

P

HOMWORK HOTLINE

**Valley View
Parent-Teacher Co-Op School
Cleveland, Ohio**

How do we encourage positive connections between families and schools? Parents, teachers, and the school administration at Valley View Parent Teacher Co-Op School are working to achieve communication through their "Homework Hotline." This automated phone system provides the following services for families, students, and the school: 1) parents may alert the school when their child will be absent; 2) parents and children may call the system to find out daily homework assignments; 3) the computer prints out the total number of phone calls made to inquire about school information.

Those involved in the project at Valley View promote the "Homework Hotline" as useful for any school. It is particularly helpful to those schools that have parent populations spread over a wide area. Funds for the project were acquired through a special fund as part of 'Vision 21' which benefits those schools who adopt a parent-teacher cooperative school model.

Reports of "Homework Hotline" use are quite impressive!! As of late January 1998, 3,747 calls have been made to the school! This large number of calls certainly suggests that Type 2 (Communicating) is growing at Valley View Parent-Teacher Co-op School.

Rita Vitanza, Lead Teacher
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PARENT INFORMATION FOLDER

Arbor Hills Junior High
Sylvania, Ohio

Arbor Hills is located in a suburban town in Northwest Ohio. The 1997-98 school year brought a unique situation to Arbor Hills with the introduction of two new grade levels into our school. We had an entirely new sixth grade being added to our building as well as the regularly planned seventh graders.

The Action Team wanted to address how to better communicate every aspect of school and community life. To achieve this we developed a "Parent Information Folder." This folder contains grade specific information and is provided free of charge to each family in our school.

Action Team members contacted every school group, club, extra-curricular activity, community organization, district recreation group, and community service organization requesting information on their activities that could be included in the Parent Information Folder. The response was overwhelming. The Parent Information Folder is an easy reference for parents and students alike. The folder also contains a Parent Club newsletter, grade specific school supply list, letter from the principal, athletic newsletter, medication forms, a student newspaper, and a parent volunteer survey.

Parent surveys about the Parent Information Folder have been extremely positive. The contents of the Parent Information Folder provide early answers to frequently asked questions. School policy, homework hotline numbers, school rules and regulations are already provided to students through their agenda book. Parents rarely have easy access to this information. The Parent Information Folder provides families with their own access to this valuable information.

An additional benefit came from the parent volunteer survey. Responses were used to create an extensive volunteer binder. The binder was provided to each teacher with grade specific information, volunteer job qualifications, speaker's bureau resources, and other valuable parent resources.

Plans for next year's folders are already being made. The Action Team will review all suggestions regarding the folder contents and make improvements and

adjustments where necessary. Although the Action Team had high expectations for this partnership activity, no one expected such a tremendous, positive response.

The Parent Information Folder is easily adapted to other schools. The activity will be on-going at Arbor Hills and continually evaluated.

Rita M. Fruth, Action Team Leader
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ROAD RUNNER RALLY

Arbor Hills Junior High
Sylvania, Ohio

The Road Runner Rally was selected as a kick-off event for our school because of its wide suitability for the entire school community. It was age appropriate for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and parents. The 1997-98 school year brought a unique situation to Arbor Hills with the introduction of two new grade levels into our school. We had an entirely new sixth grade being added to our building as well as the regularly planned seventh graders.

In May 1997, our Action Team designed a family-oriented way to familiarize students and families with the junior high school and make the first day of school more comfortable for everyone. Over the course of the summer, plans for the event evolved. Each team participant became responsible for one or more aspects necessary to produce an efficient, worthwhile event.

The Road Runner Rally included free refreshments, a disc jockey, raffle prizes, and the opportunity to mingle with school system administrators, teachers, and representatives of school clubs and organizations. Students picked up class schedules, became familiar with lockers and combinations, and reunited with friends. Parents paid school fees before the start of the school year.

Various resources contributed to the success of this activity. The Parent Club provided volunteers and financial support. Community business donations were requested and received. The Sylvania Community Action Team provided financial support with a mini-grant for the event. The township Police Department DARE program provided personnel support and donated raffle items. Ohio Partnership 2000 provided leadership, volunteers the day of event, and financial support. Returning eighth grade students served as volunteer guides.

The results of this event were evident almost immediately. Families met with staff, teachers, community members, and other families in a "festival-like" setting. Over 450 families attended (seventy-five percent of our school population). Parents paying fees prior to the first day of school created "the smoothest start to a school year anyone remembered."

The feedback received from parent surveys taken the day of the event suggested some opportunities for improvement. Suggestions included adding more volunteers; providing student escorts to assist with lockers and give guided tours; improving signs and posting more school maps; and increasing the length of time for the event. Consideration will be given to these issues when planning the Second Road Runner Rally. The overall response from participants and staff was extremely positive.

Rita M. Fruth, Action Team Leader
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National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University
Promising Partnership Practices 1998

SCHOOL-FAMILY COMMUNICATION BAGS

Barrett Academy
Akron, Ohio

Staff and parents at Barrett Academy will try using "communication bags" during the '98-'99 academic year. These bags include materials that are color-coded according to grade. For example, first grade might be assigned the color yellow, and second grade might be assigned green. Inside the bag of the first grader would be a yellow refrigerator clip and a yellow pad of paper. The purpose of the clip is for the child and parent to post teacher communication about the child. In addition, all homework assignments would be printed on yellow paper for first graders and green paper for second graders. To encourage parent-teacher communication, the color pad of paper is included so that parents may write notes to their children's teachers.

The idea of the communication bags resulted from a planning session of staff and parents. The goal is to provide a colorful visual cue to catch parents' attention regarding homework and teacher notes. It was also hoped that children may develop a special identity with a grade level.

Grant money became available after the start of the '97-'98 school year, and the Action Team unanimously decided to postpone implementing the activity until the beginning of the next school year. The grant money covered the large expenditure for the actual bags, and school supply money paid for the color paper. Staff donated time for ordering, arranging materials, and inservicing teachers about the purpose. Parents responsible for the "communication bag" activity will make the presentation of the bags to children in their classes and explain the purpose to parents at an open house prior to giving them to students.

Carolyn Collins, counselor
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COMMUNICATION

Curtis Bay Elementary School Baltimore, Maryland

Curtis Bay Elementary School has been a part of the School, Family, Community Partnership Initiative for nine years. We feel the partnerships encouraged by this initiative are responsible, at least in part, for the academic improvement made by our students in the last few years. Curtis Bay has also seen an increase in students scoring at a satisfactory or better level on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program from 6.5% in 1993 to 44% in 1998.

We have always felt that communication with parents and members of the community is essential for their active involvement in the school. Staff members at the school send out monthly newsletters that contain a schedule of events, articles from each class in the school, a list of students with perfect attendance for the month, a list of students with birthdays during the month, and information especially for parents. Included with the newsletter is a copy of the Home/School connection. This handout provides parents with tips for helping their children with reading and math. At the end of the newsletter is a response form on which parents can list any comments or questions. If parents sign this form and return it to school, their children receive a pencil.

