

9

**BUDGET ADVISORY
COMMITTEE**
**Rush-Henrietta Central School District
Henrietta, New York**

Members of the Rush-Henrietta Central School District decided to create the Budget Advisory Committee in 1994 following the defeated school district budget in May 1993 and the operation of the district on an austerity budget for the 93-94 school year.

The Superintendent of Schools recruited volunteers from district schools. Members include parents, teachers, administrators, and community residents. The Assistant Superintendent for Business is actively involved with this group and contributes greatly to their understanding of the budget, source of revenue, state aid, property taxes and other fiscal matters. The chair is a district parent. The group meets at least monthly throughout the school year.

The work of the Budget Advisory Committee is to make recommendations to the Board of Education. Since the forming of the Budget Advisory Committee, Rush Henrietta has passed every budget vote by strong margins. The taxpayers have an opportunity to understand the budget and to give their input on the budget, so there is greater community support for it. People are able to feel like real stakeholders in the budget process.

This initiative costs nothing to implement, because its members are volunteers. The greatest resources involved are time and commitment. Members are recognized at an annual awards dinner each spring. The greatest reward, of course, is to know that our budget can pass and that we can continue with a strong education program at Rush-Henrietta!

Kay Lyons, District Coordinator
(716) 359-5029

**SPACE STUDY COMMITTEE: "THE
COMMITTEE THAT NEVER DIES"**

**Rush-Henrietta Central School District
Henrietta, New York**

Rush-Henrietta Central School District formed the Space Study Committee in 1991 to gain parental and community support in studying and advising on space issues and needs within the district. This group looks at such issues as opening schools, closing schools, finding space for new programs, and redrawing boundary lines.

The Space Study Committee, which reconvenes annually, is made up of parents, administrators, teachers, school staff, and community members. The committee affects space decisions in the entire district, so there are representatives from all schools and levels. Working in an advisory capacity only, the Space Study Committee makes recommendations to the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education.

The Space Study Committee has been effective in advising on several important decisions in recent years: opening a second middle school, proposing a bond issue to open a new elementary school, and proposing a bond issue to put an addition on the high school. All decisions were made by passing a public vote, and this proceeded quite smoothly because of the support from the Space Study Committee. There was an opportunity for total community involvement leading up to these major changes!

Because everyone serves as a volunteer, the Space Study Committee costs nothing to implement. The people who serve are recognized formally at an appreciation dinner each spring and are acknowledged in various news articles and district publications.

Kay Lyons, District Coordinator
(716) 359-5029

TEAM BUILDING

DoDDS—Okinawa District Okinawa, Japan

The development of a district leadership team resulted from our effort to implement the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) Community Strategic Plan Goal 8—Parent Partnerships. Working as a team provided benefits to the team members and to the organization. We believed that in order to build capacities within our organization and achieve Goal 8 by the year 2000, we needed to build a team that represented and reflected our community members. Our team cross-section was comprised of a district liaison, parent, educator, administrator and military representative. Although our team was small, we were able to effectively accomplish our goals. We believed this was a result of two elements: effective team building and shared decision-making.

The DODEA Community Strategic Plan for Parent Partnerships became the team's road map and provided our mission, goal and benchmark statements. We also used the comprehensive conceptual framework which reflected a multifaceted, five-tiered model through which we would develop parent partnerships. Our task was to come up with a viable Action Plan, which would help us accomplish our goals.

As members of the Okinawa District Parent Partnership Leadership Team, we saw ourselves as individuals as well as part of a group working toward mutually agreed upon subgoals based on the Community Strategic Plan, the conceptual framework, and our Action Plan. Our collective knowledge of our school community, combined with local needs assessments and documented research, provided us with the base from which we charted our course, evaluated our effectiveness, experimented with fresh roles, and took new sightings as we followed our map toward our destination. Our journey provided us with several realizations.

Because of the permanency of our work, we realized two very important factors about our team: it would not die, and the members would not remain the same. Due to the mobile nature of a military community and the subsequent departure of some of our original members and arrival of others, new dynamics emerged. As we adjusted to these changes, individuals took on new roles. The legacies given by those who departed were nurtured and shared as a result of the knowledge and experience gained through the teamwork that we had put in place. While there were periodic adjustments, the group remained strong, steadfast, and focused because of the underlying confidence in one another and the team.

We feel that our success can be attributed to effective team building. Effective team building incorporates the following attributes: knowing there is value in the work we do; recognizing that each person is an equal and esteemed member of the team;

appreciating and acknowledging each member and the team for achievements. We also believe that our team's success has resulted from having clear goals and subgoals, developing a realistic and manageable Action Plan, assessing and evaluating our steps frequently, and adjusting our course when necessary. Together we were able to define our tasks and the kinds of roles each member would play. As Joe Paterno, Head Football Coach, Penn State University said, "When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality." Teamwork is the first step in building capacities within schools, districts and organizations. Any school can replicate the conditions for positive outcomes and improvement. Teamwork, combined with goals and a plan of action, can produce very powerful results.

Mary Hibbs, School-Home Partnership District Liaison
011-81-611-734-1953

"UP, UP AND AWAY" CAMPAIGN

**DODEA-Fort McClennan District
Fort McClellan, Alabama**

Our "best practice for the SY 1997-98 was our "Up, Up and Away" campaign in conjunction with the nation-wide "America Goes Back To School" project.

For two weeks, beginning September 8, 1997, we asked that parents spend a minimum of thirty minutes an evening with their child on school-related activities, such as reading, homework, study skills, and organization/time management. We asked that distractions be kept to a minimum (no TV, stereo, phone calls).

During this two-week period, students turned in to their teachers hot air balloon cut-outs that their parents had signed-off on, indicating they had spent thirty minutes reading, doing homework, etc. These cut-outs were bright, neon colors and were displayed on large posters outside each classroom. The classes were not in competition for "most balloons", but the visual display was quite eye-catching. The students were excited about returning the balloons each day. At the end of the two-week period, the entire school was rewarded with an ice cream party, funded by the PTO.

Materials and resources that needed to be provided were minimal. The PTO volunteers were used to cut-out the balloons. Each child received an envelope with the balloons and a letter to their parents about the campaign.

A news release was sent to the base newspaper both prior to and following the campaign, telling of the success of the endeavor.

**Patti Wood, District Key Communicator
(205) 820-2420**

**"AMERICA GOES BACK TO SCHOOL"
"Up, Up and Away!!"**

Dear Parents,

As a part of our school/home partnership, we plan to launch a two-week campaign for grades Preschool- 6th, September 8 - 19, 1997 entitled "Up, Up and Away." This is in conjunction with the national "America Goes Back To School" campaign. We encourage parents to spend at least thirty minutes of quality learning time nightly with their children reading, studying and discussing school-related topics. All distractions, including television and stereos, should be eliminated. Time dedicated to education spent together is critical to your child's intellectual growth. We hope this two-week emphasis on families learning together will set a pattern for the entire year.

Your child will be given eight hot-air balloon cut-outs for the eight school nights (Monday - Thursday) of both weeks. You will sign one balloon per night when you were able to spend at least thirty minutes of quality learning time together. Classes will have displays of the colorful balloons outside each room, demonstrating student/parent participation. On Friday, September 19th, at 1:00 P.M., a school-wide ice cream party celebration will be held, co-sponsored by the P.T.O.

Suggestions for Success (from the Fort McClellan Parent/Teacher's Handbook)

- Provide a specific study area.
- Provide a specific time period for learning.
- Think positively.
- Call the teacher to clarify or solve homework problems.
- Watch for signs of difficulty.
- Participate in school activities.
- Admire and love your child - build on strengths and help improve weaknesses.
- Read with your child. Spend as much time reading together as watching T.V.
- Encourage hobbies and interests.
- Note your child's progress with verbal praise and a pat on the back.
- Talk about school, interests, friends, places you go and things your family does.
- Support your child.

You are a key factor to your child's success in school. We hope to have 100% participation in our "Up, Up and Away" program. Happy learning together!

Fort McClellan Elementary
School/Home Partnership Committee
P.T.O.

STATE-LEVEL LEADERSHIP

**KENTUCKY TEACHER:
COMMUNICATING ABOUT SCHOOL-
FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERHIPS**

**Kentucky Department of Education
Frankfort, Kentucky**

The Kentucky Department of Education's *Kentucky Teacher* (December 1997 – January 1998) devotes nine of its sixteen pages to school-family-community partnerships. The Commissioner of Education's column, "Help Families Get Comfortable with Today's Changing Schools," includes information on Epstein's ten steps of school-family-community partnerships. Excerpts from the Kentucky Board of Education Policy Statement: Parent and Family Involvement Initiative help identify successful family involvement programs.

An eight-page spread in the middle of the newsletter focuses on Epstein's six types of involvement and highlights partnership programs from different Kentucky schools. The article on the six types of involvement includes a description of each type with sample practices and a Kentucky example. Stories from the field include an urban school, a rural school, and schools in four counties across the state. An article about volunteering discusses how parent volunteers can extend the reach of hard-working teachers. Finally, a list of resources provides information on programs, publications, organizations, and web sites that can help build stronger school-family-community partnerships.

This issue of the *Kentucky Teacher* says to all educators, families, and community members that school-family-community partnerships is important in Kentucky. Information is provided about how to build partnership programs and schools are recognized for their hard work and achievements. The Kentucky Department of Education takes a leadership role by communicating the importance of school, family, and community connections with all educators and families.

Freida J. Collins, Parent Involvement/Public Engagement Consultant
(502) 564-3678

GETTING BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS

**Ohio Department of Education
Columbus, Ohio**

Many state agencies must link themselves with other organizations to best accomplish their goals. Therefore, the state of Ohio's Department of Education worked to find other people with a similar purpose and passion about family and school partnerships to best strengthen family and school partnerships at the school, district, and state levels. Some of these partners include the Ohio P.T.A., the Ohio Parent Information and Resource Center, and the Governor's Family and Children First Initiative.

To encourage family and school connections at the school level, the Department of Education submitted a proposal called the "Family and School Partnership Initiative" to the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation in Cleveland. The Foundation approved the proposal, and the bulk of those funds are given to schools as \$500 planning grants. The following represent the three steps for receiving the funds. First, the Department of Education mails announcements of the availability of funding to all Ohio public school principals and P.T.A. presidents. Next, schools send teams of parents and educators to a workshop where they learn about the six types of partnership practices that they may use in the development of their family/school involvement plans. Sixteen of these meetings were held around the state last year; this year, a "rally" was held in Columbus, featuring Joyce Epstein as the keynote speaker. Four other regional workshops are being offered as alternatives. Finally, members of schools who attend the workshop receive \$500 after they write a one-page description of how they will use the \$500 grant.

This past year, many schools used the small grant to provide food and child care for community meetings. Some covered the cost of substitute teachers so that classroom teachers could attend the initial training. The plan that is developed can then be submitted for a competitive review that could possibly lead to a \$3,000 implementation grant. Originally that \$3,000 was to come from the foundation grant, but the Department recently dedicated a portion of its federal Goals 2000 grant to cover the implementation grants.

