morning announcements at school and articles in the school newspaper. The school sent letters about the conferences to all families.

Even though the conferences took place only a few months ago, the ATP is already planning an even bigger event for next year! The team hopes to solicit more community donations and encourage more parents to attend.

There is no doubt that this year's Student-Led Conferences were a runaway hit. The parents enjoyed positive interactions with their children and the students proudly showcased a year's worth of hard work.

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# The Point O'View Reading Prize Patrol

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*Point O'View Elementary School  
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**P**ublishers Clearing House move over! The Point O'View Reading Prize Patrol is on its way! Bringing books, balloons and excitement, the Prize Patrol rewards families who read together.

Point O'View Elementary wanted to stress the importance of setting aside time everyday to read with its version of the Publishers Clearing House give-away. Families who pledged to read together every weeknight in February were entered in a drawing. During the last week of the month, six names were drawn for visits from the Reading Prize Patrol.

"We felt like celebrities when the reading patrol arrived at our door," said one lucky parent. "Neighbors came out and applauded when they heard the commotion. The gift basket was full of books for everyone in the family. We really enjoyed the time we spent reading together. Thank you very much."

Nearly 160 families, with about 200 elementary students, joined the fun. The Reading Prize Patrol gathered in front of each house and blew horns as the principal knocked on the front door. The patrol then presented families with a basket of books, a heart-shaped balloon bouquet and a giant award certificate. Surprised winners greeted the patrol with cries of disbelief and tears of appreciation.

In addition to the principal, the enthusiastic patrol included the assistant principal, teachers of winning students, language arts committee members and the school mascot. "This was a fun experience. It was a pleasure to be part of the Reading Prize Patrol," said one teacher. "The look on the face of my student as he came to the door was priceless! What a good time we had going from house to house together to surprise the families. Count me in next year!"

One of the school's community partners helped videotape the prize presentations,

which were aired on the school's television station. The partner also gave copies to the winning families.

"Reading is at the heart of learning, and reading fluently is one of the most important accomplishments of early school years," said one of the organizers. "This practice addressed the need . . . to establish a regular time at home to practice the important skill of reading."

The emphasis on reading led students to read more and may have helped improve their scores on statewide tests. Students also benefited emotionally and behaviorally from having parents spend quality time reading with them.

About \$100 in school funds paid for preschool board books, baskets, balloons and party horns. The school library used proceeds from its book fair to provide the other new books that were awarded.

The Reading Prize Patrol will be in Point O'View neighborhoods next year. The school hopes to involve more families, just as this year's participation topped last year's. The planners may arrange to have a drawing every month or expand the activity to include other subjects. The school will solicit donations from community members and invite them to be part of the patrol.

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# White Elephant Bingo

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*Elmwood Elementary School  
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Imagine a bingo night where no less than 10 kinds of bingo are played, the town Mayor calls the big game, and everyone goes home with a prize. White Elephant Bingo at Elmwood Elementary was all that and more.

Wanting to break up the long winter with some excitement, Elmwood's School/Family/Community Partnership (SFCP) Team planned the event for students and parents. The price of admission was a "gently used" age-appropriate item such as a DVD, CD, board game or book -- the White Elephant -- that someone else would win.

Students then selected the game they wanted to begin with and started playing bingo. All tables were marked with the kind of bingo game and the ages it was best suited for. The SFCP Team created some of the games, drawing on topics that applied specifically to the school. Elmwood Bingo was popular among students, who loved playing a game named after their school. Other games included: Sports Bingo, Harry Potter Bingo and Outer Space Bingo. Many of the games could be played two ways -- for a table of older or younger children.

When a student won a game, he or she went to the prize table and selected a "new to them" prize to take home. The high point of the evening was a series of traditional bingo games for all students. To everyone's delight, the Mayor called these games. Students winning these games received school spirit wear and other new prizes provided by the SFCP. At the end of the evening, students who had not won anything could select a prize to take home.

White Elephant Bingo wasn't only fun. It supported the school's reading improvement goal by incorporating kindergarten and first-grade sight words into a bingo game. Other games involved elements of math and geography. Students benefited from the opportunity

to work together, to help each other and to listen well, while having fun. They also loved coming to this evening with their parent and getting to see many of their school friends.

Parents liked having a planned activity that they and their children enjoyed, as well as the opportunity to meet new parents. They also had a chance to meet and talk to their mayor.

"How nice it was to come to a free and fun event at school," several parents said. The children commented on how great it was to be able to pick a new "treasure" to take home.

About 100 students and their parents attended, which the SFCP team considered a strong response for a new event. The team plans to repeat the activity next year, perhaps at different times of the year and for a longer time. Home and School Funds paid the bills, which totaled only about \$70. Some adults contributed extra White Elephant items, so that every child would get a prize. White Elephant Bingo was definitely a winner for Elmwood.

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# Fun with Math

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*Strategic Learning Initiatives  
Chicago, Illinois*

**C**an an old egg carton really be used to reinforce multiplication facts? It sure can! That was one of the strategies shared at Fun with Math, a program that provided parents information and tools to help their children with math – and to enjoy doing it.

Every April, the Chicago-based organization Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI) asks the parents it works with to identify topics of interest or need. Math was at the top of the list. As a result, the organization's parent engagement director, manager, trainers, school coordinators and facilitators helped to plan, design and facilitate a free math workshop for parents. SLI presented the idea for the workshop to schools' Leadership Teams/Action Teams during a summer retreat.

These school leaders presented the workshop for about 150 parents at their schools. They began with a discussion of the important role of math in children's lives. Then, the adults talked about how different math is now compared to when most of them attended school.

The workshop quickly turned from talk to action, as parents participated in math activities they could use to reinforce skills at home. This is where the egg carton and multiplication came in. For one activity, pairs of parents used an egg carton and cotton balls to practice the multiplication tables. Each pair numbered the egg cups from 1-12. Then they decided which number they wanted to work on – for instance the "threes." Each parent took a turn to throw a cotton ball into the crate and to multiply the number where it landed by 3. If the cotton ball landed in egg-cup 6, for instance, then the parent solved the problem  $6 \times 3$ .

Another activity used geometric-shaped multiplication flash cards. Participants also played games, such as Math Scrabble. Hands-on activities are a hallmark of SLI, which is

dedicated to accelerating student and adult learning through best practices from education and business.

SLI took several measures to ensure that many families benefited from the workshop and activities. First, they publicized the event through posters, school calendars and phone calls. Second, they made sure that the presentation and all materials were translated into Spanish. Finally, although the activities conducted at the workshop were designed for a third-grade math level, the facilitators demonstrated how to adapt them for older and younger children.

Parents learned new strategies for helping their children with basic math facts at home, took home materials and gained knowledge and confidence as "leaders" in their children's education.

"I now feel comfortable helping my daughter with math," said one parent. "You made math interesting and fun for us," added another.

SLI's approaches encourage parents to understand that home is a place of learning. The non-profit group helps schools train parents to make their homes conducive to learning. As a result of feedback to the math workshop, organizers plan to lengthen Fun with Math by 30 minutes and may offer it at different times to accommodate even more families.

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## Math Mardi Gras

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*James McGee Elementary School  
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Last January, James McGee Elementary School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) sponsored Math Mardi Gras, an evening of fun and games focused on math. The turnout was excellent – nearly 150 students signed in, many accompanied by several members of their family.

Attendance was many times better than the prior January, when the ATP sponsored a Family Math Night. Team members evaluated the 2006 event and decided it needed to be changed. The ATP brainstormed ideas of more effective ways to get families interested in helping their children with math in hopes of improving the school's math scores. The consensus was that a "party-like" atmosphere would make the event more attractive. The time of year brought them to the Mardi Gras theme.

The goal was to engage families in math games and activities that supported grade-level expectations set by the district and guided by the State of Washington. Specifically, one major school improvement goal is to increase math scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) from 54.7% to 59.2% in the next year. By getting families to use math activities with children at home, parental involvement could support and enhance the teachers' efforts to help students attain stronger math skills.

On the night of the event, the atmosphere was festive, with Mardi Gras-themed decorations and teachers and volunteers wearing Mardi Gras masks. After signing in, families went to grade-level stations that featured hands-on projects and take-home activities. Those staffing the stations often taught the families the math games so that they could play them later. Families moved among stations at their own pace.

Students got to show their math skills to their families, and everyone discovered new

ways to enjoy math. At one station, a deck of cards was used to practice addition and multiplication facts. "I never thought to use a deck of cards that way," said parents after learning this new technique.

The ATP used multiple avenues to publicize Mardi Gras Math: the reader board in front of the school; the parent newsletter; separate fliers; the school website, and daily announcements at school during the week of the program. Perhaps all of this publicity accounted for the great turnout -- 300 parents and other caregivers, 30 teachers and 100 community members in addition to 150 students. The ATP paid for the expenses from its budget.

"This is a great example of an Action Team evaluating a first attempt to conduct a math night and, then, improving it to become a winning practice the next year," said one of the organizers. With one successful math night to its credit, the ATP hopes to establish Math Mardi Gras as a tradition – one that the students, families, educators, and the community anticipates excitedly.

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# Math Mates

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*Mill Street Elementary School  
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**B**P Amoco isn't just a company that provides fuel for cars. It also is a company that helps put schools on the road to meet the goals in their School Improvement Plans! Take Mill Street Elementary School, for example. The School Improvement Team (SIT) at Mill Street identified improving students' math skills as a priority, and determined that some students needed more math instruction and experiences. Out of the SIT's decision came Math Mates, a parent and community volunteer tutoring program.

Employees of BP Amoco joined parents as volunteer tutors, known as Math Mates. They worked with students chosen by their teachers for extra help, thus multiplying the time these students spent on math.

Working in small groups or individually with tutors, students used different approaches, such as math games and manipulatives, to improve their math skills and understanding. Math Mate tutors also provided weekly feedback to the teachers about student achievement in the program.

Teachers and parents on the school's math committee were instrumental in getting Math Mates up and running. Mill Street Home & School bought math games and manipulatives. Selected parents and staff members offered to train the volunteers -- a vital component to the success of such a program.

Increased student achievement, measured on formal standardized tests and with district math objectives, and informal assessments including classroom observations attest to the success of Math Mates. In addition, classroom teachers noted that students acted with more confidence in math by raising their hands and participating in math lessons and class discussions.

Students were not the only Math Mates participants to experience positive outcomes.

Parents and volunteers also learned more about the math curriculum and how to work with students. The training they received helped them better assist their own children. Teachers greatly appreciated the extra help and support for their struggling math students.

In addition, teachers were able to use the Math Mates materials with other students in their classrooms, increasing the benefits of the program. About 35 teachers and staff members, 20 parents and 30 community volunteers were involved.

Thanks to good planning and positive feedback, Mill Street Elementary plans to implement Math Mates next year. "The one-on-one involvement is irreplaceable," said one teacher. A parent added: "My child enjoys math now that he feels more confident."

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# Math Mornings

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*Elizabeth Pole School  
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If there is one constant in education, it is change. Elizabeth Pole School used change, specifically a new math program, to its advantage, strengthening home-school connections, improving math achievement and acquainting families with the new curriculum.

Teachers and paraprofessionals collaborated with the parent and teacher group for increasing family involvement to create Math Mornings, a set of interactive workshops to familiarize parents with the school's math program.

To accommodate as many parents as possible, Math Mornings were conducted by grade, with each day focusing on a different level from K to 4. In the gym, parents and their children rotated through stations that were monitored by teachers and paraprofessionals.

Each station featured a math game that the students would learn in school throughout the year and could play at home to reinforce math skills. Teachers at each station explained how the game corresponded with math lessons and with state and national math standards. At the end of the two-hour event, the participants enjoyed a breakfast snack provided by the school's family involvement group.

Math Mornings provided an opportunity for families to experience the new math curriculum in an inviting atmosphere. In this way, they supported the school's goal of relating the home-school connection to the learning standards in each academic area.

The refreshments cost about \$150. Other supplies were provided as part of the math curriculum or made by teachers, staff, or volunteers. Because the organizers were diligent about publicizing Math Mornings through fliers and the school calendar, more than 500 students and 250 parents participated.

This event lasted one week, but the benefits are ongoing. School staff members noted

that student performance improved in math and parents reported they are more comfortable with what is going on in math classes. The parent-teacher group president said it was a great event for families and that the staff was happy to assist. A teacher added that it was worth the time to provide a learning opportunity for the families. The children were equally enthusiastic and said they loved playing the games.

Repeating Math Mornings separately for each grade helped to ensure that families would be comfortable with the curriculum as their children progress through the grades. Regular newsletters throughout the year continued to explain math concepts and practices, keeping the message of Math Mornings fresh in the parents' minds all year long.

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# Math Seminar Parent Presentation

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*Lindbergh Middle School  
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Lindbergh Middle School's teachers and administrators knew that better-educated parents would likely translate into better-educated students. The Long Beach school also wanted parents to get more involved in their children's education. Rather than overloading them, however, with information about every subject, school leaders decided to start small and simple. To that end, the school developed the Math Seminar Parent Presentation.

The one-time presentation aimed to introduce parents to the school's math teachers, the math curriculum and the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) website to parents. School leaders hoped the seminar would give parents useful tools to help their children practice math at home. Students were encouraged to attend with their parents.

The principal opened the event and introduced the school's math teachers, who each presented his or her philosophy of teaching and talked about the daily routines in their math classrooms. The assistant principal explained the math curriculum and introduced the textbooks that are used. She also answered parents' questions. During the main presentation, there was a simultaneous translator for the Spanish-speaking parents who elected that service.

After these introductions, a school leader presented a tutorial that taught parents how to navigate the district's website so that they could help their child practice various math concepts that were taught at school.

Before the Math Seminar Parent Presentation, volunteer parents called every child's home to let families know about it. The school also sent notices home and put the information in the daily bulletin. The new event was successful, with more than 280 parents and 120 students attending.

The parents left the presentation more aware of what occurs in the school's math

classes, including teaching methods and district standards. "It was worthwhile. I enjoyed the presentation. Thank you so much for giving out this information," said a parent. "This was valuable information and I will be better able to help my son with his homework," added another.

The school will repeat the seminar next year. Its advice to those wishing to implement a similar practice is to have a sign-in sheet for parents, use microphones, make plenty of handouts, and make sure that the Internet is available and working for the presentation.

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# Reading and Math Mania

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*Merrimack Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

**H**ow do students at Merrimack Elementary School gear-up for the spring standardized testing frenzy? They participate with their families in Reading and Math Mania, an annual activity designed to reinforce reading and math skills in fun ways and to inspire parents and students to work on such activities at home.

Reading and Math Mania, originally developed by the school's Title I math specialist and spear-headed by the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), has evolved over the years. The activity began as a "tea" and is now a carnival-like event complete with food and activity booths.

Teachers from each grade planned activities to demonstrate math skills to parents and students in 20 to 25 minutes. The facilitators of math booths attracted families by giving their activities interesting names, such as "Battle of the Bugs" or "Multiplication Madness." Families chose which activities to attend, generally focusing on those offered for their child's grade level.

After the event, the school sent "Thank You" postcards to each family that attended. The class with the most students present was recognized and rewarded with a special treat, donated by community partners. Merrimack Elementary honored each establishment that contributed gifts or door prizes at its end-of-year Volunteer Recognition event. More than 200 community members were involved in this year's Mania!

Community partners were not the only ones contributing to Reading and Math Mania's success. Parent volunteers assembled goody bags for parents and thank-you gifts for participating staff. Teachers solicited donations from community partners and planned activities for each grade level. Administrators provided dinner for the staff on the day of the

event and took photos during the activities. Finally, students talked-up the evening to their parents and took home fliers as reminders.

Merrimack Elementary relied on more than just fliers to publicize the activity. Event leaders also advertised it through visual morning announcements, verbal reminders at afternoon dismissal and the CONNECT-ED communication system, which places automated calls and sends e-mail messages to parents.

More than 100 parents and 100 students participated. Students enjoyed an evening at school with their families and were able to take home activity packets to reinforce learning outside of school. In addition, teachers took advantage of the event to get to know their students' parents. Merrimack Elementary has many military families, which leads to a high student mobility rate. Reading and Math Mania allowed parents, who may have missed open house or parent-teacher conferences, to meet their children's teachers in a relaxed setting.

Next year, the school plans to conduct Reading and Math Mania again. The school's goal: Get even more parents and community members involved.

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# SMART Night (Science, Math and Relevant Technology)

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*Delmae Elementary School  
Florence, South Carolina*

The creative use of everyday household items brought math and science to life at Delmae Elementary School's SMART Night. The event offered families a night of fun that included math and science games, "Technology Tidbits," and a robotics display.

The school's mathematics coach first heard about math and science nights during a state training and began tailoring the practice to meet this school's specific needs. After researching and conferring with colleagues, the coach chose the acronym SMART (Science, Math and Relevant Technology) and set two goals:

- 1) Build community by having parents, students, teachers and friends come together for food, fellowship and academic activities.
- 2) Instill in students a love of science, math and technology.

SMART Night took place in January 2007, featuring estimation games, a robotics display and dinner. Parents rotated through math and science stations around the building and participated in activities with their children, such as making play dough and using decks of cards to review math concepts. "I loved playing math games with my dad. I didn't know that I could learn science while drinking a cup of hot chocolate!" commented one student.

First-grade students used food to discover geometric shapes, while fourth-graders made "canned constellations" from film canisters. The music teacher used glasses of water to demonstrate pitch, reinforcing a third-grade unit on sound.

The computer lab was up and running with many interactive sites. The school provided booklets listing educational websites and games so that families could visit them at home.

In fact, every family left with a compilation of activities from each grade and each subject.

Delmae's faculty, staff, parents and community partners collaborated on the event. Teachers took the lead in developing and selecting activities that families could later reproduce at home. Administrators and other staff members supported teachers' efforts by providing materials and supplies.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) helped set up and decorate the space, and the cafeteria staff prepared a delicious dinner. The school's community and business partners provided speakers and representatives for some activities.

To promote attendance, the school sent out fliers and announced the event in grade-level newsletters and on the school web site. Information also was posted on school marquis and on a reader board at First Reliance Bank, one of Delmae's business partners. Thanks to this publicity and tremendous effort of all involved, turnout was phenomenal. More than 200 parents, 458 students – more than half of the student body, 78 teachers and 15 community members attended.

Teachers and administrators heard positive comments about SMART Night for weeks. One third-grade teacher said, "The night was a good way to build community in our school and explain to parents through hands-on activities what our standards really mean."

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# Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night

Phalen Lake Elementary School  
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*“Are YOU smarter than a fifth grader?”*

This popular quiz show on TV demonstrated to parents what children feel during standardized testing – being put on the spot for a correct answer. On the eve of two weeks of such testing, the kickoff night provided an opportunity for parents to understand the importance of the tests and the crucial role they play at home. They learned how to help their children relax, knowing that “once they have done their best, that’s all anyone can ask.” The event also provided families with tools to help their youngsters at home and added to the school’s community spirit.

Families of students in Grades 3-6 enjoyed not only the parent-student quiz show, but also a video on test-taking strategies, a chance to play a card game that teaches math skills, dinner featuring chicken wings, and a book give-away. The assistant principal and a special education teacher talked about the importance of the upcoming tests and test taking strategies. They stressed how parents can help their children do their best by ensuring that they get enough sleep, come to school on time and have a nutritious breakfast.

Interpreters translated the presentations into Spanish and Hmong. After dinner, families were encouraged to select books that a local organization contributed. These gently used books were distributed with the intent of bolstering students’ at-home libraries. Each family also received a packet of math game boards from the Everyday Math curriculum used during daily instruction.

The school’s test data from the prior year showed that math was an area that needed improvement. Feedback from parents indicated that they wanted more information about the Everyday Math curriculum and math homework. The games at Math Game Night supported the skills that were included on the tests.

The staff wanted to talk about the purposes and strengths of the math curriculum and provide good information on the standardized tests that students take.

A fifth-grade teacher used an overhead projector with transparencies of playing cards to teach the game “Top It.” Each family was given materials to play along. Students were comfortable with the game, which they also played in class. This and other games can be played at multiple levels, depending on the age and skill levels of the players. Families took the games home to have some math fun and to reinforce skills taught in school.

“After playing the games, I have a better understanding of how Everyday Math works,” commented one parent. “Before that, it was hard to help my kids with their homework.” Nearly 40 parents and 56 students attended the kickoff. A teacher reflected, “I feel better about the upcoming tests knowing that my students’ families are supportive and that they know some ways to help their students prepare.”

The district superintendent and school principal wanted to familiarize families with standardized tests. Members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned and helped implement the event. The ATP took great care to make the test preparation activities interesting and fun for families. Incorporating a popular game show, using math games to highlight needed skills, serving dinner and providing books all contributed to a successful and worthwhile night.

Plans are already under way to schedule a similar event earlier next school year to introduce families to the math program and to strengthen students’ math skills.

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# Math and Science Family Fun Night

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*Early Childhood Center #82  
Buffalo, New York*

College students played a big role in the Math and Science Family Fun Night at Buffalo's Early Childhood Center No. 82. They designed games and activities to show the youngsters that mathematics is enjoyable and that the math they learn in school is connected to the rest of their lives.

Five student teachers, two professors and more than a dozen other education students from nearby Buffalo State College collaborated on the math-made-fun activities for the night. The college crowd directed the activities and, no doubt, enjoyed themselves. This kind of cooperation results from the school's designation as a Professional Development School for the nearby college.

The Early Childhood Center, with 550 students in grades K-4, sponsors two Math and Science nights a year. The specific goal is to increase family involvement by having parents do these activities with their children. The school wanted to engage families so that students' math and science scores would improve. Inspired by a family math night suggested by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Standards, the school decided to implement a similar event.

School staff and members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) helped with the event's logistics. All parents and students who participated received a chance to win a free theme basket. In the gym, there were 17 stations, each with a different hands-on science or math activity. The families played hopscotch to test their knowledge of multiplication tables. They made rockets and did water-based math activities, among others. The classroom teachers worked with the college students to be sure that the projects reflected specific state math standards.

When students and parents completed an activity, they earned a ticket and went on to

the next challenge. Later, they turned in their tickets for prizes. Project FLIGHT, a non-profit organization devoted to promoting literacy skills of children and caregivers, donated books for the prizes and other educational materials also were awarded.

Parents and children were called in groups for dinner – free pizza, chicken wings, veggies with dip and beverages. The winners of the theme baskets were called at 7 p.m., just before the evening ended. About 200 students and parents and 15 teachers, administrators and other staff members joined the college students and two professors in the night of math and science fun and learning.

Survey responses indicated that everyone enjoyed the evening and found it beneficial. Parents said they liked spending time with their children on the activities. Students confirmed that they had fun with math and science, and showed off their prizes. Some wanted to come back the next night for more activities!

The college students and professors said they had a great time. The school's faculty and staff considered the evening well worth their time. The principal called the evening an overwhelming success – a winning combination of “food, folks and fun,” she said.

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## Science – It’s All Family Fun!

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*Leaphart Elementary School  
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**R**obots, foam gliders and a Mad Scientist were all part of the fun at Science Spectacular at Leaphart Elementary. Building on the success of an earlier literacy night, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to try a science night to make science more interesting and attractive to Leaphart students. The team identified this need because test data suggested that students needed more and different instructional strategies to actively engage in learning science and to improve their achievement in the subject.

So, with an ATP member as the overall coordinator, the school put together a night of demonstrations and presentations showing how science can be fun. To increase interest, it tied the event to the school’s science fair, where students displayed their projects and competed for prizes.

“Science Spectacular was a huge hit and just an awesome event. My children raved about the presentations,” said one parent.