Since we feel that parents should be contacted on the first day of their children's absences from school, we invested in phones for each classroom. Teachers make phone calls to parents about attendance, achievement, and/or behavior. Attendance postcards and letters are sent to the home of students who don't have phones or who have been absent frequently.

Half-and-half letters are used occasionally when there are issues for which we would like our parents' opinions. At the beginning of the school year when we extended our school day by one half-hour, we used half-and-half letters. We stated the reasons why we wanted to extend the day, and we solicited the opinions of our stakeholders.

Since Curtis Bay Elementary School is a CORE Knowledge school, family projects are assigned monthly that correlate with the subject matter taught in the classroom. Many teachers give weekly homework assignments so that parents are aware of the entire week's assignment at the beginning of the week and can organize their time accordingly.

Teachers, students, parents and staff at Curtis Bay Elementary have enjoyed being part of the Partnership Network, and we are looking forward to continued involvement in the years to come.

Jackie Griswold, Action Team Chair
(410) 396-1397

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University
Promising Partnership Practices 1998

VIP ENVELOPES

Northside Elementary School
St. James, Minnesota

We began using VIP (Very Important Papers) Envelopes at Northside Elementary School in January 1997. It was our hope that the envelopes would help to foster improved communication between school and home. The envelopes are not intended for daily class work; they are intended for special papers that sometimes get lost at the bottom of a school bag or that are often discarded with worksheets.

We purchased red top-zippered fabric envelopes (1 4 1/2" x 11") for each child in kindergarten through grade three. "Northside Elementary School" and "VIP Envelope" were stamped on the front, and the students' names were written on the envelopes with a permanent marker. Students receive the envelope in kindergarten, and they take it home permanently to keep at the completion of third grade.

A mini-grant with our district contributing a stipend provided the funding for the initial purchase of the envelopes at approximately \$4.00 each. We sent envelopes home on Wednesday with school notices, report cards, and special papers. A signature sheet is in the envelope for parents to sign. Some teachers had their students pack the envelopes so they would know the contents, and others have a volunteer staff envelopes.

If an envelope fails to be returned, parents are contacted by phone or note sent with the student. Approximately 90% of the envelopes are returned weekly. Parents may purchase new envelopes if they are lost.

Parents have expressed positive comments as they know when to look for something special from the school, and some parents feel it is a good organizational tool for their child. It has proven to be an effective form of two-way communication between our school and families.

Barb Price, Staff Representative on Type 4 Committee
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YEAR OF THE FAMILY

Oakdale Elementary School
Cincinnati, Ohio

"Year of the Family" was the Oakdale Elementary P.T.A. theme for the 1997-98 school year. We noticed a lack of volunteers, especially new volunteers, who help out at our school.

Therefore, the "Year of the Family" originated with these goals:

- Encourage volunteerism, especially among parents who had never become involved
- Enhance the family atmosphere at Oakdale
- Make parents feel more comfortable at our school
- Let children know their parents are committed to their schooling
- Encourage repeat volunteerism

We implemented three programs to help develop family involvement. The first, "Helping Hands," was our way of encouraging parents to contribute their time. "Helping Hands" challenged all families to volunteer two hours sometime during the year. We sent letters that explained the program to every family two weeks before the start of school. Pledge cards were included in the letter, and after parents finished the two hours of service, they completed the card with their family name and sent it to school. We placed the cards on a bulletin board at school and continually added them as the year and program progressed. To date, more than fifty percent of the families at Oakdale have participated in "Helping Hands."

The second family program was a social event combined with a service project. Our Family Picnic (started three years ago) has become a traditional icebreaker for the new school year. The P.T.A. invited families, teachers, and administrators to spend a Sunday afternoon at Oakdale on the playground. The day consisted of a picnic, chalk drawing on the blacktop, and face painting by Oakdale Alumni (Junior High students). The week before the picnic, "plots" of blacktop were sold to families during school hours for \$5.00/plot, and we sent "deeds" home with the children as a reminder of the event. On Sunday, families created chalk designs on their plots. Together, the drawings combined to make a huge mural on the playground.

This year, a local business contributed supplies for the day. Biggs Foods supplied hamburgers and hot dogs and sent employees to man the grill. Students from school-sponsored scouting groups sold soft drinks and desserts. Besides having some quality time with their own family, parents and students had a chance to mingle with teachers and their families. This relaxed setting made for a wonderful way to get to know the teacher and helped remind parents that teachers are

approachable. Money collected through the sale of family plots, face painting, and food went to funding school programs. This is a great way to open the school year and include the whole school community!

The third program took place in February. The Family Dinner was held to provide an opportunity for families to enjoy a dinner together and to be with other families. We also wanted to increase attendance at the P.T.A. meeting that was scheduled to follow the dinner. We felt this would help improve communication of school information to parents. Informed parents are more likely to be actively involved in their children's school.

Tickets went on sale three weeks before the dinner and were priced so that cost would not prohibit families from attending. Tickets were advertised and volunteers solicited in the P.T.A. and school newsletters. Advance ticket sales accounted for most of the three hundred tickets sold. We gave complimentary tickets to Oakdale teachers and staff. Many teachers bought additional tickets for their family members.

Again, Biggs Foods volunteered to help our P.T.A. The store donated all food and supplies, except desserts and beverages. Four Biggs employees helped with the meal. Set up was accomplished with the help of teachers, parents, and students. P.T.A. volunteers, former students and Biggs employees worked together to serve spaghetti, sauce, bread, salad, and the desserts that Oakdale families contributed. A paid school cafeteria employee supervised volunteers in the kitchen.

As the dinner ended, a short P.T.A. business meeting began. Following that, a 4th Grade class put on a program. Of course, parents of those 4th Graders stayed to see the performance. So did many other parents and students who may have otherwise not come.

We feel the dinner was a success as we accomplished our goals. Families enjoyed themselves, the P.T.A. meeting was well attended, and many new and familiar volunteers helped with the event. Income from ticket sales exceeded expenses, and profits were given to a fund used by teachers for an existing school program. We plan to make the Family Dinner a yearly event. With more advance advertising, we hope to increase participation.

Denise Bourke, P.T.A. President
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TYPE 3 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.

MOMS ON THE MOVE

**Howard Elementary School
Cincinnati, Ohio**

We, the parent volunteers at Howard Elementary School, have many programs to encourage parental involvement in children's education. One that I feel works best is our coordination of school volunteers. Parent volunteers help with childcare, tutoring, copying, mailings, and many other tasks.

We felt that parents should feel needed, wanted, and most of all, welcomed at the school. In the beginning of the 1997 school year, we sent home a volunteer survey asking about the special talents and abilities of our parents.