In the first year of this initiative, 239 schools joined the Partnership Network, 177 sent teams to orientation (614 persons), 154 received planning grants, and 70 received implementation grants!

The biggest challenge within the Department has been establishing a new grant-making program while also attempting to accomplish broader initiative goals - with

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

ESTABLISHING RESPONSIBILITY

one consultant assigned full-time responsibility. This is where the partnership has been invaluable. When sixteen workshops were scheduled around the state last spring, the organization partners served as facilitators. When it was time to negotiate with grant applicants, the organization partners helped. The partners serve on the steering committee that plans most initiative activity.

The challenge in the field is to assist teams of parents and teachers to engage in collaboration at each step of the plan development and implementation. The partners desire to help schools focus first on collaboration and then on creation of activities.

At a recent steering committee meeting, the Department's coordinator asked the other members if they ever felt taken advantage of, being pressed into the service of this initiative. The unanimous response was that we all benefit from families, schools, and communities working together as equal partners supporting the education and achievement of Ohio's children.

Connie Ackerman, Consultant
(614) 466-0224

ALPHABETICAL INDEX

NETWORK MEMBER	ACTIVITY	PAGE
Arbor Hills Junior High School, Sylvania, OH	Parent Information Folder	23
	Road Runner Rally	25
Barret Academy, Akron, OH	Learn and Grow Parent Education Series	5
	Friendship Breakfast	20
	School-Family Communication Bags	26
BCPS, Southwest Area, Baltimore, MD	An "Eggciting Beginning"	67
Central Elementary School, Shelby, OH	C.C.N. (Central's Current News)	15
Charles F. Kettering Elementary School, Ypsilanti, MI	Open Library Nights	47
Covington Independent Public Schools, Covington, KY	Annual Parent Involvement Retreat	69
Curtis Bay Elementary, Baltimore, MD	Communication	27
DoDDS, Okinawa District, Okinawa, Japan	Team Building	73
DODEA, Ft. McClellan District, Fort McClellan, AL	"Up, Up and Away" Campaign	75
Dundalk High School, Baltimore, MD	8th Grade Transition Program	11
Edmonson-Westside High School, Baltimore, MD	The Business of Attracting Business	63
Gardenville Elementary School, Baltimore, MD	Career Week	55
George Washington Elementary School, Baltimore, MD	Parent/Child Monthly Projects	48
Henry Ford Elementary School, Ypsilanti, MI	KEEP BOOKS	43
Howard Elementary School, Cincinnati, OH	Moms On The Move	33
Jefferson Elementary School, Wichita, KS	Camp Read-A-lot	41
Kathleen E. Goodwin School, Old Saybrook, CT	Summer Learning Fair	61
Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, KY	Communicating about School-Family Community Partnerships	79
Kinder Elementary School, Miamisburg, OH	Kinder's Family Room	3
Landstuhl Elementary/Middle School, Germany	Back to School Picnic	14
Mary K. Vollmer Elementary School, West Henrietta, NY	Daily Notebook	19
Max Leuchter School, Vineland, NJ	The Parent Resource Center	7
Mt. Washington Elementary, Baltimore, MD	Striving for Excellence with Junior Achievement and Crestar	59
Northside Elementary School, St. James, MN	VIP Envelopes	28
Oakdale Elementary School, Cincinnati, OH	Year of the Family	29
Ohio Department of Education, Columbus, OH	Getting By With a Little Help From Our Friends	81
Perry Center-Children's Garden, Grand Blanc, MI	Kids, Kits, and Kaboodles	45
Rush-Henrietta Central School District, Henrietta, NY	Budget Advisory Committee	71
	Space Study Committee	72
St. Leonard Elementary School, St. Leonard, MD	School Improvement-Just Do It!	51
Sunderland Elementary School, Sunderland, MD	Community Learning Center	57
Valley View Parent-Teacher Co-Op School, Cleveland, OH	Homework Hotline	21
Williamston Elementary School, Williamston, MI	Chat With The Principal Over Coffee and Donuts	17
Williamston Middle School, Williamston, MI	Parent Resource Directory	35

121 TRICKS FOR YOUR PTA

Historical Wall --- Take a special wall area in your school and put up historical pictures of the school. Make it a project for the year. Old pictures, paintings, pen and inks, or other drawings can be framed. If your school is named after a person, hold a celebration in honor of that person. Students will learn about the significance of the school name and its history.

Staff's 30-Minute Certificate --- Give your staff a certificate for 30 minutes to be used any time throughout the school year. The only restrictions are: a teacher cannot redeem it if you have a commitment to someone else, a scheduled appointment, the day before Christmas or the last week of school. Don't be surprised if you give out these certificates and no more than 20% to 30% of the teachers use them. Teachers feel this certificate is wonderful and tend to hold onto it. When it is redeemed, it puts the principal, PTA president, etc. in the classroom, and students love it. It does take a commitment on your part.

Cards From the PTA When Students are Sick --- As with the hospital visit, a card sent home to a student who you know is going to be home for a prolonged period is probably one of the best pieces of medicine that the child can get. It only takes a couple minutes for you to do.

Birth Letters --- Have your teachers tell you any time that there is a birth of a brother or sister of one of your students. You can talk to that child in school and have them tell you about their new litter brother or sister. Follow up with a special little card that says, "Welcome to the world, and we look forward to seeing you in school in five years."

Pencils With Names --- If you are looking for that special little something from the PTA, a pencil is that something which is appreciated by all children. It is relatively inexpensive to have a gross or two printed with your PTA name on it. The pencil becomes important to those students who receive them.

Project of the Year --- All schools have a number of projects that they work on throughout the year. However, telling parents, teachers, and students at the beginning of the year about the project makes everyone aware of one of the schools main goals. In some cases, students or parents are not told of the project because it does not involve them. Usually the more people involved, the more assistance you will receive in accomplishing your goal. Suggestions for project of the year are: improving the physical appearance of the building or grounds, instructional goals, students goals, personnel goals, hardware, special rooms, or one of these tricks of the trade.

Sign Hallway Displays --- When you see outstanding student papers or projects on a bulletin board, write a personal note to the student on the paper congratulating them on the work well-done. A note to the entire class concerning an attractive bulletin board in the hall or classroom is always appreciated.

Theme of the Year --- The theme of the year can be similar to the project of the year. However, the theme of the year normally involves picking a specific instructional theme that runs throughout the building. It sets up the school's goal in instruction and also dictates what the emphasis will be. It puts the whole school, both certified and non-certified, into a common improvement goal. As in the project of the year, the theme of the year should be well-known to parents, students, and teachers. The theme of the year is an excellent way to make an improvement in a weak curricular area. Suggestions are: hands-on approach to science; expanding the reading in the content area; improved writing skills; drug and alcohol awareness; or the year of the library.

Theme of the Month or Week --- A variation of the theme of the year is the theme of the week or month. Examples of curriculum related themes are: sunny days, sunny ways; beary special days; you're some bunny special; dino-mite days; up, up, and away; blast off. The following is an example of how a theme can be developed. **A Whale Of A Year** --- (1) Bulletin boards welcoming students back to school can be display. (2) Students can do research on whales. (3) Instructional materials can feature whales. (4) Name tags can be whales. (5) The PTA can design notes to use to send teachers, parents, or students with whales on them. Present a note pad to teachers with the whale theme. (6) Use library materials and A.V. materials featuring whales. (7) Have guest speakers and programs featuring whales. You may want to establish themes for your school by quarters or around special events. The themes unite students, parents, and teachers.

School Mascot --- A school mascot is a life saver when planning programs. The mascot can be the narrator at programs, tying the production together. It can be used as covers for school books, handbooks, on T-shirts, or on sweatshirts. When students know the audience for their composition or work is going to be the school mascot, the quality of the composition or work goes up. Have a costume that fits students in your school.

School Pride --- Have activities that promote school pride. Examples would be: (1) Having students design stained glass windows for the library that could be made by a high school art class. (2) Having a student art gallery in the school by using old pieces of furniture, bookcases, small chairs, benches, and wooden boxes (space will determine what and how much you can use.) Have approximately 3-5 students from each class meet in the art gallery once a month for half an hour. Each class contributes art work of various mediums. Classes may send a piece of work from each child or samples from the project. Students first remove the previous month's work, rearrange the area (move boxes, plants, etc.) into a design they like and then display the new art work. If you're using wooden apple boxes, glue small strips of cork along the edges for easy display.

Curriculum Days --- Make a special day as part of curriculum development process. This is especially useful the first year of an adoption. It draws attention to a new series. It can, however, be developed into an event that is done each year. An example of this concept is **Math Immersion Day**. The following is how it is developed: (1) Teachers can use math activities in any and all the subjects they teach. (2) Students can go by numbers instead of their names for a day. (3) Math stations can be set up around the school for activities such as (a) estimating (b) measuring (c) problem-solving (d) creating a math mural (4) Guest speakers can talk about math. (5) Math careers can be featured.

Everyone is a Leader --- Make sure that every teacher and student in the school has the opportunity for leadership by being actively involved in PTA activities, in committee work, etc.

Exchange a Newsletter with Someone in Another PTA --- Find a friend in another state or another community to exchange your weekly or monthly newsletters. You will be surprised how many good ideas you can get from other PTAs. Besides, it is really easy to borrow segments of someone's newsletter for your community. We are not very good at creating new materials, but we are good at borrowing from other people. Besides, it is a fun experience to exchange ideas with PTAs from another district.

Wall of Fame --- Identify a spot in your school which can either be a bulletin board or a special place to put up special newspaper articles, pictures of children, special reports, special news happenings, special things that have happened to children at school, or any other personalized successes or awards that have been achieved by students. They can be left up all year long or changed monthly, or even weekly, if you have the time. You may want to just add to it as the year goes along.

Picture Wall --- Designate a special place in your school to put up the class pictures for the year. As the years progress, you will get a pictorial review of all the children who have gone to that school. It becomes a very special wall if you keep this going for over five years. Students come back and look at their pictures. A nice title over the top of the pictures may say something like, "These are the greatest students in the world."

Video Performances at Conferences --- Showing a video taped performance to parents as they are waiting for their conference with a teacher on conference day is an excellent technique to show your school productions. Depending on your physical setup in the building, you may show it in the library or near the entrance of school.

Videos for Parents --- If you have a special video performance of a class, you can make a copy of that tape for the parents. The one stipulation that is important is that the parents bring in a blank cassette for you to copy. Obviously, you would have to have copying capabilities to do this service.

Video Per Grade --- Each grade level in the school has a video tape. All plays, special performances, or special activities are recorded with a video camera and video cassette recorder. This tape then follows the students as they go through school. By the end of seven years, you have all of the performances that students have performed on tape. It makes an excellent exit video for parents and students at the end of the last grade.

Letters to Graduates --- High school graduates do not normally fall into a category with elementary school PTAs. However, sending a personalized congratulatory letter to high school students graduating, who had formerly gone to your school, is an excellent example of positive public relations. Keep in mind that some of these graduates may be parents of your school's students within five or six years. In many cases, these graduates also have brothers and sisters who still may go to school. Even if there is no chance of them coming back to your school or have brothers and sisters, their parents are the ones who will continue to vote on school issues.

