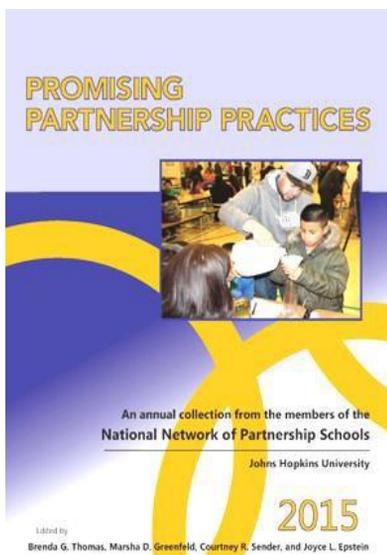


Strategies that Assist Families with Low Income to Become Engaged in their Children's Education



From annual books of
*Promising Partnership
Practices*

*National Network of
Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University*

Use these strategies to extend information in the webinar
with Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, October 28, 2015.

READERS ARE LEADERS FAMILY READING NIGHT

**CANYON VIEW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Heroes inspire students. If admirable leaders read stories aloud to students, perhaps more students would read more. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Canyon View Elementary School designed a Family Reading Night where local leaders read aloud their favorite children’s books. Students and families—many English Learners and families who are migrant farmers—met the readers and listened to good stories to spark students’ interest in reading for pleasure.

A planning subcommittee included educators and parents. It was chaired by the school librarian who developed the Readers are Leaders Family Reading Night. Local leaders were recruited from the community as the reading heroes. They included police officers, local semi-professional football players, the school principal, district superintendent, two Spanish speaking professionals, and local high school students. Also, each grade level team of teachers was asked to develop a “make and take” activity for parents and children to do during the evening and that they could take home to help their children practice a useful reading skill.

The school publicized the event actively, including sending home a ticket that could be traded at the Reading Night for new books for each child attending. To cast the community leaders as “reading heroes,” teachers and students were invited to dress as superheroes that evening. Dinner was provided and served for a half-hour before stories were read aloud.

The school mascot and greeters welcomed about 300 families to the Reading Night and gave each a map of the school with the schedule of the Leader-Readers and their stories, and make-and-take activities in different rooms. Families chose which story they wanted to hear for each 20-minute session, with 5 minutes to change rooms for

the next story. Throughout the evening, the make-and-take activity room was open for families to visit and chose the activities to make with children at different grade levels.

After all readings, the teachers and volunteers were in the cafeteria to trade the entry tickets for a new book for each child to take home. Each child also was given a bag of classroom supplies, donated by teachers. Also, a booth was set up for families to take photos of their children in their super-hero costumes.

The ATP reviewed the activity and discussed possible improvements. Parents received a survey for their views if they attended the Reading Night or were asked why they could not attend. Students benefitted from the make-and-takes that helped their parents see how to interact with them at home on key reading skills.

Mainly, everyone enjoyed hearing leaders from the community read some good stories. Many of the Leader Readers were new visitors to Canyon View. As community partners they were making a new contact and they were impressed with the enthusiasm of the parents, students, teachers, and others they met at the school. One Leader Reader raved, “I enjoyed reading to the families. It was fun to share one of my favorite stories and show the families how using expression makes a story come alive.”

Canyon View’s ATP always includes a Reading Night in its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. This one was a page-turner that everyone enjoyed.

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Type 6

READING

WHITTIER WINTER READING EVENING

**WHITTIER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
PASCO, WA**

When it's cold outside, there's nothing better than curling up with a good book. That is what happened at the Whittier Winter Reading Evening. Children and parents were invited to come to school in pajamas, bring blankets and pillows, and settle in for an evening of reading and learning together.

When they arrived, families found activities at five station-locations, each staffed with at least five staff members, high school students, or parent volunteers. At the Family Reading station, families read in a cozy classroom while enjoying cookies and a cup of hot cocoa. Parents read to their children from books borrowed from the school library. They were excited, later, to find that teachers, community members, and the local library donated enough books for all 300 participating students and their siblings to take one home.