Upon receipt of our surveys, we went about scheduling parents to assist with childcare, tutoring, copying, or office help for teachers. Because many of our parents have young children at home, we needed to have childcare coverage to permit these parents the opportunity to volunteer at the school. We have use of a kindergarten room from 1 to 2 PM Monday-Thursday. Each Monday, parent volunteers also help the teachers by sending out copies of homework and newsletters to the parents of all students. Finally, one mother serves as the "copy mom" daily. The coordination of parent volunteers benefits both teachers and parents. Teachers appreciate all of the volunteer help they are receiving, and the parents feel pride in being able to help out.

As an incentive to our volunteers (who are not all parents), we set up a log of hours for each volunteer. Those that reach 30 hours or more receive a polo shirt that reads "TOGETHER WE CAN". Parents feel honored to wear one of these shirts.

One of the Howard Elementary teachers donated a refrigerator for the workroom. We keep this supplied with soft drinks for our volunteers. Our Ohio Partnership 2000 grant money pays for the cost of the necessary supplies. We find that the work provided by the volunteers and the partnership between our school and families outweighs any of the costs associated with keeping the activity running!

Melissa Bradford, Parent
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THE PARENT RESOURCE DIRECTORY

Williamston Middle School and
Williamston High School
Williamston, Michigan

It may be a small community, but Williamston, Michigan is filled with talented, skilled people with a myriad of areas of expertise! Our middle and high schools faced an interesting challenge: how could we tap into the tremendous untapped resource our schools' parents had to offer?

The idea we came up with: a Parent Resource Directory. We made an important distinction right off the bat--this would not be simply a volunteer program enlisting help for a variety of generic volunteer activities. Instead, we would create a "talent pool"--a gathering of information allowing us to match the schools' needs with parents' unique skills and areas of interest.

Our goal was simple: to more effectively recognize and utilize the talents, skills, and expertise of as many parents as possible. How could we begin to do so?

We began by creating a **worksheet** to survey parents about the resources they could potentially offer to our students (attached). The worksheet included several types of information: (1) demographic--parent's name, address, phone number, student, and grade level of student; (2) career, hobbies, and interests--what skills and areas of interest did each parent have?; (3) availability--could a parent help from home? at school? If they could come to school how often--once a year, once a month, once a week?; and (4) opportunities--a list of possible volunteer opportunities a parent could express interest in learning more about. (We made sure the list included several opportunities a parent could do at home.) The worksheet also contained a disclaimer: by filling it out, the parent was simply giving us information for future opportunities to help, not committing to volunteer.

We presented the worksheet at the fall **Open House**, showing it to parents gathered in an audience, expressing our appreciation for their talents and abilities, and stressing that the worksheet would simply allow us to set up a database for future opportunities. The principal then asked parents to fill out the worksheet right then and turn it in. At our high school, we gained 230 worksheets on two occasions (Orientation and Open House). At our middle school, we gained 125 worksheets at Open House. We plan to present it again this spring at our incoming sixth grade parent orientation.

Once we had the completed worksheets in hand, we set up a simple **database** including all of the information on each worksheet. From the database, we

generated lists of parents willing to consider helping with staff appreciation, making phone calls to other parents, sharing an interest with a class, providing snacks, helping in a classroom or in the office, and so on. Each list contained parent names and phone numbers. We then bound the lists together into a **Parent Resource Directory** and distributed the directory to all staff members, showing them how to use it and explaining the need to call on as many different parents as possible.

Next, we recruited a parent at each grade level to serve as **volunteer coordinator** for the grade level. Each of our three coordinators received a copy of the directory plus copies of all worksheets in alphabetical order in a three-ring binder. We explained to each coordinator how to use the system and again stressed the need to "spread the wealth"--involving as many different parents as possible. We also added lists of parent addresses and phone numbers so teachers and volunteer coordinators could quickly find addresses when writing thank yous.

Finally, we included a **Parent Volunteer Request Form** in the front of the directory. This reproducible form contained all of the information a volunteer coordinator would need to line up parent help: number of parents needed, date needed, times needed, and any instructions. The teacher or other staff person could simply xerox the form, fill out the information, and turn it in to the appropriate volunteer coordinator. The coordinator, in turn, would go to the directory to find parents who might be suited for or interested in that particular project. Once the coordinator had contacted the number of parents needed, he or she could record names and phone numbers on the bottom of the request form, then return the form to the teacher. The teacher would then have a list of parent helpers and their phone numbers in case of last-minute changes or instructions.

We tried to make the system as easy and efficient as possible for busy staff members and volunteer coordinators to use. Now to put it to the test: Would it work?

Since we produced and distributed the directory in December of 1997, we have seen an *explosion* of parent help and involvement in our secondary schools, where parents were formerly so infrequently used. In the middle school, over 70 different parents have chaperoned parties and field trips, helped with a sixth-grade cookout, helped in seventh grade classrooms with special projects, begun coming in to work with students on a regular basis, helped in the computer lab, graded papers at home, agreed to make phone calls to other parents, and come in to speak to students about their careers, their ethnic backgrounds, and their travels. As an example, we organized a day-long "Journey to Japan" that brought in Japanese parents and grandparents plus many other people of Japanese heritage in the Lansing, Michigan community and at nearby Michigan State University. During the journey, these parent and community volunteers taught our seventh graders, who were studying the area, origami (paper folding) and ikebana (flower arranging); demonstrated Japanese swordsmanship and kendo (fencing with bamboo staves); gave every student the chance to try on traditional Japanese kimonos and sandals; cooked an entire Japanese meal and taught the students to eat with chopsticks at

lunch; and spoke to them about Japanese life and culture, history, and modern-day sports and education. This was made possible because of parents who had filled out Parent Resource Worksheets indicating knowledge about Japan!

At the high school level, parents have participated in a career fair and conducted mock interviews for eleventh graders; served bagel and juice to students during exam week; evaluated student presentations in physics classes; organized a committee to put on an all-night after-prom party; and evaluated book talks presented by tenth graders. All these activities were organized using the high school's Parent Resource Directory, and over 80 parents have been involved in these activities since the directory was produced and distributed in December--under four months ago!

Our staff and parents have enthusiastically joined in to help us reach our goal of valuing and making use of unique parent skills and areas of knowledge. Staff now regularly refer to the directory to find parent help, and parents express their appreciation at getting the chance to come in to the school to participate in their children's education in more meaningful ways. The Parent Resource Directory has been a great success!