Staff members, community volunteers and parents made presentations, stressing inquiry and hands-on experiences. In addition, the young students had opportunities to interact with middle school students who were invited to give robotics demonstrations.

Science Night began with a pizza supper, but the meat of the evening was a variety of sessions and stations for adults and students to visit. These included Science through Literature, Animals at the Zoo, Robotics, Biofacts (information about animals and their habitats, plant growth and vegetation at a nearby park on the Saluda River), and “Phun” with Foam, where students built gliders from styrofoam, and learned about aerodynamics. In Engineering Dynamic Duo, students learned about different states of matter through observation and hands-on investigations, while the session How Big Can You Blow a Bubble? explored the effects of air and force on matter.

Second-grade habitat projects and fourth- and fifth-grade science projects were displayed throughout the school. First- second- and third-place ribbons were awarded to the science fair winners at the end of the evening.

In addition, students and their families enjoyed a show at dinner performed by a staff member of “MAD Scientist,” an educational organization that operates after-school science camps. The organization volunteered to entertain and students assisted the “mad scientist” in his demonstration of “solids, liquids and gases” involving dry ice.

The science night cost less than \$70, as the school received donations of food and funds. The school’s PTO paid for what was not donated.

The practice supported the school’s improvement goal of encouraging the use of inquiry in problem-solving. It also contributed significantly to shaping students’ perception of science as “fun” and encouraged them to see themselves as “scientists.” Overall, 150 students and 200 parents were involved, as were 20 teachers and seven community members.

Responses and informal evaluations were positive. “Parents, students, teachers and community members were able to come together and get excited about learning science. It’s the type of home-school relationship that is a win-win situation,” said the principal.

Next year, the school hopes to offer more and different activities to extend students’ excitement about science.

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# Student Showcase Night

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*Centreville Elementary School  
Centreville, Maryland*

The joint Science Fair/Student Showcase Night took place in the spring, a few days before the final parent-teacher conferences at Centreville Elementary School. The Science Fair was held in the cafeteria, while the Student Showcase took over the rest of the building, including hallways and classrooms.

Families traveled from room to room to look at the students' displays in pre-K to grade 2 and to participate in various activities. In every classroom, there were exhibits of drawings, poetry and student books. Some classes prepared a play or PowerPoint presentation. In the music room, students made and played their own instruments. The media room hosted author presentations and book discussions. Families also proved their physical fitness on an obstacle course developed by the physical education teacher.

Centreville Elementary publicized Science Fair/Student Showcase night in a variety of ways, including the county calendar, class newsletters, principal's newsletter and fliers sent home. This resulted in the participation of more than 300 students, 150 parents and at least 35 teachers, administrators and other staff members.

Many collaborated in organizing the event, including the principal, School Improvement Team, Action Team for Partnerships, unified arts, math-science coordinator, and reading, math and teacher specialist. The math-science coordinator and her science fair team sent out fliers asking students to participate in the fair. All teachers and their students determined what they would display and how they would showcase their work. Besides the time spent planning and preparing, every teacher was present to greet and interact with parents.

Science Fair/Student Showcase Night enabled parents to see how their children were meeting the school's expectations for work at each grade level. The teachers benefited from the interactions with parents in a celebratory atmosphere. Most importantly, the students spotlighted their best work. Exhibiting their accomplishments in a variety of academic and non-academic areas boosted students' confidence and creativity and allowed them to "shine" for the school community.

A teacher said it was "a great night to see the parents and to brag about their child's efforts!" A parent added, "It is nice to see all the students' work on display and see the growth from the beginning of the year."

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# Weather Academy and Family Involvement

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*Northwoods Elementary School  
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**T**V, hot dogs and the weather proved to be a winning combination at Northwoods Elementary School. More than 300 people showed up on a May evening when the school and a local television station turned an open house into an event to increase parent involvement in science and to strengthen school, family and community partnerships. The “open house” was part of the TV station’s “Weather Academy,” a meteorology program offered to area schools.

The academy is primarily a science-based, experiment-driven, one-hour presentation about the weather for Grades 3 to 5. Presented by the three meteorologists from the local TV station, it involves some exciting experiments around the weather, including air pressure, effects of warm and cold fronts, tornado development and lightning

After the daytime presentation, the presenters came back in the afternoon with TV trucks to broadcast the nightly weather news from the school. This portion of the program is called “open house” and students, parents and teachers were invited.

Northwoods decided that the open house should be not only a weather show for the station, but also a time to have parents and children come for a hot dog supper. “This is when things got interesting and evolved into a real partnership with the community and families,” said the school’s parent coordinator.

The event was held in the school cafeteria and gym. The mascot from a local Northwoods League baseball team visited and gave away team souvenirs. The partnership coordinator worked with 10 teachers, 2 custodians, 18 parents and a media specialist to make it happen. Teachers rearranged schedules, encouraged children to make weather-themed table decorations and set up computers, TVs and sound systems.

The parents took charge of organizing the supper. One parent bought all the paper products, while other parents were in charge of setting up, cooking, serving and cleaning up. Because many of the parents were new to Northwoods, the partnership coordinator took time to introduce the parent volunteers to each other. This planted seeds for future collaboration, community-building, and leadership at Northwoods.

“This practice is a great example of turning a ready-made community program into an opportunity for school-family-community partnerships,” said the coordinator. Although many parents volunteer at Northwoods, school personnel felt that it was getting more difficult for parents to attend meetings and activities at the school. Their goal was to build on community partnerships in such a way that parents would consider the school as a resource and desirable place to be. “The local TV station’s “Weather Academy” program was just what Northwoods needed to reach out to its families and to celebrate students’ science learning,” she concluded.

The school advises others to find out about existing programs in the community in science, the arts, music, civics, and health that can be brought to the school. Then, build on the program by inviting parents and children to enjoy it together. Although a different school will host the “Weather Academy” next year, Northwood is planning a Spring Barbecue, and hopes to find another community program to tie into it that will make the event fun and educational.

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## All the World's a Stage

*Bullard TALENT K-8 School  
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All the world's a stage at the Bullard TALENT Middle School! Every year, the K-8 magnet school produces and presents a middle school musical seen by more than 4,000 school children, families, and community residents. These highly anticipated productions are the result of collaborations of the visual and performing arts faculty, students, families, and the community. Without the organization, planning and hands-on participation of hundreds of volunteers, the plays would not be the tremendous success that they have become.

The excitement begins early in the school year. At Back to School Night, parents and students learn about the new production and the many opportunities for involvement. During the first week of school, students in grades 6-8 participate in a four-day Visual and Performing Arts clinic to familiarize them with the school's course offerings and to introduce them to the selected play's script, music, choreography and stagecraft.

Staff and community specialists act as judges for two sets of auditions. Shortly after the judges announce the final casting, the school holds a parent meeting to encourage parental leadership and to assign volunteering activities.

Teachers, staff, administrators and community members play many supporting roles. Teachers direct the play, while administrators take the lead on scheduling and public relations. The larger community donates goods and services and attends the performances, providing support for students. The school schedules 14 performances, many of them for school groups.

"I have been the volunteer costume designer for the past ten years," said one former parent. "My children have long since left Bullard TALENT, but I am so grateful for what it gave them and believe so strongly in what it gives all the kids, that I will continue to do what

I can as a member of the community to make it happen." This is representative of the spirit and participation that keeps the shows going on.

Planning such a huge event is not easy. Because it is a magnet school, Bullard TALENT draws its students from all over Fresno. School leaders find that it is sometimes a challenge to bring the school together for a complex, semester-long project.

Scheduling and keeping students on track are additional challenges. Teachers and parents work hard to help students stay healthy, energetic and motivated throughout the process so they do not feel overburdened.

"I have been able to use many values such as discipline, self-control, perseverance and respect. I know that with what I have learned from doing these plays, I will be even more prepared for what's to come," said an eighth-grader.

Despite the hard work and long hours from everyone involved, the productions continue to inspire pride and commitment. "This event consumes so many students, teachers, families, former students and who-knows-who, that it boggles the mind," said a first-grade teacher at Bullard. "It is with pride that I volunteer my time in this absolutely incredible event. I wouldn't miss it."

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# Art Extravaganza

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*Discovery School #67*

*Buffalo, New York*

Where can you see a child's rendition of a Picasso, a Monet or a Warhol? The Art Extravaganza Show organized by Discovery School No. 67 is a good bet. Students there learned about great masters in art and emulated the artists' styles in their own work.

This show tied in nicely with the school's motto, "Hands-on, Minds-on," which conveys the school's philosophy of center-based learning. Opened in 1999 with 36 students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, the school now has multiple sections of pre-K through seventh grades and three self-contained classrooms for children with autism.

For the past several years, the Discovery School has been developing a Music and Art Appreciation Enrichment Program. Students study classical musicians as well as great artists. The school wanted the children to showcase the exciting things they were learning and experiencing. Parents and teachers received a grant to work in partnership with Buffalo's Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

First, parents, teachers and students from Buffalo State College visited the art gallery with Discovery students so that they could see original art and become more familiar with artists' styles. Students learned about Pablo Picasso, Georgia O'Keefe, Andy Warhol and others.

Classroom teachers worked with the art teacher, providing background on the artists and helping the children research and create their own works of art. Positive parent participation in school increased as parents mounted, labeled and displayed artwork from more than 500 students, pre-K to seventh grade.

The culminating event, an art show at the school, featured work done by students in a "master's style." More than 300 parents, other

family members and community partners attended the First Annual Art Show Extravaganza. The students were proud of their art work and were glad that so many people came to see their work. The turnout boosted students' self esteem.

One of the project's major challenges was finding display space for the students' work. This was solved when a parent's employer donated several large, portable display walls. The event also required a lot of planning. Parents, teachers and paraprofessionals volunteered many hours. The show cost approximately \$100, which the enrichment grant covered.

The project helped students develop higher-level thinking skills, gain a greater appreciation for the arts and learn socially acceptable behavior in a museum. The art gallery staff saw children from the city in a more positive light, even commenting on their level of interest in the arts and their excellent behavior. "I was amazed that pre-K students were able to explain how [Jackson] Pollock had made one of the paintings at the gallery by standing on a ladder and spilling paint."

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## Art in the Classroom

*L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School  
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Art triumphed over money at L'Etoile du Nord French Immersion School. Though the small school could not hire an art teacher because of its limited budget, it did find a way to weave art into the curriculum for its 425 students. A parent's suggestion prompted the school to set up an Arts Committee, recruit 20 parent volunteers to teach and draw on the expertise of local arts organizations to train those volunteers. This meant that every class in all grades, K-6, had a special one-hour art class twice during the year.

"My students learned so much in a one-hour lesson and were engaged and excited about art," said a first-grade teacher.

Through a partnership with the Minnesota Institute of Art and the Walker Modern Art Center, the school brought works of art, artists and art movements to its students. Some classes took field trips to the museum and arts center and all of the students had the opportunity to be artists themselves.

Recruiting parents was challenging. The arts committee, made up of parents, staff and community members, sent home fliers asking for volunteers and made a presentation at a staff meeting, encouraging teachers and administrators to contact parents.

Local museum and arts center professionals trained the parents to discuss art and conduct hands-on lessons. The training addressed teaching about and with art using specific works. The committee received artworks or copies from a variety of cultures and countries to use in the classrooms. The professionals also shared ideas for grade-appropriate hands-on activities connected to the lessons.

The committee created a schedule for the art lessons in each classroom. Parent volunteers then came to the classroom and conducted the lesson with the help of the teacher. The lessons were in French or English, depending

on the strength of the volunteer's French. If the parents taught in English, the classroom teacher would often add a French narrative.

"I enjoyed having the chance to participate in my child's and his classmates' education," said one parent volunteer. This experience gave parents a role in the immersion classroom, which is not always easy because the content is taught in another language.

The art lessons encouraged students to develop artistic habits of mind (observation, reflection, exploration, engagement, persistence, expression) that will help them in all academic areas. They also gained a new understanding of the history of art and how different art forms are created.

The cost to implement the practice was \$750, which came largely from PTO funds. Some of the already-generous volunteers donated some of their own money for the art activities.

The school definitely will schedule the volunteer art teachers again. The Arts Committee plans to identify and partner with more museums and organizations. It will also get the word out earlier about needing volunteers, so that even more parents and community members can participate in this exciting initiative.

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## Hispanic Family Outreach & ESOL Homework Club

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*Guilford Elementary School  
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When the parents spoke, Guilford Elementary School listened – and responded. The school’s efforts paid off in big ways – in better grades and greater confidence for students and in increased parental involvement in school activities.

Although the school’s Hispanic enrollment increased markedly in the past two years, the number of Hispanic families attending school events did not. In fact, only a few of these families, many of whom spoke limited English, were participating.

At the initiative of the instructional assistant in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class, who is a Hispanic parent in the school, Guilford began quarterly meetings with Hispanic families in October 2005. Conducted in Spanish, the discussions focused on how the families can support their students at school and at home.

The gatherings produced two tangible outcomes. More Hispanic parents attended school functions, such as reading and math nights and parent-teacher conferences. Also, a free after-school homework club was started that targets Hispanic students.

This club, which parents requested, began in the 05-06 school year and continued in the 06-07 school year. From 4 to 5 p.m. every Monday and Thursday, 30 students receive help with homework. Some parents also attend the homework sessions to assist students. Students are responsible for bringing their homework assignments and for completing them. Students also help each other practice skills and complete homework. Through the parent liaison, families were able to inquire weekly about their children’s progress.

Two teachers were in charge of the sessions and high school students volunteered as tutors. They were supported by a local business partner, Conexiones. These students received

community service hours for their time.

The homework club was publicized through school newsletters, telephone calls and word of mouth, and at educational conferences and county workshops on best practices for student achievement.

Students, parents, teachers and community members all came together to make the club a success. The administrators worked with the PTA to find resources and funds to pay the teachers at each session. The Howard County Family & Student Outreach Center covered most of the \$400 cost.

Teachers identified students who needed help. Parents provided transportation home on club days and established routines at home to help their children complete homework on non-club days.

The results have been impressive. One-third of the students in the program increased their homework completion level noted on their report cards. One-third of the students also improved their report card grades in basic reading skills and math concepts. Parents reported that students’ confidence in approaching homework improved. Students talked about learning and looked forward to homework club days.

The club earned praise from outside the school, too. The Hispanic Achievement Specialist for Howard County Public Schools calls the club a model for other schools in the county. Guilford’s principal is seeking grants to support and expand the club in the next school year. The goal is to increase the frequency of club sessions from two to four days each week and to lengthen the sessions from 60 to 90 minutes. In addition, the school will analyze student data to pinpoint specific needs and to better target tutoring sessions.

The club and the Hispanic family meetings improved relationships between home and school. The Hispanic families designated May

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11, 2007 as “Teacher Appreciation Day” at the school. They planned a moving tribute to the staff members by preparing a dinner of foods native to their countries, presenting student dance performances and reading poetry.

“The event reflected the welcoming, family-friendly spirit of Guilford’s wonderfully diverse school culture,” said one administrator.

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# Open House Technology Walk

*Kennedy Junior High School  
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The information page for parents at Kennedy Junior High's Open House Technology Walk headlined "Use your student as a resource. They are very knowledgeable!" The students took the lead at their school's annual Technology Walk, part of the school's February open house that focused on showing families how technology is used in the classroom.

Technology is a widely used, ever-changing resource. The faculty at Kennedy Junior High, however, noticed that the parents were often unaware of how technology helped their children learn. Teachers and administrators hoped to remedy this by demonstrating to parents the concrete ways in which Kennedy's teachers and students use technology in day-to-day lessons.

The idea for the 90-minute Technology Walk emerged from a brainstorming session at a School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team meeting in 2005. Teachers and parents worked together to formulate the walk, designed and printed the brochures, recruited volunteers and advertised the event. Now in its third year, the event has evolved from principal- and staff-guided tours to a student-led walk.

On the evening of the event, teachers and parents gave passports and information sheets to every family. The parents then headed off on the journey through Kennedy, led by their children. The families visited the technology room, where they learned about flight simulators, graphic design, T-shirt screen printing and radio broadcasting. They also visited the science room, computer lab and physical education rooms. Students and teachers staffed the various technology stations and rooms along the tour. At the conclusion of each visit, families received a stamp in their passports.

When they had completed the walk, families turned in their passports for a drawing

at school the following day. The prizes were various "kid-friendly" gift cards, provided by parents. At the end of the evening, SFCP leaders collected more than 300 completed passports!

Every constituency involved in the walk benefited in some way. The practice allowed parents to understand the use of technology, to see what their children had learned and to interact with the teachers. Kennedy's faculty evaluated their students' knowledge by watching their demonstrations and presentations to their families. Finally, the students were excited to be the ones to teach. "It was fun to show my dad how the heart rate monitor worked," one student said proudly.

The SFCP team plans to conduct the Technology Walk for a fourth year and, based on participant feedback, will continue to have students lead the tours. "I liked the flexibility of going on the tech tour at our own pace and seeing what we were particularly interested in," said one parent.

The school hopes to improve next year's tour by enlisting the expertise of its Technology Club, made up of parents who work in technology fields and who are interested in increasing technology use and availability in the school.

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## Parent Pancake Data Breakfast

*Weller Road Elementary School  
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Pancakes made the data go down better at Weller Road Elementary. After a hot, homemade breakfast, parents were able to digest the details of grade-specific testing and gather ideas on how to help and encourage their youngsters to do well. The principal and staff did the cooking and serving – pancakes, syrup, fruit cups, juice, coffee and tea – for this Parent Pancake Data Breakfast and 132 parents partook in February.

Weller Road Elementary is a Title I school with a culturally diverse student body of 515 students. Data for the 2005-06 school year showed the proficiency rate in grades 3-5 ranging from 71.9% in Grade 3 reading to 85% in Grade 4 math. The school's goal was to increase achievement and raise the percentage of proficient students.

To this end, teachers, staff and administrators got involved with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) in conducting the pancake breakfast. In addition to planning and preparing breakfast, they gathered and compiled individual student data folders, supervised student activities and collected evaluation data from attendees.

The school publicized the event in multiple languages, through computerized messages, on the marquee in front of the school, on banners and by contacting families personally. The school used Title I funds for parent involvement, as well as administration and staff donations.

Families arrived at the school for breakfast at 8 a.m. and were escorted by students to their grade-specific wing. The meal offered an opportunity for parents to get acquainted. Students liked it, too: "I was excited to eat breakfast at school with my parents and to show them the work I was doing," commented one youngster.

After breakfast, parents went to their children's classrooms, where each teacher presented an overview of test data, testing procedures, and school goals. Teachers also gave parents a folder of their own child's testing data. Hearing about test requirements and practices and exploring test results made the parents more knowledgeable partners in the assessments. With useful information, they can help prepare their children for testing, as well as set expectations. It was expected that students, in turn, would gain from the support of informed parents.

"I liked having a chance to share with parents the kinds of assessments their children have been taking and explain what they are expected to know," said one teacher.

The parents, too, were enthusiastic about the initiative: "We're very thankful that Weller Road provides these opportunities to keep us in close touch with our children's progress. And, this activity provided a warm, delicious breakfast as well!"

The school solicited written evaluations from families in both Spanish and English. Teachers also evaluated the data breakfast.

Weller Road Elementary plans to repeat this event. The ATP hopes to expand it by organizing additional sessions at dinner-time to target parents who are unable to attend a breakfast meeting.

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## Turn Off the TV and Turn On Some Fun!

*Steeple Run Elementary School  
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National Turn Off Your TV Week was marked by three opportunities to turn on some fun at Staple Run Elementary. On Monday of that week in April, families came to school in their pajamas for an evening of stories by guest readers and storytellers. On Wednesday, the school invited families to a math night at the local Home Depot store where students completed “real world” math activities. On Friday the school hosted a Dance Your Socks Off event for families.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted to encourage families to participate by sponsoring alternative activities. At the same time, the team supported specific school learning goals with each of the three events and fostered partnerships with community businesses.

The reading night aimed to improve reading fluency, connect with the community, and continue to create a welcoming school environment. Guest readers included current and retired teachers, as well as a player from the Chicago Rush, an area football league team, who was a big hit with the students. A Barnes & Noble bookstore provided a costumed book character and set up a mini-bookstore where families could buy books that were read that night at a 20% discount. Families were encouraged to not only wear their pajamas, but also to bring a new pair of pajamas to donate to a local organization that supports foster children. About 100 pairs of PJs were donated.

The school initiated another partnership with a local ceramic company so that, for a small fee, families could create ceramic tiles that showed how school is important for their children. The tiles will be permanently mounted in the library.

Math night supported the School, Family and Community Partnership’s (SFPCP) goals to increase parent involvement, get more fathers

involved, and have students and parents enjoy math. Parents, teachers, and the math instructional coordinator developed real-world, grade-appropriate math activities focused on finishing a basement. Each activity was conducted at a station staffed by a parent or teacher volunteer and a Home Depot employee to help students and parents with their questions.

One student said the event was like a scavenger hunt because “you have to find things to solve the problems.” Three levels of difficulty were developed for each activity so that students could meet their grade-level’s math expectations. When students completed the activities, they went to the final check-in table for cookies and juice. Students also received bug catcher box kits to build that night and take home.

Finally, a good old-fashioned sock hop made the school more welcoming and fun for all. A local business donated popcorn and one family took charge of the music. Students were encouraged to decorate a pair of socks to wear. The evening included line dances, Limbo and the Hokey-Pokey – for all generations.

ATP members participated in every aspect of week. Teachers as well as parents took leadership roles on subcommittees and volunteered at each event. “It was wonderful to see all of the different groups coming together to support student learning and the local school,” said one organizer. “Parents seemed particularly pleased with the support from local businesses.”

The three activities cost \$275, with support coming from the school’s Home and School (parent organization) and from the district, where the superintendent provides funds for ATP activities. With all of this fun, it’s easy to imagine that some families at Steeple Run didn’t even miss TV.

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## Turn Off the TV Family Game Night/Ice Cream Social

*Naper Elementary School  
Naperville, Illinois*

Research shows that many children spend more hours in front of the TV than in the classroom. To help families reduce children's TV time, Naper Elementary offered an educational and social alternative during National TV-Turnoff Week. The Game Night and Ice Cream Social featured board games and ice cream sundaes. Naper invited families of students in grades K-5 to turn off the TV and come to school for some fun.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) visited the "National TV-Turnoff" web site for ideas. A games coordinator contacted parents and staff members to ask what games they would be willing to lend to game night. The coordinator researched various skills that different board games help to develop, put together an information packet and made it available for families to take home. They learned that board games help to build skills in math, reading, memory, organization and strategy.

This year the school decided to make the event more enjoyable by adding an Ice Cream Social. Who can resist ice cream sundaes? A parent worked with a vendor to arrange for the ice cream, toppings, plastic bowls, spoons and napkins. The school principal, teachers and volunteers scooped ice cream and toppings. School staff also made rounds in the gym to assist families who had questions about the games. Some families challenged other families, and students realized that this was a great way to get to know people. Of approximately 295 students and 180 families in the school, about 145 students and 90 families attended, making the evening a great success.

Publicity included a notice in the monthly school newsletter and fliers posted in the school. The teachers helped create some excitement. Children were also asked to make a "pledge" that they would turn off the TV and do \_\_\_\_\_ instead.

The event supports a school improvement goal by promoting reading practices, as students used game cards, information on the board games, and game directions. The students and families also improved math fluency with games that required counting, sequencing, and play money. Yet because the games were so much fun, students learned without realizing it. "I can't wait to play a game I don't have at home," said one student. "Why do we have to leave so early?" asked another.