The fifth graders conducted a Reader's Theater in the cafeteria. The Food Station offered meals donated by Second Harvest, a community organization. In the library, Photos with Santa Claus could be taken in front of a wintry background decorated by one of the school staff. The custodian volunteered to be Whittier's jolly Santa. At the Second Harvest Food Donation station, families received a bag of food to take home, courtesy of a nonprofit organization that uses community funds to benefit families with low incomes.

Whittier wanted the event to meet the needs of their students and families, who include many English Language Learners. Because research suggests that all students would benefit from reading for pleasure at home at least 20 minutes a day, Whittier's teachers wanted to forge a strong connection between home and school to encourage students' love of reading and to increase students' vocabulary in English and their home language. Many families work long hours

during the May-November harvest season. The ATP scheduled Winter Reading Evening in December so more families could attend.

The evening was evaluated at a monthly ATP meeting and at a Vertical Team meeting. The ATP agreed it was good to obtain the donations of children's books in advance, and to recruit volunteers from the high school and community as helpers. The flyers and school's automatic phone message system increased attendance. Over 100 parents and 300 students attended. "Take homes" were very important. After reading, eating, and celebrating the season, all families took home at least one children's book, a bag of food, and some new strategies for encouraging children's reading at home. Over 20 raffle winners won holiday wreaths donated by teachers, community members, and Action Team for Partnership (ATP).

The evaluations also produced some suggestions for the future, including creating a map giving the locations of the activity stations; distributing hand-outs to all parents on strategies for reading at home; and inviting the public librarian to register families for library cards.

One parent commented on the friendly atmosphere, "The classroom was very warm and welcoming for reading." A student added, "And we get a free book. Yay!" A teacher remarked, "This is awesome. I love working at this school." It was clear that the Winter Reading Evening was evidence of a welcoming school climate for all partners in education.

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WEEKLY WORKSHOPS

**SAN PASCUAL AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LOS ANGELES, CA**

The Parent Engagement Team at San Pascual Avenue Elementary School believes that when educators and parents exchange useful information, children do better in school. As the principal noted, “When parents are aware of what their children are learning in class, they are more likely to help with assignments and become involved with learning activities at home.”

Weekly Workshops were added to the ATP’s One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships. Every Wednesday morning at 8:15 a. m., parents and other family members met with teachers and administrators to gather useful information and usable strategies to help their children on academic and behavioral goals for success in school.

The first two Wednesdays of each month focused on academic topics, followed by one week on community resources, and one Wednesday per month as a Coffee with the Principal—an open forum for questions and discussions of school and district issues. Coffee and pastries were served at all workshops. The partnership team contacted parents to identify topics of interest. Academic workshops included such topics as: Reading Skills—Sound, Sight Words, and Strategies; Math Skills—How to Help Your Child with Basic Math; Citizen Science—Hummingbirds at Home Project; Common Core Standards—Reading and Math; English Learning; I-Pad Basics; Nutrition; Raising a Well-Adjusted Child; Managing Behavior; Psycho-Motor Skills and Exercises; Communication Skills.

Community Resource Workshops featured topics such as: Applying for Insurance; Free Dental Care at School; and Outdoor experiences at the Audubon Center. The Coffee with the Principal discussed High School Graduation Requirements, A Safe School Plan, and meetings with middle school and high school principals. In all, given holidays and other realities, about 25 Weekly Workshops were conducted in the first year.

The workshops involved knowledgeable

leaders. School staff included the speech therapist, psychologist, adapted P.E. teacher, nurse, computer teacher, resource specialist, English Language Development coordinator, and classroom teachers. Community speakers included professionals from the public library, medical clinic, dental clinic, counseling center, Audubon Center, and middle- and high-school principals.

Weekly Workshops grew from an NNPS meeting where team members explored the six types of involvement and considered how to use the model in this predominately Hispanic, high-poverty school in ways that would benefit parents and students. A community representative updated the school’s website to include Weekly Workshops. Others made flyers, arranged for translators, provided refreshments, and prepared workshop sign-in sheets, equipment, and packets. The PTA covered the \$100 cost of refreshments for the workshops. Speakers volunteered their time and the school and district provided translators.