Ann Cody, Action Team Co-Chair
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Williamston Middle School
Parent Resource Worksheet

Name _____

Address _____ Phone _____

WMS Student(s) _____ Grade Level _____

_____ Grade Level _____

Career (or work-related skills) _____

Hobbies and interests _____

Other talents or areas of knowledge _____

I would consider helping:

___ Once a week ___ Once a month ___ Once a year ___ Occasionally

___ I can help from home (example: making phone calls, providing baked goods, or juice for student activities, or sending in materials needed for a class)

___ I might be able to help during the school day on these days: _____

If I did decide to help, I would probably want to (check as many as desired):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help in the office | <input type="checkbox"/> Help in a classroom (special projects, paperwork, small groups) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help organize a school/class function | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with fall Open House |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help in the library | <input type="checkbox"/> Share an interest or talent with a class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Share career information with a class | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervise a student study group |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tutor a student in _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate a student presentation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help in computer lab | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with Olympic Days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serve on School Improvement Committee or other policy-making group | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide snacks for a school function |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fold and label monthly newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with All-School Party |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help organize a school function | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with athletics |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chaperone a party or other activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Accompany students on field trip |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with extracurricular groups (drama, Student Council Honors Club, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Make phone calls to parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with alternative lunchtime activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with staff appreciation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with music groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with clubs' weekend activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help with fundraising | <input type="checkbox"/> Help with craft show |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Be an occasional Picture Person | <input type="checkbox"/> Be a part of Parents as Partners |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Recruit and schedule volunteers |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Help any way I can--just ask |

PLEASE NOTE: Filling out this form **does not** obligate you to volunteer. You are simply providing information that will enable us to notify you of future opportunities to be involved. Thank you for taking the time to tell us about your talents, interests, and resources.

TYPE 4 LEARNING AT HOME

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

CAMP READ-A-LOT

Jefferson Elementary School
Wichita, Kansas

The goal of Camp Read-A-Lot is to increase student reading achievement through family and community involvement. This practice incorporates Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at Home, and Type 6-Collaborating With the Community of the six types of involvement.

Camp Read-A-Lot is designed as an activity at the school that encourages families to read together at home. It is held in the school library which is decorated with a tent, lanterns, sleeping bags, and artificial logs, all borrowed from a local Boy Scout Troop. Students and their parents bring blankets, sleeping bags, and sit-upons so they can read together on the floor. The Brownie Girl Scout Troop which meets at the school serves trail mix to the participants as a community service project.

Children who attend choose a free book and an activity kit related to the book. Guest readers from the local professional soccer team, the Wichita Wings, talk to the students about the importance of reading and read aloud some of the books. The students enjoy getting autographs from the local heroes.

In its first year (1996-97), Camp Read-A-Lot was held during the day with all classes listening to guest readers. Now, it is held in the evening so that working parents can attend. Spanish translations of the free books also are available and are read aloud to Spanish-speaking families by a soccer player from a Spanish-speaking country. These families were invited to Camp Read-A-Lot by an interpreter.

The budget for this project included books, activity kits, and refreshments. Title I funds helped obtain the books and activity kits at a cost of approximately \$300. The soccer team came free of charge as a community involvement event.

Jefferson Elementary School shows that by creatively combining school, family, and community resources, children and their families can focus on student reading achievement and have fun at the same time.

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Marcia Mars, Action Team Chair
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National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University
Promising Partnership Practices 1998

**KEEP BOOKS:
READING THAT IS FUN AND EASY**

**Henry Ford Elementary School
Ypsilanti, Michigan**

We have many families who have limited home libraries. It is our belief that our students must become successful readers and that this can only become a reality if they learn to love reading. Reading KEEP BOOKS helps our students view themselves as readers and provides a beginning at home to a personal home library of children's books. Two years ago, we began our program on a limited scale and this year we provided all our first graders with a complete set of forty-eight books.

We began early in the year with the simplest books. Teachers introduced the books individually through an introduction summary statement and a picture walk through the book. Children were then given the opportunity to read these books and interact with them by completing text on some pages and coloring pictures on others. Books were kept in personal student storage boxes in the classroom. Some of our staff was concerned about permitting children to color and write in their books. (These KEEP BOOKS are printed on white paper with no color. As of this date, teachers have found no difficulty with the practice of individualizing the books with colors and names.) After several books were distributed and classroom reading time became a practice, parent night was held. This was a family affair. Parents and students met in the gym for a presentation on the KEEP BOOKS, then parents went with their child's teacher to the classroom and received an inservice on how to work with children in a supportive and strategic way. The children were, at this time, in a separate area enjoying a movie. After acquainting parents with the KEEP BOOKS, the children came to the rooms and shared their books with their parents. Children loved showing parents how well they could read their books and talking about their favorites. We all regrouped in the gym to share a pizza dinner. Books and the book boxes went home that night. As the year progressed, additional books were introduced in the classroom and taken home to be added to their personal book box collection.

Parents have been extremely supportive and pleased with the KEEP BOOKS program. They have indicated that to many children these books are very special, used for personal pleasure, used to share with family and friends, and often used to take along on family trips. The idea of having a special place to keep the books has appealed to many.

We find the children are very enthusiastic about receiving each new book and positively anticipate taking them home, sharing them with their families, and adding them to their collection.

This year we added an additional set of KEEP BOOKS that introduce math concepts in simple and lively real life situations. These have been well received and we plan to distribute these Math KEEP BOOKS to the second graders.

KEEP BOOKS are available from the Early Literacy Learning Initiative, The Ohio State University. Each set of forty-eight costs \$12.00. Our only additional cost was for the family dinner. Funds were taken from the Title I/At Risk GOALS 2000 account.

Sara Constant, Title I/Henry Ford Elementary
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KIDS, KITS, AND KABOODLES

Perry Center—Center Garden
Grand Blanc, Michigan

Children's Garden is a pre-school, kindergarten, and latchkey program affiliated with the Grand Blanc Community Schools, Grand Blanc, Michigan. There are over 475 children enrolled, of which over 200 are preschoolers.

When the district became involved in promoting partnerships between families, schools, and the community, we were thrilled to be invited to join the National Network of Partnership Schools as many of our families will soon have children attending school or already have older children enrolled. What better way to get families involved than to start them at the beginning of their children's school careers!

We purchased two pre-school parent/child libraries from ABC School Supply. To support the partnership, our staff wholeheartedly agreed that the learning kits would be perfect for the "Learning at Home" concept. The kits consist of 24 plastic shoebox size containers with lids. Included in each kit are books, props, activity suggestions, art supplies, or whatever is needed to complete an activity. There are at least two different suggestions of things to do with each kit. Concepts such as math, language arts, large and small motor skill development, art, music, and science are addressed.

One team member inventoried each kit and wrote a description of the contents in each box. A Parent Information Night was set up to introduce the kits, and children took home written instructions about them. Staff members printed request forms and inserted a library-type index card in each box to keep track of its travels.

To request a kit, parents fill out a form with 1st, 2nd, or 3rd choice indicated and give it to the teacher. The request is filled and sent home with the child at the end of the school day. Kits may be kept for 3 days before return. Included in each kit is a steno-pad for parents to write their reactions, likes, and/or dislikes.

Response to the kits has been enthusiastic as indicated by the many comments that parents have written. Quotes such as, "Kits are a great idea!"; "Son loved Dad getting involved!"; "The whole family had fun."; "Even the little brother joined in."; "Our twelve year-old also got involved!" etc.