Students also realized that it can be entertaining to do something besides watching TV. The school's hope was that families would try to organize their own "Family Game Night" at least once a month. "This is a great evening, I had no idea how beneficial this would be," commented a parent.

The night will be repeated because it offers family members a valuable opportunity to "reconnect" with each other, learn new skills and strengthen existing skills. It is also a way to socialize with other school families and to exchange ideas that will lead to turning off the TV more often.

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## Section II: Non-Academic Goals



Practices for Types 1-6 may be found in this section to meet non-academic goals of behavior, post-secondary education planning, health and safety, multicultural awareness, and transitions.



# Cary Kindness Chain

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*John B. Cary Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

Last March, the hallways of Cary Elementary School were decorated with a paper chain, every loop of which described an act of kindness performed by a student or family member.

Cary Elementary is a Title I school that strives to excel in all areas. It has been fully accredited for the past few years and is proud of its academic success. The administration also works diligently with its students to promote proper conduct and good behavior in school, at home and in the community.

To celebrate Random Acts of Kindness Week, every student received a Kindness Chart to take home. Students were asked to list 10 acts of kindness that they or their family members performed at school, home, neighborhood, or work. Parents helped their children organize and complete their charts.

When students returned the charts, ATP members worked with parent volunteers and students to cut apart the charts so that each “kindness” was on its own paper strip. These strips were linked to make the paper chain hung in the hallways.

The Cary Kindness Chain project supports the school’s behavioral improvement goal of increasing good behavior and reducing student suspensions. More acts of kindness should help students reach this goal. Emphasizing and providing examples of kindness help teachers and administrators promote alternatives to violence. This, in turn, helps to improve the school’s climate.

The school was interested in a character education project that families also could work on at home, because many families are unable to attend events at the school due to work schedules and other commitments. Cary wanted to provide an opportunity that would begin with learning at home and culminate with a public display of the results. In reviewing possible

projects, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) came across information on promoting kindness, loved the idea and created the materials for their school.

The colorful chain and the clear display of many acts of kindness delighted students, parents, community members and other school visitors. “Why did you take the chain down?” a student asked when the project was completed. “We love it!”

A parent said that the activity was a great reminder of small ways to help others. Each participating student and family received an Acts of Kindness Award certificate, a candy treat, and public recognition at Family Fun Night!

Another advantage of this project is that it costs very little. The only materials required are supplies that schools already have on hand, such as copy paper, construction paper and certificate paper.

Cary Elementary plans to continue this activity, and would like to involve more families. The ATP plans to create a competition among the grades, and offer more recognition in the school and community for families who exceed the requested 10 acts of kindness.

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## Community Partner/Side by Side

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Walton Middle School  
Compton, California

Walton Middle School wanted to increase the involvement of its parents and nearby community. Leaders selected a faith-based program called “Side by Side” to rally support for its students.

The resulting program, Community Partner, brought adults interested in working with students into the school as tutors, mentors and role models. The varied activities of the program provided the personal touch and positive contact to help students build a new level of trust with adults and increase their own confidence, self-esteem and achievement.

The mentors greeted students at school in the morning. They participated in field trips and at monthly Family Nights. Additionally, eight to ten tutors targeted students needing extra help and provided individual academic support and tutoring during the school day, in non-core time, or at home visits.

Each month, the Community Partner program would conduct a Family Night to address topics such as career awareness, college planning and preparation, leadership, and cooking and table etiquette. For example, a policeman, firefighter, doctor, and others were invited to Career Night to describe what their jobs required and the educational paths to these occupations. These evenings, held the third Wednesday of each month, were open to the entire student body and their families, but the targeted students received personal invitations to attend the monthly Family Nights.

There were two field trips during this school year: one to a symphony performance for a tribute to Motown and another to the aquarium. The Community Partner paid for the price of admission and the school district paid for transportation. Students said they look forward to these events because they have so much fun and learn “a lot of cool stuff.”

Walton has been in program improvement status for the past several years, and parent and community involvement has been low, according to a school staff member. The school’s community specialist learned that the administrator of Side by Side was interested in working with the school and its students. A meeting with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the Community Program Administrator cemented this new relationship. At subsequent meetings the group worked out the details of the Community Partner program, including dates and activities.

School staff helped plan and implement the activities and also served as chaperones on field trips. Many other community partners helped organize and publicize events, provided guest speakers and food.

“This is a prime example of what can be accomplished when the school and community work together,” said Walton’s principal.

The school thanked Side by Side by recognizing it at the district’s annual volunteer dinner. Additionally, the program won recognition when the host of a district Cable TV Show, entitled “Parent To Parent,” invited two representatives from Side by Side to talk about the outreach program.

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# South Penn Family Fair

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*South Penn Elementary School  
Cumberland, Maryland*

**D**isciplining children is often a challenge. The families at South Penn Elementary School recognized this and asked to have a session on parenting skills at the annual South Penn Family Fair. The school obliged by organizing a workshop on positive discipline and appropriate consequences. This workshop and one on mathematics instruction made up the program of the South Penn Family Fair.

The fair, taking a carnival theme, offered families dinner, prepared and served by teachers. Following the meal, the parents headed to the workshops. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), in keeping with the school's improvement goals, chose math skills at home as the academic focus for this year's fair.

A community agency, Family Junction, presented the workshop on positive discipline. During this time, students watched a movie in a supervised classroom. Each student selected a book to keep. They also received homework passes for attending with their families.

South Penn Family Fair has four goals:

- 1) Strengthen the school's sense of community with a shared dinner;
- 2) Connect the school and families with helpful community agencies through the workshops on parenting and student behavior;
- 3) Promote teamwork at the school and with students and their parents; and
- 4) Improve the quality of the school's parental involvement program, using parents' evaluations of the activities at the fair.

In fact, it was the survey from last year's fair that identified parents' requests for more help on positive discipline techniques.

Financial support came mainly from the ATP, which raised money for several activities at a Back-to-School Carnival. The food was

the only expense, as all of the speakers and staff volunteered their time.

Publicity began with the teachers, who heard about the South Penn Family Fair at the School Improvement Team (SIT) and faculty meetings. The school sent home fliers and reminders with the students. In addition, teachers identified parents who could most benefit from the workshops and personally invited them to attend. About 36 parents took advantage of the workshops. "This was my first year attending and I really enjoyed the way things were introduced to us," wrote one parent on the evaluation form.

While providing dinner and childcare helped boost attendance, South Penn hopes to increase participation even more at future fairs by personally calling parents. The school also wants to raise more funds so that a local restaurant can cater the dinner.

The organizers consider the fair a great example of everyone working together for school improvement and student success. "It is important to find new ways to help parents become partners in their children's education. The Family Fair provides a relaxed atmosphere to enhance these partnerships," commented one teacher.

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# Student Mentoring Program

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*Elizabeth Terronez Middle School  
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If two heads are better than one, how much good can three heads do? At Terronez Middle School, three heads can make a world of difference for students in need of mentoring.

Terronez Middle joined two partners -- the Promise Project of the One by One Leadership Program and the Mayor's Gang Initiative Program -- to sponsor a Student Mentoring Program that helps promote positive behavior and academic success.

Teachers, staff and administrators wanted to provide role models to students who could benefit from extra help and attention. The students needed extra help to reduce their participation in questionable activities that impair their ability to succeed academically and in the community. The school social worker took the first step by contacting the coordinator of the Promise Project, who then visited the school and observed and spoke with many of the students.

The social worker interviewed selected students and referred them for the mentoring program. The Promise Project staff contacted the students and their families to assess each student's particular needs. Project staff interviewed, screened, cleared and matched mentors to each of the referred students. Mentors had to commit to at least one year with the students. Volunteers came mostly from local faith-based organizations and from California State University at Fresno and Pacific University.

Like many initiatives in the start-up phase, the Student Mentoring Program had a few kinks or challenges to solve. Perhaps the greatest challenge was the long wait time required before students could be matched with mentors. To avoid this, the school's advice is to have a specific number of mentors in place before recruiting the students.

The school publicized the mentoring program through phone calls, home visits and at school and community gatherings. The One by Promise Project provided all of the necessary funding.

The program offers students the opportunity to communicate regularly with a positive role model. As a result, the students' self-esteem increases, they are more focused on school work and their grades improve.

After only one year, the program produced noticeable results. Teachers said they saw a world of difference in the behavior of the mentored students. They have noticed that, as the students become involved in organized activities such as the mentoring program, the school's climate improves.

So far, more than 75 students at Terronez Middle have been helped by the mentoring program. The principal noted that having mentors on the school campus supports not only the students who are directly involved, but also the entire school population. Next year, Terronez Middle plans to recruit additional mentors so that more of its students benefit from communicating with and receiving emotional support from a very caring adult.

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## Home Connection: Career Academy/Pathway Interest

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*Bridgeton High School  
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**B**ridgeton High School wants its students to focus on their futures – and to create bright and promising visions for themselves. Beginning in the fall of freshman year and continuing through senior year, the school helps students plan and prepare for post-secondary endeavors and to turn their visions into reality.

“We are working to develop career academies and pathways that offer courses that focus on the interests and strengths of our students while encouraging them to develop educational plans to achieve goals following high school graduation,” said the school’s organizational facilitator.

This year, Bridgeton’s motto was “Get connected. Together we can make a difference!” The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) did just that. It used information from the ATP training workshop to create a Home Connection Activity called Career Academy/Pathway Interest to involve ninth-graders and their parents in students’ decisions about academy placements.

As a Talent Development High School, Bridgeton has a Freshman Success Academy and three Career Academies for Grades 10-12: Arts and Humanities; Math, Science and Medical; and Business and Industrial Technology. In the fall of ninth grade, students take Freshman Seminar, a course focused on the transition to high school, that includes setting goals for the future in high school and beyond. As part of Freshman Seminar, students take the Holland Inventory and the Self-Directed Search (SDS) Career Exploration – two reflective tools that help them identify their career interests. The ATP felt that students and families needed to be well-informed about these assessments and about the process and options for choosing a Career Academy.

Working with the Freshman Seminar teachers, the school’s ATP developed an interactive homework assignment to encourage

students and their families to talk about the choice of a Career Academy and future career plans. The homework assignment included information about the student’s areas of interest from the SDS Career Explorer and the Career Academy Pathways and the Career Academy choices.

Guidance counselors used the information from the interactive homework assignment, which was also translated into Spanish for the school’s growing population of English Language Learners (ELL), to help place students in a Career Academy cohort that matched their interests. The assignment also assisted the Freshman Academy in developing partnerships with parents for other activities.

More than 200 students and 200 parents, 80% of the freshman class, participated in the Home Connection activity. A ninth-grade student remarked: “I think the homework assignment was a good idea. I probably would have talked to my parents about my plans for picking an academy anyway, but I don’t know if I would have explained the information about my Holland Inventory Codes.”

“I think it was a good way to let parents know about the Career Academies,” added a Freshman Seminar teacher. “It was the first time parents received information about what the students were planning to select.”

During report card conferences held shortly after the interactive homework assignment, a majority of students were able to articulate their goals. Next year, to boost participation even higher, Bridgeton High will use its new, automated voice messaging system to notify parents about the homework assignment.

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## Motion Commotion Truck Fair

*Ruth Livingston Elementary School  
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Kindergartners huddled in the scoop of a front end loader. Squeals and laughter rang from second graders in the cab of a fire truck, as they sounded the siren. The school principal and superintendent shared the bucket of a utility truck parked high above the playground. Such were the sights and sounds at this year's Motion Commotion Truck Fair.

Ruth Livingston Elementary School takes great pride in its truck fair – a school production that cannot happen without community support.

Held every other year on a fall school day, the event involves dozens of “things that go.” The motion-machines are assembled on the schoolyard for a rare sort of career fair. Hundreds of people plan for months to make the fair successful and exciting. This year at least 98 local businesses and community members displayed commercial and recreational vehicles.

On the morning of the “vehicle carnival,” excitement accelerates as a dump truck, police car, library bookmobile, deluxe motor home and limousines idle outside the school, waiting to pull onto the playground. Parents direct traffic to ensure that everyone arrives safely.

The exhibitors get a warm welcome in the school library, designated as the Hospitality Room, where they can enjoy hot coffee and fresh baked crumb cake. During the school day, students meet the various participants and explore the rolling exhibits. Teachers gear their reading, writing and mathematics assignments to the fair.

The students are eager to see it all, says one organizer. The drivers and vehicle owners talk to the students about their businesses and what they do during a work day. Teachers say it is inspiring to hear fifth graders asking what kind of education is necessary for careers in television broadcasting or automotive sales.

Each year Motion Commotion has student participants, as well. The youngsters are

always thrilled to see a classmate show off his or her dirt bike and riding gear, four-wheeler or baby calf in the stock trailer.

By celebrating different occupations and recreational activities that use vehicles, Motion Commotion supports Pasco School District's Career Pathways Program, designed to help high school students select a career goal before graduation. The school believes that exposing students to various businesses, services and occupations in the elementary grades makes students more aware of career choices before the high school Pathways Program.

In addition, the event supports school improvement goals by connecting the community and school with various occupations and careers across the curriculum in a fun way. Many of the exhibitors bring stickers, pencils, penlights, Frisbees or other small advertisements to share with students.

Ten teachers made up this year's planning team. In the fall, the Motion Commotion Team of volunteer staff members and parents began meeting. They planned everything from initial contacts and school grounds preparation to hospitality and participation certificates. Each year more staff, parents and community members agree to participate. The Action Team for Partnerships helps foot the \$200 bill.

After a morning of hands-on learning, students invite the exhibitors to stay for lunch in the cafeteria. At the end of the day, it is common to see students outside lining the building as the vehicles roll off the playground and into the street. Horns are honking, lights are flashing, sirens are screaming and students are waving and shouting goodbye and thank you! They're probably also saying, “Come again!”

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# Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program

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*Northridge High School  
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**A**lthough most people dread the mere mention of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Northridge High School actually agreed to partner with it! The high school and the IRS worked together to implement the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, a federally sponsored initiative to help taxpayers understand and meet their tax responsibilities. Northridge was the only high school in Utah, and one of few in the country, to participate in this initiative.

The IRS, Family Connection Center and United Way approached Northridge about using its computer labs to help community residents file their income tax returns. Northridge teachers saw this as a learning opportunity for the Business Academy students, especially the accounting students, who could be certified as volunteer tax preparers.

The accounting teacher was the IRS' school contact for VITA. The teacher participated in a training program and became certified along with 28 of her students. The local family center and United Way worked closely with the school to promote this service. With the help of adult volunteers, the students raised funds with the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), a student leadership organization, to support the project. Then, they prepared fliers to distribute to the school population and made signs directing taxpayers to the accounting area.

The students were responsible for initially screening tax information and answering their clients' questions. During the tax filing season, the accounting class's computer lab was open three days a week in the afternoon and early evening. Appointments were scheduled every 30 minutes, allowing the students to serve more than 200 clients during tax season. Federal tax dollars returned to clients amounted to \$240,000, while state tax returns totaled \$37,000. Most of the clients were elderly or from low-income families.

Besides the obvious monetary benefits for clients, Northridge staff considered the initiative an excellent way to reach out to its community. The student body is diverse and transient, with a large number of military families. In fact, school officials estimated that more than 250 students move in and out of Northridge in one school year. The tax program allowed students to cultivate positive relationships with community members.

Based on exit interviews conducted by a Northridge teacher, the taxpayers greatly appreciated the students' help. Students benefited academically, as they had to apply what they learned in the classroom to real-life situations. The students also commented that the tax return forms were difficult at first, but got easier as they filed more. The IRS reported that of all the sites it worked with, Northridge had the fewest number of errors on the electronically filed returns. A teacher observed that students would now be able to prepare their own taxes.

While many positive outcomes of the program were immediate, the activity also brought more long-term benefits. Many students were interested in testing for the concurrent enrollment college credit offered by a local university. The students were all certified with the IRS and one student has since been hired by a local "tax law" firm. Each of the participating students is better prepared to enter the work force. Not only are they experienced in tax filing, but they also learned communications skills, public relations skills, and how to handle complaints.

Northridge High plans to seek more community support so that it can implement this practice every tax season.

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# Family Connection

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*Naperville North High School  
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Collaboration is the name of the game at Naperville North High School (NNHS). The Family Connection, a team of NNHS families who reach out to others in need of immediate economic help, recently joined with the School/Family/Community Partnership (SFCP) team to strengthen its connections with other school leaders, build sustainability and gain recognition.

Family Connection was born out of a NNHS parent's desire to find new ways to support struggling families during trying economic times. Throughout the year, whenever the school nurse, guidance counselors, teachers, social worker or community partners identified critical needs, the Family Connection team responded by providing basic resources such as food, fuel and clothing. The school health office notified the team of specific needs that were initially identified by Naperville North's nursing staff or the Naperville City Police Department.

Families who required economic assistance were noted in a database for assistance from volunteers. Team members donated gift cards from grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations and other retail outlets. Database volunteers choose when and how much help to give each family, with complete privacy guaranteed.

The health office staff distributed the gift cards directly to the family to help them meet short-term needs. They also connected families to area social service agencies for long-term help. Students who come to school hungry receive lunch vouchers and food, including breakfast bars, which are often donated.

"I can't believe people would be this generous," said one recipient. A student whose family received assistance cried after learning that someone wanted to help.

Another recipient was thrilled: "I was in utter shock to open the gift cards and see such

an enormous amount. I jumped for joy," she said. "Simply saying 'Thank You' does not seem to be nearly enough for the unselfish acts of kindness that people have bestowed upon my family."

As a result of the team's hard work, 40 families received Thanksgiving dinners, 47 were served at Christmas and 53 families received additional aid throughout the year.

The needs of families and the Family Connection team's ability to meet those needs continue to grow every year. There was a 900 percent increase in the number of families served from the first year to the fifth year of this program. About 180 families volunteered to join or donate to the team's work.

The project has many positive outcomes. Families in need receive immediate help. This frees them to find long-term solutions to their economic problems. Those who donate, especially students, realize they can make a difference in others' lives. Besides being an example of charity and compassion at NNHS, the SFCP team and the program have inspired other schools in Naperville District 203 to adopt the model.

"Family Connection goes way beyond helping families," said the school nurse. "It helps us live with ourselves, knowing that our students' families' immediate needs have been met."

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# Harvest Festival

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*New Horizons High School/Discovery Middle School  
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**N**ew Horizons High School (NHHS) gives students and the community a jump on Halloween every year at its Harvest Festival. The festival, held in the school gym just before Halloween, offers a wonderful range of age-appropriate activities for students and the children of students and staff.

While the school serves students in grades 6-12, the festival is geared toward the entire school community. Some NHHS students have young children, and there is a licensed day care on campus. The festival is open to the entire family, including siblings, and has many activities designed for younger children.

Preparation for Harvest Festival is integral to its success. About a month before the festival, teachers begin planning the theme and activity for their class booths. They encourage stores and community members to help out or donate supplies. Every student is asked to bring a bag of candy to be used as a prize at the booth sponsored by his or her advisory class. Two weeks before the event, organizers hang fliers and posters created by students in store windows across the community to advertise Harvest Festival.

After classes on the day of the festival, students enthusiastically decorate their class booths. As families arrive, students urge parents and children to participate in their activities. Favorites include the cake walk, face painting and cookie decorating. Families travel from booth to booth and play as many games as they like. Because the booths are close together, children can do a lot in a little time. "My children enjoyed being able to participate in all of the activities in one central area. They could easily go from one booth to the next," one teacher commented. About 100 students and 20 parents enjoyed the festival.

In its early years, the Harvest Festival was organized by school staff and the Associated Student Body (ASB), which is made up of student leaders. Since joining NNPS two years ago, New Horizons has its Action Team for Partnership (ATP) collaborate with the ASB on the festival. ATP members specifically note that parents' involvement in the nighttime event helps reinforce their connection with the school. The event brings everyone in the community together to benefit children.

The two groups cover the cost of about \$225. The community responded well by donating more than half of the needed materials.

NHHS' principal summed up the activity well when she stated: "Harvest Festival is an outstanding opportunity for students and their families to spend an evening at school enjoying an event they helped to create."

Harvest Festival will remain an annual celebration of positive attitudes and community spirit for children and adults.

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## Heart Hop

*Cresaptown Elementary School  
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**M**aking physical fitness and heart healthy lifestyles a family affair was the goal of the Heart Hop at Cresaptown Elementary. Nearly 200 parents and students attending the February outing did more than hop. They jumped rope, line danced, played volleyball, spun hula hoops and took hook shots. They also found out that sharing physical activities is fun.

In addition to the sports and games, nurses checked blood pressures and offered health advice. Community organizations provided information through website games, publications, and other outlets.

The Heart Hop featured healthy snacks and lots of encouragement for adults and children to get together for exercise. The families rotated through the activities, changing every 15 minutes.

Teachers followed up with discussions on heart-healthy activities, and parents were encouraged to do the same with the help of take-home activity sheets. Several parents commented that they enjoyed doing sports, games, and activities with their children. They said they would like to see the event held more frequently.

Administrators, teachers and PTO officers organized the hop. The PTO provided the healthy snacks. The administration and physical education teacher planned the activities and the staff led and supervised the event.

The organizers made sure the six types of involvement that guide their partnership program were present. The Heart Hop supported learning at home, community participation, shared decision-making, and required good communication and volunteer contributions. The teachers and administrators also gained insight into the families in their school by interacting with them at the event.

Several newsletters went home publicizing the Heart Hop, including one with a tear-off RSVP sheet so that the school could estimate the number of participants.

The school contacted the Cumberland Times-News, which sent a photographer and published a story and photos about the event. This helped spread the word that the school was a caring place.

Students, parents, teachers and community members benefited by gaining a more positive outlook on improving their personal health. One of the challenges was to create activities in which parents could participate with their children. Some parents watched their children rather than joining them. When Cresaptown plans the Heart Hop next year, organizers will insure that parents and students stay together and interact with each other.

The school also wants to extend the program to include, among other features, an exercise route marked with arrows. The organizers also plan to advertise the event with posters and a newspaper story to boost attendance.

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## Information Fair

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*Lincoln Elementary School  
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**L**incoln Elementary School recently discovered a way to capitalize on its traditionally well-attended Parent-Teacher Conferences. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) used the popular event to disseminate information that promotes and reinforces healthy living habits. Community agencies, the PTO and school district representatives were all involved in the school's new Information Fair.

On the day of the Parent-Teacher Conferences, community representatives gave families information about health, nutrition and safety. The practice tied into district-wide and school health and wellness goals, including good nutrition, daily physical activity and parental involvement in the school. The fair was one of several activities the school conducted in the 2006-07 school year to help support these goals.

Many individuals contributed to the fair. The ATP coordinated the event by arranging for agencies to attend, securing donations and creating a welcoming atmosphere and area for those presenting and attending. Other teachers were helpful in promoting the event in their classrooms, as well as offering suggestions for booths that would be useful to the students and their families. Students encouraged their parents to attend and community members gave their time and resources to inform the parents and students.

The school promoted the fair through newsletters and fliers sent home with every student. As a result, more than 150 parents and caregivers attended. ATP members noted that the fair raised parental awareness of academics, health issues and school involvement, and enhanced school and community connections by creating a meaningful information exchange.

Students also enjoyed having their parents visit the school. "It is so neat to show my mom what I do at school!" said one of the many students in attendance.

Parents also raved about this addition to conferences. "It's a great opportunity to have a look at after-school enrichment programs, as well as the breakfast program. We knew these things were available, but never actually considered them until now," said a parent. "We never knew there was so much sugar in all the pop we drink at home," added another parent after visiting one of the information booths.