Student Display Boards --- Have a special bulletin board somewhere in your school to display special work. You can have it as a general bulletin board or you can have teacher's names and special things displayed under each name. This can also work in conjunction with a Heritage Room or a Wall of Fame.

Birthday Calendar --- Put out a monthly calendar with the birthdays of all the students in the school. You may even want to include teachers, aides, and, of course, the principal. It gives teachers an opportunity to express a happy birthday to former students and keep track of those who are having birthdays in their classroom.

Super Subs --- Every time you have a new substitute in the building, use your polaroid to take a picture of them and put it up in the teacher's lounge under a small section that says "SUPER SUBS." It allows parents and teachers to put a name and a face together when substitutes are coming in and out of your building.

Curriculum Nights --- A Curriculum Night is an outstanding way to get parents involved with the curriculum. Students can demonstrate or show off areas of a theme selected by the principal and/or staff. Suggestions would be an art fair, science fair, gymnastics demonstration, book fair, or any other theme or project that you may select. Other than the physical education demonstration, the fair would be a sort of show-and-tell by the students. The only thing that the classroom teacher would have to do is be in the room. It would be similar to an Open House only this Open House would be for the specific purpose of a curricular area. Generally the time period is one hour. It is important to make sure that it doesn't turn into a conference.

Volunteer Luncheon --- At the end of each year, the PTA invites in all parent workers and helpers to a special luncheon. This can be done by having a potluck, having the food catered through the food service, or catered through some outside catering service. Most school districts will assist in the expense of putting on one of these. At that time, accomplishments of the volunteers are addressed by the principal. Teachers are invited, if possible, to make it special. Certificates can be given or just a thank you. You may even want to consider giving a rose, a special flower, or a small gift for the amount of hours worked. Thanking parents in a special way will assist in recruiting parent volunteers for the following year. You may want to have a musical group from school provide music.

Conference Helpers --- At parent-teacher conferences it is great to have the PTA service cookies and coffee in the library, media center, or outside the principals office. It allows parents a chance to visit.

Welcome Back Letters --- A welcome back letter is sent home from the PTA two weeks prior to the starting of school. It highlights when school starts, as well as important information that the PTA would like to forward on to students and parents. This is sent through U.S. mail as a very positive approach to the beginning of school. It lets parents know that the PTA is on the job working and preparing for their children. It is suggested that you have labels made through AppleWorks or some type of data base computer program. If you don't have a computer to make the mailing labels, have students write

their own label in the spring on a sticky label which can be attached to an envelope or just have them write on an envelope. The expense of \$.29 per student or family is well worth it.

Letters to Staff --- In addition to sending a welcome back letter to parents highlighting some of the events of the first day and week of school, you can send a letter to you staff. It does not have to be long or detailed. It can be a general welcome letting teachers know that the PTA is back on the job. It also gives you an opportunity to give a special little message that you may want to include, such as a welcome to new teachers or an announcement of a faculty get-together.

Scrapbook for the Year --- Each school should keep a scrapbook for the year. It is easy to think of the things that happen the year before, but it is not easy to think of the things that have happened ten years back. Scrapbooks should include such things as newspaper clippings, special bulletins, pictures of students, pictures of teachers, and special events that have happened around school. Scrapbooks are very popular in schools with parents and students. Be sure to keep them available for families new to the school to look through. Also, have them displayed on special occasions, such as open house.

Parenting Workshops --- Depending upon your neighborhood and clientele, you can have parenting workshops either after school or in the evening to assist parents in handling such things as homework, parent involvement, community involvement, drugs and alcohol, sex education, or any other subjects that you feel may be appropriate. You must know that it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to organize these events. You may want to team with another school or get outside speakers to come in to do this job for you. Workshops are especially helpful for parents who have children starting school for the first time.

The Wednesday Express --- Some schools send home all notices on a special day. The Wednesday Express can be the Friday Express or Monday Express or any other day. It is a day when all papers and bulletins or whatever go home. Parents get used to looking for the Wednesday Express.

New Parent Meeting --- Have a meeting early in the fall for parents new to the school. This also includes parents of kindergarten children who have not previously had children in the school. Use this time to go over the high points of your school, your expectations for the school, meeting the new parents, and answering any questions. Special invitations can be sent out. Have your secretary address envelopes just after children are enrolled.

School Tours --- If time permits, give new families a tour of the school before the children start class. In the fall, schedule a couple of times for group tours.

Parent Questionnaire --- In the fall, send parents a checklist of school projects, activities, etc., where the school could use help. Also, ask if parents have a talent or skill they are willing to share. Put the checklist on NCR paper so that one copy can go to the teachers, the room mother, and the PTA.

Birthday Rose --- The PTA can send an appreciation rose/flower to each staff member on his/her birthday (or half-birthday for summer birthdays) to say "We Care" and what you do is appreciated.

First Day of School --- Parents active in the school or on the PTA make wonderful guides and helpers the first day of school. Given lists of all classes, they can help students find their classroom, reassure the insecure, and bring to the office the student who has gotten off the bus at the wrong school. A room supplied with coffee and cookies can be available for parents on the first day of school. This is particularly helpful for parents of kindergarten children when both the child and parents are having trouble letting go.

Volunteers --- Use parents, community members at large, or senior citizens in a volunteer program. Volunteers can listen to children read, work with students on computers ("The Apple Core Volunteers"), work in the library, do art projects or demonstrations. Be sure to provide training for volunteers. When asking people to volunteer, be sure to say how long you need them; i.e. 2 hours a week for 6 weeks. If people know the time commitment beforehand, they're more likely to volunteer.

Teacher Appreciation Luncheon --- The PTA can sponsor a luncheon to let teachers know that they are appreciated. It doesn't take much to put a bug in the right ear to make it happen.

Grandparents Day --- Early in September is Grandparents Day in the United States. However, it has been found by many principals that having a special Grandparents Day around Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving is more advantageous for school. Special projects and special ways of treating grandparents when they come into your school adds to good public relations.

Heritage Room --- A Heritage Room is an excellent way to develop some historical value for your school if you have a small room somewhere in your building that you can use. It can include such things as history of your school, art projects, science projects, or special school projects to be on permanent display during the school year. A Heritage Room does not have to be much bigger than an 8 x 10 room with shelves to display material. A Heritage Room gives a special touch to your school.

Cleanup Day --- Pick a day in the spring and fall for a special neighborhood cleanup. You can segment your school grounds and even the neighborhood close to the school. You will be surprised how many papers you can find within one block of school. Usually, people who live close to an elementary school have a few complaints about students cutting across lawns, papers lying around, etc. If you spend a special day to clean up the neighborhood, it will be a great help in public relations for the school's close neighbors.

Realtor Information --- If you have a special realtor or realtors that do a lot of selling in your neighborhood, you may want to provide them with fact information sheets about your school. Just having those sheets in their office, lets all people know that you are proud of your school and you have something to show off.

PHD -- Parents, Help and Dedication --- Set up a PHD program in your school. At the end of the school year, you can give out PHD degrees to school helpers. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to come up with some type of certificate. Parents also treasure the certificates they get from their child's school.

Stock Certificates --- Stock certificates are similar to PHD's. A stock certificate is given to someone who has taken stock in your school. It can be a speaker, a volunteer, or anyone that has done something for your school. Your imagination can give you lots of ideas for stock certificates. You can even give out a check worth an amount of one million dollars in thanks.

Reader Signs --- Some elementary Schools have placed reader signs at their school. Most high schools have something up in front of their schools. Why not a reader sign in front of the elementary school? Things that can be put up on readers signs are: special events, scores, or projects. This is especially important if your school is on a very busy street. If you do use one, it is very important to make sure that you keep it up to date.

Newspaper Features --- Call your local paper to take pictures or do an article about a special activity happening in your school. Students and parents love to see things about their school in the paper. Some papers will even feature student work (art, compositions, etc.). The newspaper generally will not come to you.

Mailings to School Board Members --- Be sure to put your school board members on your school mailing list. Send them your newsletters, handbooks, etc. Make sure to invite board members to school to see results of projects. Have a school board member to lunch. You have a great school to show off! Don't forget, these are the people that have the ties to the budget money.

Senior Citizen Helpers --- There are many senior citizens who are very capable people and would love to come into schools to help. They make great listening friends, library helpers, or general volunteers.

Christmas Sharing --- In place of a gift exchange between children at Christmas, have children earn money that they will give to a needy family, a charitable group, or organization. Let students help decide where their money will go.

Non-certified Luncheon or Tea --- An outstanding trick that will let aides and other non-certified in the building know that they are very important is to have the PTA send them to lunch and take over their duties. It does wonders for strong public relations and it also lets them know that they are important in the operation of the school. If the luncheon is not something that is suitable for your particular situation, you can have a small coffee or tea after school and invite all the non-certified and thank them with a small gift of just a special thank you. Take a few minutes to say something about each non-certified person. An alternative is to have a teacher say something about a particular aide.

Custodian Day --- Have one special day out of the year and call it a "Custodian Day." All of the students and teachers treat the custodian or custodians special that one day. Ideas for custodian's day are: students help clean the lunchroom, clean around school, assist the

custodian in an outside cleanup day, give him/her a special certificate, or any other imaginative ideas.

Red Shirt Day --- This can also be called blue shirt day, black shirt day, red hat day or any other kind of day that you want. A good method of having a shirt day is to have school T-shirts worn that day.

Biography Writing --- A super way to start the new school year off is to have sixth graders write a biography about first graders. It gives sixth graders writing skills and lets first graders build a special relationship with the older students in the school. It is a very positive project with all the students and teachers enjoying it. You can go to great lengths to have laminated covers and binding, or you can have simple little folders for students to take their biographies home.

Christmas Story Reading --- Taking every class one twenty-minute period during the month of December is a super trick that is very well received by students and teachers. You pick out a book for the whole school or one per grade level and read a Christmas story to the students. As the years go along, students will look forward to a story at Christmas time, as much as anything else in school. Teachers love to get out of the room, and it does create a very positive feeling between the PTA and the teachers. You do have to have the teachers sign up ahead of time on your schedule.

Summer Library Program --- If it is at all possible, having a summer library program in your school is an excellent way to keep children in books. The management of this program is the most difficult part. You can usually get volunteers to work your library. In schools we generally check out books for 9 months, and then we say that the students can't touch them for three months. Any way that you can open your library periodically through the summer is an excellent method to keep students actively reading.

Awards Day --- Have an Awards Day at the end of the school year. If you have not tried it, you should. It is a good way to end the school year. One way the the PTA can make sure every student has some kind of an award is to require each teacher to give an award. Some ideas for awards are: spelling bee, reading over 100 books, special writing paper, American Legion Citizenship, Presidential Academic Fitness, Presidential Physical Fitness, attendance awards, essay contest, reading wheel award, or any other kind of awards that you can come up with in your school. One of the secrets to having an awards day is to make sure that the students, teachers, and parents know in the fall what awards will be given out in the spring. Parents are not necessarily invited to Awards Day, however, you could invite them. This is a day that is special for the students, not necessarily the parents.

Birthday Cards --- If you are not already giving out birthday cards from the PTA to students, you should consider doing it. It is generally the highlight of their day when they get to come to school to receive their card.