The partnership team conducted an end-of-year evaluation of Weekly Workshops. Five parents shared their experiences and reflections on the workshops. One parent said, “At school, the teachers instruct the children. The workshops gave me the tools to help my child [at home].” The evaluation suggested changing the schedule to conduct two rather than four topics per month, with morning and evening sessions so that parents employed during the day could attend.

Weekly Workshops engage some parents at the school building each Wednesday. The rich information should be available on line and/or distributed to all students’ parents to make the most of a good thing.

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MONTHLY DINNER AND A SHOW

PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL KENNEWICK, WA

Park Middle School's partnership program provides parents with useful information about the school and offers opportunities for parents to meet teachers, administrators, and other parents. The school serves a diverse group of students. About 65% of the families are Hispanic and over 90% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The principal and ATP knew that many parents would be well served by monthly events that provided dinner, a food bank, and a topic of interest to parents. The team added Monthly Dinner and a Show to its One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships.

The ATP selected monthly themes for these occasions based on parents' responses to a survey conducted at the start of the year. Parents asked for more information about several topics that would help them support their students in the middle grades. Each month, teachers, staff, parents, students, and ATP members met at school for a friendly dinner and for a discussion of a topic requested by parents.

One month the theme was Figuring GPA. Teachers, staff, and ATP members explained the schools' online grading system and how grade point averages (GPAs) are computed. They took families, step-by-step, through procedures for using the school's online system to review their child's grades. Teachers also designed an interactive homework assignment for students to complete with a family partner about how students earned their report card grades.

At the After-School Program dinner and show, the staff for the 21st-Century Program introduced the afterschool program to students and parents to encourage student attendance. Four stations were set with activities like those offered after school, including making holiday ornaments and creating winter celebration pictures.

For the Online Scavenger Hunt evening, students and parents were guided to explore the school's new website to find information specific to the student's grade level. They searched for and found online textbooks, links to homework help, school announcements, calendars and activities, and other useful sections. The 10th task in the hunt was "Go enjoy dinner with your family."

Park's citizenship and behavior program, Make Your Day, was featured at a Monthly Dinner and Show. Members of SALT (Student Advocate Leadership Team) explained the program and performed a skit for families to see how the behavioral process worked at school.

Monthly Dinner and a Show succeeded due to good planning and many able volunteers. The survey of parents at the fall Open House ensured that parents' suggestions and requests were included among the monthly themes. Teachers and administrators planned, attended, presented, and emceed at monthly events. Each month, the local Second Harvest Food Bank provided fresh produce and other pantry staples for parents to take home. Student leaders greeted families at the monthly dinners and helped with childcare.

Monthly Dinner and a Show events were well advertised in bilingual flyers, the Reader Board, e-mail, daily student video announcements, and personal phone calls to targeted families. Title I funding covered costs of dinners and supplies. According to one parent, Monthly Dinner and a Show "always feels casual, engaging, and welcoming." An ATP member added, "These events help build relationships with our families."

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PARENT PORTAL ACCESS

OCHOA MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WA

Teachers at Ochoa Middle School know that one of their most important tasks is to communicate with all parents about their child’s academic progress in school. About 95% of students are Hispanic and about 94% are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Teachers must solve a language challenge to communicate effectively with parents so that they feel confident about supporting their children’s success in school.

One tool Ochoa Middle School provides for parents is a web-based Parent Portal to make it easy to monitor their student’s report card grades, assignments, missing assignments, and grades on classroom assessments. Most parents of Ochoa students have internet access on a home computer or smart phone to connect to the Parent Portal. However, teachers were not sure how many parents actually used this tool, and, if they did, whether and how it helped them interact positively with their child about their academic progress. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other teachers and administrators looked into details about parents’ uses of the Portal in a sample of two seventh-grade classrooms.

The ATP and colleagues revised the original printed directions on how to use the Parent Portal to make them clearer and more user-friendly. They also developed more detailed guidelines in English and Spanish on cardstock with a magnet affixed to the back for posting at home.