Plans for next year are to implement take-home story bags with books, props, and activities for families to enjoy. We want to encourage families to read together. These will rotate around the class until everyone has had a turn with a particular

25th Anniversary Special

story, and then a new story will circulate. We have already purchased fifty board books as we feel these will be sturdier for traveling. A committee of parents and teachers will work on ideas and props this spring so that the bags are ready to use in the fall.

Although the initial cost was high (\$699.95 for each pre-school library), this idea could easily be implemented at less expense. Boxes could be purchased at a dollar store or discount store; staff members and/or parents could brainstorm different ideas, and props could be donated, or a fundraiser could be held to purchase materials. Additionally, this could be adapted for any grade level.

Our families and kids are having fun learning at home. Here's hoping yours can too!

Pam Tigges, Action Team Co-Chair
(810) 603-3170

OPEN LIBRARY NIGHTS

Charles F. Kettering Elementary School
Ypsilanti, Michigan

"Open Library Nights" is a Type 4 Involvement activity used at Kettering Elementary School. The goal behind this weekly event is to encourage parents and family members to work with children on educational activities. Every Tuesday evening from 6:30-8:00, all families of Kettering students are invited to the Media Center to participate in different activities which promote student achievement. Fliers advertising events, announcements in classrooms, phone calls home, and personal invitations are used to notify families of the topic for the evening. "Open Library Night" represents the most common Tuesday evening activity; the event focuses on encouraging families to come to the school and read together or work on the computers with Internet access.

Organized by parent involvement coordinators, this regularly scheduled event provides the opportunity for other forms of involvement. For example, sometimes the event centers on a workshop like "Parenting with Love and Logic." This four-part workshop included topics such as making children accountable for their actions and increasing children's self-concept (Type 1: Basic Obligations of Families). To foster communication between home and school (Type 2: Communication), teachers often invited families to come to the Tuesday activities, and teachers frequently attended the event themselves. Finally, the student and parent volunteers as well as the parent involvement coordinators have support from the P.T.O (Type 5: Involvement in Committees, Governance, and Advocacy) and community businesses like McDonalds who provide generous donations of free food coupons and refreshments for the family events.

Those at Kettering report great success with the program thus far! Everyone is pleased that the school is open more often, and parents are glad to learn more about computers as computers skills are becoming more of a necessity in today's world. The event encourages the collaboration of students, teachers, and families, and the volunteers solicit feedback from all groups to keep the program effective.

Jenna Merritt and John Harding, Parent Involvement Coordinators
(734) 481-8288

INTERACTIVE HOMEWORK PROJECTS

**“Gorgeous” George Washington
Elementary School
Baltimore, Maryland**

One of the practices that we use to encourage parental involvement in children's learning is to require a monthly curriculum-based project. According to our School Improvement Plan (SIP), it is our goal to have families receive monthly critical thinking skills' activities that require parent and child interaction.

Once a month teachers are required to submit a monthly project assignment sheet to the administration for approval. The projects must be grade-level appropriate and an intricate part of our curriculum. Materials are obtained from community business partners and teachers. Many of the projects have been the result of creative use of everyday household items.

Teachers have provided on-going training, orientation, and follow-ups to necessitate performance-based assessment tasks. The practices described above have been an on-going part of our school improvement plan since September of 1995.

As a result of these projects, parents and children are in competition with others in their grade levels. Children are requiring their parents to get involved in helping to get their projects in on time. Students are maintaining information learned from our Core Knowledge/Baltimore City Curriculum. More parents are participating in our Family Fun/Learning Night activities, and our school's standardized test scores have improved.

Felicia Gray, Action Team Chair
(410) 396-1445

TYPE 5 DECISION MAKING

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

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT— JUST DO IT!

**St. Leonard Elementary School
St. Leonard, Maryland**

Our School Improvement Team serves as a decision making body in our school. Viewed in this manner it could be considered the "head" of our model. Our three Action teams could be described as its heart, hands, and brains. Each Action Team is chaired by an administrator who also sits on the School Improvement Team. Each Action team is responsible for a different facet of School Improvement: School Climate, Student Achievement, and School/Family/Community Partnership. Staff members and parent representatives are encouraged to serve on one of the Action Teams. Meetings are usually held once a month. Grade level representatives from each Action Team are asked to also serve on the School Improvement Team. Communication and integration of all groups is thus ensured. There is an overwhelming sense of ownership and cohesion that is achieved when everyone in the building is a part of an Action Team. Each part is important on its own but when added to the others becomes the sum that defines who we are.

Our Action Teams are organized in the following manner. The School Climate Action Team is chaired by our School Counselor. They concentrate on promoting our School motto: "The Three R's: Respect, Responsibility and the Right to Learn," and our emphasis on character education.

The Student Achievement Team is led by our Vice Principal who is also the building level Test Coordinator. They plan MSPAP (Maryland School Performance Assessment Program) nights, as well as oversee the development of grade level drafts of our Scope and Sequence. The team guides the implementation of our Portfolio Assessment and Latin programs. They are concerned with our Special Education/ Collaborative Teaching and multi-year student-teacher relationship or "looping" practices.

Our School/Family/Community Partnership Action Team is led by our principal. The goal of this Action Team is to facilitate communication and a positive working relationship between the school, community, and home. This is achieved using the following strategies: "Principal Points" Newsletter, our weekly Tuesday Folder program, and Parent Surveys. The Team is accountable for the dissemination of academic information through interim reports and Parent Conference Day activities. Business Partnerships and Mentoring and Tutoring programs are facilitated through the work of this team as well as other enjoyable community events such as our Chili Hoedown and Spring dances. The Team encourages the building to be used as a Community Center.

The Teams are conducted in such a way as to be autonomous yet connected. There must be communication and contact among the three groups and the School Improvement Team. We have found that having the chairs of the teams be the School Principal, Vice Principal, and Counselor has helped foster the desired relationship.

When St. Leonard first opened in September 1996, this design was adopted and implemented by the staff. Our most informative measure of success of the program has come through our Parent Surveys. Also, the results can be measured by the observable characteristics of our school. When parents, community members, substitutes, grandparents, other teachers, and administrators in our county walk through the door they see our plans in action. We have had distinguished visitors including members of the Maryland Business Round Table, colleagues from other schools in the state, and representatives from the State Department of Education. All have commented on the whole demeanor of our school: the students, faculty, parent volunteers, and building itself. The success of the program can be attributed to several components: an administration that possesses a strong vision and leadership skills, a dedicated faculty, and caring parents who are committed to working together for the benefit of children.

Laurie Meiser, Action Team Member
(410) 535-7714

**TYPE 6
COLLABORATING WITH
THE COMMUNITY**

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

GETTING WORKING PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS INTO THE SCHOOL-CAREER WEEK

Gardenville Elementary School
Baltimore, Maryland

Students' experiences with career visits at school had not been centrally coordinated before the 1997/98 year. Teachers in higher grades had sometimes coordinated visits from working people to share their professions on a small scale, but no school-wide effort had been organized at Gardenville Elementary. To draw more working parents into the school and to encourage involvement from community members, the P.T.O. sponsored a weeklong schedule of classroom visits from March 16-March 30, 1998.