Urinal Target --- Got a problem with your boys missing the mark!!! A black painted dot will certainly solve that problem.

Book Week or Library Week Activity --- Take pictures of book characters and have them duplicated on paper for 4 inch badges. Each staff member wears a book character. When a child tells you who the character is and something about the character, the child gets the badge. Students will spend time in the library trying to find unfamiliar characters. Book awards can be made to the child or class for recognizing the most characters.

Post Card Express --- Each teacher drops a post card to their students sometime in the month of August, welcoming them to their classroom. It is an excellent positive step in good public relations with teachers and parents. The PTA should supply cards with stamps for teachers to fill out some time during the summer. It only takes a few minutes to jot a note, and it does solidify who the teacher will be for each child in the family. These cards should be sent home approximately one week before school starts. If you don't have a computer that will sort out the class enrollment and make the mailing labels, have students write their own label in the spring on a sticky label which can be attached to the postcard in late summer.

Reading Contest --- There are a variety of ways to have a reading contest. The easiest way is to pick a week such as Library Week or National Children's Book Week and count how many books each class reads. A special treat can be given for the class with the most books read. Your imagination will allow you to come up with all kinds of ways of having reading contests. Since reading is the number one subject taught in the elementary school, it is appropriate to promote it in every way we can.

Celebrate the Birthday of Your School or Name --- When was the last time that you celebrated the birthday of the person for whom your school was named? This celebration can be a real educational experience. There are hundreds of Jefferson Schools around this country, as are there Washington, Lincoln, Emerson, and other famous names. If you have not done this in your school, you would be surprised about how many students do not have the slightest idea as to who the person was that the school was named after.

Key Chains --- A variety of key chains can be made to inspire parents, students, and teachers. One school has key chains with a short saying imprinted on one side of the plastic attachment. The saying is "I am proud to be a Main Street School Teacher." Other key chains that can be made and sold to parents or given as a reward for volunteer work are "I'm proud to be a Jefferson School Parent" or "Volunteers Make Jefferson School Grow."

Ribbons, Ribbons, Ribbons --- For the expense of 1,000 ribbons, you can have a saying made up to reward children for outstanding work. These ribbons are similar to certificates which many schools give out. Sayings on these ribbons can be motivational to reward students for outstanding behavior, outstanding school work, exceptional school service, or other things that can be a reward for something well done.

VIP Award --- Many schools give out a "Very Important Person" award for students and/or parents. However, one school gives out a VIP called "Volunteers Improve Progress." The VIP award is based upon volunteer work that helps in student academic progress.

This award has become a very prestigious award in this school. Like student work that is exhibited on refrigerator doors, so are the VIP certificates for parents exhibited at home. This shows children that parents care about what goes on in their school.

Barbecue --- Have a student barbecue at least twice a year. Work out an arrangement with your cook or food service to have hamburger cooked outside. This can be done by the cooks or by parents volunteers. The best way to have this be a success is to have the PTA volunteers be the chief cooks. Invite parents and have the lunch period out on the playground. Even though this takes a considerable amount of planning, the PR between the kitchen, the staff, and home is outstanding. Students enjoy it and the lunch count goes up considerably on this day.

Slide Show --- Put together a slide show about your school. Make it generic in nature so that it can be used at an open house, a kindergarten orientation, a civic club presentation, continuous showing at parent teacher conference time, or any other place you may find it appropriate.

Pencil Sale --- Buy one to five gross pencils printed with your school name. Have them in the office for sale to students. Keep them available throughout the day. In order to avoid a constant flow of students to the office for these pencils, have a special time when pencils can be bought. If you have a school store they can be sold there in addition to the office. The office is always open, but a school store is not. Make a profit on your pencils and designate that the profits go to a certain project.

Coffee Time --- Designate a special time each month for coffee time. Invite whoever is interested to come to school and have an opportunity to visit about what is going on in school. Your imagination can dictate the agenda or you can have parents suggest agenda items. If you do not want anything formal, you can just have a discussion time. In order to have a variety, you can have special teachers such as gifted and talented, music, or P.E. spend some time at one of these meetings. In addition, you can have primary or intermediate teachers join you. Do not make teachers have a presentation. They should be there as a resource to you in discussing whatever areas you want to cover. If you want to take it a step further, you can send special invitations out to selected parents who may be interested in a particular subject area.

Neighborhood Open House --- If you anticipate a difficult time passing a school referendum, have a neighborhood open house. This open house should be in addition to the normal open house that most schools have at the beginning of each year. The idea behind the neighborhood open house is to solicit your PTA to bring neighbors who do not have children in school to see what is going on. Special invitations can and should be sent to businesses in the neighborhood. During this open house, have students demonstrate certain aspects of the curriculum, such as an art night, a science night, etc. You will find that this is an outstanding way to promote your school.

Room Parent --- Most elementary school teachers have a room parent who assists them during special party times. An offshoot of this is to have a room parent to use for projects other than parties. A room parent does not necessarily do all the projects that you want, but contact other parents in the class when help is needed. Suggestions are learning centers, listening to children read, helping with bulletin boards, helping with special school

projects such as open houses or carnivals. A room parent can be an asset to any school program.

Ten Minute Assembly --- A ten minute assembly is similar to the one minute manager. This takes place of special announcements or special awards that are given to students. You can use the ten minute assembly to introduce a candy sale, wrap up a candy sale, give special reading awards, motivate children to keep the school clean, and other such valuable things that can help the school. One school's favorite trick in a ten minute assembly is to have classroom drawings for simple prizes, such as pencils or a box of candy. In doing this, you have a captive audience to get a particular point across to the students. Building school pride through the ten minute assembly is an excellent technique to create great school spirit. The ten minute assembly should be done at the end of the day since a good presentation can get them higher than teachers want them for the instructional day. It is also an excellent time to reward teachers for outstanding work.

Service Pins --- Be the leader in your school district to initiate service pins for teachers. Generally these service pins are for ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, etc. years to the school district. Be the leader that designs a pin that teachers can wear in pride as being a part of the school district. This also develops a strong bond between associations and the school district. Be sure you give the service pin during an assembly so that students help recognize teachers for their dedication in employment to the district. These pins can also be given to non-certified staff.

Teacher Mailbox Gift --- Something special showing up in the teachers' mailboxes once or twice a year will be good PR between you and your staff. A small chocolate bar or a unique teaching tool that shows up around Christmas, Valentine's Day, or any other special holiday also has a significant impact on teachers. It doesn't take much nor does it take a lot of money to have a large impact. It is the little things that establishes the great public relations between the PTA and the staff. This can also work well with the non-certified staff.

Photographer of the Year --- Every school should have a good camera to take pictures of significant things that happen around school. It also can be used by the PTA to take pictures of students who have done outstanding work or have exemplary behavior. When getting these developed, you should have double prints made. One print is given to the person who collects materials for the scrap book, the other print is sent home via U.S. mail with a short note from the principal or PTA. That picture will become one of the most valued pictures the family will collect.

The Alumni Report --- Use your newsletter to accent significant achievements by students who have gone through your school. It does not have to be a regular section, but can be added when an outstanding award or achievement has been accomplished by a former student. Examples are: all-state recognition, honor society, honor roll, or any other awards that former students have achieved.

A Nice Thing Happened at Our School Today --- Have a stack of pre-printed post cards entitled "A Nice Thing Happened At Our School Today." These cards are regularly available for all staff to use. This is a way of accentuating self-esteem and encouraging

parent pride and support. Personal notes home are one of the most valuable things that a school can do.

Pre-School Story Hour --- If the librarian, library aide or PTA volunteer has time in the spring of the year, a pre-school story hour will begin to open the door for new students coming in. You need to setup some strict guidelines so that it does not become a baby sitting time for parents. The best way to structure it is to have an activity for parents such as a coffee hour while there is a story hour going on. If the principal can get involved in reading the story, it will also help to get children ready for school.

Academic Fairs --- Having some type of academic fair each year, will lead to an improved curriculum. Academic fairs can include a P.E. demonstration, an art fair, a science fair, a social studies fair, math fair, or any other curriculum area that you would like to emphasize. Building this around an open house will involve parents in the project. Prizes can be given or not given. No matter whether you give awards or not, certificates should be given to every student who has a project. The enthusiasm toward the subject area will increase considerably with parents, students, and teachers. The teachers do not have to do anything other than attend. The students demonstrate or show off whatever they have.

Business Partnerships --- Business partnerships are a growing trend in American education today. Even though businesses have been heavily involved in education in our country, most of this has been in post secondary education. There are a number of things that your PTA can do to develop a good strong working relationship between you and businesses in your school attendance area. Some of these are: holding staff meetings in local business meeting rooms; touring business facilities; having business leaders come to your school for lunch; involving businesses in helping teach; and other ideas that fit your community and attendance area. School business partnerships will send a positive tone from school to the community about what is going on in your school.

Legislative Involvement --- Involve your teachers, students, and PTA in following a Legislative bill. You do not necessarily need to be close to a state Capital to follow a bill. Use your legislator to help you follow a non-controversial bill. This will be a great learning project for both students and staff. Normally, local legislators will be more than happy to get involved in this kind of project. If possible, testifying at a hearing is a learning experience that is second to none.

Dress Up Day --- Provide a little variety in your school year. Have different types of days such as dress up day, shirt day, cap day, special T-shirts day, blue jean day, or whatever fits your school area. One principal who participated in dress up day wore a tuxedo on this special occasion. You will be surprised at the wonderful comments that you will get from parent and teachers when you have a special event like this. Children do take pride in their dress regardless of what parents and teachers believe.

Bus Driver Day --- Have a special day in the school year to recognize your bus drivers. It does not have to be a large extravagant affair, but the recognition will go a long way in having them become a vital part of your school. Just having them come in for lunch and recognizing them will suffice. Giving them a tour of the building and talking a little during the visit will also aid in good discipline. Remember, the bus driver is the first

person that sees the students after they leave home. The tone they set is very important for you.

Video Specialists --- Train one of your upper grade students to be a video specialist. This person will do all of your videoing during programs and special events. Surprisingly, students will take more of a special interest in taping than a parent or teacher will. Giving an award to them at the end of the year is also beneficial. If you do it right, you will have two people filming, one in training and another one who was in training the year before.

Parent Congratulatory Letter --- Everyone likes to get recognition. Occasionally, parents make the paper for an outstanding achievement, award, or recognition. In that case, you should take the time to drop them a congratulatory note. This will also give the students an extra special pride in their parents' accomplishment. It is another way to link school and home.

Hallway Themes --- Nearly all elementary schools have hallway decorations. Sometimes during the year you may want to elect to have a theme for the whole school. This theme could be seasonal, subject, or a special theme that the school has elected to have for the year or month. All teachers would have their students have some type of display in the hall. These displays can then be publicized in your newsletter. It is especially effective around parent teacher conference time.

Class of the Week --- There are many schools around the country that has a class or teacher of the week. This recognition is given by the principal or PTA for outstanding accomplishments by the class. It can be academic or non-academic in nature. The students are honored with some special treat, such as additional time outside or time with the principal. Teachers are also given a break by the principal assigning someone to take over the class. It is an effort to recognize the outstanding work that teachers and students do throughout the year.