The ATP's advice to others planning to sponsor similar events is to have enough space for a large crowd and to make sure that the exhibits are finished at least 30 minutes before opening to accommodate early attendees. The school will heed its own advice when they host Information Fair again. The ATP also intends to invite more community agencies to provide parents with additional information on health, wellness, and to strengthen home, school and community relationships.

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## Parent-Child Book Club

*Ranch View School  
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The parent-child book club is a great example of an activity adapted from another school's Promising Partnership Practice. Ranch View School built on a practice developed elsewhere to meet two needs – addressing students' social and emotional issues and improving reading fluency.

A survey at Ranch View indicated that students faced difficult developmental issues that should be addressed at school and at home. Good children's literature assists students in learning ways to handle problems and situations. The book club guided children in grades 2-5 and their parents in discussions of books and how they related to their own lives. Also, one school goal is to improve reading fluency. Research suggests that one way to do this is for children to read regularly outside of school. The book club involved parents in meeting this goal.

The books selected for the book club portrayed children dealing with bullying, divorce, friendship, intolerance and physical disabilities. Having a parent and child explore these issues in the context of a book club increased the chance they would talk together about how the child might approach these issues in his or her own life. Parents had the opportunity to influence their children's ideas and decisions on how to deal with these common life challenges.

The school had about 290 participants this year, including fathers, mothers, grandparents and children. For each meeting, children and their adult partners were asked to choose one book from a list of three or four to read together at home during a three-week period. Then, they met at the school, in a library meeting room or at a local restaurant to discuss the book. The school provided discussion guides for all participants. Students received a kick-off question on an index card on which they could write their answers. This helped the quieter students join the discussions.

A staff member or parent acted as a

facilitator for each discussion. In keeping with the relaxed setting, the school served healthy snacks and drinks. At the end of the one-hour book club meeting, parents and children were given a survey to complete. It asked them to rate various facets of the activity, including the book, the discussion and the location, and to offer suggestions for future book clubs.

Teachers, administrators and the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) assisted by facilitating the discussions and by choosing the target books. Students and families received information on each book, including topic, reading level and number of pages. Teachers conducted book talks to acquaint students with the books. The children were responsible for taking the information home and working with their parents to decide whether to participate and what book to read.

A local bookstore provided invaluable support in choosing the books and making sure they were available if the parents wished to buy them. The school library also carried multiple copies of several of the books.

The cost of implementing the practice was \$350, which included purchasing 45 books for one of the book club meetings. A grant from the Home and School Association covered these costs. The School/Family/Community Partners (SFCP) provided the snacks.

The event was successful in many ways. It increased the amount of time that parents and children spent together in a quality activity. Parents reported that the practice allowed them to see their child in a different light – as reading partners. Enthusiasm for reading at home increased and so did students' level of comprehension and fluency.

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## Sources of Family Stress and Relief

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*Early Childhood Center #61*

*Buffalo, New York*

**S**tress and parenthood go hand-in-hand. Sometimes it is ordinary, everyday stresses. Other times it is major problems that put parents on edge.

The teachers and administrators at the Early Childhood Center No. 61 believed that stress was holding their parents back from becoming more involved in the school, and that having more involved parents would benefit the students. So they organized Sources of Family Stress and Relief, a workshop for parents and teachers.

Thirty parents of students in pre-K through fourth grade, along with 10 teachers, administrators and staff, and five community members, participated in an evening of stress relief. They saw a PowerPoint presentation about stress management, talked about personal stress and how they coped, and learned different strategies for dealing with stress.

Catherine Collins, an author, mother, school volunteer and educator, conducted the workshop. She has written widely on sources of family stress and stress management.

Among the coping skills she suggested were exercising, eating healthfully, getting enough rest, using relaxation techniques, and talking to others. Organizers modeled each strategy for parents. In addition, a dance teacher taught the parents how to line dance – dancing is an effective stress reliever – and the school served healthy refreshments.

Parents said they learned a great deal about factors that contribute to stress and ways to handle it. Some parents also took home prizes that matched the workshop theme, such as candles and aroma therapy bath products.

The school staff is hoping that less-stressed parents will approach their parenting responsibilities more calmly and have more time and interest in working with their children

on school activities. The school has many single-parent families for whom time is a particularly important factor in their involvement.

The school would like to increase the number of parents attending future workshops. Organizers will advertise the topics, benefits, prizes, and refreshments more widely next time.

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## Cultural Experience Night

*Highlands Elementary School  
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If you don't have the time or money to go to different countries, why not bring the countries right to you? Highlands Elementary School did just that during its Cultural Experience Night. Sponsored by the School, Family and Community Partnership (SFCP) team, Cultural Experience Night provided an opportunity for students, families and the school staff to learn about many different cultures.

The SFCP's idea for Cultural Experience Night stemmed from student, parent and teacher surveys that indicated a need to build students' social-emotional skills. More specifically, the Highlands Elementary community desired greater understanding and communication among students from across the globe. The SFCP hoped that Cultural Experience Night, designed for all K-5 students and families, would provide an opportunity to learn about many different countries and embrace the similarities and the differences of diverse people. One practical goal was to improve student relationships and interactions in the classroom and during recess.

Each student participant received a "passport" at the door. As families visited exhibits about various countries, exhibitors stamped the passports. The event included many creative, interactive exhibits featuring native costumes, homemade foods, games and dance. Many students and parents also participated in special performances, such as a Swedish maypole dance and a Chinese yo-yo demonstration. At the end of the evening, children enjoyed comparing their passports to see who was the most-seasoned traveler. They also received a take-home coloring book containing an assortment of cultural illustrations.

More than 20 Highlands families and community organizations showcased different cultures and heritages for approximately 150 attendees. Participants were treated to imaginative displays highlighting Africa, China, India, Ireland, Lithuania, the Philippines, Scotland

and more. In addition, the school's hometown of Naperville, Illinois has a "sister city" in Nitra, Slovakia, which was represented by the community organization dedicated to that partnership.

SFCP members solicited and organized exhibitors, publicized the event, designed the passports and coloring books, provided refreshments and handled all other logistics. The team worked with the school's Diversity Club, which designed colorful cultural posters that decorated the school gym that evening.

The immediate responses of participants to Cultural Experience Night were overwhelmingly positive. SFCP team members heard parents and students say, "You should do this every year" and "We liked the performances and wanted more!"

The comments of participants attest to the success of the night, but the real proof of the value of the activity is in the numbers. On the end-of-year School Perceptions' Continuous Improvement Survey, 80% of students agreed that "Students at our school are tolerant of other students who look and act different from them." That percentage is a 2% increase over an earlier survey. Highlands Elementary School plans to continue building cultural awareness until 100% of its students agree with that statement.

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# Cultural Night 2007

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Weller Road Elementary School  
Silver Spring, Maryland

*We are a culturally diverse family  
working hand-in-hand towards excellence.*

This motto prompted Weller Road Elementary School's teachers, staff and administration to host Cultural Night 2007, a fashion show that highlighted cultures from 15 countries around the world.

In the 2006-07 school year, the student population at the school was 62.7% Hispanic, 15.7% African American, 11.7% Asian and 9.9% White. Teachers and parents decided to celebrate this great diversity by sharing customs, culturally diverse food, music, dress and performances.

At the event, organizers welcomed families and handed out programs for Cultural Night 2007. Food tables, set up in the gym, were grouped by continent so that families could share their dishes. The principal and involvement coordinator welcomed everyone, followed by the singing of the Star Spangled Banner. Students and staff presented a fashion show featuring traditional dress from Korea, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Haiti, Jamaica, India, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Peru, Zaire, Guatemala, Jordan and Bolivia.

Pre-K students followed the fashion show with an interactive music performance. Other presentations included an African dance, Sakura song, Reggaeton dance, tango and disco. Performers included Weller students, teachers, parents and community members.

Middle school students joined in the fun with a demonstration of a Stepper routine. Teachers, administrators and staff performed a special "Dream Girls" selection to end the evening.

Collaboration was the key to the success of Cultural Night 2007. Teachers, staff and administrators created programs, contacted

community partners, and supervised students in weekly rehearsals of performances after school.

Parents bought or found costumes, performed in the show, prepared the food and assisted with advertising. Students practiced diligently and met the behavioral standards set for them to participate in the show. Finally, community members supported the event by attending, donating food and performing.

Students who performed increased their confidence and overcame their fears of performing in front of a crowd. Teachers also noticed that students strengthened their sense of responsibility and commitment.

Parents also noted positive effects of Cultural Night 2007. "I will definitely get more involved as a result of my experience and am determined to get others involved as well," commented one parent.

The positive feedback of Cultural Night 2007 participants encouraged the staff to continue planning events that involve parents and community members. "Every year the event gets better and better," said the principal. Next year's Cultural Night is sure to include even more cultures, participants and community support.

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# International Night “Around the World in 90 Minutes”

*Prairie Elementary School  
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Some of the international families with children at Prairie Elementary were feeling isolated from others at the school. They talked with the teacher of English Language Learners (ELL) about wanting to be more involved with the school and with their children’s education. So the school decided to conduct an International Night to welcome these families and help them connect with others at this celebration of cultures.

Building on last year’s successful international “Games Around the World,” the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to expand the event this year to include food, music, art and dance. With the theme, “Around the World in 90 Minutes” and a hot air balloon to carry the idea, International Night took off, with adventures galore.

Each family was invited to share its heritage with a display of interesting facts, photos and artifacts, and to bring a food or prepared dish from its cuisine. Students, teachers and parents traveled around the school to:

- View cultural displays that highlighted fun facts about many families’ native countries
- Sample ethnic foods prepared by families
- Get creative with international crafts, including Chinese character writing, origami, and German paper cutting
- Learn traditional Hebrew songs or participate in an African stone-passing game
- Learn to salsa dance.

The ATP designed a passport that included each activity and its country of origin. The passports included interesting facts about each country and space for a stamp on each page as families visited the various activities.

Throughout the evening, the organizers gave away international board games as raffle prizes. Winners were announced every 10 to 15 minutes throughout the evening. During each announcement, families were reminded to explore the various activities.

Members of the ATP oversaw the entire event, which required considerable planning and coordination. Many team members volunteered to teach games, crafts or music. Other volunteers coordinated the food tables. Community partners contributed, too. A local dance instructor taught salsa to families, and a neighborhood business donated the Italian ice cream, Gelato, for sampling.

One of the challenges was communicating with some of the ELL families who do not speak English. To overcome this, the ATP met with the families about six weeks before the event and stayed in close contact with the ELL instructor, who communicated instructions to the families, making sure everyone understood what they needed to do.

In addition to encouraging parent involvement, the International Night enriched children’s knowledge of social studies and enhanced their cultural awareness. All Prairie families were able to appreciate and enjoy the cultural diversity within the school. As a result, ELL families seem to feel more welcome.

The event was well-attended, with 140 students and 80 parents present. When the ATP solicited informal feedback from attendees and volunteers, many commented on how much fun the evening was. The ELL instructor said she had never seen her students look so happy and confident.

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# JES International Fair

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*Jonathan Elementary School  
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Students from different cultural and religious backgrounds do not always have the opportunity to share who they are and where they come from. With students from 17 different countries, Jonathan Elementary School (JES) wanted to find a way for students to better understand each other and the world they live in.

The JES Parent and Community Involvement Committee led the way on this around-the-world tour, organizing the second annual JES International Fair. The day-long event spotlighted the cultures, languages and traditions of many countries – Germany, Honduras, Laos, Kenya, Australia and Guatemala, among them. The fair also brought together parents, students from nearby Chaska High School and community members who offered to participate.

To build interest, the school planned a special lunch menu for International Fair Week highlighting foods from different countries. Each day that week, students posed a question about a distant country on their morning JES news; answers were given the following day.

On the day of the fair, welcome banners in several languages waved from the school. The question that day: Where in the world will you be on March 2? Nearly everyone could answer differently as they traveled to new lands. Each student received a passport modeled after a United States passport, complete with picture and two labels indicating the countries they would visit.

Before setting off on their individual travels, however, the students watched a video, “Welcome on Board,” created by the school’s media specialist and two parents – one is a flight attendant and the other a pilot. Then the children found their way to the country presentations, where they were greeted by an ambassador who stamped their passports and welcomed them to the country. The ambassadors were parents and grandparents.

For 25 minutes, the students toured the country, learning about its geography, culture, language, food and music. Their guides were Chaska High School students who had lived in or studied in a particular country or parents or grandparents who were natives of another country or who had lived or traveled abroad. Each presentation included an activity such as a game, craft or dance.

“I had fun meeting people from the Netherlands and Germany,” commented one student. “Also, I learned a lot of things in the German language like hello and goodbye.”

The parent involvement coordinator said that the students “left the fair excited about their experiences and interactions with the adults and [high school] students. They wanted to learn more and wished the fair were longer so they could have visited more countries.”

Others involved also were impressed. The world languages teacher who organized and coordinated the high school presentations said that her students gained self-esteem and confidence from their roles as guides and presenters. “The JES International Fair gives students a wonderful opportunity to share who they are . . . their backgrounds, traditions, culture and religion – things they normally don’t talk about with their peers.”

One grandparent considered the fair a great event, saying: “It was so exciting not only seeing the elementary students engaged with folks from other countries, but also hearing the high school students give presentations about their cultures and countries. One high school student in particular blossomed right before my eyes, starting shy and afraid, to answering questions, smiling and being fully engaged with her students. What a wonderful event to witness.”

The fair supports three school and district goals:

- \* To create a global awareness and understanding of a diverse world. The fair promotes citizenship and appreciation and

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respect for others through understanding and interaction.

- \* To support and strengthen the school, family and community partnership. The fair drew on the NNPS six types of involvement for this multifaceted project that involved 50 parents and other caregivers and at least 70 staff members.
- \* To involve students (in this case, high school students) in service learning.

The fair cost \$660. The school won a Learn and Serve America mini-grant to cover most of the expenses, and the PTO contributed funds, too.

An unexpected benefit of the fair was the successful partnership that developed between the elementary and high school students. The older students were wonderful role models, and gained leadership skills and experience.

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## Passport to Possibilities

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*Middle Township High School*

*Cape May Court House, New Jersey*

What better way is there to foster a dialogue between school and community than to host a cultural fair where all are welcome? This is just what Middle Township High School did one evening in May with its Passport to Possibilities. The family event brought together musicians, performers and artists, and featured cultural booths and ethnic foods. Nearly 500 parents, family members and others from the community came to the fair.

“The attendees traveled throughout the school and tasted food, watched various performances and viewed student artwork and projects,” said one administrator.

This enjoyable educational event required a good amount of planning by the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). Student involvement was crucial to the fair’s success. Teachers assigned projects that the students could research and present throughout the school. The foreign language and home economics classes prepared food from other cultures that could be sampled in the “Cultural Café,” and students created artwork, dances, and vocal and theatrical presentations.

In keeping with the theme, the students crafted passports that they took from area to area to get stamped during the fair, and later earned extra credit toward their class grade for submitting their passports to teachers. Middle Township High School did a wonderful job of integrating curriculum requirements with the planning and hosting of a community event.

Another key to the event’s success was the participation of community-based organizations. The Cape May County Museum displayed historical photographs and artifacts in two displays. The Kingdom of Luzerne held fencing demonstrations, craft demonstrations and theatrical performances in the gymnasium.

Enlisting performers for the event was the main challenge, as the ATP relied exclusively on personal contacts to find volunteer entertainers. The ATP publicized the fair in newspapers, on the radio, and through fliers and the school’s “Global Connect” system, which automatically phoned each student’s home to encourage the family to attend.

The fair celebrates diversity in the school while emphasizing community involvement in the educational process. By showcasing student talents and achievements, the fair promotes tolerance and mutual understanding not only within the school but also in the community at large.

Best of all, there were no costs involved. Staff members and community-based performers all volunteered their time in a true show of community spirit. The students supplied the projects and food as part of course requirements.

Overall, the event provided a fun-filled, informal setting where students, teachers, parents and community members could get to know one another. The administration was particularly pleased that nearly 600 students participated.

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# Section III: Climate of Partnership Goals



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



# Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour

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*Hermitage Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

To reduce the first-day-of-school jitters, Hermitage Elementary instituted an Annual Neighborhood Bus Tour as part of its back-to-school kick-off week.

During the week before school opened, teachers and staff boarded a school bus that made three stops in the neighborhoods where the school's students live. Wearing Heritage T-shirts with the year's theme, "Coming Together for Learning," teachers and staff visited with the students and their parents for about 20 minutes at each stop. They passed out school supplies, tickets for a raffle and tips for a successful school year. This gave students a chance to meet their new teacher and to reconnect with their former teachers. At the end of the visit, the principal drew the winning ticket for a book bag stuffed with school supplies.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) endorsed the bus tour as a way to bring the excitement of back-to-school week to students and parents. Passing out materials also helped give parents a break on school supply expenses. The ATP also thought that the tour, started during the school's first year as a member of NNPS, would give teachers additional insight into their students' home environments.

This is Hermitage Elementary's first year as a Title I school, with 40 percent of its students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. The school serves a large number of students from the nearby naval base.

Along with a mailing about students' room and teacher assignments, the school sent each family a flier with information on the three bus stops and the time the bus would arrive at each stop. Also, the schedule was posted on the school website. This year, the bus tour was videotaped by VBTV and shown on the Virginia Beach station. About 100 students and 50 parents met the bus.

The ATP arranged for the bus and worked closely with the PTA and secretaries to get school supplies ordered in time. With many school supplies donated, the event cost less than \$80. Costs were covered by the Student Activity Fund.

Students, parents, teachers and community members all benefited from the practice. Because the students were able to meet their new teachers on the youngsters' "turf," they were more comfortable with their teachers by the first day of school. Teachers were able to greet many students by name when they arrived, making the classroom friendlier and helping everyone to get the year off to a good start. Parents and community members also benefited because they were able to see the school staff out and about and interact with them.

"I thought it was a wonderful way to get out to the places where our students live and see their home environments for ourselves," said one third-grade teacher. "It was great for public relations too. The students and parents loved it!"

The school uses its yearly survey and comments collected during the tour to evaluate the activity. One parent expressed her enthusiasm: "We love the bus tour. The kids in our neighborhood are thrilled to see all the teachers pile out of the school bus to say hello! The enthusiasm the teachers show during the tour is extremely contagious. The bus tour is an eagerly anticipated event in our community."

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## Beautification Day

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*Bassette Elementary School  
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Last November, students, parents, staff members and community representatives got their hands dirty to add more curb appeal to Bassette Elementary School. They planted flowers, spread mulch, plucked weeds and had a good time at School Beautification Day. Overall, 90 students, 40 teachers, 20 community members and 85 parents helped create and maintain the school's welcoming landscape.

Hampton City Schools puts a big emphasis on school presentation, cleanliness and safety, and so does Bassette Elementary. "Besides looking nice, a clean, neat environment has a positive effect on both adult and student behavior," said the school's parent involvement facilitator. Students also seem to concentrate better on their classwork in a more organized environment.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned the event. Parents, students and community representatives contributed ideas, donated money and flowers, and gave a helping hand during the day. Administrators and staff organized and bought the materials, and also dug in to help.

Administrators got the children excited about the event by talking about it every morning during announcements. The school sent home multiple fliers and notified local businesses and school partners.

With the flowers, mulch and lunch for the volunteers, the day cost about \$500. The local Department of Parks and Recreation donated equipment and tools. A grant from a nearby Lowe's store provided more materials. The challenge was to find affordable flowers, and the school called different businesses and compared prices. A PTA board member who is a gardener provided many plants at affordable prices.

Participants said the event was fun and that it was great having school, parents and community members come together to improve the school's appearance.

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# Breakfast with the Principal

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*Berendo Middle School  
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The principal of Berendo Middle School wants parents to feel comfortable and be involved in the school, so he invites them to breakfast once a month. This gives parents an opportunity to meet the principal, teachers and staff and learn first-hand what's happening at Berendo.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) initiated the breakfasts, which run just over an hour. They include a principal's update, a guest speaker on topics such as school safety or grading policies, or a hands-on demonstration. The April breakfast, for instance, showed parents how technology is used throughout the curriculum. Then, the parents have an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns. By telling the principal their ideas, parents can also influence decisions on school activities and policies.

The urban middle school has a majority of Latino students, many from low-income neighborhoods. The open door policy of the breakfasts helps parents get acquainted and discuss issues that are important to them. "Having parents participate will enable them to feel at home when visiting the school," said the principal. "I want them to be part of our school community."

At the beginning of each breakfast, the principal introduces himself and his guests of the day. He also updates parents on what is happening at the school and tells them about upcoming events. After the guest speaker or presentation, the principal opens the floor for questions, comments or concerns from parents and community members. On other occasions, the parents receive a form on which they can write questions and comments. Students, teachers, administrators and parents contribute ideas for discussion at each breakfast, which increases the sense of partnership.

Effectively publicizing the breakfasts is key to parent participation. Berendo has many ways to reach parents and community members, including a monthly parent newsletter, a school brochure, a school web site, the Phone Master system that generates calls to all students' home phones and take-home fliers. In addition, representatives from the Parent Center make personal calls to families.

Despite all the publicity, Berendo still is working to increase the number of parents at the principal's breakfasts. Each meeting has seen a steady increase in attendance, however, and the responses have been extremely positive. "Thank you for making me feel welcome!" said a parent. A student added: "My mom and dad like coming and hearing about what I do at school."

This year, 50 parents attended, along with 10 teachers and administrators, and 5 community members. ATP members hope to increase participation next year by generating more publicity and providing more hands-on activities for parents.

The relaxed breakfasts give the school staff an opportunity to welcome parents who might otherwise feel isolated. Parents attending the breakfasts also gain practical skills, such as computer training. Most importantly, students benefit greatly from having their parents know more about their school and how it operates.

The school uses its Title I funds for the breakfasts, which cost from \$50 to \$75 each.

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# Caring Hands for the Caring Tree

*Ballentine Elementary School  
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Ballentine Elementary School strives to show its students that they can make a difference, even though they are very young. Indeed, “Make A Difference” was the theme for this school year. In the spring, teachers and administrators decided the children needed to be reminded to be kinder to others. So they started a simple project, “Caring Hands for the Caring Tree,” that really blossomed.

Through a letter in the weekly Bear Bulletin, the school’s main way of communicating with families, the school invited parents and other care givers to describe acts of kindness that their children performed. They wrote on a form shaped like a handprint, which read: “Caring Hands for the Caring Tree. My child, \_\_\_\_\_, showed caring when \_\_\_\_\_.” Signed \_\_\_\_\_.

The handprints were hung on a “Caring Tree” for all to see. When the children started noticing the handprints, they were eager to add their own examples. The handprints were posted to look like leaves on a tree, and the children could be spotted searching the tree before announcing “I found my handprint!” Teachers made sure their students were contributing to the tree and parents visiting the school checked the tree for their child’s handprint.

The first tree in the guidance office was extended to a second tree in the hall to accommodate all the good deeds. One handprint told of a child who helped his mother bring things in from the car when she was not feeling well. Older children’s examples included helping at home by assisting their siblings and grandparents, cleaning their rooms and setting the table. They did their chores without being asked or opened doors for people, the handprints reported. They improved others’ lives and in turn grew from the experience.

This activity was fun. It also was an easy

project to participate in, even for parents who cannot come to school frequently. It provided parents with the opportunity to share what their children do to help their families. This project met one of the school’s goals of building a sense of community between school and home. Each week, the organizers published what parents had written about their children in the newsletter. The children saw their names and acts of kindness, and could read what their schoolmates do to help others.

Each of the school’s more than 700 students had a handprint hanging on the Caring Tree by the time the project was complete. Organizers said more than 1,400 parents and other adults were also involved, making this a highly successful project. The principal was particularly thrilled to see such wide participation.