At the fall parent-teacher conference, parents in the two sample seventh grade classrooms received the printed, magnetized directions for accessing and using the Parent Portal. They were asked to place the guidelines on the refrigerator as a reminder to check grades often. These parents completed a three-question survey in Spanish or English that asked:

1. Are you familiar with or do you know about the Parent Portal (not at all, a little, somewhat, and very familiar).

2. Do you use the Parent Portal to monitor your student’s grades? (no, a little, sometimes, or very often).

3. If you use the Parent Portal, does it help your student be more successful in school? (not really, a little, a lot, or it is essential to student success).

The same parents were surveyed again at the spring teacher-parent conference. Data from the pre-and post-intervention surveys were collected, tallied and analyzed.

The results indicated that more parents used and found the Parent Portal helpful from fall to spring of the school year. Students, too, were more aware in the spring of their own grades because their parents used the Parent Portal. One 7th grade student stated, “My mom checks my grades all the time, so I know I have to work hard.” Parents could support their students better when they had information about which assignments were assigned, turned in or missed, and how students performed on a related assessment. A parent of a 7th grades lamented, “I wish I knew about this last year!”

The use of the Parent Portal is a work in progress at Ochoa. New parents arrive with their children every year when they transition into the school. The new guidelines and teachers’ discussions about the Parent Portal should help more—or all—parents support their children’s academic success in school.

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BOOKS AND BREW: A HOME VISIT PROGRAM

**HAWTHORNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Teachers may be hesitant to visit students' homes, but when they do everyone reaps major benefits. Studies indicate that after well-planned and well-implemented home visits, families and teachers enjoy better communications; teachers gain new perspectives on their students' lives outside the classroom; and students feel more support for their education from their families and their teachers. This is just what happened at Hawthorne Elementary School, where seven teachers visited the homes of fifteen students.

Books and Brew—A Home Visit Program was proposed by a parent on the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to promote positive teacher-parent communications. The ATP partnered with teachers to identify students who would benefit from a home visit. This included students who were struggling academically or whose parents had not previously engaged with the school. The team prepared suggestions for the initial telephone contacts of teachers with students' parents. The team also purchased supplies and wrote guidelines for the teachers to ensure that the visits would be both purposeful and enjoyable for everyone.

Teachers called parents and arranged appointments for their visits. On the evening of the appointments, teachers stopped by the ATP area at school to pick up a book, a math game, and a prize (such as a gift card donated by a community member). They also picked up a cup of coffee—the “brew” in Books and Brew—for the parents. Along with a colleague such as an interpreter, the principal, or an ATP member, they drove to students' homes.

Upon arrival, the teacher offered a cup of coffee to a parent. After friendly introductions, the teacher and student demonstrated a few

strategies that the parent and child could use to practice reading and math skills at home.

The strategies were linked to the learning goals for students by grade level. For example, practicing reading aloud can be fun and improve students' reading fluency. Asking probing questions about the plot and characters in books students read can start a good conversation about reading.

Teachers kept the visits short, positive, and friendly, purposely avoiding discussions of behavior problems. They thanked the families for hosting them and reinforced how happy they were to have the students in their classes.

After making the visits, teachers were glad to have met the parents and engaged with their students in their own homes. “...It was a good experience,” said one teacher. “I enjoyed talking to the parent at a more personal level. I will do this again . . .!” “The value of these visits is huge,” added another teacher. “I saw a great change in my relationships with the parents and the students.” Students enjoyed the visits so much that they talked about them at school. Soon, their peers were eager for home visits, as well.

“We want to make it a culture within our school,” said the ATP Co-Chairs, who allocated \$200 for the practice. The ATP may grow the practice by hosting an informational meeting for all teachers at the beginning of the school year. “Our vision is that, someday, each teacher will visit each child [sometime] during the year.”

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Type 4

READING

LEARNING AT THE LIBRARY

**GREENWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
FLORENCE, SC**

Type 4

“**R**eading certainly is taught differently from back when I was in school,” a parent at Greenwood Elementary School observed. Upon learning that many other parents shared this sentiment, the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) brought families together to explain the school’s new literacy curriculum and Common Core State Standards in reading. The ATP and reading teachers also wanted to provide strategies that parents could use at home to help students practice and improve reading skills and attitudes.

To encourage attendance, the ATP hosted Learning at the Library off campus at a convenient time and appealing community location—a wonderful new public library for the area. They advertised the gathering by posting flyers around the school, tucking invitations in students’ weekly parent communication folders, generating automated phone calls to parents, and displaying a sign in the car line outside the school. Over 50 parents and 53 students attended the Learning at the Library workshop. The principal noted, “We did reach some parents who would benefit and usually don’t attend things at the school.”

Attendees were welcomed to the library with snacks. A jargon-free PowerPoint presentation outlined the teachers’ reading curriculum, instructional approaches, and Common Core standards. School staff members distributed guidelines for parents to reinforce approaches to increase reading fluency such as decoding, using context clues, and increasing reading rates. Other guidelines focused on improving reading comprehension such as sequencing events, reading directions, interpreting main ideas, evaluating facts or opinions, and other higher-level thinking skills. The guidelines were on laminated cardstock bookmarks that could be easily used at home when children were reading library books or

when parents and children were reading together. “After this workshop, I know how to better help my daughter study for reading tests,” one parent said. “I didn’t know that you weren’t supposed to tell a child a word that she doesn’t know, but should instead use context clues to help her figure it out.”

Parents were given time to practice the strategies with their children, while teachers circulated to answer questions or demonstrate techniques. Parents and children also met with members of the library staff, who gave them an overview of the library’s services and special programs for children and families. After a tour of the library, the families could sign up for library cards and check out books.

Each child received a high-interest book at the appropriate reading level, purchased with \$500 of Title I funds. “I liked the book I got,” one student reported. “I read it and made a good Accelerated Reader Grade on it.” Teachers reported that they observed improvements in the reading skills and attitudes of students who attended the workshop with their parents. The emphasis on reading spread to include students who could not attend Learning at the Library. In the month after the workshop, students at Greenwood completed 1,000 more Accelerated Reader activities with higher scores than in the prior month—over 74,200 in all. Fewer students were identified as “at risk” on the Accelerated Reader program ratings.

Learning at the Library helped many families learn more about students’ literacy education. Greenwood Elementary School is defining the right place for reading as the school, home, and community.

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READING

CAFÉ MATH NIGHT

**PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL
KENNEWICK, WA**

Numbers are all around us—part of everyday life, but some students and parents are intimidated by middle grades math. In the past, Park Middle School’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) has struggled to achieve strong family attendance at math events. No longer.

Last year, the ATP developed a wonderful way to make math popular and palatable by pairing math with ice cream sundaes. More than 100 students and 300 parents and family members gathered at the school to earn delicious treats by playing a variety of math games at Café Math Night.

Community collaborations helped ensure success. GEAR UP donated materials for math gift bags to be distributed at Café Math, and a local casino donated decks of cards for some math games. The school’s math coach incorporated the playing cards in math games aligned with Common Core State Standards. With these contributions, the event cost about \$300 to conduct.

To promote Café Math, the principal mailed home flyers and created a video to show to students during first period announcements. He also reminded staff about the event at meetings, and thanked them for their planning and participation. More than 25 teachers volunteered to help with the event. The teachers built interest and confidence about Café Math Night in advance by teaching students in class how to play the math games that they would play with their family partners at Café Math. Students also helped by creating posters to mark the locations of the different games.

On Café Math Night, families were welcomed by the school secretary and given

a menu of games and a map of the game locations. They attended one session to hear about the games and how to play them. To earn ice cream sundaes, they had to visit four math game stations. If they visited five stations, students would receive an extra ice cream topping. As an extra bonus, if a family created a homework plan together, they would receive a math gift bag full of games to take home.

At the first four stations, families played games that enabled students to show off their knowledge of integers, fractions, multiplication, and probability. Commented one attendee. “I didn’t know you could make math fun.”

At the fifth station, families watched a slide show explaining how to make an effective homework plan. Families were given time to create their own homework plans, and teachers were there to help. The gift bag incentive ensured that families did not skip this important stop. Families were happy to get the gift bags, which contained versions of the math games that they could play together at home. “This is something really fun we can do together at night, instead of you texting on your phone,” one parent was overheard saying to a student.

Café Math Night facilitated school and family communications and showed parents and students that math was nothing to fear. As the principal put it, “Parents learned ways to work on math with students at home in positive and engaging ways, and to be an active participant in their student’s learning.”

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FALL FOR LEARNING MATH AND READING NIGHT

CHICOT PRIMARY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER MABELVALE, AR

Chicot, a school in the Little Rock School District, serves students PreK-2, starting at three years old. A large school of over 800 students, Chicot's students and families have diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, with 60% African American, 30% Latino, and 10% White. The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) knows that helping families support their young children with early reading and math skills will enable parents to continue to guide their children across the grades. The ATP designed and implemented Fall for Learning Math and Reading Night to show families what their children were learning in class and how they could reinforce and celebrate the same math and literacy skills at home.

The combined focus on math and literacy skills was scheduled at the same time as the school's Book Fair to increase attention and attendance. The Book Fair also gave families the opportunity to purchase high-interest children's books to advance reading skills and positive attitudes about reading. The PTA donated funds so that each child could select one free book for their home library. Community members and the PTA also supported Fall for Learning with donations. The district donated three computers that were raffle prizes at the event.

The young students at Chicot served as ambassadors at Math and Reading Night as they escorted their parents to designated classrooms. In each classroom, teachers provided an overview and examples of math and literacy skills that students were learning, with information on why the skills were important at each grade level. One student reported, "Thank you for teaching my

parents the work we do at school. Now, they can help me more with my homework."

Teachers created math and literacy games by grade level linked to state standards for parents and children to take home to reinforce and practice the skills they learned about at school. A parent thanked them, saying, "This was a great experience [with ideas] that I can take home and share with my child."

The ATP, teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and community leaders collaborated to plan and implement Math and Reading Night. Over 125 parents, 80 students, 21 teachers, and 5 community members participated at the event—more than expected. Refreshments were served and childcare was provided for very young children.

The ATP team achieved its goal for engaging many parents in their young child's learning. Students benefitted from seeing their parents at school talking and working with their teachers. They will benefit from the games for parents and children to practice early reading and math skills.

At Chicot, a Parent Center offers resources to parents, including books on parenting, books with tapes to support reading, supplies for students, videos, and computer access. These resources are always available, but it also is important to have events like Math and Reading Night to reflect the school's mission to work together with parents to set students on a path to success in school.

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TAKIN' IT TO THE STREETS

LAKE CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LAKE CITY, SOUTH CAROLINA

Type 2

In any school, some students fall through the cracks. Some may not measure up to their full potential. Some may lack strong support at home for their work at school. Lake City Elementary wanted to help all students succeed at high levels and increase the involvement of parents in ways that would prevent any students from failing in school.

The teachers and administrators knew that they needed some new approaches to reach families who, previously, were “hard to reach.” They decided to take their communications with parents in a different direction by Takin’ It To The Streets.

The plan was for teachers and administrators to visit three neighborhoods one Saturday. They would bring with them their interest in the children’s success, information on school and community resources, a picnic, and a chance for students and their families to win prizes. By Takin’ It To The Streets, the educators hoped to create new connections with parents and start some important conversations.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers began by making bilingual flyers about neighborhood visits in English and Spanish. They sent these home with students and distributed them to area businesses and community agencies. The team also ran radio announcements for two weeks before the selected Saturday activities. They made poster-size copies of the flyer for the areas selected for visits.

Two teams of teachers and administrators traveled to two neighborhoods in the mid-morning. They set up a sign-in table for parents. Parents and students visited booths for information on school-linked topics such as state tests, school attendance, kindergarten registration, and adult education. There was a final booth for good food and free clothing. Finally, the ATP and educators held a drawing for prize baskets of good things

for students and parents. After photos were taken, the teachers and administrators packed up and headed to one more neighborhood.