Birthday Cards for School Employees --- Many PTAs around the country give birthday cards to students, but very few give birthday cards to staff. This special recognition by the PTA to the teacher is well received. It is worth the time and effort to jot a note on the card on this very special day.

Sent to the Principal Award --- Put together a certificate that says "Sent to the Principal." When teachers send a child to the principal for something good, the principal in return fills out a short note congratulating them. They sign it and the students take it home. It is a way to accentuate the positive in the school.

Bumper Stickers --- There is one school which has bumper stickers made up advertising their school. The PTA has taken on this project and sells the bumper stickers for a profit. This is a very positive way to advertise your school and recognize cars from your attendance area.

Parent Talent Survey --- Design a survey that fits the needs of your school and community and send it home to parents looking for special areas of expertise. Make sure that your survey is well written with specific goals in mind. Parents filling out these surveys are also signing up to be on a speakers bureau for your school.

Archives --- Many schools have a school scrapbook that they keep either from year to year or yearly. However, not many schools have established an archives. This archives should have a collection of artifacts that have been collected from the year. They include such things as photographs, parent newsletters, displays of student work that is exemplary, newspaper articles about the school, a collection of school photos, and other material that will be relevant to the archives of the school. The first few years of establishing an archives is difficult. However, after it catches on, teachers and students are anxious to include things in an archives box kept in the library.

Photo Gallery --- Taking time to put up a photo gallery of black and white photos of students around school is one of the most popular bulletin board ideas that a school can have. Rotating pictures with small and blowups is desirable. This photo gallery can go from year to year and does not have to be changed at any particular time. It does take a dedicated teacher, principal, or other staff member to keep it up. There is an expense involved with it, however, the pictures can end up in a scrapbook or archives.

Business Partnership Certificates --- It is very easy to establish a Business Partnership Certificate with a local fast food restaurant. Establishments such as McDonald's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Dairy Queen, and other such companies are willing to discuss with you the potential of having certificates made up for free food for certain tasks accomplished. Most businesses will allow you to set your own criteria. Pizza Hut with its Bookit Program is probably the best known across the country. Other food chains and local food outlets are happy to get young people in their business as a reward for good work.

Monthly Calendar Bulletin Board --- Use a bulletin board in the hall and put up a monthly calendar. Include on this calendar all birthdays of students, school activities, and school district activities that affect your school. Teachers may add to the bulletin board as the month goes along. Having a bulletin board station close to the office is advantageous.

Button Maker --- A button maker is a necessity for every school. Making creative buttons is limited only to the imagination of the PTA. Having buttons sold at carnivals or open houses can also be a money maker. It adds a lot of motivating students, teachers, and parents.

Radio Messages --- Although the National PTA and other organizations have public service messages, a class project and student written and spoken public service announcement personalized to a hometown will go a long ways. Most of the time, all it takes is a personal contact with the station manager to get this done.

T.V. Time --- Have a special project that you want to publicize? Go to your local T.V. station and talk to your news manager about your project. Most of the time, they are more than happy to have good public interest stories on their nightly news. Any way that you can market your school through the media is advantageous to a school district.

Back to School Picnic --- Having a picnic involving parents, students, and teachers prior to the opening of school is an outstanding way to start the year off.

Television Coverage --- Most coverage that schools get across the country is by accident or by an unusual event which causes media attention. In order to have television stations focus in on your school, it is a good idea to visit your local television station and talk with the news manager. Acquaint him or her with the unusual aspects of your school. Invite them to come to school at any time. This includes a moments notice. Most of the time T.V. stations will come for background coverage on an education story. This kind of coverage will open the door for a feature story that you want for your school. With a little work, you can control the media instead of the media controlling you.

Founders Day --- Celebrate the birthday of your school by inviting all alumni and alumni staff members back for an assembly and open house. Generally speaking, those people who come back to school are the old timers and not the most recent graduates of your school. It is a thrill for parents to come back to elementary schools where they once attended. It is also a time for old staff members to take pride in the culture and history of the school. This is an excellent public relations event. Surprisingly, you will have a large turnout and it will be well received by people living in the neighborhood.

Perfect Attendance Awards --- Most schools have a Perfect Attendance Award which is given out at the end of the year. However, Perfect Attendance Awards can be given out at the end of each quarter. Although these awards are normally given in the classrooms, there are various other ways that it can be advertised in your school. It can be done by a bulletin board, a listing in the newsletter, announcements over a P.A. system or other ways that fit your school. Children will begin to take pride in being at school every day.

Monthly Calendar of Events --- Nearly every classroom has a monthly calendar somewhere in the room to show students the dates where things will be happening in the classroom. Take a bulletin board somewhere in the school and have a monthly calendar of school events. Design the bulletin board in such a way that it can be a felt board or something that is written or changed fairly easily. It is a very popular bulletin board with parents as they visit the school. Although it does take some time, it does keep the parents and students up-to-date on what is going on in and around school.

Muffins for Mom and Donuts for Dad --- Have your PTA provide two special days for moms and dads. Establish a tradition of each day having this special activity between 7:45 and 8:45 in the morning. Valentines Day is set aside for fathers while Mother's Day is set aside for mothers. Following a breakfast, the students escort their parent through the building giving them a special tour and inviting them to stay as long as they like for the day's activities. Most parents will stay for the first fifteen minutes to half hour of the opening of school. It is an excellent public relations idea that will grow from year to year. It can be expanded to include grandparents if it can be worked in. This also can be added into a Grandparents Day.

Staff Member of the Week --- Pick a staff member each week and recognize them for the weeks of work that they do. This can be done very simply by an announcement or as drawn out as one wants by bulletin boards, gifts, biographies, newsletters and other such forms of recognition. In a 35-40 week year, you can usually recognize everyone in school. This

can be broken into two years and done every other week. Every building and staff is unique in its own way. You can recognize each staff member in a personal way by designating them as "Staff Member of the Week". Students and parents love to get to know their staff members in a little different way through this exercise.

Student of the Month --- Recognizing outstanding students in a school is a long standing tradition of the elementary and middle school. This can be done through business partnerships or in a very simple way by just announcing the "Student of the Month" over the intercom. Generally speaking, the "Student of the Month" is one selected from each classroom. Criteria is set by the classroom teacher. It can be done for something that is outstanding academically or through a special accomplishment done in the room. Businesses are more than happy to work cooperatively with schools to reward students for outstanding accomplishments.

Welcome Wagon Bag --- Have your PTA pattern a project after the National Welcome Wagon Organization. This project includes a bag full of coupons for each new student. The coupons are designed to have the students quickly meet all of the people they come in contact with, plus a small gift redeemable for each coupon. The child meets and talks with the librarian, secretary, nurse, custodian, principal, etc. In addition, the bag contains all of the school information plus information from the PTA.

Staff Picture Board --- Somewhere near the office have a board set aside with a picture of each staff member. This includes teachers, principal, secretary, custodians, aides, etc. Although the staff is familiar to most students and all people who work in and around the school, faces are not familiar to parents and school guests. This picture board will give those unfamiliar with staff members, an idea of who they are looking for when they go through the building. This coupled with pictures of all of the students shows the pride of each school.

The Alumni Hall of Fame --- Many schools have displays for accomplishments of students in the school. However, there are some schools that use a Hall of Fame for accomplishments made by former students. The older the schools the larger the Hall of Fame. This does add pride and accomplishment to the work done in your school. Depending upon your physical setting and community, you can set up the rules that best fit your school.

New Family Welcome Letters --- One of the best PR things that you can do with new parents is send a letter home after a child or children have been enrolled for a two-week period. The letter can welcome them and reinforce some of the things that were told to them when they registered their children. This can be a very simple easy thing that can be done by the secretary with only your signature needed. The time that it takes to send this letter will reap great rewards for your school/PTA.

Big Friend - Little Friend --- Have a "Big Friend-Little Friend" program. Sixth graders are paired with kindergarten students and do weekly activities together. The older students are role models and friends to help the younger students become a part of the school. Activities such as reading stories, learning games, cooking together, craft projects, and

other school activities help kindergartners feel welcome to the school. This buddy system works great and gives the sixth graders a sense of accomplishment in helping a young person begin their career in school.

Set Goals --- Know where you are going, what your priorities are, and how you're going to get there.

Weekly Newsletter --- Most PTAs send out a monthly newsletter. If you don't do at least a monthly one, you are missing the greatest public relations technique known to the elementary school. If you want to go one step further however, putting out a weekly newsletter will even do more for your school. Most PTAs that try it find that it is not only a better mode of communication, but that it is easier than a monthly one and much more timely. The secret is to send it home on the same day each week and make it one page and only one side. Every PTA knows that most parents do not read past the first page, even if they read that much.

Parent T-Shirts --- "I am a Jefferson School PTA Parent" is a strong way to promote public relations with your parents. You will be surprised at how many parents will be interested in having a T-shirt, especially if they coordinate with your school T-shirts. All T-shirt sales, both students and parents, should be pre-paid so that you are not stuck with dozens of T-shirts.

Room Mothers' Christmas Party --- Because room mothers give so much to a school, have a party for them at Christmas. Have it at a parent's or the principal's home. They'll know how much they are appreciated.

Use Your Dentist and Doctor --- Most dentists in an attendance area or a community will come in to talk to your students about the good health and will even examine teeth on a quick screening of students. In addition, community doctors can be used as health speakers and even give talks on the delicate subject of sex education. Use your community leaders to your advantage in your school. Most of the time you will have a parent who is either a professional or knows a professional who can assist as a community speaker.

Ice Cream Social --- One way to increase parent participation in Open Houses is to have an old fashioned ice cream social in your school lunch room. Your PTA will provide all of the ingredients including ice cream and toppings plus the manpower to run this social. It is guaranteed to add class to any school's Open House.

Sing-A-Long's --- One of the easiest ways to have a quick affective assembly is to have a sing-a-long. Usually these are conducted around special holidays. However, if a week or season seems to be dragging, you can get your music teacher to conduct an impromptu sing-a-long. The most affective way to make this a success is to have the principal lead the singing. Overhead transparencies add to the efficiency of the sing-a-long. It also gives you an opportunity to praise the music teacher in front of the whole school.

Thanksgiving Feast --- Have your PTA work with the kindergarten and primary grades to have a Thanksgiving Feast. Potluck lunches are outstanding. It is also a time when fathers can be invited to school to take part in the feast. Generally, classes will have a short assembly or play for the parents immediately preceding the feast. This is also a time

when grandparents can be invited since many of them are in town for the Thanksgiving holiday. Be sure that the work is centered around the parents and it does not become a teacher cooking project.

Career Day --- "What Do You Want To Be?" week was sponsored by PTA. Children indicated on flyers what they wanted to be when they grew up. From the answers, a list of careers was compiled. Assemblies were held with two presentations per day, and teachers and children were given the opportunity to choose which to attend. Careers included make-up artist, zoo-keeper, detective, fireman/paramedic, ballerina, nurse, doctor, business owner, etc. Teachers supplemented career information in the classroom. The week ended with children dressing for their chosen careers.