“The parents loved it, the teachers loved it and it is interesting to see what things families do together and how we all have many opportunities to help each other in our daily lives,” said one of the organizers. “It helped children to grow academically, behaviorally and emotionally,” she added.

The “Caring Hands” project capped a year of “making a difference” through good deeds and community service. This also included visiting a nearby nursing center, Lowman Home, and bringing the residents there small gifts, including socks, Valentine’s Day cards and forget-me-not plants that the children grew from seeds as part of their classwork.

Ballentine students had many opportunities to make a difference.

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# Classroom Coordinators

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*Lincoln Elementary School for the Arts  
Anoka, Minnesota*

**C**lassroom Coordinators is a grassroots project involving parents communicating with parents, sharing news of school events and activities, assisting new families and working with teachers and staff. At Lincoln Elementary every classroom has a Classroom Coordinator (CC) who is a parent or guardian of one of the students. The CC works with the teacher to promote classroom and school events by making phone calls to all families, talking at events, arranging guest speakers and volunteering in various other ways.

The goal is to improve communication between school and home, to increase family participation in reading, writing, math and technology and to promote positive behaviors and partnerships.

Acting on a parent's suggestion, Lincoln introduced CCs this year when it became a specialty school, a School for the Arts. Their role was to assist in the transition by communicating how the school would integrate the arts into the curriculum and by trying to increase parent involvement. Fourteen CCs worked at Lincoln this year.

The CCs are similar to "room parents" in that they may organize parties, volunteer for field trips and assist in the classroom. Lincoln Elementary CCs, however, go a step farther by promoting school events and activities, making and receiving calls about homework, class work and a variety of other school questions. In just a year, they have become a vital link between the classroom and the home. With their leadership, all parents were personally informed of events, activities and projects. The effects went well beyond the notices students brought home.

A teacher recounted that when asked if she needed volunteers for a field trip that were recruited by the district's Volunteer Services Coordinator, she replied: "No, our classroom coordinator is already working on it!"

Everyone is involved in the CC project. The volunteer coordinator recruits adults for the CC positions, conducts orientation and distributes packets of information and contacts. CCs attend orientation, provide feedback and input and are constantly in touch with classroom teachers. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) provides support and feedback for CCs, and promotes the position at events and staff meetings. Parents complete a contact permission form so that the CC can communicate with them.

The responses have been positive. "I contacted a parent who at first was not sure why I was calling," recalled one CC. "But by the end of the phone call, he was sharing his ideas with me."

One of the challenges was how to communicate with the large number of families who do not speak English as their first language. The solution was to discuss the role of CCs at the English as a Second Language (ESL) dinner, which had a translator present. The school made provisions for families to request specific communication services, such as a translator.

Because the CCs are volunteers, this practice cost less than \$50 to implement, mainly for the CC materials' packets and for refreshments at the meetings and trainings. The district's Volunteer Services Coordinator picked up the tab.

Lincoln plans to continue using CCs and hopes to expand the program by recruiting coordinators in the spring. By planning ahead, the CCs would be available for Open House in the fall, giving them additional visibility.

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## Coffee with the Principal

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*Lincoln Junior High School  
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A change in leadership did not deter Lincoln Junior High from continuing its work to strengthen home-school connections. In fact, the School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team capitalized on the change by instituting Coffee with the Principal, informal gatherings at Lincoln families' homes to discuss school-related matters.

This past school year, the principal and two assistant principals were new to Lincoln Junior High. The SFCP felt that it was imperative to immediately create a positive relationship between the parent community and the new administrators.

Four coffee-get-togethers were held during the 2006-07 school year. Families of students in grades 6-8 volunteered to host the coffees in their homes and provided light refreshments. The first coffee, though open to all, was geared for sixth-grade parents. The last of the get-togethers focused on current fifth-grade parents, whose children would be coming to Lincoln in the fall. Among the topics discussed were issues about the transition from elementary to junior high school. Holding the coffees in families' homes rather than at the school created a friendly, inviting environment.

The SFCP and principal purposefully did not set a formal agenda for the meetings, hoping that the parents would bring their own questions and concerns. The open forum proved to be successful in generating new thoughts on ways to improve the home-school connection. Consequently, several ideas have been implemented as a result of the discussions, including a periodic calendar update sent home every other month.

Planning for Coffee with the Principal involved many people. To begin, a parent volunteer coordinator sought families who were willing to host each event. The principal then worked with the families to set convenient

dates. Publicity included the use of Talk 203, an e-mail notification system. The individual hosts also personally invited parents in the community.

Every activity has accompanying challenges, and Coffee with the Principal was no different. Time seemed to be the biggest difficulty in scheduling the meetings as the teachers, parents and principal were all busy. Thanks to perseverance on all sides, however, the practice was implemented to everyone's satisfaction.

The school hopes to have more coffees next school year and will ensure that the get-togethers remain open to all who wish to attend, especially to parents from feeder elementary schools in the community.

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## Community Forum Series

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*Oltman Junior High School  
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Connecting parents to Oltman Junior High is a priority and a challenge for the school, given that students' families speak as many as 14 different languages. To increase parent involvement, solicit parent feedback and create a greater sense of community, the school launched the Community Forum Series. The intended audience was the parents of the school's English Language Learners (ELL), some of whom had never been in the school.

The forums included dinner and time for questions, comments and informal conversation. Organizers hoped parents would get acquainted with one another and with how they might become more involved in their children's education. The guiding principles of the forums were:

- Establish and cultivate relationships of trust
- Connect with families that have not been involved
- Reassure parents, families and community members that the school values their input in the educational process
- Involve families and community members as participants in school decision-making

Held once a month from February to May, each forum started with a presentation by a community organization on a topic such as post-secondary opportunities, parent-teacher conferences, or recruitment for the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Dinner and conversations followed, allowing parents to voice their concerns and to make suggestions on improving the school's parent and community outreach efforts. The forums gave families and community members a rare opportunity to meet the principal, the community involvement coordinator and the president of the PTO, all at the same time.

Four translators staffed the forums so that all the parents understood what was happening and were comfortable speaking. With

the help of the district's translation service, all publicity about the forums, including formal written invitations from the principal and personal phone calls to target parents, were in the native languages of the families.

The series reached its target audience. Most of the more than 40 parents attending each forum had never been in the school building before, not even for a parent-teacher conference. The reason they had not come, they said, was that they did not feel comfortable there. The forum organizers extended an invitation to parents to actively participate as volunteers in decision-making by joining the PTO, the School, Family and Community Partnership Committee or the school site team.

Organizers handed out a 10-item questionnaire about school climate that focused on the quality of communication. Attendees commented that they now felt comfortable bringing genuine concerns to the table and that those concerns would be addressed. The issues raised by parents at the forums were later presented to the whole staff during faculty meetings.

The forums helped start a meaningful conversation about the importance of parent involvement and its contribution to student success. Organizers said the gatherings set in motion a new partnership that will be consolidated in future forums.

Starting in September, forums will be held quarterly. Information from these gatherings will be posted on the school's website so that parents who cannot attend will remain informed and continue to feel included and welcome at school.

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## Donuts for Dads

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*Maple Elementary School  
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**H**ow does a school with a geographically and demographically diverse student body increase the involvement of its students' male role models? The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Maple Elementary tackled the task with donuts, neckties and a motivational speaker.

The ATP was looking for an activity that was not only fun, but also useful for parents and caregivers. Maple Elementary has a diverse enrollment. Its students live in small urban communities, suburban subdivisions and on farms. The family demographics are as diverse as the geography. Donuts for Dads provided Maple Elementary's students the opportunity to spend quality time with some of the important men in their lives, whether they were dads, uncles, grandfathers or other caregivers.

At the November event, staff members greeted the "dads" before they joined the children in the cafeteria. After a welcome from the principal and a donut and juice breakfast, the children and their guests worked on a craft project. Each pair got special paints and a real tie to decorate. The dads and father-figures kept their ties as a memento of the event.

Maple's staff capitalized on having the men in the building. After the students returned to their classrooms, the "dads" remained in the cafeteria for a motivational session, entitled Cowboy Up. Led by a representative from the Boy Scouts of America, Cowboy Up provided advice about how to be more encouraging, supportive and helpful to their children. Topics included help with homework and how to encourage good behavior. Finally, the guests had an opportunity to visit the children in their classrooms.

The ATP facilitated Donuts for Dads and the school's administration invited the guest speaker, ordered the food and publicized the event through the school calendar and

newsletter. It also sent letters to parents and guardians inviting them and requesting an RSVP.

Maple Elementary's new spin on a traditional practice enticed 49 parents or other caregivers and 58 students to attend. The feedback from the "dads" was overwhelmingly positive. Many remarked that the motivational speaker was particularly helpful and encouraging. The children were thrilled to have an important adult spend time with them at school.

To strengthen this practice next year, the ATP plans to make personal phone calls to increase attendance.

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## Drive-Through Breakfast

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*Wallace Gregg Elementary  
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A poster at Wallace Gregg Elementary's Drive-Through Breakfast read "Honk if you like our service!" There was a lot of honking on September 29, 2006, when the teachers and administrators surprised parents with a drive-through breakfast at the school.

Beginning at 7 a.m., Action Team for Partnership (ATP) members served muffins and juice from rolling carts to the car line as parents dropped off their children. About 110 parents who enjoyed the drive-through service were thrilled. "What a nice surprise!" exclaimed one parent.

Teachers, assistants and the principal put breakfast items on carts and positioned them intermittently along the car line with teachers at each cart. Parents were asked to sign in on clipboards. In addition to breakfast, they also received a bookmark with tips for helping students with their homework. The "servers" made sure to tell parents that the school cared about them and appreciated their continued support.

The ATP wanted the breakfast to be a special treat and surprise. Therefore, it did not publicize the activity. It was a challenge to keep this activity a secret, as well as have faculty and staff commit to being at school before 7 a.m. for last-minute preparations.

ATP members initially brainstormed activity ideas while developing their One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships at an NNPS training session. The team members knew they wanted to give the parents a special "Thank You" for the academic and emotional support they provide their children. They also wanted an activity that would help meet the parent involvement goals from both the School Improvement Plan and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' Plan. Because many parents drive their children to school, Wallace Gregg teachers believed that Drive-Through Breakfast would be the perfect activity.

Even though parents who do not drive their children to school were not able to partake in the breakfast, every parent received a copy of the bookmark of homework tips. These were designed to help parents better support their children's at-home learning. ATP members noted that many of the parents who could not participate in Drive-Through Breakfast did attend other delicious and informative events, such as Donuts for Dads, Muffins for Moms and Grits for Grandparents. The Principal's Coffee and Chat gatherings also acknowledged family support.

The ATP's advice to those wishing to implement this practice is to plan well, have a backup plan in case of rain, sign up enough staff or volunteers for the various tasks and make sure there is enough food. The school's plans for next year's event include involving the Florence Morning News and inviting district office personnel and other community members to participate.

"I could get used to this!" said one parent. Well, it won't happen every day, but it could be that someday, when they least expect it, parents will enjoy another Drive-Through Breakfast at Wallace Gregg.

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# English as a Second Language for Parents

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*Eastern Elementary School  
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Eastern Elementary is having no problem finding parent volunteers. The challenge lies, rather, in communicating with them. The families at the school speak 10 different languages with Spanish and Russian the most prevalent. The school wanted to enable more of these families to communicate in English with teachers, doctors and other community members.

In March, Eastern Elementary started offering English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for parents. The class is held from 8:30 to 9 a.m. every Monday and Wednesday in the media center with two teachers in charge.

One of the teachers has experience teaching adults as a volunteer with the Literacy Council of Washington County. The other teacher speaks Spanish and teaches ESL to students. The school principal gave these teachers permission to spend an hour a week to teach parents who were interested, and the school staff pitches in to take over their other duties.

To publicize the practice, the school sent home fliers in English, Spanish and Russian. The teachers and the Family and Community Partnership Coordinator (FCPC) talked to families about the class. Finding parents to attend was initially a challenge. This was solved by encouraging students to talk about the option with their families and by having the teachers and administrators publicize the classes to boost attendance. This year, 11 parents and other caregivers took the classes.

During the first week, the teachers evaluated each parent's English proficiency and divided them into two groups based on need. The county's Literacy Council provided materials. The first parents who attended the program helped recruit other parents and networked with each other after class. The FCPC, with Title I funds, occasionally provides breakfast to the parents.

Many parents said they like the class. By the end of the year, the school staff has noticed that some of the parent volunteers speak English more often in the volunteer room, and more of them are coming in to volunteer right after their English class. Teachers are hoping they will be better able to communicate with these parents, who will then have stronger connections with their children's school and education. Another benefit is that the Literacy Council has reached families it may not have without this program.

The school plans to offer the classes again next year and hopes to recruit more parents through the methods they tested. The school also plans to adapt the program for different proficiency levels so that the classes will fit parents' needs and help them advance their English language skills.

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## Fall Festival

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*Tarrant Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

When Tarrant Elementary School's Second Annual Fall Festival ended, some people just didn't want to leave. They had such a good time at this community-wide event and wanted to ride more rides and play more games.

Held in the school and on the playground, the festival featured rides, concessions, a cakewalk and games planned by the teachers to mix fun and learning. One big reason for having the festival – other than fun – was to build community spirit among the families at the school and those that live in the apartment community that surrounds the school. More than 200 students attended with about 60 parents, 40 teachers and administrators and more than a dozen community members.

"Members of the community were able to visit and participate in this event to become familiar with the school population," said one of the festival organizers. "I'm glad you did it," said a festival-goer. "It was much bigger than last year," added another.

The event was filled with learning and recreational activities. Each grade-level team of teachers created a fall festival game. Every game had Standards of Learning (SOL) skills built into it. Staff members managed each station and students were able to apply their knowledge to these activities. The school's PTA sponsored the concessions and rides.

While the youngsters played games, parents were able to visit with teachers and other staff in an informal setting.

The festival cost about \$600, though much of that was covered by the sale of event tickets, cake walk tickets, food and drinks. In addition, the PTA, parents, community members, and organizations such as the West

Hampton Baptist Church all made donations – candy, cakes and small prizes for the game winners.

The school sent fliers to local businesses and faith-based organizations to get the word out that the festival was open to everyone in the community, not just those connected to the school.

Next year, the planners will do even more marketing to attract the neighbors. Perhaps those who did not want the festival to end will spread the word and encourage others to attend next fall.

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## Family Days at Barnum School

*Barnum School  
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As the preschool program for the Taunton Public Schools, the Barnum School is strongly aware of the tremendous impact that families have on school readiness. To be responsive to its diverse families and to involve and support families as they begin to work with their young children toward academic success, the school sponsored Monthly Family Days.

Each month, the school invites families to school for a parent workshop followed by visits to the classrooms. The adults take part in regular classroom activities, such as enjoying a snack, playing in the block area or pushing their child on a swing. Realizing that many parents are working, the school always invites other important adults in the child's life to come in place of parents who cannot make the meetings.

Each Family Day begins with coffee and a welcome from the principal or chair of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). After news of upcoming events, there is a half-hour presentation by various staff members. For example, the school's occupational therapist presented a successful workshop, *How to Develop Your Child's Fine Motor Skills*. Participants learned how the hand develops and worked in groups exploring wikki stiks, theraputty, pencil grips and other activities to do at home.

Another month's presentation was a *Make It and Take It Literacy Workshop*. A special education teacher instructed parents, working in four rotating groups, how to create literacy games to use at home. At one station, parents put together fishing games using dowels, string, magnets and alphabet cards. At another, parents made bean bags out of plastic bags and rice to use for an alphabet or shape toss game. Other groups designed game boards with markers, stickers and lots of imagination. At the final station, parents created letter and rhyming matching games.

Throughout the morning, there was a special camaraderie among parents. All of them left with four games they could play with their children that night!

Additional popular topics include how to prevent colds and other diseases, how to increase their preschoolers' physical activity, and a round-table discussion with the principal on how to improve parent-teacher communications. One of the most popular programs was a special event for the whole family featuring a performance by a children's singer and storyteller.

The ideas for the workshops came from a parent survey conducted at the beginning of the year and from staff suggestions. With the principal's input, Family Days are scheduled in advance and put on the calendar for the whole year.

Attendance has been consistently excellent. The children benefit from the active involvement of their families. Families connect with one another and gain valuable insights into strategies for helping their preschoolers develop readiness skills.

The staff believes that more parents are reached in these morning get-togethers than at evening workshops. Barnum School plans to continue its Family Days as it explores new ways to ensure that parents see the school as a welcoming, engaging place.

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# Family Resource Night

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*Isaac Stevens Middle School  
Pasco, Washington*

Isaac Stevens is a Title I school in improvement status. With a large minority population and almost 90 percent of its students eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, the school is reaching out to the community to give its students and families an extra, helping hand.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) went into high gear when it learned from the district's drop-out prevention manager about a program to provide resources to families with needs similar to those of many Stevens' families. With his assistance, the school planned a two-hour Family Resource Night so families could learn about community resources to help with a myriad of family issues.

It snowed on the January night when the event was originally scheduled and had to be rescheduled. That didn't dampen the efforts of the team to present important information.

When the event was held in March, the principal and school's drop-out intervention specialist warmly welcomed the parents and students. Two officers from the Pasco Police Department presented information about preventing youngsters from seeking gang affiliation and related topics.

Following these presentations, representatives of community organizations conducted break-out sessions. Participating organizations were the Boys and Girls Club, Salvation Army, Catholic Family Services (a mental health center), Washington State University, La Clinica (a community health center), Nueva Esperanza (a counseling center) and the police department. Each organization provided literature that families could use to follow up on the services they learned about. The workshops were conducted twice, enabling family members to obtain information on more than one community service provider.

"Knowledge is power and we need to empower our families," said the ATP chair. "The school believes that if it works on the

affective domain, the cognitive domain will follow."

The team received positive feedback. Parents indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to learn of the many services available to them, to ask questions of the organizations and to receive valuable information. "It is a relief to know that there is help out there," said one parent. "We're not alone!"

The school publicized Family Resource Night through its automatic phone call system, fliers sent home with students, announcements on a local radio station and personal calls. The ATP provided a room for child care and snacks and activities, such as movies and games.

Although fewer families attended than the school hoped for, it intends to plan more Family Resource Nights – perhaps two next year, advertise them more widely, and provide translators. This should help many more families learn that the community cares about them and their children's success in school.

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# Fathers' Night Out

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Community School #53  
Buffalo, New York

Community School #53 knew it had to do something when one-third of the teachers recognized that they communicated with parents only to report inappropriate or negative student behavior. To establish more positive interactions, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to implement Fathers' Night Out, an event to celebrate the fathers, grandfathers, brothers and other male figures who are involved in students' growth and development. The comprehensive event featured guest speakers, workshops, activities, dinner and a raffle.

The three-hour Fathers' Night Out began with a general welcome and two guest speakers, followed by a dance performance by a group from the African American Cultural Center. During the second hour, participants moved through various activity and workshop stations: a math-related basketball game, grade-specific take-home reading packets, book giveaways, a booth for making photos and picture frames, and a fingerprint station sponsored by the local police department. Other activities included dance lessons and a hairstyling station that helped fathers learn how to style their daughters' hair. The third hour included dinner – hot dogs, hamburgers, salads, cake and punch – and a raffle for gift certificates, lottery tickets, household items and bath products.

Before Fathers' Night Out, the ATP created a thorough task list and delegated duties to parents, staff, community members and administrators. Publicity for the event included advertisements in the school's newsletter, Save the Date postcards sent to all students' homes, fliers and press releases to the local newspaper. An easel board in the school's main hallway also advertised the event to incoming parents and visitors.

Community members played a large role in planning and implementing the night out. They served as guest speakers and dance performers. Additionally, the ATP sent letters to various businesses requesting both in-kind and cash donations. These were used to purchase food and supplies and gift certificates were used as raffle items. Business partner sponsorship of Fathers' Night Out covered most of the event's \$800 price tag.

Thanks to the diligent work of the ATP and community members, participation in Fathers' Night Out was outstanding, with more than 250 parents and caregivers in attendance.

Students saw that their caregivers were interested in both academics and the school environment. Most importantly, Fathers' Night Out was an occasion to celebrate the roles that fathers and families play in the lives of students. It was an excellent way to provide fathers and the important males in students' lives with an opportunity to interact with teachers and administrators in a positive, constructive atmosphere.

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## Grandparents' Day

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*San Fernando Elementary School  
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San Fernando Elementary has found a wonderful way to honor people who are true heroes in many students' lives. These are the people who bring them to school, pick them up, help with homework, and, often, are care-givers while the students' parents are working. These heroes are grandparents. San Fernando Elementary honors them with a day all their own.

In two years, attendance at Grandparents' Day grew from 100 to 250 adults and children. Although it is widely publicized with fliers, posters, banners and school announcements in both Spanish and English, word-of-mouth worked the best, swelling the crowd well beyond expectations, organizers say.

On their day, grandparents are treated to breakfast with their grandchildren. Then, they visit their grandchildren's classroom, where special activities involve them in the day's projects. Some teachers interview the grandparents; others ask them to read to the class.

After the classroom visit, grandparents and students move to the cafeteria for a special activity. This year, they decorated picture frames and gingerbread figures. Teachers walked around taking photos of family groups so they could put the picture in the frame. The gingerbread figures showed an adult, symbolizing the grandparent, and a smaller figure representing the grandchild holding hands. This illustrated the bond of care and friendship between the two generations.

A committee of teachers and members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) plans the day and divides the responsibilities. It was important to have Spanish-speaking volunteers on hand because many of the grandparents speak only Spanish.

"Our vice principal came to welcome everyone, and once again, this was done in Spanish and English. We really wanted everyone to feel welcome and special," said the chairperson for the day.

The event cost about \$300, including food. It proved well worth the expense. Many of the visitors stopped by the office to say what a wonderful time they had. Teachers, too, were impressed with how nice the school looked and with the crowd of happy grandparents and their grandchildren.

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## Grill and Chill

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*John B. Dey Elementary School  
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John B. Dey Elementary School cooked up a get-ready-for-school activity to help families, students, teachers and administrators make a smooth transition into a new school year. Grill and Chill turned into a “big reunion,” as one student said, because students had an opportunity to be with friends they had not seen all summer.

The weather did not know about Grill and Chill and momentarily turned the event into a grab-and-go. Heavy rains forced everything to be moved indoors to the school cafeteria. The team’s back up planned worked, and many families opted to picnic on the sparkling cafeteria floor.

Grill and Chill was a get-together, with hot dogs and chips on the agenda, so that students, parents and teachers could get acquainted before school started. Specifically, the goal was to create a welcoming climate for all members of the diverse population. Families and teachers had met briefly before dinner.

“The event allows the kids to get rid of the first day jitters. They were very excited and couldn’t wait to get to school and meet their teachers,” said one parent. “It was nice for us too!”

Another parent added, “The event was a good idea. It put the students at ease and made them comfortable for the first day of school. . . It also made moms happy since they don’t have to go home and fix dinner!”

One teacher said that she enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in which to meet parents and students.

The School Planning Council, school staff, community and business partners were instrumental in Grill and Chill. Partners and businesses provided the food and beverages, so there was no cost to the school.

The idea for this activity originated at an ATP meeting. The school sent invitations to all parents along with their children’s class assignments for the upcoming year. Information also was posted on the school website and marquee. The planning committee kept the staff informed.

“We wanted everybody to connect in a positive setting. It was supposed to be beautiful outside, but everybody enjoyed the conversation and we had a lot of spirit inside,” said the principal. “It was a phenomenal start to the school year.”

It is obvious that the Dey community agreed: 800 parents and family members and 500 students took part. Community support was important, too, as 15 community members participated and all 90 staff members were involved.

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# Loaves and Fishes Food Drive

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*Scott Elementary School  
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Helping others is an important life lesson that Scott Elementary tries to teach by example. Through its Loaves and Fishes Food Drive, the whole Scott community shows it cares about others. The project helps students in this highly diverse student body understand that a person can be generous, regardless of how much money he or she has.

Scott Elementary actually conducts two food drives each school year to benefit a community food pantry. The October drive lasts all month and includes a kick-off tour of the pantry. One child from each classroom, several teachers and parents from the School, Family, Community partnership (SFCP) team take the tour.

The director talks with the group, explaining why people need food assistance, how much food the pantry collects, how much it gives away and the important role of volunteers. The students see the food on the shelves, how much food is missing, and how bags are filled for families, and they walk into the refrigerator. Part of their job is to listen and take notes. After the tour, the students take a collection box to their classrooms and give a short report on what they learned.

Once a week during the drive, SFCP team parents gather the food from the classrooms, count it and take it to the pantry. The school keeps a tally of how much food it collects each week and displays the numbers on a thermometer-type-poster in the school lobby. The October food drive netted more than 2,700 food and non-food items.

The February food drive is a one-week competition among grades. A few days before the food drive begins, the school sends fliers home with a list of most needed items. The Student Council teachers and representatives help the SFCP team by counting food items and bringing them to the lobby each morning. SFCP parents accept the food and collect the food tally sheets. The collection stays in the

lobby for several days so that everyone can see how much has been collected.

At the end of the February drive, SFCP volunteers took several van loads of food to the pantry. Almost 1,700 food and non-food items were donated in one week.

The winning grade received doughnuts and a special warm, fuzzy thank you note from the SFCP. The second-place grade received bags of chips and a warm fuzzy thank you animal for the classroom. The SFCP sent home a "Thank You" flier, as well, to thank all families for their help.

Students, teachers and parents benefited greatly from the food drives, as did the community members on the receiving end. Teachers commented on how touched they were by the pantry tour and how important it is for children to have this opportunity to learn why helping and donating are important.

A child, however, captured the essence of this project: "Mom, take some of my money and buy more items for the food drive."

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## Lunchtime Gatherings

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*Phoenix Academy  
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The staff at Phoenix Academy, an alternative education school for students who were not successful in other schools, wanted to strengthen the connection between home and school and to help the parents feel appreciated. To accomplish this, the teachers decided to help students throw a Valentine's Day party in honor of their parents. The activity was so popular that it evolved into quarterly Lunchtime Gatherings.

Each gathering began with a free lunch, typically a barbeque or pasta fest, held either in the cafeteria or outside, depending on the weather. Business partners donated, prepared and served the food so that the staff could spend time with the children and parents.

Once the parents, students and staff finished eating, a teacher or administrator led the program, offering general parenting tips and information about available services in the community. At the end of each event, a bicycle, donated by the Police Activities League, was raffled to a participating student.

The elementary-grade students took the lead on many aspects of the Lunchtime Gatherings. They decorated the tables and made a gift for their parents. Teachers noted that they could feel the students' sheer excitement as they prepared for the event. This excitement translated into positive teacher/student interactions in the classroom.

Before the first gathering, the Valentine's Day party, many teachers and administrators were concerned about low attendance. However, teachers and office staff made personal contact with every parent in each class to ensure that they were aware of the party. They also publicized the event (in English and Spanish) through newsletters, fliers, the automated Tele-Parent phone system and even home visits. Phoenix Academy also made transportation available to those parents who needed it.

The diligence and great effort of the faculty, staff and administration paid off! About 65 parents attended the first Lunchtime Gathering. This number jumped to 180 by the second event, held only a few months later. "This is like heaven," said a parent. "I can't believe you did all this for us," added another.

The cost of the luncheons, from \$150 to \$500 depending on the food and number of parents attending, was paid by the school's business partners. The school has, however, allocated money in next year's budget to help support these successful gatherings.

The school also plans to work with the parents' employers so that parents can attend without losing income or being penalized for the few hours at school. Phoenix Academy is setting a lofty goal for next year's Lunchtime Gatherings, hoping that all parents – 100% – will be able to attend one of these useful and enjoyable meetings.

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# Parent Learning Walk

*Phalen Lake Elementary School  
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**O**n National Parent Involvement Day, Phalen Lake Elementary School invited parents and community members to take a Learning Walk. More than 90 adults accepted the invitation, issued in English, Hmong, and Spanish, to learn more about what their children do everyday and why.

With the principal in the lead, the walk began in the kindergarten hallway. The principal called the group's attention to examples of student work that teachers had posted outside their classrooms. She talked about what is expected of students, what is contained in the curriculum and what the students are learning with each activity on display. "I thought these were just pictures on the wall. I didn't know the children were learning so much," said one parent.

Interpreters assisted Hmong and Latino parents. The activity was particularly important at Phalen Lake because the school uses the Core Knowledge Curriculum, which focuses on specific knowledge that the curriculum creators believe every educated person should know.

Parents had the opportunity to leaf through books to compare the work with the posted standards. School staff also helped parents understand the value of homework and its connection to school work, as some parents had commented at conferences that they did not understand the purpose of some homework assignments.

As the tour progressed through the grades, parents could compare and contrast students' work at different grade levels. For example, they compared the memoirs written by third graders with those of fifth graders and saw clear evidence of skill growth. Parents also gained an understanding of the way each year's Core Knowledge builds on prior knowledge. In addition to student work, teachers posted the

academic standards, work that illustrated those standards and evidence of student self-evaluation and teacher feedback.

The principal brought this idea to the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) after school staff participated in similar walks for purposes of professional development. The ATP sponsored the walk because it recognized the need to strengthen parents' understanding of what their children are doing at school. Teachers promoted parent participation through fliers in three languages and personal contact.

Parent Involvement Day included other activities: A performance of the biographical play "Black Eagle" by Mixed Blood Theater; a fifth-grade presentation of a speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called "What is your life's blueprint?" and an invitation for parents to visit their children's classroom for a Valentine activity. Parents also were invited to have breakfast or lunch with their children. The Learning Walk was scheduled several times during the day to accommodate different schedules.

One of the organizers called the feedback "overwhelmingly positive." "It was good to see so many parents actually paying attention to the student work displayed," said a teacher.

Buoyed by its first experience, Phalen Lake will schedule more learning walks – perhaps in tandem with other events to increase participation and raise parents' awareness of an activity that keeps them in step with their children's school life.

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## Pizza Open House

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*John F. Kennedy School  
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**H**ow did John F. Kennedy School boost attendance at its annual open house to 500 adults and students? Pizza – is the short answer. Providing dinner for busy families added to the response.

Attempting to attract more families than in previous years, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the Family Resource Center decided to begin the annual open house night with a free pizza dinner. Many of Kennedy's families have both parents working outside the home. The extra convenience of sitting down to a prepared meal was the perfect incentive for them.

Before the Pizza Open House, the school sent fliers home to the parents with an RSVP in order to get a head count. The event also was publicized on the school's morning announcements and posted on the district-wide calendar.

On the evening of the open house, families of students in grades 1-2 ate and toured the school first. Families of children in grades 3-5 started a bit later.

Parents and PTO members helped set up and clean up, while teachers and administrators greeted families and served the meal. To the students' delight, teachers had dinner with the families, which included parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Eating together was a wonderful way for teachers to get to know the students' caregivers.

Discounts and donations from community members helped the school plan and pay for Pizza Open House. The local pizza parlor gave the school a discount on the 30 party-size pizzas it delivered, making the total cost of the event approximately \$750.

The benefits of providing a meal to families far outweighed the price of pizza. Costs were covered by the Family Resource Center. Offering a meal proved to be a good solution to

fitting a school event into parents' busy schedules. The casual atmosphere ensured that families felt at ease and encouraged them to be part of the school community. Pizza Open House provided many parents an opportunity to visit their child's classroom and meet their teacher, perhaps for the first time.

For other schools hoping the boost attendance at any evening event, the organizers of Pizza Open House suggest getting a head count of the number of parents and students who will attend as early as possible. This information ensures that there will be enough food, and that there will be the right number of volunteers and ample space to accommodate a large crowd.

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## Reach Out and Touch: Outreach to a Local Nursing Home

*Luther W. Machen Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

**M**achen Elementary School is part of a military community. Many students do not spend much time with their grandparents because they are located at a distance. But thanks to a parent on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), the students now have a meaningful connections with the elderly in their community.

At the beginning of the school year, Machen Elementary took the parent's suggestion and "adopted" the Coliseum Park Nursing Home. Each month one grade level (K-5) sponsored an activity at the home or involved the residents in other ways. For example:

- \* One month, the seniors read to students during Children's Book Week, and the student Nutrition Club helped serve lunch to the visitors.
- \* Around Christmas, the second-grade teachers, students and families decorated holiday wreaths for the residents' doors and entertained residents by singing carols.
- \* Kindergarten staff, students and their family members participated in a "throws and bows" workshop in January. They made cards and gift-wrapped blanket throws and socks donated by local businesses for the nursing home residents.
- \* In February, students put a "giving tree" at the entrance of the school with the names of residents and items they needed printed on a paper heart. All families and staff had the opportunity to remove a paper heart and buy the gift that was listed. Parent volunteers and staff representatives delivered the gifts to the residents.
- \* The last outreach activity of the year involved first-grade students making sun visors for the residents, promoting the importance of sun safety.

About 100 students and parents, 35 teachers and administrators, and 100 community members participated in the monthly activities.

Reach Out and Touch made students more aware of the needs of others and acquainted them with service-oriented organizations in their community. It was hoped that the students would benefit from positive community relationships that encouraged a sense of belonging and purpose. The practice, included in the Action Plan for Partnerships under Collaborating with the Community, aimed to instill and reinforce compassion, friendship, respect and tolerance. In addition, it is designed to foster social responsibility among families.

Parents in the school's Parent Partner program planned and organized many of the activities. They worked with classroom teachers to communicate initiatives for families and the community. All activities were supported by the Title I parent involvement fund. Teachers and parents worked together in and out of school to organize and execute all activities.

Feedback from the residents and the coordinator of the nursing home was extremely positive. Those at Machen liked the project, too. "I think community service is necessary especially for the population we serve," said one fifth-grade teacher. "As classroom teachers we should model for our students how we give back to the community."

A fourth-grade student was equally enthusiastic: "It is a good thing because we get to do generous things for other people. It teaches kids to do things for others and not to just think about themselves."

To improve the activity even more, the school invited the coordinator at the nursing home to become a member of the ATP for the 07-08 school year. The coordinator accepted – making an already-strong partnership a little more secure.

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## ROB TV – Digital Video Streaming to Communicate

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*Roberts Elementary School  
Wayne, Pennsylvania*

**R**ob TV is for every child who ever wished a relative living far away could see him or her perform in a school play, concert, or debate or demonstrate a science project. Rob TV – Roberts Elementary School Television – is a technological bonus added to the school’s website that allows people everywhere to see what’s going on at this school. It’s a special gift to grandparents.

Rob TV is an informational streaming video program made using digital video, still photographs and Microsoft Photo Story software. Students are involved in the reporting, filming, editing and uploading, as well as starring in many performances and advertisements. The director and editor is the school librarian. So far, Rob TV has covered the third-grade wax museum, first-grade weather reports, second-grade musical and fourth-grade Opie Winfrey Show.

Its primary goal is to improve communications between home, school and community by “bringing home” (wherever that may be) the school’s events with the simple click of a mouse. Roberts’ students are a diverse group with far-flung family members. It is important that relatives and the larger community can connect with the school anytime and from anywhere.

Rob TV has a link on the school website. It was first publicized there and in the monthly newsletter. In May, a group of students introduced Rob TV at the student technology showcase at the Capitol Rotunda in Harrisburg. In June, the local school board saw a presentation of Rob TV.

The district began by training people on the content and capabilities of the new website. Once the idea for an informational streaming video program was framed, district administrators discussed the pros and cons and gave permission to try it. Costs were about \$900 for the low-end equipment. Rob TV received a grant from the Upper Merion Educational Founda-

tion and additional funding from the school budget and KYW radio in Philadelphia.

The school decided to use Eyespot as its free web hosting service. It was necessary to protect the security of students, who were instructed not to identify themselves on any Internet video. Children can only be hosts of events if their parents agree to sign a photo release. The school offers regular classes on Internet safety and students must sign a Responsible Use Policy for the Internet. About 92% of Roberts’ families have computer access, according to the principal. To ensure equity of access, next year the school will focus on families without computers by planning workshops and assisting them in using libraries and other public places that offer Internet access.

Rob TV was a big hit in informal ratings from teachers, children, parents and the public. “Rob TV is a great tool to see the special things your children are doing in school,” said one parent. “It is especially nice for working parents who may not be able to attend an event during the school day. We also send the links to grandparents instead of making copies of performances on videotape or DVD, which is really convenient and a time saver.”

The broadcasts got rave reviews, too, from the school principal and the district superintendent. “How very, very cool!” said the superintendent, who urged other principals to tune in. “Our students are learning at an early age the power of mass media and developing presentation skills that they will use for a lifetime,” added the principal.

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## Sentara Senior Readers

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*Arrowhead Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child. For students who attend Arrowhead Elementary, that village is Sentara Village – a nearby nursing home. A 16-year partnership between the two institutions allows students in grades 1-4 to develop a meaningful relationship with older members of their community. Once a month during the school year, Sentara residents come to the school to read to the children. The students, in turn, visit the nursing home during holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

On the third Friday of each month, Sentara residents come to school to read to, talk and interact with the students. Teachers report that through these monthly visits, students learn respect for their elders and benefit from the wealth of knowledge and fascinating life stories these men and women share. For many students, visits from Sentara residents are the highlight of the day. One third-grade student notes: “I love when Miss Patty comes to read to our class. She is very funny and nice.”

On occasion, the students also participate in activities at Sentara. For example, the nursing home hosts an Easter Egg Hunt and fall festival for first-graders.

While the Friday visits and other activities are enjoyable, Arrowhead students agree that the highlight of the partnership is the yearly holiday celebration. Each third- and fourth-grade classroom honors a resident of the nursing home by crafting a holiday door decoration for him or her. Students take charge of the whole project, from planning to creating the design. Some students from those grades are chosen to go to the nursing home to put up decorations, deliver gifts, sing holiday songs and spend time with the residents.

Even though Sentara’s residents and Arrowhead’s students are the key players in this partnership, many other individuals contribute

to its success. The nursing home’s director organizes the senior volunteers, arranges transportation to the school and oversees the seniors while they are there. Sentara also buys all of the supplies for the events held at the home.

Arrowhead teachers organize larger events, collect donated items and select the books for the seniors to read. Parent chaperones, along with teachers and administrators, attend the events at the nursing home. Finally, local newspapers report the various events at the Sentara facility. During the 2006-07 school year, more than 375 students, 40 parents, 20 faculty members and 25 community members participated in the partnership.

Amid the plethora of both academic and nonacademic benefits this partnership provides, perhaps the most noted is that Arrowhead’s students learn to communicate more effectively with older adults. The partnership coordinator and third-grade teacher reports: “This 16-year partnership has been a rewarding experience for teachers, students, parents and residents of Sentara. The longevity of the program speaks for its success.”

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## **Section IV: District and State Leadership**



**Districts and states in the National Network of Partnership Schools conduct leadership and facilitation activities to assist schools to develop programs of school, family, and community partnerships.**



## Added Value Activities

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*Saint Paul Public Schools  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Can school districts turn a highly attended event into a useful parent involvement activity? In Saint Paul, the answer is a resounding “Yes!” The Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) developed 17 short parenting sessions, known as Added Value Activities, for schools to include at popular events such as awards ceremonies, open houses and student performances. The activities not only made the most of parents’ presence in the school, but also targeted parents who might not typically attend informational workshops.

The idea for Added Value Activities came from the parent involvement staff at various schools within the district. They expressed the need to provide parents with useful information in an easy-to-use format. A team of district administrators listened to their suggestions and took action.

District leaders wrote Added Value Activities in a user-friendly way so that any school staff member could present the 10-15 minute sessions. The activities include a short introduction, a paragraph or two about the importance of the subject for parents, and handouts on the topic in the district’s four major languages: English, Hmong, Spanish and Somali.

The sessions provide parents with educational strategies including tips for reading with children and helping them build vocabulary. Some of the Added Value Sessions tackled challenging issues that parents may not be sure how to address, such as bullying and teen depression. Many activities included a component for parents to complete at home with their children.

To ensure the activities were, in fact, user- and parent-friendly, the parent educator who wrote them had them reviewed for content by the parent involvement school staff, district staff for English Language Learners (ELL) and

the Title I program manager. To make the sessions easily accessible, they were compiled in a notebook for every school and made available on the district’s website, [www.title1.spps.org](http://www.title1.spps.org).

The cost of implementing Added Value Activities was approximately \$1,500, covered by Title I funds. Payments were made for notebooks, printing and translation services.

Thanks to Added Value Activities, teachers and administrators in all Title I schools have readily available resources that add more substance to school events and that help parents on important topics.

Soon, other schools will benefit from Added Value Activities. The district presented the notebook at a conference of the Minnesota Association of Administrators of State and Federal Education Programs and everyone gave it great reviews. Saint Paul will develop ways to share this information, and activities will be added to the notebook and website over time.

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# ATP Connection: A District Newsletter

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*Pasco School District*

*Pasco, Washington*

The ATP Connection helps the Pasco School District stay in touch with its 16 Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP) and their more than 230 team members. The monthly newsletter not only keeps all ATP members updated on the great activities going on throughout the district, but also communicates important dates, resources, and special events and deadlines from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). It also helps to keep ATP members thinking about school and family partnerships. Even if they miss a meeting, they will still feel connected.

The ATP Connection is a way to recognize the work of ATP members. District administrators, school board members and community partners also receive the ATP Connection. They, too, will know about school and family partnership activities in the district.

NNPS suggested distributing a monthly or bi-monthly FAX to ATP members, but the partnerships coordinators decided that a newsletter would be more effective for reaching all members. They reviewed other newsletters to get ideas for columns and decided on a one-page, double-sided format.

ATP Connections has five sections: District News, Spotlight On, Read All About It, Resource Corner and Important Dates. The Spotlight On section highlights a school or person each month to share ideas about how a school successfully organized an event or practice. For the Read All About It column, one of the district coordinators reviews a different book from the ATP Resource Library at the district office.

After the coordinators write the stories and format the text and pictures, district facilitators proofread it and district translators translate it into Spanish (the only other language currently represented on ATPs). The district facilitators ensure that the newsletters are printed, folded, sealed, labeled and mailed in a timely manner.

This is the second year of ATP Connections, with 20 issues to date. To reach out to the broader community and neighboring school districts, the coordinators sent the October 2006 issue to 157 businesses, more than 30 nearby districts, various community contacts, service agencies and non-profit organizations. Along with the newsletter, the coordinators included information about the Pasco School & Family Partnerships Program and gave everyone an opportunity to sign up to receive the newsletter either by mail or electronically. The newsletter is also available on the district web page under the "For Parents" tab at <http://www.psd1.org/psd2/index.php?pgid=1193>.

So far, the newsletter has been positively received. "I look forward to seeing who is in the spotlight each month," said a parent and ATP co-chair. "I love to see what other schools and people are doing. There is always someone amazing with an awesome idea or event. It really highlights what our ATP committees are all about."

An administrator added, "The ATP in each building has given parents a voice in the school's academic focus. They are part of the decision-making process in determining goals and activities to support student achievement, based on the unique needs of the building's student body. The ATP Connection newsletter keeps the district connected with the events occurring at individual sites and allows for the sharing and celebrating of ideas."

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# Childhood Conversations Conference

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*Windsor Public Schools  
Windsor, Connecticut*

**W**hat started out as one conversation turned into a daylong conference, filled with many conversations. Parents and teachers from the Windsor Public Schools talked about how important it is that they talk to their children and shared tips for talking about challenging subjects, such as safety, stress and grief.

To build community connections that benefit children, the Windsor Public Schools Family Resource Center organized the day-long Childhood Conversations Conference that put parents and educators in touch with vital information on best practices for supporting their children. Collaborators included the Windsor Early Childhood Council and Windsor Start Smart. A representative of each group made up the planning committee.

Originally, the plan was to conduct “a community conversation on the importance of birth-to-five programs for student success later in life,” said the district’s center coordinator. But as the center looked for partners, the idea expanded to a full-day conference.

The day started with a morning keynote speaker who talked about the important role that adults play in children’s lives. Following the presentation, participants chose from multiple sessions. Topics included:

- ✦ Safety
- ✦ How boys and girls learn differently
- ✦ Stress management for children
- ✦ The importance of fathers in children’s lives
- ✦ The needs of grieving children
- ✦ Children’s rivalry
- ✦ The power of play

A parenting expert spoke at lunch on the importance of the words we use with children. “He made me think about how I will talk to my own children differently. It is the simple phrases that make the difference,” said one of the 15 teachers who attended. About 65 parents and caregivers joined the teachers, district administrators and community members.

To publicize the conference, the committee created a brochure that it distributed directly to parents through the schools, e-mailed to all school system employees, listed on the Internet and posted in public locations both in and outside of Windsor.

More than 20 Windsor High School students volunteered at the conference, adding some young voices to the conversations. A large group of students from the medical emergencies class conducted the safety workshop. The students took part in the workshops as well as volunteering.

Participants received notebooks, a conference bag, and a water bottle, plus all the information they could carry. Most of them said they were taking home ideas and suggestions that they could apply immediately. One parent was fascinated by the presentation on how boys and girls learn differently. “It is something that we thought about, but never talked about in depth,” he said.

The four sponsoring organizations received a grant to cover some of the expenses and divided the rest. The day cost about \$10,000.

The district plans to expand the conference into a two-day regional meeting that offers parents and professionals more workshops. The district will try to attract more partners to help with costs, and put together multiple tracks (e.g., an in-depth educator/professional track and a parent-track) to attract a larger audience.

This year’s organizers made filling out the evaluation form a particularly sweet experience. Anyone returning a completed survey received a coupon for free Cold Stone Creamery ice cream. Talk about leaving a good taste in your mouth . . .

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# Family Partnership for Math and Reading

Anoka-Hennepin School District  
Coon Rapids, Minnesota

When life gave Anoka-Hennepin's district leaders lemons, they made lemonade. In other words, a 40 percent budget cut in 2003 spurred the Minnesota district to step up efforts to involve parents more directly in their children's education.

A survey indicated that parents were ready to become more involved, but needed guidance and information on how to help their children at home. This survey gave birth to the Family Partnership for Math and Reading, a district-wide initiative that provides materials to parents of the district's 17,000 elementary students to help them work with their children on math and reading skills.

Elementary school teachers assembled and distributed the following materials at parent-teacher conferences:

- Math games that directly support the elementary math curriculum
- Math and literacy "tip cards" with specific grade-level information
- Refrigerator magnets asking "What did you do in school today?" These promoted communication between parents and children about school. A "prompt card" was provided for parents to use in helping students reflect on what they learned or did in school that day
- Promotions for other district resources for parents

Teachers also distributed educational materials at the spring kindergarten registration. These included an alphabet placemat, activity book, parent handbook and a booklet with math and science tips. Kindergarten teachers and principals discussed the materials with parents and encouraged them to use them throughout the spring and summer to help their children prepare for kindergarten.

Monthly newsletter articles reinforced how parents could use the materials, offered additional math and reading activities and served as general reminders about the initiative.