At this stop, the fire department also set up a table with fire safety information and displayed their great fire trucks. Even the mayor showed up, as did police officers. Parents and students enjoyed meeting their children’s teachers and talking about the important roles that parents and other family members play in helping their children succeed in school. Everyone enjoyed hot dogs for lunch.

The connections that were made were real and important. Teachers were able to meet parents, talk with them about their children’s school performance, and learn something about children’s lives outside of school. Parents received useful information. Students talked with teachers informally. Across all stops, teachers interacted with over 150 parents and 450 students.

Takin’ it to the Streets cost the school about \$300, thanks to significant support from community partners. PepsiCo donated drinks, Lake City Housing Authority and the local Title I Office provided the hot dogs, and Wal-Mart gave the school a gift card to help pay for supplies and prizes.

One administrator commented, “Takin’ It To The Streets was our most successful event this year.” It was successful because of strong teamwork, good planning, and the enthusiasm of parents and students on the streets where they live. It is expected that, as a result, many more parents will be more actively engaged with the school and with their children.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNITY CAREER AND RESOURCE FAIR

**NORWICH TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
NORWICH, CT**

These days, it's not just high school seniors who are searching for job opportunities and crafting their careers. It's their family members, too. Knowing this, the student services team and Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Norwich Technical High School hosted a Community Career and Resource Fair to give students and their parents opportunities to explore postsecondary employment and education programs in the area.

"The purpose of the Career and Resource Fair was to provide networking opportunities for our students and their family members to learn about possible careers in different companies," a school staff member explained. "This includes current and future opportunities for job shadowing, volunteering, internships, and part-time or full-time employment."

The ATP and other teachers compiled a list of organizations that might be interested in attending, ranging from local businesses to colleges to military recruiters. The school's social worker created a database and asked school staff, work-based learning partners, and members of the technical trade advisory committee to send suggestions. These contacts were then e-mailed or faxed formal invitations five weeks before the event. Nearly 80 representatives agreed to attend.

Teachers and other staff members talked about the Community Career and Resource Fair with their students and discussed appropriate networking behavior. They suggested that seniors bring copies of their resumes to give to prospective employers, and advised juniors to chat with work-based learning providers. They also gave freshmen and sophomores tips on how to engage in professional conversations.

Flyers advertising the Fair were included in student report card mailings to ensure that

families were aware of the opportunity. About 700 students and many of their parents visited the Fair.

The school's Culinary Arts students played a special role in the event. They prepared a lunch buffet for the career representatives, and ensured that there was plenty of coffee and pastries to keep energy high throughout the afternoon. The refreshments cost about \$500.

All attendees enjoyed the afternoon. The career representatives from businesses and other agencies and organizations had high praise for the students. One representative described the students as "unbelievably polite, friendly, and engaging." Another added that he was "impressed by [the students'] ability to approach a complete stranger and introduce themselves with a solid handshake."

Even if a participating organization did not have openings at the present time, students and parents from Norwich Tech could benefit from the insights and advice that representatives shared about their industries. Meeting the career representatives made the students even more excited about life after high school. The Fair was "awesome," according to one student. "It gave me a lot of opportunities to think about."

Norwich Tech plans to host a Career and Resource Fair at least every two years. They recommended that schools interested in implementing a similar activity prepare months in advance and distribute maps of booth locations to make navigation easy. Norwich Tech also recommends including families at the Fair so that the practice will truly benefit the entire school community.

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HUNGER IN OUR COMMUNITY: SERVICE-BASED LEARNING

**FRANK W. COX HIGH SCHOOL
VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA**

Type 6

There are many serious problems in our communities that need to be solved. Poverty and its related issues head that list and pose real challenges to improve the circumstances of the poorest among us. Frank W. Cox High School wanted its students to understand the nature and extent of social problems in their area and to try to solve some through the school's program of Service-Based Learning.

The community service project's goal was to help students become globally aware, independent and responsible learners, and productive citizens. To start, teachers embedded the project in tenth grade Honors English classes. Students were asked to select a service learning activity that they could accomplish, and, by so doing, improve the lives of others. The students decided that they could make a real difference if they worked together to solve targeted issues of hunger.

Students began by conducting research. More than 100 tenth grade Honors English students toured the Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia. The on-site staff gave them an overview of the situation. They reported how many people the Food Bank served and how much food is needed to feed the hungry. The staff also explained the Food Bank's mission and strategic plan. They provided the organization's annual report. After the tour, students asked questions to learn what they could do to help solve the problem of hunger in the area.

Next, the tenth graders and other students wanted to find out what it felt like to feel hungry. Researchers estimate that 60% of the world's population eats a small bowl of rice each day and 25% eat just a little better. By contrast, 15% do not want for food.

For a simulation, 220 students entered the cafeteria for lunch and received a ticket selected at random. The ticket's color determined whether the student received a bowl of rice, a bowl of rice and some fruit, or a full meal. The students reflected on this experience.

Finally, students participated in the Food Bank's Extreme Food Drive. Students created posters, spoke in their classes about the project, and went door to door in their neighborhoods collecting food for the Food Bank. Eventually, all students in the school participated.

The students organized and boxed the donations. With support and music from a local radio station, the students loaded the food into a Food Bank truck. In all, students, families, and others in the community donated over 7,000 pounds of food to the Food Bank.

Importantly, students took the lead to organize the project. They learned a lot and produced impressive results. Teachers helped them along the way and families and others contributed to the project. With service-based learning, students and the school made a difference in the community.

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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POVERTY SIMULATION

**FRANCIS MARION UNIVERSITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE
FLORENCE, SC**

ORGANIZATION LEADERSHIP

What is life like for families with low incomes who must survive from month to month? Nearly 80 teachers and community members got a glimpse into the life of many families in the region at a Poverty Simulation conducted by Francis Marion University’s Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty (FMU-COE). The simulation is a training tool to enable participants to view poverty from different angles in an experiential setting. “When teachers and administrators have a deeper understanding of their families who live in poverty,” a COE staff member explained, “students benefit academically and behaviorally.”

On the recommendation of a state education leader, COE purchased a kit to conduct the activity from the Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation (about \$2,000). Five simulations were conducted last year at FMU and across the state. Each one takes about three hours, and each time the kit is used, its materials must be replenished.

The COE began planning for the June simulation two months in advance with a mass e-mailing to educators and community leaders. Those who registered were reminded of the seriousness of the activity, and were told that latecomers and observers would not be permitted at the sessions.

First, 18 volunteers were recruited and trained to take specific professional and community roles in the life of families in poverty. They were prepared to act as banker, mortgage/rent collector, pawnbroker, social service worker, police officer, and other service providers. Recruiting these volunteers was a challenge. COE worked with the local Housing Authority to find individuals with experience living in poverty, but could find no volunteers available to play these parts. Instead, some registrants and COE staff members filled the

roles. The volunteers received small thank you gifts in appreciation for their time and effort.

The participants in each session also were assigned specific roles. They were designated as 26 different families with low incomes. Some families were newly unemployed, some had recently lost a breadwinner, and some consisted of grandparents raising grandchildren. Each family’s goal was to acquire food, shelter, and other basic supplies and services during the course of four 15 minute “weeks” in the simulation.

It was difficult. Participants described the experience as “eye-opening.” On evaluations of the experience, participants reported that they were more sensitive to issues related to poverty. “The entire system really needs to be re-evaluated to help those in need,” one community member realized.

The poverty index in South Carolina’s public schools is about 70%, so it is extremely important for educators and school community leaders to understand the experiences of their students and families. “Poverty is much more stressful than I imagined,” observed one teacher. “I found the simulation to be very touching,” added another.

Planning is underway for future simulations with local school districts. COE aims to add a bus tour of an economically depressed neighborhood paired with a guided discussion about poverty and education. “We highly recommend the simulation training for anyone interested in learning about life in poverty,” said a COE representative. When you walk in someone else’s shoes—even in an activity like this—you gain a real understanding of what others experience.

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