Environment --- "Earth Week" --- a series of activities to help children become aware of their importance in being a part of environmental conservation and recognition. Children were asked to rate their lunches -- throw-away items, etc.-- and were given examples of "earth saver" lunches. Children wore green clothing on one day to show participation. Videos and classroom activities --- writing stories about Earth Day, recycling, discussion of where garbage goes --- were included.

RECRUITING FATHERS

These tips on recruiting male volunteers are adapted from the book *Getting Men Involved* by James A. Levine, Dennis T. Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson.

Reprinted from *Our Children* September/October 1995.

- **GET DAD'S NAME ON FILE**
 - ▶ Make sure membership roll include the names of member's spouses.
- **SEND MAILINGS AND NOTICES ADDRESSED TO BOTH PARENTS**
 - ▶ A sense of being included is important.
 - ▶ If Dad doesn't live at home, send a separate mailing to his address.
- **CREATE A FATHER-FRIENDLY CLIMATE**
 - ▶ Meetings and other events should be places where men feel comfortable, not out of place.
- **TAKE A MALE-INTEREST SURVEY**
 - ▶ No more than 10 or so questions can help you find out the keys to more male involvement.
- **USE OTHER MEN AS RECRUITERS**
 - ▶ Sometimes other dads who are already involved can create a domino effect.
- **RECOGNIZE WOMEN'S HIDDEN RESISTANCE**
 - ▶ Sometimes mothers may not want to yield "their" territory.
 - ▶ Try to identify and deal openly with such mixed feelings.
- **REACH OUT TO MEN FROM THE COMMUNITY.**
 - ▶ Local businesses, professional organizations, houses of worship, and public agencies may all be sources of male volunteers.



High School Family-Community Partnerships Look **Different!**

Just as the parent-child relationship changes during the teen years, the needs and expectations for family-community-school partnerships at the high school level change—for students, families, and school staff. Maintaining the same level of personal interaction with six high school teachers that a parent had with her child's one elementary teacher may be impossible, as well as unnecessary.

Some things do not change. Families continue to teach their high school-aged children many valued attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, and skills. Although most parents of high schoolers cannot and do not participate at the school building as volunteers and decision makers, 80 percent of parents surveyed said they do want to know *how to help* their children succeed at home and *what to do* to help their children succeed at school.

Parents surveyed by Joyce Epstein and Lori Connors at the Center for Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning said they especially want more information from their child's high school about

- adolescent development,
- what and how well students are learning,
- planning for the student's future, and
- monitoring and assisting with homework.

Paul Spies, president of the newly formed Wisconsin High School Association, has taught at four Wisconsin and Illinois high schools. He offered his observations about "what works" for family involvement practices in high schools.

Create Realistic Expectations for Teachers

To make contact with students' families "manageable" for teachers, create interdisciplinary learning teams which allow teachers from the core disciplines to teach, know personally, and act as advocates for smaller numbers of students.

Even though Spies' school of 3,000 had an incoming class of 900 freshmen students, his interdisciplinary team was responsible for only 125 students. That meant each teacher had to make about 30 telephone calls at the beginning of the year to introduce themselves to parents, a task they were able to do because the numbers weren't overwhelming.

For one teacher to personally contact the families of his or her average daily student load—100 to 130—is a gargantuan task. For families to get telephone calls from the five or six teachers who their son or daughter sees each day might also be confusing. But parents who know the face and telephone number of one teacher to address questions or concerns are parents equipped with a useful "tool" to monitor and participate in their child's learning.

Parents are "pleasantly surprised" when they get a phone call from a high school teacher at the start of the year, Spies said. Some parents say they feel less intimidated about showing interest in their child's high school education because a welcome has been extended.

Make School Open House Night an Occasion

Yes, Open House Night is a popular and useful way for families to meet high school teachers and learn about mutual expectations for the student. Some schools go a step further in making it easier for parents and teachers to meet by holding School Open House Night in one large, accessible location—the school gym, for example. Staff gather around easy-to-identify stations by subject or discipline or alphabetically and talk with parents as they circulate around the room.

Here's what else schools are doing:

- incorporating parenting tips, the school district's family involvement policy, and the school's mission into an Open House Night talk by the principal.



Learning Together

facing children's learning. Therefore, every effort must be made to use that time efficiently.

I have been at some advisory council meetings where most of the meeting was taken by reports from the principal and chairperson, with little time for discussion. It was great information, and I was glad I was there, but that same information could have been provided to all parents through the newsletter, voice mail, cable TV, or any other of a number of vehicles.

Just as the time of parents is precious so, too, is the principal's. Principals have far more meetings than they have time for, and they don't need to waste time talking at an advisory council. My parental advice to principals is:

- Use your staff and volunteers to develop information sheets on the issues you want discussed.
- Give information to the council ahead of time.
- Use technology—including the phone and computer—to supplement the council's meeting time.
- Tell council members about other meetings that they can attend to get information about programs that you would like feedback on.
- Ask parents for their advice and listen to hear new ideas and perspectives.

Council members want to feel they are contributing, and it doesn't do a thing for our self-esteem when we are talked at for most of the meeting and given no specific assignments.

Other suggestions for the care and nurturing of parent advisory councils:

- Use councils as *one* means to seek advice from parents on substantive issues; realizing that additional input may be needed.
- Make a concerted effort to get a diversity of perspectives (cultural, income, academic, working class, and so forth) on the parent advisory council.
- Don't expect that you have met your obligation to provide information to all parents by providing it only

to the advisory council. Use the parent advisory council as one way to get information to parents, with the hope that they will share the information with others. Some will, some won't.

- Use the parent advisory council to recruit volunteers to serve on other committees, as well as to do other tasks.

- Use the parent advisory council to get feedback. Give them information prior to the meeting and ask them to react to it at the meeting. Break into small groups to give everyone a chance to talk.

- Periodically ask council members to make some phone calls to solicit input and poll other parents. Invite council members to other meetings; encourage them to attend school board meetings. Send them reminders about the parent advisory council. Give them a sense of ownership in something.

- Allow parents the flexibility to bring their children to the meeting. I have, on several occasions, taken one or more of my children to meetings. I strongly believe parents should not have to pay for child care to do volunteer work. Therefore, where possible, provide the option for bringing children to the meeting. Usually a corner in the meeting room is fine for the kids to sit and read a book or put together a puzzle. My expectation is that my child will behave and benefit from seeing me participate.

- Finally, listen to parents and respond with other than, "That's just the way we do things here," or "That's our policy," or "That's already been decided." Instead, try, "That's a perspective we hadn't thought about; how might we work together to improve what we are doing?"

Good luck and happy PAC-ing!

Sample

Responsibilities of grade level participants on the Verona Area High School Parent Advisory Council: to be actively involved at monthly PAC meetings, to assist in chairing or co-chairing committees as they are established; to be a participant on committees that increase opportunities for our students that do not involve alcohol and other drugs; to assist in improving opportunities for students to learn; and to interact and network with other parents on behalf of their student's education.



- videotaping the proceedings for parents not able to attend.
- kicking off the session with a barbecue or potluck supper, giving parents and teachers a chance to mingle informally. This can be done by classroom, for families of the new freshman class, or the whole school.
- circulating volunteer sign-up forms during the open house. Interest in volunteering to help students in reading, computer, or other study laboratories will be greater in high schools.
- inviting your school's parent group and community organizations and agencies to set up exhibits or distribute information.

Ask, Listen, and Act

Whether it's a formal survey or during a one-on-one conversation, school staff pay parents a great compliment when they ask parents' opinions about how well they think the school is working for their child, take time to listen to their responses, and then act to meet the needs they hear about.

"In order to connect with the community, schools have to be communities," Spies said. This means reaching out in a variety of ways to parents who may normally be reluctant to come to the school building, including

- bringing together parents with similar interests, cultural backgrounds, or by neighborhood, including an Hispanic Parent Alliance or an Afro-American Parent Alliance. Ask alliance members to gather information—aneccdotally or in writing—and serve as representatives for other parents.
- gathering family "focus groups" with a distinct purpose and limited time demands to respond to curricular, planning, or community issues. Avoid using "token" parents on school or staff committees. One or two parents on a committee of 20 teachers cannot adequately represent the needs and opinions of parents not at the meeting. If you can't increase the number of family members willing to serve on those committees, provide a means for families to offer their comments at numerous key points in the planning process.

WHSA, created in 1996, provides a network for educators and others to share experiences and to promote successful high school practices and to share experiences. It is affiliated with the National High School Association, headquartered in Irvine, CA. For more information about membership or about the organization, please contact Paul Spies, WHSA President, 2931 S. 57th St., Milwaukee, WI 53219, call (414) 327-1581, or e-mail paulspies@aol.com.



Schools Where Family-School-Community Partnerships Flourish

Characteristics of a Partnership School

Collaboration between teachers, administrators, families, and communities has become commonplace. Most schools, for example, offer some type of parent volunteer program, a school open house, parent-teacher conferences, newsletter for parents, and a fund-raising parent group. In addition to traditional involvement, however, schools are devising many new opportunities to work with families and the community to help each other and to improve the school.

Why have some schools been able to make partnership practices an integral part of the school's culture, while others continue with lower or traditional levels of family and community involvement? Don Davies, co-director of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, has found several common characteristics among the "breakthrough schools" that live and breathe family-community partnerships.

These are the factors that partnership schools share:

Principal and teacher leadership. Principals and at least some teachers are willing to lead and take risks. They understand the meaning of shared responsibility for children's learning and well-being. They have learned that the school alone simply can't do the job of helping all children succeed. They understand that partnership means reciprocity—that the school exchanges information, services, support, and benefits with its families and communities.

Diverse opportunities. The school provides a varied menu of opportunities for participation geared to the diverse needs of families and their children and to the particular conditions of each school and school district. Partnerships are integrated with the mainstream activities and programs of the schools.

Outside help. The school usually has sought an outside agent to serve as the catalyst and facilitator of change. Outside help takes many forms, including taking advantage of federal programs such as Goals 2000 or the Drug-Free Schools Act; or an interested university, or a federally-funded research and development center. Outside help usually has two crucial components: discretionary money (often very small amounts, as little as \$5,000); and the presence of an outside facilitator, or consultant, on a continuing basis.

Ways to welcome families. The schools have a structure and focus to help families feel welcome. A family or parent center is a low-cost, easy-to-manage method to make schools more hospitable to families and to plan and carry out a wide variety of family and community activities. The center sends a message that families are welcome in the schools.

Learning at home. Learning does not stop at the schoolhouse door. The school helps families do what nearly all of them want to do anyway—increase their children's academic success. Teachers help families set realistic expectations, monitor and help with homework, select appropriate books and learning materials, support the school's academic priorities, and use home learning materials. The school negotiates increased access to community resources, including reduced fees at museums and cultural events, family reading programs in libraries, increased access to college facilities and courses, and tutoring and mentoring programs in businesses and corporations.

Multiple approaches to communicating. The school uses varied and imaginative forms of communication. The more informed families are about the schools and their own children's social and academic progress, the better able they are to participate effec-

Reflections on Parent Advisory Councils: One Parent's Experience

by Jane Grinde, Team Leader
DPI Family-Community-School Partnerships

So your school has a parent advisory council? Is it a gathering of parents who bring energy, enthusiasm, and great ideas to the learning experience for your students, or is it another way for the principal to tell the few parents who attend what is happening in school?