At the beginning of the school year, school staff sent parents interest forms that identified volunteer opportunities. In addition, the form included the question, "Would you be willing to talk to a class about the work you do?" Names of those people who answered affirmatively were put on the a career resource list to be used in March for scheduling class visits.

Two weeks before the visits were scheduled, a survey form detailing the format of the visits was distributed to teachers. Also, the survey allowed teachers to indicate preferences on professions or individuals they wanted to visit their classes. The P.T.O. gave teachers the complete career resource list, which had been supplemented with community members who had been contacted and were willing to visit the school to speak. The coordinator worked with the information to schedule two visits per class (or more if requested) by making phone calls.

We advised speakers to bring props, save time for questions, emphasize the importance and relevance of education in elementary school, and work with teachers to integrate their talks with lesson plans. Teachers were encouraged to contact their speakers ahead of time to prepare them for what the children at that grade level are like and what the class has been studying.

We provided the office at the school with a central schedule of all visitors coming to the school to participate in Career Week and suggested morning announcements. The purpose of the announcements was to inform all students, teachers, and staff about the visitors so that they were aware of the many fields being discussed at school each day. All in all, twenty-seven visitors gave presentations to classes, and many of the visitors presented information to two classes.

Results were reported both formally and informally. Many classes felt moved to write thank you notes to their speakers. Students spoke with enthusiasm and great

interest on the visits to their classes. A formal evaluation form distributed to teachers came back with comments like the following:

"Great idea! Presentations were excellent!"

"I would like to recommend the same speakers to come back next year or to visit other classes."

"Very worthwhile!"

Teachers also offered information on the reliability of individual speakers (including lateness), specific speakers we should ask back, resource people they knew personally whom we could add to our list, and communication with the coordinator. All teachers were in favor of repeating the event, organized in the same way again next year, and the PTO Board voted to repeat this event next year, finding it a success for all participants.

There really was no budget for this activity. The school provided copies of the lists and forms distributed to teachers, and a volunteer's home phone was used for all phone calls to coordinate the event. A real "cost" was classroom time – but teachers utilized the visits to cover parts of the curriculum, like constructing "webs" on information gathered in the presentation or working on letter-writing skills in thank you notes.

We hope to improve Career Week next year by having more visitors to each classroom and by extending the time period to two weeks. In addition, a kick-off event will be held for the entire school. We will provide participants with written advice on their presentations, not just verbal, to improve communication from the coordinator and increase reliability of their commitment to be there and be on time. Publicity at least one month ahead of career week through school newsletters and a local newspaper will also ensure a larger pool of resource career people to choose from. (We did have a few parents that felt left out when they were not invited to share their profession at the school, but they were not parents who had let us know they were interested in coming). Specifically, we will target more of those who work in the arts and in animal-related careers, which are especially exciting for elementary children.

Chris Lindberg, Action Team Chair
(410) 325-7520

CREATIVELY CONNECTING COMMUNITY

Sunderland Elementary School
Sunderland, Maryland

In October, 1997, students and parents at Sunderland Elementary School in Calvert County, Maryland, came to the school's learning center in the evening. The purpose was to involve parents in their child's education. Both parents and children came to a computer lab to increase their skills in math and reading, to select educational, fun games to take home, and to select books to read. Often families read together, after which the child will take the challenge of an Accelerated Reader test on the computer.

One of Sunderland's favorite activities is story-telling. Our principal is a resident story-teller and numerous parents share their talents as well. Eyes light up as children hear stories by enthusiastic volunteers. During the holidays, volunteers may teach a craft or highlight a tradition involving that holiday. Local high school students volunteered time to read to students. Health and safety issues were addressed by community professional persons.

Before Christmas, one family gave their children the option of going shopping or coming to the learning center. The children chose to return to school!

In addition to the core of parental and community volunteers, Sunderland's staff also volunteers. Seven members of the staff are present most of the evenings the learning center is open. The spouse of one of Sunderland's staff volunteers often comes along to tutor a child who benefits both academically and socially.

Attendance varies according to schedules, interest, and weather, but the average attendance is twenty-five students and parents. Sunderland is a rural school, so this involves driving to the school to participate. Many of our parents commute long distances to work. This limits some participation, but also shows the desire for involvement on behalf of those who do attend.

A survey is being planned for the end of the program. One will be sent to the families who did participate, asking what they valued and asking for suggestions for next year's program. Another survey will likely be sent home in the school newsletter particularly designed to survey the families that did not participate so we can learn how to better serve them next year. Our intention is to send personal invitations to targeted families next year.

The learning center was funded by a Maryland Partnership 2000 grant and another community-based grant, providing for the cost of one paid staff person and materials for the game center. Most of the support consisted of volunteer hours.

Sunderland has taken up the challenge to creatively bring together our school with its community and families. We believe we have built bridges for some families, but we have before us the challenge of attracting more families, especially those whose children need both academic and social enrichment. We are partners, working together to educate families and to be educated by families. United, we shall continue to creatively connect our community!

Erma Morris, chair of the School-Family-Community Committee of Partnership Schools at Sunderland Elementary School. The report was prepared by Carolyn Lenz, parent representative, and by Carolyn Jones and Erma Morris, faculty representatives. (410) 257-1501

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE WITH JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT AND CRESTAR

**Mt. Washington Elementary School
Baltimore, Maryland**

Detra Gray is seen taking a walk to the Mt. Washington market with her daughter Olivia and Olivia's classmate, Amber. They return with the ingredients for making lemonade. The teacher, teacher's assistant, and other parent volunteers are now busy guiding excited kindergartners along an assembly line as the class prepares lemonade to sell to other classes. As a volunteer consultant for the Junior Achievement Elementary School Program, Detra Gray is teaching these youngsters about the roles individuals play in the economy as workers and consumers.

The Junior Achievement Elementary Program is an innovative business and economics program for children in kindergarten through sixth grade. Participants learn about everything from economic concepts to zoning regulations. Each theme helps students to understand how they can contribute to society as workers, citizens, and consumers.

The success of this program depended on collaboration with local businesses (consultants from Crestar Bank) and parent volunteers. Each consultant was encouraged to visit the class before presenting his or her first lesson. This gave the consultant a chance to meet the students and tell them a little about what they would be doing during subsequent visits. In turn, the teacher (who was meeting the consultant and working with the program for the first time) had an opportunity to prepare the students for the program.

Through our business partnership with Crestar Bank, we received a grant for \$4,200 to fund this endeavor. This provided \$300.00 per 30 students in 14 homerooms. The funds were used to support the necessary training for community and parent volunteers, teachers, and to supply classroom materials.

The concepts and skills taught in Junior Achievement's Elementary program correlate with our school improvement goals to meet state proficiency standards as measured by the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) for students in grades 3 and 5 in social studies, reading, language, mathematics, and science. There is clear alignment between Baltimore City Public Schools elementary social studies curriculum goals and the learning concepts and skills that were addressed during the Junior Achievement Program classes. The program also supports the school improvement goals to increase parent involvement, to expand relationships with the business community, and to improve school climate.

We conducted a survey of parents, consultants (business and community volunteers), students, the principal, and teachers, and it was found that all stakeholders valued the real-life applications of the program. We discovered that the curriculum was appropriate for urban children, for both genders, and for a diverse array of ethnic groups. We also discovered that the consultants needed better training and the teachers needed to be involved in the training. For example, consultants wanted help on classroom management, and teachers asked for ways to integrate the program into the general curriculum. The parents, teachers, and students were very impressed about how the Junior Achievement Elementary Program showed the relevance of education to the workplace. One of the teachers at Mt. Washington eagerly voiced her opinion about the Junior Achievement Elementary Program with the following comment: "My experience with the program reinforced my belief that children can benefit from knowledge about real world issues. I have been able to incorporate the program subject matter into both math and science instruction. Also, the parent instructor was very enthusiastic."

We were extremely pleased with the level of commitment from the staff, community, and our business partners and realize that the decision to implement the Junior Achievement Elementary Program at Mt. Washington has been one of our *best practices* yet.

Jacqueline Waters-Scofield and Amy Bernstein
Principal and Action Team Chair
(410) 396-6354

**HELPING PARENTS PLAN
MEANINGFUL SUMMER ACTIVITIES
FOR THEIR CHILDREN**

**Kathleen E. Goodwin Elementary School
Old Saybrook, Connecticut**

How can you help parents keep children meaningfully engaged in a variety of learning and recreational activities during the summer months? The Home/School Forum of Kathleen E. Goodwin Elementary School's P.T.O. sponsored an evening to answer this question. We invited organizations within the community to come to the school one evening to provide parents with information about their summer programs.

The design for the program was simple and inexpensive. To provide plenty of time for brainstorming, planning, and reservations, the committee chose the date for the activity one year in advance. The committee then brainstormed and listed organizations within the community that provided valuable activities for children during the year and throughout the summer months. Just prior to the New Year, committee members contacted these organizations and asked if they might be interested in presenting summer program information to parents at our "Summer Learning Fair" in April. The responses from the organizations were overwhelmingly favorable, and the P.T.O. mailed formal registration information to interested organizations in February.

Those in charge of publicity for the "Summer Learning Fair" sent fliers home with students and provided information to the local newspapers. The agenda for the event included the following: (1) provide parents with a list of organizations offering summer programs along with a school map showing the locations of the presentations that evening, (2) welcome and orient the parents and presenters for ten minutes, (3) allow parents the opportunity to choose the presenters of their choice in the eight 10-minute periods. Each organization met with interested parents in separate classrooms, and no registrations were permitted on the evening of the event.

The "Summer Learning Fair" was an enormous success for parents as well as the organizations that were represented. The organizations represented at the fair provided a variety of summer learning activities, including sailing lessons, Nature Center camp programs, River School programs, Boy and Girl Scouts, public library programs, YMCA programs, and more.

Other than the costs for fliers and 30 mailings to organizations, minimal expenses were required in order to implement this program. More than 150 parents in a school population of 440 children attended the fair. Parents found the evening to be a highly informative and efficient way to collect data from the different organizations.

Only a few of the organizations represented expressed dissatisfaction with the number of parents visiting them, asking questions, and securing information on summer activities. Representatives of the organizations were also pleased that they were able to give parents information about programs offered during the school year.

John E. Walsh, Ph.D., Principal
(860) 395-3165

THE BUSINESS OF ATTRACTING BUSINESS

**Edmondson-Westside High School
Baltimore, Maryland**

One goal of our Action Team at Edmondson-Westside is to encourage additional business and community support for our vo-tech high school. A luncheon was planned to attract new businesses as partners and provide them with a first hand look at what we do. Edmondson-Westside staff members take the job of preparing the future work force very seriously. The Action Team wanted to see how the business world would rate our efforts. They also wanted to present opportunities for these future employers to intervene at this critical point of preparation, allowing them the ability to offer expert advice and assistance. We wanted to explore avenues which would eventually allow our students to gain as many first hand, practical experiences as possible in their chosen or considered trade.

We had invited a local caterer to tour our school in the beginning of this school year. He was so impressed with the caliber of instruction and the programs offered that he encouraged us to aggressively seek out new business partners and volunteered to help us in our efforts. He supplied us with his list of business contacts and we canvassed our staff for additional businesses to include. We drafted an invitation and mailed it to all our potential guests. Parents on our Action Team agreed to visit neighborhood businesses and make follow up phone calls. The Action Team decided to hold this event in conjunction with vo-tech week so that our guests could see results of student work in the form of interactive displays.

Plans were then put into place to serve food. We were fortunate to have the caterer donate and deliver the food to us. Folders were prepared with motivating and helpful information. Worksheets were drafted to use both during our tour of the site and for a commitment of partnership after observing the students at work. We were very interested in the evaluation and reactions of our guests as they viewed our program offerings. The first worksheet was designed to capture their initial reactions and perceptions as they toured our building. We were also curious to see what resources they felt were lacking, especially those related to their field of expertise. The second worksheet listed possible programs of partnership and interventions the businesses could establish, such as shadowing, mentoring, summer or after school employment, scholarship opportunities or service learning. One guest, the plant manager from Pepsi-Cola Company, expressed great interest in helping our school. He described his dismay at the practice of his company, and many others, of driving through the city and seeing but ignoring the needs of our students. Instead, they stop in surrounding counties which are not as limited in resources as many city

schools. He was very pleased to have been invited and spoke to the other guests about the responsibility businesses should take to help city students succeed.

Our 40 guests enjoyed the video we shared which highlighted our school and the talks we had describing our hopes and dreams for our students. We also discussed the role they could play in making those dreams a reality. Lunch, served by our students, was also a hit. After this delicious luncheon, we toured the site in groups. Our guests were encouraged to react to the programs observed as well as the resources viewed. My group was continually impressed with the quality of instruction they saw, as well as the resources they noted. When we reconvened this was a common reaction of all of our guests. We talked again about how they could positively intervene to support, enhance, and encourage our students. Ideas were flying as our guests brainstormed a list of possibilities for their assistance. We were able to recruit 22 new partners as a result of these efforts. Follow-up is crucial to this activity in order to capitalize on the interest generated. Thank you notes were sent to each participant. Our guidance counselor, an Action Team member, took over the responsibility of remaining in contact with our new partners and establishing specific programs based on the information gathered at the luncheon. For the initial investment of postage and invitations, we were able to obtain 22 partners who will add a wonderful dimension to our course offerings.

Vivian Castian, Action Team Chair
(410) 396-8094

DISTRICT-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

AN "EGGCITING" BEGINNING

Baltimore City Public Schools Baltimore, Maryland

The Southwest Area was one of three new areas added to the Baltimore School/Family/Community Partnership Program in 1997-98. Many supports have been available to me as a new facilitator of this program because of the successful implementation in the original three areas. I had the experience of being an Action Team Chair in my previous assignment and received extensive training by the facilitator of that area, who has now become my mentor. I was also privy to many successful programs of partnership at other schools which had been part of my cluster. As a result of my experiences, it was obvious to me that the ability and enthusiasm of the Action Team Chair is critical to the success of this program in any given school. With this in mind, I knew I wanted to provide my Action Team Chairs with as much support and training as quickly as possible.

In an effort to provide additional experiences which would build on the momentum begun at our summer training, I decided to bring together all the Action Team Chairs to capitalize on progress already made. My Area Executive Officer (AEO) was fortunately like-minded and wanted to offer the new chairs an extra special activity in a pleasant setting to begin this important work. Mrs. Buie, my AEO, was able to acquire the necessary funds and plans could proceed. I contacted The Omelet Man, who comes to a site and prepares omelets to order. Having attended other affairs which he catered, I knew how wonderful his omelets were and that he would help make this activity very special. It took a few calls until I was able to find the perfect site for this event. Some schools expressed concerns about distracting students with the delicious aromas escaping from our activity. I knew I didn't want to have this in a cafeteria due to conflicting schedules as a result of early lunches. I was able to locate a comfortable setting where the event was far removed from the students. Invitations could be distributed now that a site was selected and plans could proceed.

I invited Dr. Joyce Epstein and Sister Rosemarie Nassif of the Fund for Educational Excellence to provide expert training and prepared a folder of materials which I felt would be helpful to the participants. Many of the items included were part of our training manual *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, including Members of the Team, and Structure of the Team. A brochure was also included, that my area designed, which describes the program and names the Action Team Chairs in the southwest area. I contacted Jackie Griswold, an Action Team Chair from the southern area and a member of my former cluster, to give a first-hand account of the power of this program. She has done an excellent job in creating a strong Action Team capable of delivering outstanding practices and programs of partnership which support all six keys of involvement. I wanted this

account to come from someone outside of our area who could offer a totally objective perspective. Jackie was extremely motivating and helpful as she described her initial steps in designing an effective Action Team and implementing her Action Plan. She was able to reassure the new chairs that small incremental steps were needed and she did an excellent job mapping out an effective path that an Action Team could follow. An Action Team Chair from our area then shared her structure and beginning successes. We were all overwhelmed by what she had been able to accomplish in a very short time. After the presentations, the new chairs were free to ask any questions remaining. This gave me an opportunity to see where I might need to concentrate my efforts.

This activity presented me with a very powerful springboard from which I could dive into my work. I felt a sense of relief and renewed confidence emanating from the new chairs who now had a stronger vision of their mission. I was able to schedule initial conferences with those chairs that I had not yet been able to contact. Everyone seemed armed with a rekindled sense of purpose. The success of this activity was well worth the price of \$6.99 a person the Omelet Man charged.

The Maryland State Board of Education offered a \$500 grant to any school new to this program this year. I was pleased to note in the grant requests that many new chairs were requesting funds to implement practices and programs that were described at this breakfast. I found this activity afforded me the ability to begin my association with my new Action Team Chairs in a very positive, motivating way and to bring a great deal of information to all my chairs in an efficient manner. I know the power of this program and the benefits it can bring to a school and this gave me the opportunity to share the potential with my new chairs. I was able to share the news that my school from last year was going to be awarded \$35,000 for increased scores on our state test. I believe that a great deal of this academic success could be attributed to the power of this program. When schools, families and communities work together, strong partnerships are formed which serve to benefit our students.

Marsha Greenfeld, Southwest Area Facilitator
(410) 545-1536

FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS...TOGETHER FOR STUDENTS

Covington Independent Schools
Covington, Kentucky

Covington Independent Public School District's Parent Involvement Advisory Council has coordinated an annual parent involvement retreat since 1995. The goal of this practice is to come together as a district group focused on the mission of increasing parent involvement. At the retreats we share mutual interests, build strengths, and pool resources to reach further as a collaborating team working to meet district goals.

The retreat is a day long conference held at an easily accessible location. The most recent one centered around our district's parent involvement goals. Creating more welcoming schools, increasing parent visibility, and helping parents help their children learn at home were selected as objectives based on the district wide parent involvement needs assessment survey which polled parents, students and staff. The grade levels involved were pre-school through high school. Thirty-six parents, 12 teachers, 12 administrators, 6 family resource center coordinators, 2 youth service coordinators, 10 family advocates, the chairman of the Board of Education, the superintendent, and a group of community supporters attended. Breakfast and lunch were served. Off site child care was offered to all of the attending parents. A small stipend in the form of a gift certificate to a local grocery chain was mailed in a thank you note to each parent after the conference. Expert speakers were recruited to share best practices supporting our goals and to facilitate team planning sessions. Our superintendent's attendance under-scored the importance of parent involvement as did his remarks to the group advocating the concept of interactive home work.

Evaluations from previous retreats and professional development sessions indicate that our teachers and staff are receptive to trainers from outside of our school system. It has been a challenge to recruit experts that can relate to the specific needs of our high poverty urban district. This was especially true in finding an expert on interactive homework and parent involvement with skills to facilitate 12 planning teams. It took plenty of lead time, a lot of net working, and many phone calls. By the time someone was located, the description of our needs was well-honed and gave the speaker/facilitator a solid foundation on which to build her presentation.

Each of our 12 schools ranging from pre-school to high school and an alternative center, was represented by a team consisting of an administrator, teacher, family advocate, family resource center coordinator, and 2 or 3 parents. Community

National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University
Promising Partnership Practices 1998

representatives also participated along with our Chairman of the Board of Education. The school team was asked to take back new information and re-energized enthusiasm to their buildings to implement changes and improvements.

This practice has grown stronger over the years as we have tailored it to meet our needs. Not only has it given the whole school district the opportunity to learn and grow as a team, it has served to be an affirmation of why and how parents are vital partners in the education of their children. Our success is reflected in the following remarks taken from evaluations: " The opportunity to talk with school personnel in a different environment allowed us to focus as a group on goals and action steps to meet them Left with specific goals Became more motivated to achieve stated goals I have better insight into the schools my children attend I thought it was great.... The district as a whole is headed in the same direction Parents and teachers talked together about critical goals and expectations and figured out ways to achieve them Our school will have an improved homework policy A clear sense of goals for the district ... A collaborative spirit ... Good food for thought-questions encouraged looking some more at parent involvement

The cost to design and implement the most recent retreat was \$1900.00 which was paid with Goals 2000 federally funded - Parent Involvement funds.

Trisha Brundage, Title I Parent Involvement Advocate
(606) 292-5980 ext. 14