The most important addition to the program this year was the translation of the math and literacy "tip cards" into the district's top five non-English languages: Spanish, Russian, Hmong, Vietnamese and Arabic. Teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes received translated versions of these cards to share with their students' families.

District curriculum and Title I funds paid for the initiative. In addition, the district's student services department, including ESL, paid for a portion of the translation costs for the "tip cards."

In a random sample survey in the spring of 2006, 75 percent of the elementary parents surveyed said the materials were "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." "Playing math games with my child at home increased my knowledge of what was going on in the classroom" said a surveyed parent.

Positive parent and teacher comments encourage the district to continue to provide the materials. It also plans to add science "tip cards" to the collection, because science will soon be part of Minnesota's state-mandated test program.

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## Focus on the Future Showcase

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*Allegany County Public Schools  
Cumberland, Maryland*

**H**ow do you give ninth graders a taste of the real world of work? Try a science and technology showcase that highlights students' achievements while putting them into contact with future employers.

The first countywide Focus on the Future Showcase in Allegany County took place in April. Hosted by the 23 county public schools, in partnership with the Allegany County Chamber of Commerce Education Committee, the four-day event featured exhibits in science, social studies, acceleration and enrichment programs and career connections. There were business promotion exhibits and career-connected student displays.

Students in grades 3-12 participated, using their exhibits to show how much career education is part of their everyday lessons. As part of the showcase, every ninth-grade student toured the showcase, which afforded them hands-on experience and an introduction to various workplace skills.

The event "was a collective effort to showcase how curriculum prepares students for the future," said the Allegany County's Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. "During the showcase, students were involved in job shadowing. This involved giving ninth graders exposure to trades before they make decisions between college and technical schools," he added.

The idea arose from a need for economic development in Allegany County. "To see Allegany County continue to grow and prosper ... means offering more jobs and keeping graduates locally employed," organizers said.

Through its focus on student achievement, this showcase reflected all six types of involvement. Parents, teachers, administrators and community volunteers came together to help prepare students for a successful future.

The event provided an important opportunity for parents to get involved in thinking and talking about their children's career paths, as they attended the showcase and helped out with student exhibits.

Businesses contributed in another big way by making donations that covered the cost of the showcase. Area business provided about \$7,500.

Nearly 1,000 students participated, and another 800 had the opportunity to tour the exhibits. Hundreds of adults were involved in planning and during the actual showcase. At least 100 school personnel, 100 district colleagues and 75 business people worked together to make the showcase successful.

It was a win-win situation for the school system and for the local business partners. It allowed students to make public presentations, which developed their interpersonal skills and helped them get acquainted with businesses. The business partners in turn were able to meet future employees.

The showcase exposed students to positive and realistic images of the world of work. It also provided a perfect opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate student achievement.

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# Homework Assistance and Prime-Time Teen Alternatives

North Penn School District  
Lansdale, Pennsylvania

The North Penn School District shares a vision with the North Penn Valley Boys and Girls Club: To inspire each student to reach his or her highest potential and become a productive, responsible and caring citizen. To turn the vision into reality, the two groups formed a partnership to reach out to families and youngsters who need and want these services.

The organizations operate two after-school programs: The Homework Assistance Program for students in Grades K-6 and the Prime Time Teen Alternatives for middle-school students.

The Homework Assistance Program offers a structured learning experience with individual attention after school. Funded by public and private foundations, corporations and the United Way, the supervised program offers free tutoring and organized activities.

There is space for 130 students in five classrooms from 3:30 to 6 p.m. on Monday through Thursday. Students must complete their assignments to the best of their ability and have them checked for accuracy before they are allowed to leave the homework room. The club has learning centers and computer technology centers that are equipped with 10-12 computers, laser printers and Internet access.

On Fridays, students attend the same hours, but participate in Skills Mastery and Resistance Training (SMART) Moves, a drug and alcohol awareness and abuse prevention program.

Students participating in the program are expected to improve academically in their classes. When this happens, their self-esteem increases and their attitudes toward school improve. School attendance rates, behavior, and graduation rates are expected to improve, too.

Families also are involved. Each family signs a "contract" that lists expectations for

success for students and their parents or guardians. The staff maintains regular contact with families and with school teachers and principals. The educators, then, can monitor students' performance in the classrooms.

The district agreed to provide bus transportation to the club from all 13 elementary schools. This service allowed the club to expand its services to all families in the community.

Prime Time Teen Alternatives is a program for middle school students on early dismissal days. On these days, students may be unsupervised in the afternoon. Knowing that early dismissal days can be a challenge for parents and for the community, the Boys and Girls Club created this program.

It begins after dismissal and teens may stay until 8:45 p.m. The district provides transportation to the club and parents pick their children up at the end of their work day.

The program provides recreational activities, dance parties, and field trips to bowling alleys, movies and restaurants. The club also integrated the district's bullying prevention program so that students hear consistent messages from the school and after-school programs. In its first year, the Prime Time Teen Alternatives program was filled to its capacity of 50 students. The club hopes to expand the program as space and funds become available.

Both the Homework Assistance Program and the Prime Time Teen Alternatives Program are examples of partnerships aimed to enhance student achievement and development. The programs also expect positive effects for families and the community.

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# Kindergarten Festivals

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*Long Beach Unified School District  
Long Beach, California*

Research shows that kindergarten students are more successful if they have had preschool experience and their families understand what to expect in kindergarten. Approximately 6,000 students enter kindergarten in the Long Beach Unified School District each year. Of these, about 45% are English Language Learners and 25% have not been to school before. The school district and the Long Beach Early Care and Education Committee decided that the best way to reach families and improve school readiness was to host a series of Kindergarten Festivals for incoming kindergartners and their families.

The goals of the festivals were to:

- \* Increase parents' comfort level with school
- \* Support the home as a primary learning environment
- \* Provide hands-on, teacher-modeled learning activities
- \* Provide an opportunity for free, family-focused learning experiences

The district held the festivals on four Saturday mornings at schools throughout the city. Brightly colored balloons, red-clad staff and teachers and decorated booths helped create a carnival-like atmosphere. During the festivals, families attended three classroom presentations. The first, "A Kindergarten Classroom Experience," let families meet a kindergarten teacher, visit a kindergarten classroom and discuss the registration process. The second and third presentations focused on reading and mathematics, respectively, dealt with ways parents can help their children with these subjects and included hands-on activities for parent and child.

Community agencies set up booths outside the classrooms to provide information for families. Participating agencies included: the district Head Start, Long Beach Public Library, the city health department, Volunteers in Public Schools (VIPS), a dental health association, the Children's Home Society, School Uniform

Information, and Family Literacy.

After attending the classes and visiting the booths, each prospective kindergartner received a free child-size backpack filled with school supplies and a book. Their siblings also received a free book. Every family had its photo taken as a memento of the event.

All of the supplies were donated. The John S. & James L. Knight Foundation awarded the district \$20,000 over two years, and The National Council of Jewish Women donated \$7,000 over two years to cover the cost of the backpacks. Other community organizations also contributed. Among them were the Long Beach Education Foundation, Molina Health Care Book Buddies, the Long Beach Chapter of Stand for Children and Children's Home Society of California, along with the public library and the city.

The event was publicized through local newspapers, including those published in Spanish and Cambodian. Fliers were distributed to schools, libraries, preschools, private and public family child care providers, grocery stores, churches, child care and Head Start centers and at a variety of other locations in the various communities where the festivals were held.

So far, the Kindergarten Festivals have enjoyed tremendous success. Attendance nearly doubled this year, with 400 families attending, compared to about 200 last year. More than three-fourths of the families answered surveys when the festivals were over. They were very positive, rating the events as "very helpful" and convenient. The sponsors are hoping to attract even more families next year.

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# MALDEF Parent School Partnership

Houston County School District  
Perry, Georgia

*Many times we Hispanics make excuses for not participating in school – too tired or I don't know English or I can't drive – but we need to come to classes like this to help our children and to learn about the schools here.*

Rosa Garcia, a parent and graduate  
of the MALDEF Parent School  
Partnership Training

**T**his eight-week course, a partnership between the district's migrant education office and the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF), was designed to help families understand the school system, graduation requirements for students, and how to be more effectively involved in their children's education. The specific goals of the district activity were to communicate better with the growing Hispanic community; to encourage parent involvement in the schools; and to encourage Hispanic families to plan with their children for post-secondary education.

Houston County learned about this opportunity from a Two Rivers Migrant Education staff member who had seen the program in a neighboring county. The District Parent Coordinator researched the program before deciding to contact the area MALDEF representative and put together a team to work out the details.

The coordinator and the three migrant education liaisons recruited families, arranged childcare and found a non-threatening central location for the classes at a local church. The coordinator also worked with the MALDEF teacher on handouts specific to Houston County, arranged for guest speakers and translators as needed, bought refreshments and planned a program graduation.

A survey and letter were sent to Hispanic families asking about their interest in

the class and their need for transportation and childcare. With this information, organizers choose a central location on a bus line for the workshop sessions and encouraged families to set up carpools. There was no need to provide transportation.

After the first session, parents who attended tried to persuade others to join them. The team found that once parents came, they stayed, so attendance was consistent. The program graduation ceremony included a luncheon and field trip to a local college. The 20 graduates each received a diploma/certificate and small gift for completing the series.

Students benefited from this activity because their parents became more informed about school culture and practices, homework policies and curriculum and graduation requirements. Participating parents seemed to feel more comfortable in the schools and to know more about community resources that would help them learn English.

This course also helped the district's focus on volunteering. Many Hispanic families were reluctant to volunteer because they did not know about activities and could not communicate at school. The training helped to eliminate those limitations for the participating parents. The partnership training also helped the district meet NCLB requirements, as the course included information about the curriculum, testing, Title I and Title III programs, and many ideas for families to become more effectively involved in their child's school life.

Overall, the training was an excellent way for families to get better acquainted with the school and others in their community and to share ideas and information.

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# Military Welcome Packet

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*Virginia Beach City Public Schools  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

It's tough being the "new kid" in class. Children in military families may be the "new kid" several times during their school years. That is why Virginia Beach City Public Schools designed a Military Welcome Packet that will ease the transition for military families new to the area and its school district.

More than 20 percent of the 72,000 students in the Virginia Beach City Public Schools are from families in the military. Through NNPS, the district benefitted from the Military Child Initiative (MCI), which aims to improve schools and educational experiences for highly mobile and vulnerable young people, especially those in military families. The idea for the Welcome Packet originated at meetings of the Military Task Force, which were guided by MCI technical assistance activities from NNPS.

Although tailored to Virginia Beach schools, the packet is available to others on the district's website, [www.vbschools.com](http://www.vbschools.com). In Virginia Beach, the school system advertised the welcome packet in both family and school staff newsletters, as well as on local cable TV. So far, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Requests have come from as far as Djibouti, Germany and Italy.

The packet includes a letter of welcome from the superintendent, literature specific to the school district, including registration information, school locations, curriculum and programs. It also provides important information about the military, such as base locations and medical resources, as well as an informative CD from the Military Child Education Coalition.

The information is aimed at helping families navigate the process of moving, acclimate to a new school, and adapt to life in a large military town. Not only does the packet help simplify the nuts and bolts of transitions to new

schools, but also lets families know that the school district is there to help and that schools and families are partners in education. Most importantly, parents and school staffs reap the benefit of an easier transition for students.

The Task Force offered critiques and suggestions for the packet. Recipients have noted how helpful the information is. Soon the packet will be available as a reference for guidance counselors at every school.

"It is imperative that the Virginia Beach school system is aware of the impact the military has on the lives of the students and people who live in our city," said a high school guidance counselor. "The deployments, the war, and casualties affect all members of a family, whether it is the person who is serving or the spouse and children who stay home. It is my belief that the military initiative is only the beginning step in helping these families make successful transitions into our city."

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# One-Page School Snapshots

*Fresno Unified School District  
Fresno, California*

Communicating with families and helping them find their way around the schools pose some special challenges in the large Fresno Unified School District. In its 97 schools, students speak 78 languages. More than 30 percent of the district's nearly 80,000 students are English Language Learners (ELL).

In light of these realities, the Fresno district wanted to create a welcoming, user-friendly way to engage families and the community and build support for students' development and academic achievement. The district's Community and Family Engagement Network (CFEN) developed one-page school and district office snapshots to acquaint families with people in individual schools and in district departments they may need to contact. The snapshots are available on the CFEN website: [www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdep/cfen](http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdep/cfen).

Each page contains photographs so that parents and other caregivers can identify key people in the schools and district departments. It also contains important information, such as school hours, the school calendar, dress codes and a locator map. Other information includes:

- School and district addresses and websites
- Six ways for families and communities to get involved to increase student success
- Neighborhood Resource Center services
- SafePlace status
- Character traits to model
- Contacts for PTA, Parks & Recreation and a child care center

The pages can be downloaded. To make them more accessible, a school may print and distribute copies of its page and encourage families to post it on their refrigerators. The pages also are distributed at school activities, such as kindergarten orientation.

The CFEN surveyed parent groups, high school student leaders, 25 ethnic and faith-based focus groups, and district department leaders to determine what information should be included in the snapshots. The district

photographer took the pictures of the school and district leaders. One CFEN staff member formatted the information, personalized each page, uploaded the snapshots to the website and modified the information, as needed. The network developed a "modification form" for schools and departments to submit changes in key personnel and other information.

Fresno initiated the One-Page School Snapshots project after seeing the Ohio State Department of Education's virtual reality tour at a Community and Family Engagement Conference. The virtual tour generated a lot of interest in Fresno, prompting the district to adapt some of the ideas to help families and the community connect with schools.

CFEN shared the snapshots at many meetings around the district and with the district's English Learner Advisory Committee, PTA, special education office and many ethnic focus groups.

The project was time-intensive at first, when CFEN was deciding what to include and gathering information and photos. It also was time-consuming to personalize the information for each school and to front load the information. The CFEN director explained that the snapshots continue to require attention due to personnel changes in schools and among administrators. It is necessary to keep the photos and information up-to-date so the pages are truly helpful.

In the future, the district aims to translate the information into the most prevalent languages of the 78 spoken in the district.

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# Parent Center Institute

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*Local District 8, Los Angeles Unified School District  
Gardena, California*

**L**ocal District 8 in Los Angeles has been on a quest – searching for the best in school/family/community partnership (SFPC) team practices and concepts. For the practices it has found and those it plans to develop, the district set up a Parent Center Institute (PCI) to develop partnerships that will help improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.

The PCI provides opportunities for school teams and district leaders to learn and share the best practices, concepts and skills for increasing parent involvement and school partnerships. Its specific goals are to provide opportunities for these groups to learn about latest research; plan partnership annual programs; exchange ideas for parent outreach, and share information and resources for parent centers/programs.

The institute does much of its work through bi-monthly training workshops for school teams that include parent leaders, school volunteers, parent-community representatives, parent center coordinators and others working to build parent partnerships. These workshops are important professional development activities that provide “high-quality training for raising student achievement,” said a parent liaison.

PCI provides additional support by six parent community facilitators, who visit schools and work with institute participants to improve programs and outreach. This approach helps the district’s parent involvement unit and school practitioners obtain current information and continually improve how they build partnerships within a learning community.

The institute also helps the local district implement activities to meet NCLB goals for engaging parents in ways that will help raise achievement, especially for minority students. It answers the call to action for a grassroots movement to promote and support all students’ high achievement in school.

The district realized that one-shot workshops are not effective. Continual training, including attendance at NNPS conferences in Baltimore, enables district leaders to disseminate information and use best practices immediately. Facilitators keep abreast of developments as they train others.

One of the Six Types of Parent Involvement is the focus of each of the three-hour sessions that are conducted by PCI. The presenters demonstrate techniques for effective presentations so that participants can bring the information from the workshop to their schools. The institute also schedules presenters from within and outside the district, who share resources and ideas. Participants usually receive videos, books, pamphlets and copies of materials that they can use with their parent/community volunteers.

“This is the best training I have been to in many years...very practical,” commented one Title I coordinator.

To increase participation, PCI sends information about the workshops to schools early in the year and follows up with fliers and individual mailings. Participation is supported by the local district superintendent, who approves the scheduled practices and sends memos to all administrators, encouraging them to send teams from their buildings.

“More practitioners are working to engage parents,” said one administrator. “We need to keep monitoring to document concrete evidence of how students benefit. We do see evidence of more welcoming school climates, which help children and families feel more comfortable at school.”

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# Parent Volunteers Program

*The School District of Philadelphia  
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A training program for Philadelphia's parents paid off – in many ways. Not only did parents gain leadership skills and earn a stipend for their time, but the district, schools and students reaped benefits, too. The School District of Philadelphia enlisted many new volunteers; schools had more adults on campus to improve school climate; and students began to feel better about their schools.

The Philadelphia school district established the Office of Family, Community & Faith-Based Initiatives (FCF) to develop and manage initiatives that will bridge gaps in home-school connections. The office strives to help parents become effective partners in their children's education, and seeks to establish long-lasting partnerships with community-based organizations and communities of faith.

The district held meetings in different sections of the city to explain the Parent Volunteer Program and recruit parents. Then, the district held an Orientation Training Session. State and Pennsylvania Department of Education representatives greeted the parent volunteers. Six well-established and diverse community organizations provided training on cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, computer basics and school district policies and procedures.

The district assigned the volunteers to various activities at the schools. At a Parent Welcome Desk, volunteers greeted visitors to the school and provided resource materials. Some parents joined a Parent Patrol to monitor public areas in and around their schools. About 1,000 parents participated in the programs in 162 schools. Parents received a stipend after completing 70 hours of work. Throughout the year, the district provided additional training in customer service and parent advocacy. A recognition ceremony celebrated the work of all parent volunteers at the end of the year.

The district encouraged the parent volunteers to expand their leadership by joining the district's Home and School Council, Parent

Leadership Academy and/or Title I Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). These initiatives are working to strengthen awareness of the roles of non-profit organizations in schools.

The Volunteers Program helps parents develop their leadership skills and to see the value of being engaged in their children's education. Importantly, the active presence of parents in and around schools has enhanced everyone's sense of safety and improved the school climate.

The collaboration of the district staff and community-based organizations led to effective recruitment, training, and payroll. Also, working with its large, multiracial schools, the district produced a bilingual English/Spanish recruiting video, Parents and Schools Working Together, and other training materials. The video features parents talking about the importance of getting involved in their children's educations. Next, the district will produce Khmer and Chinese language versions of the video.

A Pennsylvania Department of Education grant provided support for this \$1.7 million project, along with in-kind support from the district. The grant paid for checking criminal and child abuse records of volunteers, incentives, stipends, and some staff support. The work was evaluated with site visits, interviews with parents and principals, and questionnaires after every training session. One of the challenges was getting all of the clearances for qualifying volunteers on time.

District leaders were pleased with the increased number of parent volunteers. "The program provides an excellent opportunity to build more effective school, family and community partnerships within the district," said the Assistant Director of Family Engagement.

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## Pasco Notebooks for ATP Members

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*Pasco School District  
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School and Family District Coordinators in the Pasco School District recognize that the members of their sixteen schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP) wear many different hats. When Pasco joined NNPS in the summer of 2005, the district facilitators wanted to make the ATP members' jobs as easy as possible. To ensure that the members had all pertinent material and paperwork at each monthly meeting, the facilitators developed an organizational and record-keeping system for their schools, appropriately titled the "ATP Handbook."

Each ATP Handbook is a binder with clear outer pockets for the notebook and spine titles to slip in. The district coordinators organized the binder in the following eight sections: Training Materials, One-Year Action Plan, Meeting Minutes, Newsletters, ATP Contact Information, Resources (Help!), Evaluation Tools and Correspondence & Miscellaneous.

Specific materials include the NNPS One-Day Team Training Workshop materials, Epstein's Six Types of Involvement, a sample One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships and a workshop evaluation form. The district employed and trained a high school student to compile the materials.

One of the district coordinators suggested the handbook after attending the NNPS Leadership Development Conference in March 2005. There, all attendees received notebooks with well-organized materials. The district coordinator felt that ATP members also would appreciate having such a notebook. After designing a master notebook, they translated all of the information into Spanish. The ATP members received their notebooks at the beginning of the 2005-06 school year.

The district facilitators encountered "runaway notebooks" that first year. It became difficult to keep count of how many notebooks each school had. To remedy this, the leaders devised an inventory system.

In August of 2006, the district coordinators organized a day long All-ATP Training. ATP leaders received new notebook and spine covers for all team members. They, in turn, returned the previous year's binders to the ATP chair, who forwarded them to the district office. This inventory allowed district coordinators to assess how many notebooks each ATP had.

When a member leaves the team, the notebook is passed along to the new member, as the ATP notebooks are the property of each school. To make the notebooks more useful, the district coordinators provide new binders and spine covers each year with appropriate updates and materials. The notebooks cost about \$5.95 each.

District coordinators received very positive feedback from ATP members. "I really appreciated being given a notebook that not only was well organized, but also was full of valuable information," said a teacher and ATP member. "The first year, I turned many times to the page with district contact information. It's a tangible way to say to someone 'You're on board,' and have them feel included."

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# School & Family Partnerships District Training

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*Pasco School District  
Pasco, Washington*

The district coordinators in the Pasco School District view training as key to building an effective partnership program. Still new to NNPS, the district's School & Family Partnerships Office wanted to provide training for district staff and members of schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) to help them focus on pertinent partnership issues. To build capacity in district schools, the office planned two training workshops on cultural diversity. Parents were welcome, too.

The first, Reach Out to Families: Cultural Competency Building, was a day-long workshop during the district's Professional Development Day in October. The district's School and Family Partnership Coordinators worked with Reach Out, a Seattle-based training and consulting organization, to develop content tailored to Pasco's needs.

The workshop focused on working with families from diverse backgrounds, because about 65% of the families in the district speak a language other than English at home. The training offered staff and ATP members an opportunity to look at their own cultural backgrounds with an eye to how this affects interactions with others.

The second workshop, Latino Family Literacy, was held on a Saturday morning in April as part of the Bilingual Program's Mini-Conference, a day-long series of workshops for the district's bilingual staff. Perla Rodriguez, principal of Cornelius Elementary School in the Forest Grove School District in Oregon, was the keynote speaker.

Her experiences working with Latino/Hispanic families over many years allowed her to develop innovative approaches to building relationships with families, particularly in developing literacy skills. ATP members were invited to attend her presentation and a follow-up breakout session entitled, Latino Family Literacy in the Classroom.

One of the biggest challenges was ensuring that ATP members attended. Although attendance was good, some could not attend. Therefore, the district coordinators provided all ATP chairs with information and handouts from the trainings to share with their teams. The cost of the workshops, about \$8,000, was provided by Title I and Title III funds, with cooperation between these district offices.

These workshops were designed to help educators increase student success. As the district staff becomes more culturally aware and better equipped to work with families from many different backgrounds, students benefit from more open communications, interactions between families and school and increased parent involvement, even if in non-traditional ways.

The family literacy workshop provided many ideas for activities that teachers could conduct in class to learn more about the culture and history of their students. There also were ideas for interactive homework assignments.

Some activities have already been initiated in the district. The participants enjoyed Dr. Rodriguez so much that plans are already in place to have her speak again. Coordinators are also exploring the possibility of a joint training with the staff from her district and of reaching out to include nearby districts.

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## Series of Partnership Handbooks

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*Fort Worth Independent School District  
Fort Worth, Texas*

The district administrators in the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) have done their homework. They read the NNPS *Handbook for Action* from cover to cover, trained 10 pilot schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATP), and understand the dynamics of the schools' staffs and students. In other words, this district has the recipe for partnership success. Part of its work is to provide easy-to-read materials to its partnership schools.

Many families and students in the district are transient. They move in and out of schools in and away from the district. Even principals frequently transfer from school to school. Thus, the success of NNPS implementation depends on the development of short, non-intimidating, user-friendly materials related to the model.

To support and enhance levels of partnership, FWISD created a series of handbooks for administrators, action teams, parent liaisons and volunteers. The handbooks provide schools with resources and ideas for increasing parental involvement in meaningful ways. The district compiled three handbooks:

1. Parent Volunteer Coordinator Manual to assist volunteer coordinators with ideas, tips and various templates (English and Spanish)
2. Epstein Model Training Guide to train ATP members in the NNPS model
3. Fort Worth ISD Promising Practices to share best practices from PTAs, PTOs and Parent Liaisons district-wide

The director of parent engagement distributed the Parent Volunteer Coordinator Manual at two orientation sessions early in the school year. The manual contained numerous suggestions for recruiting, training, monitoring and recognizing volunteers.

The Epstein Model Training Guide is a condensed version of the NNPS Handbook for the district's 10 pilot schools. The guide clearly defines the components of the model, including the Six Types of Involvement, the roles and responsibilities of ATPs and sample one-year action plans.

Finally, the district collected promising practices from its pilot schools to showcase the great partnership work at each school. The district hopes this collection will not only provide ideas to the next cohort of partnership schools, but also make other schools in the district aware of excellent activities. This goal is being met, according to one parent liaison: "I was not aware of some of the activities going on in schools across the district. There are some really good ideas in here."

The district received positive feedback from many teachers, administrators, parents, students and hundreds of district colleagues and community members. "This is a great resource! I love the fact that the English and Spanish versions of the Volunteer Manual are contained in one book. The handbook tells you how to do everything step-by-step," commented one volunteer coordinator.

FWISD is already working on improving the handbooks to support its partnership program efforts. Its Assessment and Data Quality Department is evaluating parent engagement and communication with stakeholders. Next year, the Office of Parent and Public Engagement will work to translate all of the handbooks into Spanish and make them available on the district's website.

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# Transition to Middle School Program

Los Angeles Unified School District (Local District 4)  
Los Angeles, California

The transition from elementary to middle school is often difficult, occurring at a critical time in the social development of adolescents. The stress of adjusting to a new school and classmates affects not only the students, but also their parents and families.

District 4 of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) wanted to make the transition easier for everyone. Although the district had a traditional orientation program, which allowed fifth-graders to visit middle schools, meet teachers and attend orientations, it wanted to do more. District administrators wanted parents to know more about middle school, what their children would experience, and how to help and advocated for their children. District 4 initiated The Transition to Middle School program, in collaboration with a community organization, Families in Schools, and the intervention office of LAUSD.

Ten schools participated this year. The program targets families of fifth graders, who are invited to attend six workshops taught by volunteer parent leaders working with teachers. The series topics are:

- ♦ The Importance of Education
- ♦ The Middle School Campus
- ♦ Academic Achievement
- ♦ Adolescent Social Pressures
- ♦ Parent Engagement
- ♦ Preparing for College.

The workshops include tours of middle schools, explanations of student data, suggestions on how to communicate with teachers and administrators and discussions about college pathways. Each school identified at least 40 families to participate. Parents learn how middle school differs from elementary school and how to support their early adolescents. They also build relationships with other parents. They gain skills in supporting their children academically, socially and emotionally during the sometimes-challenging transition from elementary and middle school.

“This program is excellent!” said one parent. “In the past, the transition to middle school was both confusing and stressful. The program provided me with information that will make it easier for my daughter to attend her new school.”

Teachers, too, found the workshops useful. One fifth-grade teacher said she understands the transition process much better and is able to “confidently communicate with parents, in detail, on the process of elementary to middle school transitioning.”

The district’s Office of School, Family and Community Partnerships played an active role in developing the program. The office staff, one parent coordinator and seven parent/community facilitators worked with the schools to set up the workshops. Each school’s administrators selected the parent/teacher teams, implemented the workshops and identified parent participants. The transition program cost \$12,000, which was paid for by the LAUSD intervention office.

Parents and teachers evaluated each workshop. The information will help improve the content and conduct of the various workshops. The district also will use the data to evaluate how the students adjust and perform on the first grading period in middle school.

Transition to Middle School will be conducted again and improved in several ways. Mainly, it will start early in the second semester. Parent coordinators and parent/community facilitators will be prepared to work more directly with the schools. The district is so pleased with this program that it is considering initiating a similar partnership to ease the transition from middle school to high school.

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# Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through

*Middletown Public Schools  
Middletown, Connecticut*

Research shows that students are more successful in school when parents and the community are involved. It also shows that parents are more likely to visit and volunteer in schools they find attractive and welcoming.

To ensure that it measures up, the Middletown Public Schools District adopted the “Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through,” developed by the Fairfax (Va.) County Public Schools’ Parenting Education Center. It was introduced to the Middletown district by the state’s School Family Community Partners (SFCP) team. What makes the walk-through helpful is that it provides the school with an objective tool for assessing school climate, collecting perceptions, and making recommendations to bring positive change.

By the end of this school year, five schools were scheduled to complete the process, involving more than 2,000 students, 3,000 parents and caregivers and 300 teachers. The superintendent has asked all 11 schools in the district to conduct a walk-through.

A team of parents, staff and community members evaluates the physical environment, school-wide practices and policies, written materials and how welcoming it finds the school staff. The team then makes recommendations to the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), which develops an action plan for implementing the six types of family and community involvement. In addition, the practice also helps the school meet the family involvement requirements of No Child Left Behind by directly involving parents in evaluating and changing communications, procedures and policy.

Each school invites parents, staff, students (in high schools only) and community members to participate. The District Facilitator for Partnerships, the ATP and the principal

put together a representative team to complete the walk-through and make recommendations.

A typical walk-through takes about two hours. It includes a welcome from the principal, a statement of purposes and objectives and description and directions from the district facilitator. The participants are then divided into four smaller teams, which spend about one half hour to:

- \* Walk through the school with the checklist to evaluate the physical environment.
- \* Walk through the school with the checklist to evaluate the welcoming staff.
- \* Review the written materials (gathered by principal in advance) and web site.
- \* Interview the principal on practices and procedures.

Examples of checklist statements and questions include:

- A school map is displayed near the entrance that highlights frequently requested locations.
- When an irate parent calls, the staff member answering the phone remains calm, listens attentively and attempts to solve the problem or find someone who can.
- Is information about school and classroom policies, school rules, parent-teacher conferences and bus and lunch schedules available to parents in their languages?

Following the walk-through, the four small teams summarize their findings, reconvene and suggest next steps. The district facilitator then takes all reports and prepares a list of recommendations, which also includes a commendation section for what is presently working well.

Students benefit directly from the implementation of the recommendations. For example, one Middletown middle school started a chapter of the National Honor Society to recognize students’ academic success. It set up

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additional displays of student work and established awards. The staff also rewrote discipline letters that are sent to families so that they were clearer and more appropriate. One school bought the software for an auto-dialer so it could better inform students and parents about major events. Another school used its auto-dialer more frequently and added messages in Spanish.

Gathering a representative team proved a challenge for some schools. In addition, some teachers and staff members thought the evaluation could be punishing or detrimental to the school. Inviting teachers and all staff to participate was one way to overcome this perception.

In the end, the walk-through was considered a positive activity. It not only offers a concrete strategy for improving the school, but also empowers everyone involved to participate and take pride in those improvements.

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## Youth Net Programs and Youth Net Centers

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*The School District of Philadelphia  
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The School District of Philadelphia teamed up with youth development organizations and faith-based institutions to coordinate secular programs, known as Youth Net Programs, in each of the district's 270 schools. Each region will have a Youth Net Center that will organize, coordinate and provide mentoring opportunities and recreational and educational services in a safe place.

The goal is for every school to partner with a faith-based institution by 2008, and for every school that is on the "persistently dangerous" list and/or not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on test scores to have a Youth Net Center to support student learning and development.

To date, there are four centers, and a fifth is planned for 2007. These centers match students who want to achieve with mentors from various faith-based organizations. They also provide a safe place for social gatherings, homework support, snacks and meals, and extended learning experiences. The centers have served about 4,000 students so far.

The centers also offer programs for parents and adults. One of the centers, The Steel Center, for example, is the most active, with monthly gatherings on topics ranging from street cleanups to city weatherization programs. Other centers have parent advisory committees that include parents, teachers, mentors and others active in the community. They also offer activities, such as evening basketball tournaments, for students and adults. The future center at Benjamin Franklin High School will house a Department of Human Services Truancy Office, so parents and truancy officers can meet during school hours and in the evenings.

"The district realizes that the task of educating its students cannot be effectively accomplished without the support of families, the community, and faith-based entities – all

of which have a vested interest in children's welfare. Services for students and family are ongoing when they are community-anchored," he added.

"Achievement Has Its Privileges" is the motto of these center, which operate from 3 to 7 p.m. daily. Students must meet basic criteria of behavior and attendance. At the beginning of the school year, parents attend an orientation, complete permission forms and agree to attend meetings quarterly on their child's behalf. Volunteers from the community and faith-based organizations staff the centers.

The mentoring initiative recruited clergy who have assisted the district in times of need. Members of their congregations also were called upon to assist their local schools. After being trained, these individuals were assigned to mentoring or safety programs. They received additional training in parent advocacy and safety throughout the year. For instance, Townwatch Integrated Services, a city agency, offers workshops to volunteers on Safe Corridors and effective adult presence in schools.

Developing and implementing partnership strategies make it possible to enhance the quality of learning and school life for all students in the target schools. A Sports Bond grant with in-kind support from the district is supporting the first series of Youth Net Centers.

A major challenge in initiating the centers was convincing regional and local school leaders that communities of faith can operate legally within the principle of separation of church and state. Another challenge involved designing spaces for extended learning and mentoring in the sites selected for these centers.

The district used fliers, newspaper ads, Public Service Announcements, public television shows and radio appearances to publicize the programs and centers. About 1,000

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teachers and administrators, 300 community members and 100 district colleagues joined the effort.

“When volunteers get involved in the schools, they give students a greater sense of self-worth, which often helps the students set and meet higher expectations for themselves,” a district administrator commented. Students who participated at the centers began to see school as a more welcoming place, because of the volunteers.

The benefits were reciprocal. The community volunteers gained respect from school personnel for their invaluable contributions in improving school climate and a broader sense of community.

In addition to adding another center, plans for the 2007-08 school year include a Parent Leadership Academy satellite office in all centers to offer twice-weekly free workshops and seminars to meet the needs of parents and families.

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## Data Collection

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*Hawaii State Department of Education  
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A common question among NNPS members is: “How should I collect data to evaluate our partnership program?” The Hawaii State Department of Education found an answer when its 20-year-old Parent Community Networking Center (PCNC) program teamed up with an updated web-based data collection mechanism.

In the past, PCNC collected parent involvement data manually and stored it in binders. Data collection consumed a lot of the facilitators’ time and reports were difficult to generate. This year, the center worked to make reports instantly accessible to all school, district and state personnel. The data collection transformation began when the education department created a web database for various support programs. PCNC facilitators learned how to keep records of their parent involvement activities and to provide web-based data input – a much easier process than in the past. Finally, state and district leaders trained school and district PCNC facilitators to use the technology and produce and analyze reports.

With the new data collection mechanism in place, PCNC facilitators at each school input parent involvement activities into the statewide database. The database contains information on the purpose of activity, type of parent involvement, people involved, cost, evaluation and activity’s relation to academic goals. Schools are able to use their records for:

- School improvement
- Evaluating progress of partnership programs
- Assessing the need for staff development

More specifically, this system enables facilitators to generate reports about which students’ families attend particular activities. Finally, the reports’ clear focus assisted every school and district in evaluating how they are addressing the No Child Left Behind requirements for parental involvement.

The data collection system cost about \$50,000, covered primarily by state funds.

Time to develop, learn, and prepare leaders to use the system was the biggest challenge. Key stakeholders and leaders invested a great deal of time mapping out the database and identifying the kind of reports and results the state department of education, districts and schools wanted to produce.

Another challenge was to help the facilitators use new technology and to change the way they entered data on family involvement activities at their schools. State and district leaders provided user-friendly, hands-on training to help ease the facilitators’ transition to the new data entry system.

Hawaii’s new data collection system is estimated to have benefited more than 2,000 teachers, administrators and other staff, and countless parents, caregivers, and other district and state leaders. Students benefit because it allows schools to productively self-evaluate their school, family, community partnership programs. As more and more schools’ Action Teams for Partnerships are trained, more facilitators for partnerships will be encouraged to input data into the new database, which will continue to be updated for easier use.

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# Hawaii Parent Guide: A Resource for Families

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*Family Support, Student Support Services Branch  
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The Hawaii State Department of Education made parents' jobs a little easier by putting a lot of useful information at their fingertips.

The Hawaii Parent Guide: A Family Resource, published for the first time this year, includes emergency phone numbers, a school calendar, information on relevant agencies, articles on first-aid and parenting tips. It also explains the six types of involvement and gives examples of each. In addition, the guide recognizes outstanding parent volunteers and encourages parent involvement.

"Thank you for the information in the Parent Guide. It matters!" commented a teacher. "I agree that parents are their children's first and life-long teachers! We only live with their keiki (children) for 9 months."

The idea for the guide grew out of a need – parents often depend on school personnel for the answers to every type of question about their children. School personnel often don't have all the answers and are not always successful in locating the appropriate resources. Now, a wealth of information is in one bound publication.

The department published 185,000 copies, with help from its friends and community partners. When the first printing was distributed, the department published a version on its website for easy use. The Honolulu Advertiser published the guide with about a dozen sponsors who contributed \$5,000 each to cover printing and publication costs. The total cost was about \$60,000.

Because this was the first such family resource guide, selling the idea to partnering agencies was a challenge. A department specialist explained that there was no sample to show, only an idea to present. The leaders solved the challenge through regular meetings and contact with various agencies that liked the idea and

had a vested interest in the main audience for the guide – Hawaii's families. The guide also marks the first time the Department of Education and the Department of Health produced a joint publication.

In addition to finding a publisher and sponsors, the department had to set deadlines for submitting articles, review and edit submitted materials, meet with the publisher to design the guide, send it to all sponsors for proofing, distribute it, and accommodate requests for additional copies.

The guide generated a lot of enthusiasm. "This is an excellent resource. I personally grabbed one of those 185,000 copies. Thanks to you and your team," said a district leader. Many people in the medical field (hospitals, children's clinics and health organizations) also found it useful and called for copies.

Due to the overwhelming success of the first guide, the publisher agreed to be a partner with the department for the next issue.

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## Keep the Website Simple

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*Family Support, Student Support Services Branch  
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**H**aving a website is standard practice for every organization, and the Family Support Office of the Hawaii Department of Education is no exception. This state-level office noticed that few people actually used its site. Leaders decided to revamp the existing website to communicate the importance of its partnership program and to provide district- and school-level family involvement specialists with a user-friendly resource.

The Family Support Office decided to organize the website to meet the needs of district, school and state personnel, as well as community agencies, parents and Parent Community Networking Centers. The website assists those specifically charged to implement family/ community involvement requirements with information on No Child Left Behind, English Language Learners, special education, teacher standards boards, the department of education strategic plan and Hawaii Board of Education policy.

Some of the resources include a start-up collection of local promising partnership practices shared by schools and that other schools can use or adapt. To ensure that family involvement specialists receive the best information, the website is updated weekly and additions are publicized through an e-mail list and the statewide newspaper.

While it was a challenge to redesign the website, recognizing the hard work of the original designers, it was important to make improvements and to get everyone to work toward its successful transformation. Another plus of the new website was the price: Free! Family Support completed its own web design and the Department of Education provided the site itself.

Many who have taken advantage of the new design comment that it is easy to navigate. In addition, some of the information is available only on the Family Support website, including

the electronic version of the first Hawaii Parent Guide.

Students will benefit if their parents are better informed about the types of involvement for remaining engaged in their children's education. The website also lists workshops and other opportunities that will help parents cope with the challenges of parenthood at all grade levels.

Because of the nature of websites in general, it is difficult to measure precisely how many individuals have or will benefit from the new design. Family Support Office leaders, however, estimate that more than 2,500 teachers, administrators and other staff members have already benefited from the website, as well as more than 500 parents, 200 community members and 50 district leaders.

Although the website has been operating for only 10 months, the results and feedback are extremely positive. The state's special education leader said, "You have developed an incredible website! Very exciting, informative and user-friendly! I especially liked how you incorporated the many community agencies and linked to their web sites. WOW!!!"

The family support office plans to add more resources and program areas. It is also looking for more local promising practices so that every school can be featured in sharing activities in the partnership section.

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# Maryland Parent Advisory Council

Maryland State Department of Education  
Baltimore, Maryland

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) knew that it wanted to raise student achievement in its schools and that increased parent involvement was one way to accomplish that goal. The department leaders also knew, however, that this goal would not be accomplished overnight. MSDE developed a long-term plan for increasing parent involvement in Maryland's public schools.

M-PAC is Maryland's Parent Advisory Council, a statewide group of 120 parents, educators and advocates appointed by the State Superintendent of Schools, Nancy S. Grasmick, in the fall of 2003. Its purpose was to advise Dr. Grasmick and the State Board of Education on parent involvement issues ranging from policy to implementation.

To insure that M-PAC represented all of Maryland's parents, membership nominations were solicited from many groups and organizations that work with parents and families. The department selected members to serve on the main committee and on subcommittees, based on their expertise, region and experience.

The department's vision for education is organized around five goals. MSDE charged M-PAC with examining Goal 5: "Parents will be involved in education." The council examined state, local and school-based policies and school-based implementation strategies. The Main Council of M-PAC oversaw the work of three subcommittees on: 1) parent/family involvement and its impact on student achievement; 2) communication and partnership through non-traditional channels such as community and faith-based groups; and 3) education policy issues.

M-PAC's subcommittees conducted research, attended presentations by state and national experts, provided the Main Council with regular progress reports and produced final reports. From March through May 2005, M-PAC held public forums in all 24 school districts to give the public an opportunity to

review and provide feedback on the preliminary recommendations. The forums were well-publicized in multiple languages and formats, and yielded an impressive turnout in many locales.

M-PAC produced a final report, "A Shared Responsibility: Recommendations for Increasing Family and Community Involvement in Schools," and an executive summary that has been widely distributed. One recommendation stated that parents should participate on statewide and local educational committees and task forces. After publication of the report, MSDE surveyed these task forces and committees to see that they included parents.

Another recommendation focused on increasing parental involvement in decision-making. MSDE partnered with other organizations, including NNPS, to increase training opportunities for parents in the decision-making process and in developing school-based partnership programs. Still another recommendation addressed the need for varied methods of communication to parents. The department now translates publications in multiple languages and has designed a website that is more parent-friendly.

By heightening awareness of the importance of parent involvement, the state has increased opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education at many levels. This should increase the chances for success of the more than 800,000 Maryland students.

The work continues. A new group, the Superintendent's Family Involvement Council, was formed to advise the state superintendent on issues related to family involvement. This council meets twice a year to give parents' perspectives on statewide issues and activities.

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# Quality Partnering

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*Hawaii State Department of Education  
Honolulu, Hawaii*

For years, the Hawaii Parental Information and Resource Center (HPIRC) has strongly supported the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE). This past school year, DOE extended this relationship by inviting the Resource Center's staff to join its week-long NNPS training. Center staff and education department personnel eagerly attended the training and committed to implementing the NNPS model in Hawaii's schools.

Collaboration between the two organizations aimed at:

- Aligning the goals of the HPIRC with the goals of the DOE Family Support Office;
- Encouraging and implementing the training of Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) and various other school teams for partnerships statewide; and
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the training and program implementation.

HPIRC and the Family Support Office at the education department share similar goals, target the same audience and collect data on parent involvement. By combining efforts and sharing resources and expertise, the two groups have learned to work smarter and more efficiently than if they worked alone.

Resource Center employees have a wealth of experience and expertise in education and evaluation that they can share with the family support office staff. In turn, DOE offered free training in the NNPS model, which the HPIRC staff can use to help familiarize school districts about partnership programs.

The two groups have set an ambitious goal of training all of districts in the state to facilitate their schools in development more effective partnership programs. The two agencies are working to get on the agenda of each district's leadership team meetings, principal meetings and Complex Area Superintendent meetings, to describe how they can assist the

schools with their work on partnerships. Once the initial agenda at district-level meetings is met, HPIRC and DOE will continue to collaborate in supporting and maintaining school teams.

An added benefit of the partnership of HPIRC and DOE is that both groups can help districts and schools meet requirements of No Child Left Behind by strengthening their family involvement programs. The new agenda consolidates the programs that the Hawaii DOE has implemented for the last 20 years with its parent Community Networking Centers.

In addition to state colleagues, more than 50 teachers, administrators and staff, 50 parents, 30 community members and 25 district leaders were directly involved in developing the new partnership and in working together as if they were from one organization.

Hawaii's leaders encourage other states in NNPS to partner with their PIRCs and with other educational departments that share the same vision and agenda for improving programs of family and community involvement in every school. Offices that have a common goal and vision can build on each other's strengths and resources, as did HPIRC and the DOE's Family Support Office.

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# Wisconsin's REACH Initiative

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction  
Madison, Wisconsin

How can partnerships help schools remove barriers to learning and promote the success of all students in the state? Wisconsin's REACH (Responsive Education for All Children) Initiative provides schools with leadership and technical assistance to increase instructional options, professional development and family-school-community partnerships.

The REACH Family Involvement Team (FIT), a collaborative group of five state agencies and organizations, offers assistance and resources to district and building leadership teams so they can better meet students' needs by strengthening partnerships. FIT, which functions as a state-level Action Team for Partnerships, urges schools to use the Six Types of Family-School-Community Partnerships to achieve their school improvement goals. It also advises schools to form action teams and explore how partnerships can help the school meet academic and behavioral goals.

Despite its diverse representation, FIT works because it focuses on families' strengths in helping children learn and grow. The group meets every other month to develop technical assistance materials, design workshops and review networking opportunities offered at four REACH Regional Collaborative Centers.

FIT kicked off its REACH efforts in December 2006 with a two-day "training of trainers" for 35 parents, mentors and educators statewide. They learned how to help schools infuse effective partnership plans and practices into their goals for students. Research-based partnership materials from NNPS formed the backbone of all five partnership-promoting workshops.

REACH emphasizes the importance of well-organized programs of family and community involvement. Although competitive grants are available to schools and districts implementing REACH, the goal is for all schools in Wisconsin to adopt a collaborative approach to

prevent students' learning and behavior problems, especially among students who are at risk of failing or of being referred to special education programs.

REACH is a major initiative of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction; it promotes State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's "New Wisconsin Promise," – a commitment to close the achievement gap. The New Wisconsin Promise also encourages greater parent and community involvement in public schools and libraries. The initiative is receives federal grant money. In 2006-07, 271 Wisconsin schools in 93 districts received \$1.4 million in REACH funds.

One parent in a REACH school commented: "It's an overwhelmingly wonderful feeling to have a room full of loving, caring people ... drawing on varied backgrounds ... getting to know your child and working together to assure that this young mind is receiving the best education he or she can."

FIT also makes written and online family-school-community partnership materials available to teachers, who meet frequently with each other and with school support staff to share ideas on helping children learn. This group developed "The Team Approach to Meeting Student Needs: A Guide for Families in English and Spanish." The group is working on another publication, "Involving Families in Meeting Student Needs: A Guide for School Staff," to be published in 2007 and distributed to all Wisconsin schools.

FIT's ongoing support for partnerships ensures that families will continue to play a central role in helping children learn and flourish.

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