Who comes to the advisory council meetings? Who knows about the meetings? Who sets the agendas? Who talks at the meetings? Who listens? Who follows up on concerns and issues raised? Who follows up on the great ideas brought forth?

As a veteran of parent advisory councils PreK to high school, I'd like to offer a few observations about some of my successful and not-so-successful experiences. I am currently the parent of three children in early elementary, middle, and high schools. My experience has taught me that parent participation takes **energy, time, and commitment**, and often produces real feelings of frustration.

Despite many years working for a state department of education in communications and family-school-community partnerships, my level of contribution as a parent seldom matches my expectation of what it should be. Just as parents and students bring different perspectives, needs, and interests to their roles, so too, the experiences of serving on councils will be varied.

For example, sometimes the knowledge, familiarity, and experience of veteran council members may unintentionally intimidate parents new to the group. Maybe it's my own guilt, but in the presence of some parents, I feel a little inadequate. These are the wonderful parents who volunteer regularly, know the routine, know the staff, and perhaps take for granted that other parents can be just as caring as they but aren't able to participate in similar ways. We need to remember that all parents' contributions are important, beginning with what we do at home with our children.

My first meetings of the middle and high school parent advisory councils were remarkably similar. I was late both times and knew only one or two of the 20-plus members. Most of the parents seemed to know each other.

So, there I was, feeling a little inadequate. But, if I felt that way, how many other parents with fewer resources and less experience felt worse? No wonder so few of us make it out of the home door and through the school door!

And, what efforts were made by me or others on the council to recruit the "waiting to be reached" parents, the parents who don't even know the school has an advisory council? The parents who don't have transportation? The parent who works an hourly job in the evening? The parent who doesn't feel welcome in the school, or doesn't even know where the school is?

My reasons for serving on a council are fairly simple. I want to learn more about my children's education, want to offer my ideas, and I want to be respected as a partner in the learning process. I also want convenient times and locations for the meeting. I want information, but don't want to be overwhelmed with too much information, nor with minor issues that take time away from the larger picture. I want to be able to talk without feeling I have to compete for the time to offer my opinion in a group of 20 or so people, most of whom I don't know.

Certainly, we don't want to discourage large groups, but if it is to be an advisory council, then make sure all get to talk and offer input. It's easy to break into small groups to deal with issues. It's more efficient to provide dot points or one-page summaries of programs before the meeting rather than have someone take precious time to explain a new program. The typical 90-minute meeting is a bigtime commitment for many participants, yet certainly not long enough to deal with the many important issues



facing children's learning. Therefore, every effort must be made to use that time efficiently.

I have been at some advisory council meetings where most of the meeting was taken by reports from the principal and chairperson, with little time for discussion. It was great information, and I was glad I was there, but that same information could have been provided to all parents through the newsletter, voice mail, cable TV, or any other of a number of vehicles.

Just as the time of parents is precious so, too, is the principal's. Principals have far more meetings than they have time for, and they don't need to waste time talking at an advisory council. My parental advice to principals is:

- Use your staff and volunteers to develop information sheets on the issues you want discussed.
- Give information to the council ahead of time.
- Use technology—including the phone and computer—to supplement the council's meeting time.
- Tell council members about other meetings that they can attend to get information about programs that you would like feedback on.
- Ask parents for their advice and listen to hear new ideas and perspectives.

Council members want to feel they are contributing, and it doesn't do a thing for our self-esteem when we are talked at for most of the meeting and given no specific assignments.

Other suggestions for the care and nurturing of parent advisory councils:

- Use councils as *one* means to seek advice from parents on substantive issues; realizing that additional input may be needed.
- Make a concerted effort to get a diversity of perspectives (cultural, income, academic, working class, and so forth) on the parent advisory council.
- Don't expect that you have met your obligation to provide information to all parents by providing it only

to the advisory council. Use the parent advisory council as one way to get information to parents, with the hope that they will share the information with others. Some will, some won't.

- Use the parent advisory council to recruit volunteers to serve on other committees, as well as to do other tasks.
- Use the parent advisory council to get feedback. Give them information prior to the meeting and ask them to react to it at the meeting. Break into small groups to give everyone a chance to talk.
- Periodically ask council members to make some phone calls to solicit input and poll other parents. Invite council members to other meetings; encourage them to attend school board meetings. Send them reminders about the parent advisory council. Give them a sense of ownership in something.
- Allow parents the flexibility to bring their children to the meeting. I have, on several occasions, taken one or more of my children to meetings. I strongly believe parents should not have to pay for child care to do volunteer work. Therefore, where possible, provide the option for bringing children to the meeting. Usually a corner in the meeting room is fine for the kids to sit and read a book or put together a puzzle. My expectation is that my child will behave and benefit from seeing me participate.
- Finally, listen to parents and respond with other than, "That's just the way we do things here," or "That's our policy," or "That's already been decided." Instead, try, "That's a perspective we hadn't thought about; how might we work together to improve what we are doing?"

Good luck and happy PAC-ing!

Sample

Responsibilities of grade level participants on the Verona Area High School Parent Advisory Council: to be actively involved at monthly PAC meetings, to assist in chairing or co-chairing committees as they are established; to be a participant on committees that increase opportunities for our students that do not involve alcohol and other drugs; to assist in improving opportunities for students to learn; and to interact and network with other parents on behalf of their student's education.



Families as Advisors: Ideas for Empowering Families as Decisionmakers

Of the many ways educators can choose to involve families in their children's education, among the most challenging is involving parents and family members as decisionmakers in school policy, programs, and operations. The voices and expertise of families must be heard in the formation and planning of school programs, however, if those programs are to be most responsive to families and most effective for children.

The most important factor for ensuring the successful involvement of families in advisory roles is commitment to the idea of collaboration. The following guidelines and ideas can help schools successfully involve families as advisors and decisionmakers.

1. Maintain a broad view of collaboration.

There is no formula for helping families provide input. What is important is that families have many opportunities in a variety of ways to share their expertise. Establishing a variety of formats and forums for families to contribute their perspectives will ensure that many viewpoints shape the discussion. The program, in turn, will be better able to serve families, each with its own diverse perspectives and experiences.

2. Expand the definition of successful family involvement.

Limiting your families' opportunities to make decisions by serving only on a long-term advisory board or committee will exclude many families from the discussion process. Developing flexible and time-limited advisory activities will encourage a wide array of perspectives and won't overburden a small number of time-starved families. Short-term approaches will also make both families and organizers feel successful. Review the "Family Involvement: Broadening Our Vision" Checklist for more ideas.

3. Identify and recruit families to participate in innovative ways.

Identifying advisory families may be particularly challenging if the families have not been

involved in an advisory role before, when they speak a different language, or are from a culture which does not encourage extensive collaboration with the school. Following are a few strategies for identifying and recruiting such families:

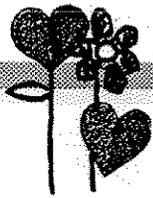
- asking families served by the program,
- asking teachers and other school staff for their suggestions for interested families,
- enlisting the support of your local PTA or PTO,
- using the knowledge of staff in health care, social services, or other community agencies who may work closely with families,
- developing radio, television, and newspaper public service announcements in the languages of the communities the program hopes to reach,
- posting notices in appropriate languages in the school newsletter, church bulletins, grocery stores, community centers, and waiting rooms in other recreational and social service sites,
- contacting organizations that serve particular cultural groups.

4. Look for opportunities to promote family involvement.

Be vigilant about opportunities to promote families' perspectives at all program and policy levels. Every new initiative, needs assessment, program evaluation, or training activity your school or district undertakes provides a new opportunity for families' input.

5. Provide training and support to both families and school staff.

Learning to work collaboratively requires new skills for both educators and families. Before joining formal committees, family members will benefit from receiving a thorough orientation about the work and the history of the group. Give families asked to speak before a group or at a conference plenty of time to practice their presentation. Match new families with veteran families to offer important support as they move into advisory roles. Conflict resolution and team-



Learning Together 2

building training can greatly enhance the effectiveness of family-as-advisor participation.

6. Anticipate problems and plan for them to occur.

Many factors may impede family participation: transportation, child care, scheduling, location, language, cash flow, and lack of support staff. Try to ensure that all costs for family participation are covered up front or are eliminated. Most families are eager to participate in an advisory role, but must balance the demands of their personal lives with the expectations of their advisory roles.

7. Believe family participation is essential.

Schools committed to inviting families to become advisors and decisionmakers are schools that will have higher performing students, more supportive families, and more responsive and effective school programs. Use "Families As Advisors: A Checklist For Attitudes" and "Guidelines for Successfully Involving Family Members on Boards, Task Forces, and Committees" to assess attitudes, beliefs, and practices about family participation in your school's advisory activities.

This article was adapted from the newsletter, "Advances in Family-Centered Care," Fall 1994, published by the Institute for Family-Centered Care, 7900 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 405, Bethesda, MD 20814.



25 Ideas for Communicating the Curriculum to Families

Want to keep parents positive and enthusiastic about schools? Make sure families are informed in a variety of ways about what their children are learning throughout the school year.

One teacher starts each school day by reminding herself that the bright-eyed children filling her classroom don't come to school each day by themselves. They come with their family members "perched on their shoulders," with the voices, lessons, and hopes of their parents, siblings, grandparents, and other family members resounding in their ears, brains, and hearts.

How many of the following ideas has your school done or even considered doing to ensure that families know and understand what their children are learning and how they can help? Schools with involved families are schools that enjoy support from families, rank higher on achievements tests, and report content, productive staff members. What have you got to lose?

- Invite new students and their families to a "Get Acquainted Hour" before school starts or early in the school year.
- Establish and publicize regular visitation days for family members to observe classes and a way for them to comment about their experiences.
- Schedule school open houses for one grade level at a time. Smaller groups give parents a better chance to get to know staff members and each other.
- Hold a start-of-the-year potluck supper for students and families by grade level or classroom, followed by a short school- or curriculum-related presentation. Food and families bring people together.
- Vary the times for open houses, holding some during the day and some at night, to allow all families to come.
- Organize special outreach efforts for waiting-to-be-reached families. The personal touch—telephone calls, home visits, and special invitations mailed to families in their own languages—will reap results.
- Try a few neighborhood coffees in parents' homes. Invite people in a neighborhood area to meet informally with the principal and one or two teachers to chat about the school and education issues.
- Advertise one evening a week when parents or students can visit with or telephone the principal to ask questions or discuss problems.
- Advertise a weekly or monthly time and telephone number when parents can call teachers during the day to ask questions or discuss their children's progress.
- Devote time at staff workshops to discuss skills for communicating with parents and ways to get feedback from them.



Learning Together

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction • John T. Benson, State Superintendent • 125 South Webster Street • P.O. Box 7841 • Madison, WI 53707-7841 • (800) 441-4563

- Set up a "family shelf" in the school library with materials parents can check out on child development, discipline, homework techniques, and learning styles.
- Is there a place for visiting parents and family members to hang their hats in your school? Designate space for a school family center in the school building where parents can talk with teachers, community groups can meet, and the lights and coffee machine are on!
- Suggest that parents shadow their students for a day to experience a typical day.
- Organize a parent-and-student field trip so they can learn together.
- Develop a "How Parents Can Help" handbook which offers practical suggestions for doing learning activities in the home and in the community, creating a learning-friendly home environment, and establishing good homework guidelines.
- Start a "Family Corner" in your school district newsletter that invites the PTA, PTO, or individual parents to talk about opportunities for them to get involved.
- Offer computer and family math night programs for parents and students to learn together.
- Videotape or publish short summaries of programs or presentations offered by your school for families so those unable to attend will still be able to learn from them.
- Offer learning-together opportunities that especially appeal to fathers, such as programs on the father-child relationship; making kitchen, science, music, or art projects; and gym or athletic activities.
- Involve parents in creating your own parent-teacher-student learning compact or agreement.
- Enclose a two-minute survey in report cards asking parents how well they think your school is helping children learn.
- Keep weekly school newsletters to one or two sides of a page on bright-colored paper so it can be read easily and quickly. Publish your school's goals for the year and leave a "clip 'n comment corner" for parents to jot down a thought or two about a featured school issue.
- Survey family members about hobbies or interests and schedule time for them to visit their child's class during the year to talk about that interest.
- Create opportunities for families to volunteer together—in a community drive for the local food pantry, cleaning up a park, or visiting those in need.
- Establish a "Families and Friends Program," bringing families from different neighborhoods or cultural backgrounds together at a school picnic and another time during the year to share food, conversation, and the joys of parenting.



Learning Together 2

Starting a Family Center in Your School (and making it work!)

This article was condensed from the Family Centers booklet, from "A Tool Kit for Quilting," published by The League of Schools Reaching Out, a project of The Institute for Responsive Education. The Tool Kit is available from the Institute at (617) 353-3309 or 605 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

What is a Family Center?

A family center is a place in the school (or nearby) where families can always feel welcome and comfortable—a place that serves their needs and, in doing so, supports the social and academic success of children. Many family centers provide resources that families need to make their home a supportive place for the education of children.

Sometimes the family center is a meeting ground for school staff, students, parents, grandparents, and local business community representatives.

A center allows families to feel a sense of ownership in the school, to feel like insiders. The family center is a new, creative space within the school that permits school staff and families to establish relationships, programs, and activities different from those of the past.

Finally, family centers are an important symbolic statement that says, "Yes, families are an important part of the fabric of this school."

A Space for Families

A family center is a space in the school that families can call their own. What kinds of space should you look for?

For some, the choice is "whatever is available"—the former teachers' lounge, a one-time supply room, a corner of the library, or a vacant classroom. If you can choose, a room on the main floor of the building near the principal's office would be ideal. The main office is often the center of action in the school, has higher traffic flow, and allows easy access.

Remember, a strong family group can be your most important lobby for space in the building. Before they meet with administrators to discuss alternatives and write follow-up letters, be sure the purpose of the family center and some activities it is to provide have been spelled out.

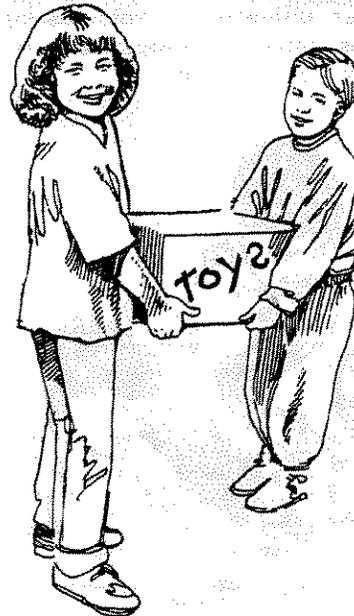
Other items to encourage families to relax and talk include adult-sized furniture such as tables,

chairs, and a sofa, a telephone, a coffee pot and hot water for tea, and storage for food and supplies. A refrigerator is a great addition, and a popcorn maker in action before meetings is sure to draw a crowd. Good lighting is a must, and a play area for toddlers and other young children will help parents and grandparents to come without having to find babysitters. A "toybrary" from which parents and children can borrow toys and games is an added attraction.

Staffing Your Family Center

The staff will be the heartbeat of your family center. The parent who comes to a cold, darkened, empty room will feel much different than the parent greeted by a warm smile and a pot of hot coffee. Some centers have part-time staff paid with Chapter 1 grant funds and supplemented by volunteers.

Others, reluctant to get involved with salary and labor issues, get their family centers up and





Learning Together 2

running with a corps of dedicated volunteers. Some schools launch their efforts with the assistance of a paraprofessional on staff. If possible, this person should be someone who is especially good at working with parents and who lives in the community.

A Place Where Things Happen

Just as families together know an awful lot about where to go to get things done in a community, your family center should be an important source of information and referrals, a place to "talk over the back fence." Make it a place where parents can come to get help with translation, get answers to questions about child care and health and social services, receive GED and ESL instruction, and talk about their children's education.

Some schools use their centers as places for parenting education and family nutrition classes, and job support services. Social events are a great way to invite families into the center to have fun. Family breakfasts can be a friendly, happy way to get parents and teachers together before work. Holiday parties, multicultural celebrations, and staff appreciation days can be planned by family groups.

Family members who feel comfortable in the center are often interested in volunteering as classroom aides, tutors, and supervisors in the library and on the playground.



Home-school communication is also a good job for family center participants to take on. Groups of parents are often willing to undertake planning for home visits, a telephone tree, or a home-work hotline. Family centers spur the development of smaller social networks of parents who need a place to explore and do their common interests—cooking, community concerns, and quilting, to name a few.

Teachers can find help at the family center, too, in preparing for art projects or a bulletin board, planning a class birthday party, or choosing a new set of library materials.

A Place Where Relationships Happen

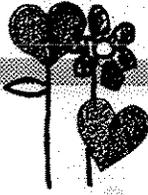
Invite everyone to be a part of planning for and conducting the day-to-day activity of the family center. Administrators are often the most knowledgeable about available resources. Teachers are rich resources of information about the needs of children and their families. Teachers must see the family center as a source of help for them, something that makes their job easier.

For instance, teachers often appreciate access to a telephone placed in a family center, and the possibilities are virtually endless for how volunteer programs coordinated from the family center can assist teachers: tutoring or mentoring activities, telephone trees to reach families, and teacher appreciation days.

Make planning and oversight of the family center the responsibility of a school-community council. Members could include parents, the principal, teachers, and a community representative. The council's mission could include discussion of how to start the center, how it finds resources and support, how it should grow, whether it's working, and how it can be integrated with the school's other initiatives.

Funding

Use your imagination here. One school was happily rewarded when it let banks, stores, churches, and local businesses know of its needs and was able to fill the room with a couch, coffee pot, chairs, and filing cabinet. It paid for their



Learning Together 2

parent room coordinator with Chapter 1 funds and seek state grants to stock library shelves with resources. A local foundation funded emergency services and provisions for families in need, and a quilt produced by participants at a quilting workshop in the center decorates the walls.

Extending the Reach of Your Family Center

There's no single, end-all way to let families know you're in existence, but once you let them know that you care about them in a number of ways, your efforts will be well-rewarded by participation and support. Choose the ideas which best reflect the personality and uniqueness of your school and community:

Create a brochure or information sheet—simple, lively, and inviting—about the family center and make sure that all school families receive one.

Make follow-up calls to families so they know they're welcome and that the center is for them.

Develop a survey of family needs and interests, follow up with the results of the survey, and let families know how the center can address some of those needs and interests.

Offer workshops for families, trying different times of day or night to see what works best for people in your community. Workshops can focus on parenting skills, available resources in the community, and parent educational opportunities such as GED or ESL.

Hold open houses at the center, coordinating them with school events likely to draw a crowd.

Host families. During the first few days of school ask parents and families to act as hosts and hostesses to welcome parents and make them feel comfortable.

Promote school performances. Encourage families, coming to school to see their children perform, to drop by the family center before or after performances for refreshments.

Develop a community resource guide. A good first-year project for participants, the guide could be the collective knowledge of families about what resources exist in the community.

Translate all materials into appropriate languages, not only the pieces you think important. School families and staff may provide the resources needed to translate.

Make a video. Parents in one school developed a video about the family center to welcome new families, offering versions in several languages.

Establish a communication system early on to spread information about the planning group and the center. Let everyone in and around the school know who these folks are, why the group was formed, and what they plan to do.

Develop a family center newsletter. Make sure it's sent to all school families and include ideas and information on assisting children with learning. If there's a PTO or PTA newsletter at your school, join forces and produce the newsletter together.

Make home visits to families who have not responded to other forms of outreach. Use trained parent volunteers.

Take pictures of the family center and its staff and hang them in the main office with explanatory captions. Hang posters, too.

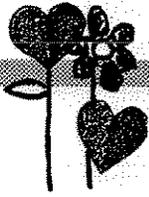
Explore the possibility of organizing family car pools to the school.

Create a coffee break! Set up an information table outside the school building with coffee and doughnuts for parents bringing their children to school and get to know the families.

Advertise your family center in local church bulletins, community newspapers, the cable access channel, grocery store fliers, and wherever families go.

Connect with community service organizations that may be interacting with the same families.

Above all, hang in there! It takes time, energy, love, and patience, but eventually families will discover that they need just what you are there to provide.



Educating Homeless Children in Wisconsin: What Can Schools Do?

More than 12,000 Wisconsin children are homeless on any given day, according to a 1992 DPI survey of school districts, family shelters, and service agencies. Since that survey was conducted three years ago, those numbers have probably grown and schools are increasingly faced with the challenge of educating children who consider "home" a car, a hotel, a relative's home, or the changing faces, smells, and sounds of a shelter for the homeless.

The Need

The number of homeless people in this country is fast approaching the levels of the Great Depression. Today, families with children are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population. Between two and four million people are expected to be homeless before the end of this

decade. One third to one half of them will be children.

In Wisconsin, the DPI survey showed that the greatest number of homeless children were elementary-aged (4,252 in K-6), closely followed by pre-school children (3,764). Homeless middle school children numbered 2,025 and high school youths numbered 1,968.

Homelessness affects children in both urban and rural areas in Wisconsin. A special federal program to ensure that homeless children attend school, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, funds programs in the school districts of Ashland, Siren, South Shore, Delavan-Darien, Chippewa Falls, Menominee Indian, CESA 2, Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Kenosha, and Racine.

Some homeless children may live in chaos and uncertainty, may never know where they will be living or eating, or how their basic needs will be met. Since school may be one of the only sources of stability in the life of a homeless child, school staff and administrators need to be aware of how homelessness affects the child's ability to learn and what they can do to help homeless children be successful in school.

What are some issues homeless children face when they come to school?

First and foremost, of course, homeless children are children. They face the same basic needs as other children:

- physiological needs of shelter, clothing, food and warmth,
- safety needs of order, security, continuity, and well-being,
- the need to feel loved,
- the need for self-esteem and a sense of control over one's destiny.

However, homelessness prevents many of these needs from being met. For example, some homeless children may:

