Stories of PRINCIPALS Actively Engaging Communities

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

3RD EDITION
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Spotlight on Promising Practices: Stories of Principals Actively Engaging Communities was co-created by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and Collaborative Communications Group, and funded by MetLife Foundation.

The mission of NAESP is to lead in the advocacy and support for elementary- and middle-level principals and other education leaders in their commitment to all children. Over 30,000 members of the National Association of Elementary School Principals provide administrative and instructional leadership for public and private elementary and middle schools throughout the United States, Canada and overseas. Founded in 1921, NAESP is an independent professional association with its own headquarters building in Alexandria, Virginia. Through national and regional meetings, award-winning publications and joint efforts with its 50 state affiliates, NAESP is a strong advocate for both its members and for the 33 million American children enrolled in preschool, kindergarten and grades 1 through 8.

MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife. The Foundation supports programs that increase opportunities for young people to succeed, give students and teachers a voice in improving education, develop partnerships between schools and communities and strengthen relationships among parents, principals, teachers and students. The goals are to strengthen communities, promote good health and improve education. The Foundation continues a tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement begun by MetLife at the turn of the century.

Collaborative Communications Group is a strategic consulting firm that builds the capacity of individuals, organizations and networks to work collaboratively to create solutions that are better than any single entity could produce on its own. Through strategic consulting, dialogue and convening, creation of publications and tools, and community conversations, Collaborative helps organizations and networks to identify, share and apply what they know in ways that increase productivity and effectiveness. The ultimate objective of Collaborative’s work is the improvement of the quality of public education and community life.
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Sibyl Jacobson, MetLife Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer

To ensure access and opportunity for all children, MetLife Foundation supports initiatives that improve public schools, develop the leadership of teachers and principals, engage parents in their children’s education and create community connections. The Foundation gains perspective on the field of education for the development of its programs from the findings of the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*.

Our work with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and support for the *Sharing the Dream* initiative has responded to key Survey findings about the importance of building stronger family and community relationships to encourage student success, and the central role of principals in fostering those relationships. In the 2003 Survey, *An Examination of School Leadership*, teachers, parents and students reported a significantly less positive view of their school’s atmosphere and school-family relationships than principals had. Many principals in the 2004–2005 Survey, *Transitions in the Role of Supportive Relationships*, identified their interactions with parents as a primary source of stress and anxiety, and new principals expressed a lack of confidence in the adequacy of their preparation for working effectively with community members. Most principals in the 2006 Survey, *Expectations and Experiences*, identified having more parental involvement as an important strategy for retaining good teachers in their schools.

*Sharing the Dream* encourages principals and schools to improve relationships with parents and communities, create more welcoming school climates, and enable connections for students and families with needed resources. This report spotlights the results of the 2006–2007 *Sharing the Dream* grant projects at 30 schools across the nation, demonstrating improved school climate, school-home communication, community perceptions, family involvement and student achievement.

This publication recognizes innovative and effective leaders who build more inclusive, welcoming and effective learning communities. We hope these examples inspire emulation, new ideas and innovation, and renewed commitments to connect with parents and community to improve the culture of learning.
FOREWORD

Gail Connelly, NAESP Executive Director

“When the families are involved — really involved — our school community feels complete,” shared one principal. Creating learning communities that engage students, families, staff and the external communities is one of the most challenging and rewarding efforts a principal undertakes, she explained.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) is committed to supporting and strengthening the work of elementary and middle level principals across the country. The *Sharing the Dream* project enables principals to test ideas on how to involve and engage their communities to build greater ownership for the work of the school by sharing leadership and decision making, by keeping all stakeholders informed about all school news — good and bad — and by creating a school climate that fosters open communication, safety and security, respect for every individual, and the idea that the school is the center of the community and welcomes all of its members.

MetLife Foundation, through its annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*, has provided us the data and the resources to engage families and communities in new and innovative ways. We are pleased to work with MetLife Foundation to highlight the good work of the schools funded this year with the hope of inspiring and assisting many others.

Every child deserves the opportunity to grow and learn in a caring, supportive environment. Principals know that learning is holistic; schools need to foster development of the whole child. Focusing on engaging families and communities reaps benefits beyond test scores. The principals featured here have made great strides in strengthening a culture of learning, and have created strong learning communities enabling every child to flourish to his or her full potential. We applaud their efforts and thank them for their leadership and service as inspirational role models for involving the whole community in enhancing the learning environment for the benefit of the children in their schools.
Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.
INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly evident that community involvement in the lives of children and youth is instrumental to their future success. Principals understand the complexities of preparing a new generation of students to compete in a global economy. Problem-solving, teamwork, leadership and relationship-building skills go hand-in-hand with academic achievement in developing capable citizens and responsible adults. The challenge, then, lies in fostering an environment where these skills can thrive. But teachers and school administrators cannot do it alone. It does, in fact, take a village to raise a child. Because learning does not end when children leave the schoolhouse, the best principals are making strides to reach family and community members and involve them in the work of school.

There are limitless opportunities to involve students in community life and to bring a wealth of talent and knowledge into the lives of children. Through mentorship programs, special events or “bring a child to work” days, students, families and community members can interact and learn. As public institutions, schools should be warm, welcoming places where the entire community feels encouraged to become involved in the academic and personal development of students. Likewise, many other community structures and organizations are well suited to host students seeking knowledge and enrichment. Sharing the Dream aims to inspire principals to envision and capitalize on these opportunities.

While classroom instruction fosters students’ academic achievement, there are no better lessons than real-world experience. To do is to know. The work and experiences of family and community members offer outstanding examples. Through interactions with caring adults, students learn about responsibility and the realities of professional expectations. Furthermore, when parents are engaged in their child’s education, student achievement and personal fulfillment are positively connected.

By creating and facilitating stakeholder involvement in the work of the school, savvy principals encourage the development of the whole child. After all, academics are only part of the story. Children and youth also require good health, a nurturing, safe environment, support from caring adults, and a personalized learning space where they can explore and build qualities that are critical to success in the 21st century.

Armed with these real-world experiences, future generations of students will be well prepared for the challenges and opportunities in higher education, the work force and a global society.
Sharing the Dream

The National Association of Elementary School Principals has long encouraged its members to actively engage parents and communities in schools. Standard Six of the NAESP 2001 guide Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do acknowledges that as public institutions, public schools embody the values and hopes of the community. Understanding that community engagement is a complex process that occurs at many levels, the guide outlines strategies for principals to create a school culture that encourages community ownership of schools’ work; shares leadership and decision-making; encourages parents to become meaningfully involved in school and their children’s learning; and ensures that students and families are connected to the community services they need.

In fall 2004, NAESP partnered with MetLife Foundation to pilot a program helping principals engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success. Twelve principals got a small grant to implement projects to spur communities toward bolstering student achievement. Results of the pilot year were significant. They showed that with a little support, a clear focus and a lot of dedication, schools, parents and community members can build relationships and take action to improve learning.

In the 2005–2006 school year, NAESP and MetLife expanded their commitment by awarding 30 grants for projects representing a diverse group of schools and ideas. Projects were selected based on principals’ ability to articulate their vision for parent and community involvement in their schools; explain how their approach linked to one of the strategies of Standard Six; identify data sources to measure involvement throughout the year; and connect their project to student and school success.

Now, in 2007, another successful year of Sharing the Dream has concluded. Again, NAESP and MetLife funded 30 projects seeking to increase student achievement through family and community involvement. The principals that received this grant looked at the needs of their schools, families and communities and found innovative and practical ways to integrate community into the work of the school.

Through grant reports, conversations with principals and visits to Sharing the Dream sites, NAESP continues to build a knowledge base of best practices—and principal concerns and challenges—related to community engagement. This year, we have reached beyond the theoretical to bring you tips and tools to adapt to your communities and schools. These practical ideas are woven throughout Spotlight on Promising Practices in the hopes of providing inspiration and offering new perspectives. The stories in this publication describe some of these best practices and offer up good ideas for others embarking on similar efforts.
Spotlight on Promising Practices

In the case studies that follow, we take an in-depth look at how five Sharing the Dream grant recipients approached parent and community engagement in their schools, how they overcame barriers to their work and what they learned in the process. We also summarize the work of the other 25 grantees—how they used Dream grants to involve families and community members, and their challenges and successes.

Through their stories, principals show their dedication to parent and community engagement in schools. They share their innovative strategies to build relationships with parents and community members; communicate with stakeholders about their work; reach out to groups previously underrepresented at the school; blend funds to maximize program scope and effectiveness; and continuously assess the needs of students and families—and find ways to meet those needs.

Parents and community members at the 30 sites proved their eagerness to contribute to their children’s education and the work of schools. They became active participants in classrooms, leadership teams, parent groups, mentoring programs, workshops and school events. Parents and community members built relationships—with school leaders, teachers and one another—that changed the way they think about themselves, their schools and academic success.

Through the Sharing the Dream grant initiative, NAESP, MetLife and outstanding principals across the country fostered enriching relationships between schools and communities. The stories and reflections captured here are intended to inform and inspire other principals serious about finding their own way to similar goals.
When *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able To Do* declared that “effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success,” tips and ideas were offered to support principals in that endeavor. For the last two years, *Sharing the Dream* has continued to collect and share lessons, tips and useful tools that have helped principals across the country engage their communities. Again, in 2006–2007, principals were candid about their successes and challenges. In their stories, we find many powerful and inspirational ideas that all principals can learn from. Whether starting a new project or reflecting on an existing program, principals can adapt the following lessons and tips to meet local needs.

- **Offer personal invitations.** Principals and teachers should talk to parents and community members and personally invite them to school-sponsored programs and events.
- **Hold a drawing.** “Freebies” and incentives get people in the door and encourage them to stay until the last name has been drawn.
- **Provide child care.** Parents are often unable to attend meetings because they have no one to watch their children during that time.
- **Let teachers take the lead.** Offering teacher-led workshops and meetings serves more than the participants—they provide a wonderful opportunity for professional staff development.
- **Ride the back-to-school bandwagon.** Early autumn is prime time to engage parents in school activities.
• **Don’t be afraid of change.** Programs are most effective when they are adjusted to the needs of the audience.

• **Vary days and times of meetings.** If many parents or community members can’t attend a meeting at 5 p.m. on Monday one week, there’s a good chance they can’t make it at 5 p.m. the next Monday. Vary days and times to provide many options for working parents and busy families.

• **Let parents learn with their children.** Many programs take place in the evening—a cherished time for families. Plan events that engage parents with their children and let them learn together.

• **Create a video.** Introduce parents and families to the school in a unique and personal way. It’s the next best thing to having them there, and may compel them to get involved.

• **Include a parent page on your school’s Web site.** From newsletters to message boards, a Web site is a great resource for parents and families.

• **Use technology to engage culturally diverse families.** At many schools, language barriers obstruct family and community engagement. Translation equipment eases these barriers in an unobtrusive way.

• **Provide food.** Many families avoid evening activities because they take place at dinner time. Make it easy on families by offering food—they’ll have more incentive to attend school events.
LEADERSHIP LESSONS

• Impartial facilitators create a space for free thought and the unbridled generation of ideas.

• During meetings, guiding questions and a statement of purpose help people work toward a common goal.

• Some of the greatest outcomes do not require radical plans, but are the result of making simple ideas a priority.
Christina Burton became principal of the Denver Arts and Technology Academy (DATA) in April 2005—five years after DATA opened as a public charter school. Founded by parents who wanted to provide a quality education to the area’s primarily Hispanic students from low-income families, the school had a strong foundation in engaging parents. In 2004, the DATA board of directors began a process to address issues such as policy, economics, academics and values. In collaboration with school administration, teachers and parents, the board issued this vision statement: “The DATA community is committed to academic excellence in a nurturing environment for each child, to community and financial stability and to educating the whole: individual, family and community.”

However, when the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) evaluated the school in 2005–2006, the state found that while DATA was well on the road to meeting its vision, there were steps that could speed progress—and connect outcomes to state standards. Entitled "Collaboration, Coordination, and Community (Standards 3, 4, 5, 1, 2)”, the evaluation states:

“Collaboration, communication and community are the necessary components for increasing student achievement at DATA. Collaboration is the element that involves seeking ideas from all stakeholders in the school. … Communication is essential to exchange ideas so that people can work together. … Communication among leadership, parents, teachers, students and the greater community is essential for forward progress. In a school community, there should be a sense of shared responsibility and purpose and a sense of being a meaningful and valued part of a whole.”

In the short term, the CDE recommended that DATA staff do more to engage parents and the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school. Specifically, the state recommended parents be involved in a shared leadership structure at the school.

Burton recognized that these recommendations were consistent with the vision and goals the DATA board established in 2004. She saw an opportunity to ramp up parent and community involvement and she used the Sharing the Dream grant to implement the state’s recommendations. In partnership with Susan Krebs, a consultant from the University of Colorado, Denver, Burton envisioned the formation of a school accountability committee (SAC) that would be supported by a community council. This project, Community Building Tools: Community Council and School Accountability Committee, aimed to provide parents and community members a greater voice in school improvement processes to raise academic performance and improve communications and community involvement.

The SACs in Colorado operate under state statute and are responsible for reviewing and making recommendations concerning school improvement goals, district/school budgets and school safety issues.
IMPLEMENTATION

Burton and Krebs worked with a group of parents, teachers and school administrators to establish protocols for a newly formed communication committee, which would oversee the SAC and the community council. This team was immediately charged with developing and defining primary systems and structures that would support effective operations, including governance structure, communication systems and decision-making responsibilities. Once the organizational structure was established, the team devised an action plan to link internal and external communication systems to improve parent, teacher, staff and student engagement. The plan included these tactics:

- **Video production.** Videos (or DVDs) would introduce families to teachers, staff and principal, explain the school philosophy, processes, procedures and expectations, welcome parents and invite them to be an integral part of the learning community, and describe ways to be involved in the life of the school.
- **Spanish translations.** All documents, including newsletters, field trip forms, walking permission forms, school handbooks and school policies, would be in Spanish and English to better serve the school’s large Hispanic population.
- **Movie nights.** Movies would be presented each month, alternating Spanish and English pictures with subtitles.
- **Parent volunteers.** Each classroom would be assigned a parent responsible for coordinating parent volunteer activities.
- **School Web site.** Parent volunteers would regularly update the Web site with relevant information for parents and families.

Overseen by the communications committee, the community council would develop nonthreatening ways for parents to communicate their concerns and suggestions about improving academic achievement, and encourage parents to play an active role in the solutions. During the 2006–2007 school year, the council:

- Developed and implemented a postcard system for soliciting parent comments, suggestions and ways to help improve academic achievement
- Monitored a suggestions box in the main office
- Distributed parent concerns to the appropriate school personnel for follow-through
- Worked to establish foundation documents to support the operation of the council
In accordance with the CDE’s theme of Collaboration, Coordination, and Community, the SAC was established to provide advice on the school improvement plan (SIP) and on budget and safety issues, and to oversee the communication committee’s progress in increasing communication and engagement. The SAC’s charge included:

- Developing a statement for the board of directors to create and establish the purpose of the SAC
- Establishing bylaws to address committee responsibilities, officers, meeting times, reporting procedures and membership
- Creating monthly education agenda items to inform committee members and visitors about SIP initiatives, administrative actions, budget and safety issues, and focus areas (such as school and district initiatives, policies, and board actions)
- Distributing meeting minutes and attendance and following up on concerns or suggestions
- Preparing monthly newsletter updates
- Creating official committee documents to be made publicly available in the school’s main office
- Making presentations on the SIP, state standards and benchmarks, school discipline policy and the Freedom of Information and Right to Privacy Act (FIRPA)

As part of this work, Burton hosted a Burrito Night, sponsored by the SAC. Parents were asked to express their opinions and perform SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analyses in four areas: arts and specials, community building, student achievement, and discipline and safety. Burton learned that parents wanted to be involved, but didn’t know how. (After the Burrito Night, one of the parents joined the board.) The lesson here, for Burton, was that community-building activities are most successful when they are presented with an explicit purpose.
RESULTS

Burton and Krebs used seven different methods to measure the results of their *Sharing the Dream* project, but Burton also knows that some of the most meaningful lessons cannot be measured, they must be seen. As she watched parents wander among the discussion rooms during Burrito Night, she was struck by the necessity of structure and clear expectations to facilitate room navigation and conversation topics. “You need to be intentional about creating a culture,” Burton says. While a certain level of flexibility and informality are necessary, careful planning is key to bringing people together and creating a learning environment.

Through her observations and such sources as SAC minutes, council reports, surveys of parents and teachers, and the revised school improvement plan, Burton has learned a great deal about community engagement at DATA. First, parents prefer to be contacted by phone or by newsletters sent home with their students. They want more community-building activities like Burrito Night. Areas for improvement include:

- Developing a user-friendly SAC agenda that highlights special-interest items in an attractive manner
- Communicating SAC meetings, agenda items and accomplishments in a variety of ways
- Offering Spanish instruction and enhanced arts programs for students
- Revising school’s videos and DVDs to include more generic school information

*SWOT analysis* is a useful tool that assesses:

**Strengths:** Internal attributes that are helpful to achieving the objective.

**Weaknesses:** Internal attributes that are harmful to achieving the objective.

**Opportunities:** External conditions that are helpful to achieving the objective.

**Threats:** External conditions that are harmful to achieving the objective.
Burton was quick to respond to the lessons learned during her *Sharing the Dream* grant period. In response to feedback, she has hired a Spanish instructor and arts education teacher for the 2007–2008 school year. The SAC is moving forward to establish a discipline and safety committee, sponsor more family information and celebration activities, develop a reliable way to log parent volunteer hours, and address issues such as arts education, grant writing, parents-as-teachers instruction, literacy assessment and policies for bullying and discipline. The communication council is expanding its duties. In the upcoming year, council members will write and distribute a monthly newsletter to all families. The council is also investigating the purchase of an automatic phone dialing system to keep parents informed about important school events with messages recorded in both English and Spanish. And as for that successful Burrito Night? Burton intends to transition the SWOT analysis concept into quarterly meetings and potluck dinners.
LEADERSHIP LESSONS

• Engage community volunteers in their area of expertise. They are your best resources to provide students with real-world learning.

• Conducting interviews is a powerful way to teach students about their communities, increase their communication and literacy skills, and engage the community in the work of the school.

• Bringing parents and community members to the school for a celebration of student success fosters pride and excitement.
PUTTING LEARNING ON DISPLAY

Stemley Road Elementary is located between two small towns in rural Alabama. According to Principal Judi Clark, the school doesn’t really belong to either town. She, however, wanted parents and community members in both towns to support Stemley students’ literacy development. In 2006, Clark applied for a Sharing the Dream grant to create the Building Dreams Together With Research Display Day, a project that used community members’ knowledge and expertise to strengthen students’ literacy skills. For Stemley Road, being a foundation school for the Cornerstone Literacy Initiative and an Alabama Reading Initiative site means continually striving to expose students to the best literacy practices to build confident and successful learners for life.

Research shows that talking with adults encourages student achievement. So Clark used Dream funds to connect students with parent and community members in meaningful ways. All Stemley Road students—from kindergarten to sixth grade—participated in the Building Dreams Together project. Students interviewed family and community members on selected topics, which built students’ content knowledge and their communication and literacy skills. These interviews, conversations, dialogues and presentations culminated in a springtime Research Display Day that showcased students’ work.

IMPLEMENTATION

After each grade established a theme and aligned it with Alabama Course of Study Standards, students began the research that would support their studies. Classes took field trips related to their themes and invited guest speakers to the school. Students used books, videos, pamphlets and the Internet for their research, and interviewed teachers, students, parents and families, and community members. Parents were kept abreast of students’ progress through monthly newsletters. On Research Display Day, students presented writings, poster displays, student art, scientific investigation results, PowerPoint presentations, video clips, historical reenactments, crafts, murals, speeches, sample exhibits and more.

Summarized here are each grade’s themes, activities and community resources.

Kindergarten: Life on the Farm
Students went on a field trip to a local farm, helped hatch baby chicks and butterflies, and grew tomatoes, radishes and onions. Representatives from the Soil and Conservation Department came to inspect the garden that the students planted with help from many parents, grandparents and gardeners from the community. A local farmer helped students set up the incubatory to hatch the baby chicks. An American Dairy Association representative visited with the famous cow, Daisy, to present the process of milk production.
First Grade: The Study of Rocks and Minerals
Students made a field trip to a famous local cave and researched their topic with books and Web sites. Students and parents transformed a school hallway into a cave formation, complete with stalactites and stalagmites. They performed experiments in growing their own crystals and identifying a variety of rocks. “It was thrilling to see their own interpretation of their learning in models of caves they constructed,” says Clark.

Second Grade: Animals and Their Habitats
This project relied on parent and community interviews that were used to create books and stories about the environment. Students furthered their knowledge by reading nonfiction texts and watching videos. A guest from Honduras spoke with and was interviewed by students about the animals and landscape of Central America. Students viewed animals in their natural habitat during a visit to the Montgomery Zoo.

Third Grade: Plant Life
The third grade invited volunteers to help construct and maintain a green house. First, a local gardener demonstrated planting techniques and got students started on a plant project for each month. In conjunction with Jacksonville State University, students attended a nature lab at a local lake to gain a deeper understanding of plant life and lake ecology. Many parents participated in “Dig Day,” during which third graders used their knowledge of local flora and growth techniques to plant flowers and shrubs on the school campus.

Fourth Grade: Alabama: Famous People, Places and Events
By incorporating social studies standards and a field trip to the Historical Civil Rights Museum in Birmingham, students used reading, writing, listening and speaking skills to build their history learning. At the museum, students conducted interviews and compiled anecdotal notes. Parents attended several dramatic plays that students presented on Alabama’s heritage. Students reenacted Rosa Parks’ famous bus ride. The local mayor attended Research Display Day and shared information about Talladega’s history.

Fifth Grade: One Man’s Trash Is Another Man’s Treasure
Encompassing a variety of science and math standards, students surveyed and interviewed parents about the importance of recycling for the environment. In addition, they visited SIFAT (Servants in Faith and Technology), a local organization that enables students to experience the role of atmospheric pressure and gravity in pumping water as early Americans did. Students’ final product was a brochure that explained the lessons they’d learned about reducing, reusing and recycling.

Sixth Grade: Inventors and Their Inventions
Sixth graders explored the world of the late eighteenth century. To support their learning, students visited the Discover Museum in Birmingham. A local artist from Talladega College helped students create a mural depicting the inventions of this era.
RESULTS

Clark says that Stemley Road students successfully met their goal of incorporating state standards through project-based learning using parents and community members as experts and partners. Field trips exposed students to their local resources and surrounding region, parents and community members came to the school to speak as experts or assist students with projects, and interviews helped students gather research and develop oral language skills. Most importantly, says Clark, greater communication was established between school, home and the community. Based on attendance at Research Display Day, more than 700 parents, family members and community visitors shared in the celebration of students’ work.

Parents and visitors remarked that they were amazed at the in-depth work students did for their projects. Families saw oral language development increase as a result of dramatic plays, presentations, interviews, speeches and scientific inquiries. They felt a great sense of pride in Stemley Road and their students’ accomplishments. Last but not least, there now exists a stronger bond and greater communication between school, home and the community.

NEXT STEPS

Clark’s dream is “an ongoing aspiration that we can continue to strengthen the relationship and create a positive communication pathway between the home, school and community.” She knows that when parents are actively involved in their children’s education, students perform more successfully. In mentioning the importance of parental and community relationships, Clark notes that, for kindergarten students especially, these relationships set the foundation for future involvement. Having established many positive relationships during Research Display Day, Clark and her staff now want to build on this program. They envision additional parent involvement activities, including family nights highlighting literacy, math, scientific investigations and more.

Because Stemley Road is a Title I school, Clark is quick to point out that their goals have always included building parent involvement to improve student achievement. She is committed to providing the best possible opportunities for students by strengthening the home–school–community connection.
Ensure that students and families are connected to the health, human and social services they need to stay focused on learning.

**Sherry Kijowski, Principal**

Mcllvaine Early Childhood Center  
Magnolia, Delaware  
Student Enrollment: 120  
Grades: Kindergarten

**LEADERSHIP LESSONS**

- Sharing responsibility with your staff increases buy-in and encourages team building.

- Meeting families in their homes enables staff to identify issues of concern, present information and alternative options, and make referrals.

- Increasing student and parent awareness of healthy lifestyles leads to higher attendance rates and greater focus on learning goals.
“It may take a village to raise a child, but it also takes an entire community to educate one,” says Sherry Kijowski of the McIlvaine Early Childhood Center. To support this belief, the Center is committed to ensuring that the community’s youngest learners who need extra supports get a strong start in their school careers. Students with language battery scores below the 35th percentile are enrolled into one of the Center’s six full-day kindergarten classes. The McIlvaine faculty consists of a school nurse, six teachers, six full-time paraprofessionals and a reading specialist. Ancillary services are provided on an as-needed basis by a speech pathologist, school psychologist and an occupational therapist. Because the school has no principal, Kijowski, who serves as supervisor of instruction for the Caesar Rodney School District and oversees the McIlvaine Early Childhood Center, relies on a “shared approach” to building leadership. All faculty members are responsible for chairing at least one committee or holding a particular responsibility within the school.

Before the start of the school year, the school nurse and a classroom teacher visit each new student’s home. Home visit observations help staff identify potential health risks to students and begin talking to parents about supports students need to be successful at McIlvaine. Based on these home observations and others made in the classroom, the faculty at McIlvaine began to put child wellness at the forefront of the school mission. This priority on child wellness has spurred a motto of “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds” at the Center. Each year, the Center hosts an annual health fair that brings community groups together to support children’s health so they can achieve in school. In 2006–2007, Kijowski used the Sharing the Dream grant to enhance student wellness and support the spring health fair.
IMPLEMENTATION

Kijowski used Dream funds to purchase books, display boards, demonstration models and multimedia materials for the health fair. The school nurse also used these items in classroom visits and to inform parents and children about making healthy choices in their lifestyles, connecting learning at home and at school, and reinforcing health needs such as vaccinations. In late 2006, McIlvaine staff conducted 90 home site visits; they spent more than an hour per visit discussing child wellness, health and safety. These visits also provided a wonderful opportunity for staff to identify potential health risks, and share information and solutions with families. For example, if staff members noticed that children were riding bikes without a helmet, they raised the issue of the importance of wearing protective gear. Kijowski has found that these early interventions and referrals have had a significant impact on ensuring that children arrive at school ready to learn.

Pursuing the belief that a healthy body will lead to a healthy mind, McIlvaine staff joined with nursing students at local Wesley College to plan the spring health fair. Through partnerships with a local fire department, national honors society, the department of public health, a state police troop, the American Lung Association and others, Kijowski and her team began preparing for Aloha to Your Health, the 2007 health fair. In spite of rain, more than half of McIlvaine’s student population turned out for the event. On the school campus decorated in a Hawaiian theme with leas and tropical designs, students and their families learned about a broad range of health issues, such as dental, vision, nutrition, bike safety, and health and safety risks. Kijowski plans to offer this event each year, which she sees as starting her students off on a “healthy lifestyle journey.”

RESULTS

Kijowski and her staff believe that the McIlvaine Early Childhood Center health fair met its goals. As mentioned, 54 percent of the student population attended the fair. Thirty-five Wesley nursing students participated in the event—85 percent of their nursing cohort. Moreover, approximately 90 percent of the nursing faculty at Wesley attended and 100 percent of McIlvaine’s faculty attended and supported the event. Kijowski asserts that the presence of these faculty members provided an “invaluable link between public education and higher education.”

The program also reinforced a strong home–school connection and presented an opportunity for students and families to come together in an academic setting. In this way, the health fair promotes health advocacy for students once they leave McIlvaine. Families are often connected with state agencies during the health fair, thus promoting wellness visits, inquiries and vaccinations. Kijowski knows that such opportunities develop habits that influence her students’ siblings and many future students.

Additionally, McIlvaine staff has seen attendance at school events increase because of the summer home visits and the health fair. Teachers have observed a decrease in absenteeism when health services are highlighted during the health fair and throughout the school year.
McIlvaine Early Childhood Center continues to refine the work supported by the initial Sharing the Dream funds. Many home visits have been planned for 2007, and Kijowski and her staff eagerly anticipate the 2008 health fair. They continue to have conversations about student wellness and its connection to learning. And as the school's bilingual population increases, McIlvaine staff are devising ways to support the needs of an evolving community. Moreover, the Caesar Rodney School District will host its first community health fair in October 2007. The district's other school nurses have been impressed with the McIlvaine staff’s work and they want to expand the concept of wellness to the district’s entire student body. “It’s wonderful to be a pioneer!” says Kijowski.
Engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school.

Marsha L. Sackash and Barry Bowe, Principals

Bald Eagle Area School District
Port Matilda, Pennsylvania

Student Enrollment: 720
Grades: K–6

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

• Partnering with volunteer organizations gives schools access to vast resources.

• The senior population is an untapped resource in many communities. They have many special experiences to share with students.

• By providing a real-life experience, personal letter writing is an excellent way to develop young writers’ skills.
BUILDING LITERACY BY WRITING LETTERS

The staff at Port Matilda Elementary School strongly believes that “students need real-life reasons to write.” In thinking about real-world learning connections, Principal Barry Bowe realized that the school was not tapping the rich contribution that senior citizens could make to student learning. Adults over age 65 make up 12 percent of the school’s tax base, and Bowe believed that these older adults had much more than financial resources to offer the school. He developed a pen pal program with the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to bring a real-world context to students’ learning. This program partnered senior citizen volunteers with elementary school students in a letter exchange program that lasted throughout the school year. In the past years 170 Port Matilda students were partnered with 150 adult volunteers. At the end of each school year, the project culminated with a “meet and greet” social event.

The Sharing the Dream grant enabled this unique pen pal program to be implemented in all four of the district’s elementary schools: Port Matilda, Howard Elementary School, Mountaintop Area Elementary School and the Wingate Elementary School. Port Matilda’s procedures were modified to fit the expanded version of the program. More adult volunteers of all ages were recruited so that many more children could participate in the pen pal program. WPSU (Penn State University’s Public Television) provided adult volunteers, including university students and professors, and office workers.

IMPLEMENTATION

More than 370 adult pen pals were partnered with 720 elementary students in grades K–6 throughout the school district. Grades K, 1 and 2 had one pen pal per classroom. These students wrote a group letter on chart paper to the pen pal, who responded with one letter to the whole class. In grades 3–6, each student was matched with his or her own pen pal to correspond with from October to May. A formal list of rules helped keep the program running smoothly. Orchestrating the pen pal letter exchange was a large task involving many staff members and volunteers. The secretary at Port Matilda Elementary School directed each month’s exchanges. A team of people from the RSVP and WPSU read all letters to ensure students’ safety.

Classroom teachers believed in the educational benefits of the program. Writing letters to an actual adult pen pal was highly motivating to students and their classmates. Students were able to write about their lives and share stories that were important to them. Sharing these experiences in writing challenged the students to improve their writing and reading skills, and making personal connections was rewarding to students and

“Among more than 800 variables, nonfiction composition is the most powerful way to improve student achievement. It teaches children to describe, compare and persuade.”

Anita Jiles, NAESP Communicator, May/June 2006
volunteers. Bald Eagle Area School District teachers acknowledged that the writing skills practiced in this project directly correlated to the Pennsylvania State Academic Standards of reading and writing.

In May, the four elementary schools held a meet and greet social event in their buildings. Each building’s music teacher presented a program showcasing the pen pal students in grades 3–6. Over punch and cookies, the students and adults finally got the chance to meet and to chat like old friends. Students and pen pals exchanged gifts—each student received a book from their adult pen pal. Afterward students sent thank-you notes to each volunteer pen pal.

**RESULTS**

By all measures, the pen pal program was a success. Of the 375 adult pen pals, 75 percent said they would like to continue participating. All of the 43 classroom teachers involved in the said it was wonderful for their students because it was a real-life activity, motivated students to write, made each class or student feel special and writing letters addressed the state standards. All teachers said they would like their students to participate next year.

Marsha L. Sackash, principal of Mountaintop Area Elementary School, recalls that children were so excited about the meet and greet event that there was a “happy buzz” in the building. Parents cleared family calendars for the day. Students eagerly introduced their pen pal to the teachers and principals. During an awards assembly, a sixth grader at Mountaintop Elementary said the pen pal program was the highlight of his year. Sackash expects many students to continue to correspond with their pen pals throughout their school years.

**NEXT STEPS**

With continued support from the RSVP and WSPU groups, as well as teachers and parents, the district will be able to continue this Sharing the Dream project for years to come. Thanks to Dream funding, a one-school pen pal project has evolved into a four-school project. The RSVP partnership will continue to seek adult volunteers of all ages. The partnership with WPSU Television has yielded a lot more than pen pals—the station helped Bowe and Sackash promote the program and found sponsors and special deals on products for the meet and greet events. The district hopes to extend the program to grades 3–6 at the Wingate Elementary School. In the other three schools they aim to match individual pen pals for all K–2 students.
GOALS FOR 2007–2008

• Expand the pen pal support system in the elementary buildings. Secretaries will attend the planning meetings and will be responsible for arranging the meet and greet events in each building. Planning meetings will take place in August and January.
• Seek support for refreshments from sponsors or parent-teacher associations.
• Add at least third and fourth grades at Wingate to the individual pen pal list by actively seeking more pen pal volunteers from RSVP and WPSU.
• Incorporate “mini lessons” on letter writing into each grade level’s lesson plans before the pen pal letter writing begins.
• Create a packet for each school with step-by-step directions for the program. Packets will be given to teachers, principals and building secretaries.
• Set a schedule for letter exchange and meet and greet events at the beginning of the school year.
LEADERSHIP LESSONS

- School-based mentoring programs can strengthen student scholarship and self-discipline.

- Cultivating relationships with community members increases students’ sense of self, and encourages them to become productive citizens.

- You never know when a small project will spawn a great partnership.

Doreatha White, Principal

Dreamkeepers Academy at J.J. Roberts Elementary School
Norfolk, Virginia
Student Enrollment: 451
Grades: Pre-K–5

Engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school.
MENTORING STUDENTS’ WAY TO SUCCESS

The Dreamkeepers Academy at J.J. Roberts Elementary School is located in urban Norfolk, Virginia—an area riddled with crime. Principal Doreatha White sees that many Dreamkeepers students need to accept more responsibility for their academic growth and strengthen their social skills, etiquette and self-motivation as they progress through school. Her goal is to nurture the whole child by fostering academic achievement, character education and college or career preparation. White is confident that Dreamkeepers can become a “world-class school.” Toward this goal, White wanted to help students connect with community members to foster character development and academic success—and create positive connections within the community at large.

With Sharing the Dream funds, White and Dreamkeepers Academy staff established a student mentorship program with community organizations, parents and other education partners. During the 2006–2007 school year, more than 118 mentors—84 community members and 34 school staff members—joined the program. Dreamkeepers Academy established five new, local partnerships to support the character education initiative: a high school science department, a university nursing program and women’s basketball team, a local truck and fleet repair company, and a local church.

“To children, mentoring means having a trusted friend who cares about them and listens to them, a role model they can look up to, who will help them achieve their dreams.”

Dr. Doreatha White
IMPLEMENTATION

Upon receipt of her Dream grant, White designated school counselor Tamara Rainey Glover to orchestrate the school-based mentoring program at Dreamkeepers. Glover participated in district-wide training sessions to build the program and implement best practices. Staff began promoting the program with PTA announcements, advertisements on the school marquee and a newsletter for stakeholders and prospective volunteers. Throughout the months of the 2006–2007 school year, these activities started and built mentor relationships:

September
Sixty students were identified to participate in the mentorship program. These students were recommended by teachers who were concerned about the students’ academic progress, attendance, behavior, social skills and lack of home support.

October
The First Annual Student Mentorship Luncheon welcomed and trained local professionals, military personnel, parents and high school cadets (Junior ROTC members) interested in volunteering. Councilman Paul Riddick spoke to the 75 participants about the impact of creating shared leadership, establishing community accountability and providing positive role models for students in urban communities. Requirements were discussed, including program expectations, criminal background checks, TB tests and mentee matching interviews. After this first orientation session, all participants applied to join the program.

Meanwhile, student mentees completed a parent permission form, mentee contract and student pledge.

November
Classroom group sessions paired the mentors and mentees. Students were informed about the mentor–mentee relationship, as well as additional student support services. Grab bags filled with notebook binders, book bags, pencils, crayons, coloring books to boost test-taking skills, literacy books and healthy snacks provided a fun incentive for the students.

At Thanksgiving, some of the participating families received a Thanksgiving dinner basket. Parents and students were delighted with the enthusiasm of the mentors and surveys suggested that school morale was high and parental involvement was increasing.

Student Mentee Pledge:
I am special.
I love myself.
Therefore; I choose to grow
and become the best person I can be.
Others can help me to grow,
but the choice is basically mine.
I will let others do their best, too.
I will not try to hinder them from growing.
If I believe in myself, I will achieve success.
And, if others believe in themselves,
then together we will ALL succeed.
December
As part of a service learning project, the students and mentors put together a collage of holiday cards for a local senior citizens home. Students learned what it means to be part of a community of caring. Twenty mentees delivered the cards, sang carols and exchanged small gifts with the seniors. This activity raised awareness among the residents, and many enrolled as classroom volunteers.

In late December, mentees were given gifts and a grab bag filled with supplies to help encourage academic progress. Cadets from a local high school mentored students in character education. Mentor and mentee numbers began to grow.

January
Mentors conducted school uniform checks, modeled study skills, read books and held puppet shows for their mentees. They also took an active role in the Peace Garden, an activity assigned to homerooms that promoted school beautification through trash pickup and planting flowers. Many mentees developed an interest in environmental science and learned the importance of nature and responsibility.

February
Mentors participated with their mentees in a school news show, and continued to work with students as they prepared for March state assessments.

March
Classroom teachers reported that the mentoring program was an effective component in the school accountability plan to promote student learning and building social skills. Higher test scores confirmed these claims.

April
Mentors and mentees collaborated on educational games, class project work, essay writing contests and homework as mentors began visiting more frequently to check student’s attendance and class progress. Dream Dollars were distributed as motivational incentives for regular attendance, good behavior, improved class performance and for using appropriate cafeteria manners.

May
Guests were invited to speak with the mentees about health and happiness, school safety, and second chances.

June
On June 7, 2007, mentors and mentees were invited to attend a pancake breakfast followed by an awards ceremony. Students and volunteers received recognition, including certificates, plaques and shared testimonies. All participants took a survey and prizes were awarded for mentor of the month and most improved student mentee (based on attendance, grades and behavior).
In May 2007, White learned that 100 percent of fifth grade students passed the Virginia Standards of Learning writing exam. The school received the National School Change Award sponsored by Fordham University in New York and the Promising Practices Award sponsored by the Character Education Partnership. Moreover, the Norfolk Public Schools received the State Student Mentorship Award for the 2006–2007 school year.

White notes that parents, mentors and students were inspired by the results of the program. As indicated in the TfHS (Test for Higher Standards) results, Dreamkeepers ranked well above the district average. According to the results of a student mentorship survey (Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education), Dreamkeepers ranked above average. The student mentorship program cultivated an environment that fostered enhanced student achievement, character development and a sense of belonging. White believes that increased parent and community involvement in the school—evidenced through school data—points to the significant success of the program. She believes that students’ interactions with their mentors will help them make academic and social gains necessary to their success in school and beyond.
NEXT STEPS

White sees the student mentorship program as a model for “world-class education” that would include implementing a program to engage community collaboration. In light of their successes, Dreamkeepers staff intend to model the program and share best practices with other school-based mentoring programs. From their lessons learned, they hope to inspire other schools to:

- Establish an open, friendly and trusting relationship with “at risk” students
- Help students develop life skills at home and school and in the community
- Provide students with new possibilities, exposure and opportunities
- Model appropriate communication styles and thus help students increase their ability to successfully interact and communicate with others
- Develop community partnerships and collaboration
- Encourage peer tutoring and student leadership
In her urban community, Principal Nkenge Bergan saw many parents who didn’t know how to be a part of their children’s school experience. School data supported her observations: Godwin Heights Middle School’s parent volunteer rate was less than 1 percent in 2006. Combined fall and spring parent and teacher conference attendance in the 2005–2006 school year was 60 percent. Bergan identified many reasons for lack of parent participation in the school. Some middle school parents felt that their children were pushing them away during these “awkward” developmental years. Other parents’ negative memories of school kept them from becoming involved. Under- or unemployed parents often lacked the time or know-how to be involved. She also identified a non-school-related challenge: Parents who could benefit from support services for themselves and their children often didn’t know how to access community resources. Though she identified these challenges, Bergan struggled with how to provide parent involvement opportunities with declining state aid dollars and inconsistent funding. After attending a series of sporting events at which visiting team members’ parents outnumbered Godwin Heights parents, Bergan knew that she had to do more than just write articles in school newsletters and mail progress reports; she knew she had to help bring parents to the center of their children’s learning.

Bergan believed that it was crucial to provide an unstructured opportunity for families to contribute to their school—and access important information for themselves and their children. She used her Sharing the Dream grant to institute the Parents in the Middle program. Funds were applied to create a physical space for parents in the school, where they can feel welcome and access resources. During the 2006–2007 school year, Godwin Heights dedicated a room specifically to parents and stocked it with furniture, a phone, a computer, resources and literature about parenting skills and community service agency supports. According to Bergan, having a place for parents in the school helped improve teacher-parent relations. Bergan also worked to establish direct relationships with community agencies, such as the Kent School Services Network and the county parks and recreation department. She has urged agency representatives to come speak with parents, increasing their awareness of community services that can support student success.

Based on these initial endeavors, Bergan now sees various ways to build the Parents in the Middle program. Financial responsibility will be reinforced by creating a coupon and sale information exchange center. Another idea is a babysitters list to support families. Bergan hopes that community agency support will grow as more parents access and use this space to share information. Bergan continues to identify ideas for involving students and parents in learning—a partnership that she knows will lead to improved student achievement.
Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children’s learning.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING PRACTICES: STORIES OF PRINCIPALS ACTIVELY ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

Cynthia C. Bernard, Principal

Dwight D. Eisenhower Charter School
New Orleans, Louisiana
Student Enrollment: 582
Grades: K–8

Shortly after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Principal Cynthia Bernard opened the doors of Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary in New Orleans to students in great need. As the entire city struggled to regain social, economic and mental well-being, so too did the students and families of Eisenhower. Every student in the school, for example, was made eligible for free and reduced-price lunch benefits. Bernard sought Sharing the Dream funds to help support these families and students who were trying to get back on their feet.

Through the program called All About My Child: In the Know/Parents and Teachers Together, Bernard has used her Sharing the Dream grant to offer simple but powerful incentives—transportation, meals and child care—to bring parents into the school at a time the school and its students needed them most. Parents were provided with transportation to get to and from parent and teacher conferences and school events. Students received homework help or worked on other activities while parents talked with teachers and support staff about their children’s needs. Dinners provided by the school meant fewer meals for parents to prepare on tight budgets. Bernard believed that by offering assistance to parents in this turbulent time, they would be more likely and able to help their children focus on learning.

In a town where so many residents are in the process of recovering, Bernard is pleased that she and her staff were able to meet their goal of building a vibrant and growing parent-teacher organization where parents felt “wanted on the school campus” and that the school had an “open door” policy. Because of this, an average of two parents volunteered at the school each day, 70 percent of students submitted correct and complete homework daily, 24 percent attended a family literacy night, 30 percent of kindergarten families participated in Sunshine Club, a Saturday breakfast reading program, and approximately 65 percent of fourth and eighth grade parents attended a workshop in tutoring for high-stakes testing. Bernard plans to build on these successes in the coming school year by increasing participation rates in existing activities and engaging parents and students in new activities such as special nights for science and social studies and access to the computer lab. She hopes that the momentum from the Sharing the Dream grant will help school staff exceed all their goals by 2009.
Delores Bitsilly ranked parent involvement as relatively strong in her rural school, which had operated as a Bureau of Indian Affairs residential and day school since 1911. The school had long concentrated efforts on getting parents to visit the school and participate in social events. But for Tohaali Community School students, all of whom receive federal free and reduced-price lunch benefits, Bitsilly knew that parent support of their children’s education was crucial—and had to move beyond social events. She used the school’s restructuring process—spurred by requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act—as an opportunity to involve parents in supporting student achievement, and invested *Sharing the Dream* funds to sustain and improve supports already in place for parents in the school.

Bitsilly’s *Dream* project, Building Positive Relationships for Our Children—Alchini ba adeiti, is designed to help the school enhance and strengthen partnerships with parents. Bitsilly mapped out a year-long agenda of activities, each aligned to specific objectives and outcomes for raising parents’ involvement in their students’ education. Objectives included improving parenting skills, addressing student behavior issues and helping parents better assist their children with homework assignments. Bitsilly used *Dream* funds to implement many activities on her agenda. On the first day of school, for example, Tohaali students and staff hosted a successful “meet and greet” event. The school hosted several family literacy nights, where parents learned skills such as how to use the library and read to their children to enhance student learning. The school also hosted school information and homework seminars, as well as parenting classes. In addition, Bitsilly and staff prepared a “parent room” where parents can access resources, training and the Internet.

Through this project, Bitsilly was able to increase the parent participation rate in school events from 80 percent in 2005–2006 to 85 percent in 2006–2007. Participation was measured in three key areas: fall and spring parent and teacher conferences; attendance at parent advisory committee meetings; and other school functions such as homework seminars, school-wide information system seminars and field day. According to Bitsilly, the greatest reward is seeing new parents participate in school activities and initiate the first steps to being a part of their children’s education. She intends to continue providing opportunities for parents, community members and students to participate in after-school educational activities, and to build stronger connections between home and school. For the 2007–2008 school year, Tohaali families will have access to workshops on literacy development and parenting skills, as well as two-way multimedia communication between home and school.
Principal Julie Bloss can point to research that shows school and family partnerships improve student performance, empower parents and strengthen communities. In her rural school, where half of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch benefits, Bloss wanted to use that knowledge to make parents and community members effective participants in students’ learning. Bloss seized the opportunity of the Sharing the Dream grant and launched the Parent Involvement Project.

The Parent Involvement Project included four distinct after-hours programs for parents and children.

1. **Late-night library.** The lower-elementary library is kept open after hours at least twice a month for students and parents to use. Children check out books, listen to stories and participate in hands-on learning activities. Adults use the schools’ parent-focused resources, access computers and interact with their children.

2. **Literacy lab.** The school’s computer lab is kept open at least two evenings a month for student and parent use. Students can use the school’s math and reading software, as well as get homework assistance.

3. **Parent meetings.** Parent meetings are hosted once a month after school hours. At these sessions, parents and children hear special presentations by school personnel and outside sources.


Bloss was able to measure the success of this project in a variety of ways, and found that the impact was substantial. Forty-two adults participated in the parent book clubs, 182 students and adults attended the literacy lab, 300 children and adults went to late-night library and 825 parent contacts were made through parent meetings. A comparison of data from 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 indicated a 23 percent increase in parent and community volunteerism. Perhaps most telling, parent surveys showed that parents appreciated opportunities to be actively involved in the school though a variety of programs, enjoyed being able to establish “networking relationships” with school staff and other parents, and found monthly newsletters helpful in learning about child development and the school calendar. The successes achieved with the Dream grant at Grove Lower Elementary will be extended into 2007–2008 to continue to build trust and strengthen relationships between parents and school staff members. Bloss plans to use creative financing strategies to maintain the late-night library and literacy lab, as well as continue the monthly principal newsletter, book clubs and parent-teacher communication.
Crossroads Elementary opened in 1999 as a year-round school with two distinct but collaborative educational magnet programs—one rooted in science and the other in Montessori instruction. Principal Celeste Carty watched more than 380 parents and community members volunteer at Crossroads in the 2005–2006 school year. She realized, though, that in the 740-student school, 380 volunteers were not enough. Crossroads students, especially the more than one-quarter of children who receive English language learner services, needed more support from parents and community members to be successful in school. Carty knew that bridging the varied cultural beliefs about parents’ role in schooling would be a challenge in engaging parents, but she knew it was a challenge the school needed to take on.

Using *Sharing the Dream* funds, Carty created Parent Power, a program to encourage parents to become more meaningfully involved in their children’s learning, especially parents who did not traditionally attend school-sponsored events. Through Parent Power, the school hosted educational events featuring guest speakers. Event topics were determined by parent input. The school provided transportation, child care and food to make it easier for parents to attend the events. Early in the 2006–2007 school year, a Parent Power presentation featured a reading expert who helped teach parents skills to support children’s literacy development—at home and in the classroom. Another event helped parents learn about the school’s math curricula. Carty hoped this event would help parents become more confident in their own understanding of math, and better be able to help their children with math homework assignments. Carty also used *Dream* funds to develop a special math section on the school’s Web site, as well as other Web-based materials.

Carty measured the success of the school’s *Dream* grant using survey and test score data. Through evaluations, parents reported that the presentations increased their knowledge about working with their children and communicating with their children’s teacher, and that they would like to attend more presentations in the future. Although Carty accomplished much of what she set out to do this year, she believes it is only the beginning. She plans to continue providing parent education nights, family-oriented activities and opportunities to develop healthy relationships that she hopes will enable parents to become “education managers.” By creating a stronger feeling of community within the school, Carty envisions a place of community learning, interaction and conversation.
Hutcherson Early Learning Center serves all children in the city of Lynchburg between the ages of two and five who have been identified as having special needs. Principal Polly Cassady reports that it is often difficult for parents to learn about their children’s developmental or learning disabilities. Often, support services are not in place to help parents overcome their initial shock—and, at times, grief—in learning that their children need special assistance. Many parents are not used to working with teachers and other educators to support their children. Cassady, however, knows that especially for students with special needs, parents are an essential part of the education team.

Cassady’s Parents Are Partners program used Sharing the Dream funds to give parents the knowledge and confidence they needed to become key decision-makers in their children’s education. Hutcherson kicked off the program with an open house at the beginning of the 2006–2007 school year. Parents met with therapists, teachers and community group members to learn about child development and parent support services. Dream funds were also used to establish a parent resource center and lending library, which provided parents with information about child development and ways to better support their children’s learning. The school also hosted parent support groups with guest speakers who addressed parent concerns about their children’s development. These groups provided a needed forum for parents of children with special needs. Dream funds also supported a parent mentor program that gave parents personal supports.

Progress of the Parents Are Partners program was measured by the number and depth of relationships between parents, teachers, students and community resource providers. Cassady found that over the course of the year, the program generated a loyal following of seven to 10 parents who attended monthly meetings and shared resources, tips, experiences and other valuable information that addressed their needs. Although she acknowledges challenges, Cassady has worked with staff and parents to identify areas for program improvement. During the 2007–2008 school year, Cassady hopes to increase communication with parent programs from other Lynchburg City Schools, collaborate with Lynchburg College to provide specified trainings, establish parent-initiated play groups for children with autism and recruit parent volunteers who better reflect the demographics of their community.
Principal Bridget Clark wants Johnston Elementary to be a gathering place for the community. In the 2005–2006 school year, a sharp decrease in parent attendance at school events proved that the school was moving away from this goal rather than toward it. Even though the school provided child care for all of its evening activities, its Hispanic parent population shied away from school events. Parents' lack of transportation to school meetings and events, language barriers between parents and school staff, and parents' feelings of alienation kept them from participating. Clark sought to “level the playing” field for students who needed extra support and attention from their parents—particularly students from Hispanic families. She had a vision for parent and community involvement in the school—one rooted in a sense of community that fostered an atmosphere of fun and learning.

Clark used her Sharing the Dream grant to launch her community outreach efforts. In the 2006–2007 school year, Johnston Elementary hosted a parent night for the Hispanic parents in the school community. An interpreter was hired for the event, allowing parents to ask questions—and get answers—about their school in their native language. Parents were provided information on school policies, curricula and state testing while sampling refreshments.

The parent night was a tremendous success. One hundred percent of the school’s Hispanic families attended the event. Hispanic parents relayed through the translator to school staff that receiving information in their own language made them finally feel like part of the school. Subsequent results continued to roll in. During the year, the school saw more Hispanic parents attend the regular parent report card pick-up event than ever before. This was good news to Clark, who says she now knows Johnston Elementary is “on the right track” to improving parents’ participation in their children’s education.

Clark attributes this success to listening to parents and making adjustments when necessary. In doing so, Clark feels her staff gained valuable insight about parent values and cultural stigmatization that enabled them to better understand how children’s experiences affected their attitude and academic performance. As she looks forward to a new year with new challenges, Clark now knows that all parents can be reached when she and her staff reframe old thought patterns. Clark plans to continue this work into the 2007–2008 school year by using bilingual translators at meetings, visiting local housing projects to make presentations, hosting meals for fifth grade parents and providing free transportation to school events.
Even before applying for a *Sharing the Dream* grant, Principal Lynn Clark knew that teamwork was key to serving Funston Elementary School students. A staff goal for the 2006–2007 school year was to engage parents as members of their children’s education team. So the rural school, with a growing population of Hispanic students and families, selected “Teamwork...We’re Better Together” as the theme for the year’s parent involvement activities.

Clark incorporated a sports theme into the events that brought students, parents and community members together. A tailgate party, which included a pep rally for parents and students, kicked off the school year. During football season, high school varsity football players visited classrooms each week to read with students. *Dream* funds allowed the school to host several parent workshops, including a Hispanic parent orientation, a “season opener” for parents of pre-K and kindergarten students, and a math activity workshop. Funds also allowed the school to purchase a set of receiver headphones that instantly translate dialogue from English to Spanish, allowing Hispanic parents to better participate in school events. As the year came to a close, Clark started work on a parent resource center and hosted workshops for parents led by the school social worker.

The school also reached out to local businesses for financial support for its ambitious engagement plans. Funston received a strong response—29 area businesses made financial contributions and joined the school’s team to improve student success. By reaching out to these “community friends,” Clark says she was able to spread positive information about the school. Activity and visitor logs show that hundreds of parents of the school’s 350 students have come to the school to participate in activities to boost their children’s learning. More meaningful to Clark than the numbers, however, was improvement in home, school and community relationships. Likewise, Clark is encouraged by the school’s higher Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) scores. “By involving parents in all aspects of education, we can expect them to be more active members of our educational team,” says Clark. Funston staff intend to capitalize on these efforts as they plan for the 2007–2008 school year. Through publicity, enthusiasm and a focus on high expectations, Clark will continue providing more educational opportunities for parents—especially by finding ways to get them more involved in the classroom.
Barbara J. Cook, Principal

Principal Barbara Cook wants to do more in her community of Wurtland, Kentucky, to help parents overcome their economic and academic barriers to helping their children succeed in school. Seventy percent of Wurtland parents have a high school education or less and nearly 70 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch benefits. The largest employer in the rural town is the county school system. Cook knows that it will take extra effort to get parents and the community more meaningfully involved in students’ learning.

Using a Sharing the Dream grant, Cook implemented Project Passport to Success to raise parent involvement by offering monthly school activities and learning opportunities for parents. Activities were determined by a project planning committee, which included school staff and community resource providers, such as Title I personnel, local community services staff, a family resource liaison, a volunteer coordinator and a representative from the school’s parent-teacher organization. Events included school open houses and orientations that helped parents become familiar with the school, activities to boost parent and community-member volunteerism in the school, and events that focused on the school’s arts, humanities and geography curricula. The school provided meals for families who attended each event, and activities were geared toward helping parents learn strategies for improving student learning at home.

Cook was pleased to learn that through Project Passport to Success, parent involvement increased by approximately 16 percent, representing a total attendance of 2,962 at activities throughout the year. Survey results indicated that parents had a better understanding of the school curriculum and academic expectations, believed activities were informative and created a parent-friendly environment, enjoyed dinner service as a way to encourage their participation, and would like to see similar activities continue for the 2007–2008 school year. Based on this feedback, Cook plans to implement changes that will further encourage parent involvement in the future. Her ideas include increasing parental understanding of school operations and decision-making processes, offering adult education classes to bolster parents’ marketable skills, continuing to build community partnerships that strengthen the belief in public schools, and emphasizing healthy lifestyle choices.
Designated as a Weed and Seed school by the U.S. Department of Justice, the John P. Parker School has worked to decrease crime by “weeding out” negative influences and “seeding” research-based strategies that help the community combat crime, poverty and social ills. The school has moved off state academic watch lists, largely due to the more than 100 volunteer tutors and mentors who work with students. Seeing the positive effect of having volunteers support students throughout the year, Principal Lynsa Davie applied for a Dream grant to sustain this strong foundation of involvement.

Under Operation CONNECTS (Community Outreach and Neighborhood Network to Effectively Connect To School), Davie and her staff connected students, parents, community members and school staff as encouraging partners to become meaningfully involved with students’ learning. Dream funds supported a back-to-school bash in fall 2006 for parents and students, where each student received a backpack and school supplies. The school also hosted a “bring your parent to school day” in November where 46 parents met with Davie over breakfast and then spent the day observing their children’s classrooms. In March 2007, the school hosted a “guardian gala” where each student invited one guardian to attend a banquet and dance. Information about students’ progress in meeting learning standards was made available to students’ guardians at that event. As part of their Dream project, the John P. Parker staff also hosted a Saturday event at the school for parents to learn about the school’s academic program. More than 150 people attended this information session. Davie has also helped publish two school and community newsletters about the school’s programs that were distributed to more than 500 families. Additionally, a parent-teacher association was established and held several meetings during the year.

The success of Operation CONNECTS was measured by monitoring changes in parent and community involvement in the school. By tracking the number of families represented at events, Davie and her staff were pleased to report that they engaged parents at higher levels. Davie will continue to incorporate John P. Parker’s many partners—including churches, a children’s hospital and the city health department—into the work funded by Dream. She expects to see a 30 percent increase in parent and community involvement overall, as well as positive gains in student achievement.
In 1990, the New Jersey Supreme Court found
the education provided to the state’s urban school
children to be inadequate and unconstitutional.
At that time, the Court identified a number of
school districts as “poorer urban districts” or
“special needs districts.” Those districts later
became known as Abbott Districts. Keansburg
Public Schools is one of the Abbott Districts.
But Principal Nicholas Eremita doesn’t need the
state to tell him that the students and families
in his community need extra support; he can
see that for himself. Keansburg has frequently
topped state and county lists for having the
most residents in need of educational, financial,
employment and health supports. According to
Eremita, it is essential that students and their
families hear some good news, and he has set out
to help them focus on stories of achievement, rather than
failure, that are emerging from their community.

Eremita used Sharing the Dream funds to host the Project Fair that
built on similar events the school had hosted in the past. At the fair,
students showed off their academic achievements to parents and
community members in a nonthreatening, informal environment.
The fair also provided information to parents about free support
services in the community. Eremita believed that by allowing students to share their work in a
positive atmosphere, and connecting parents and students to health, human and social services,
students would receive the support they need to be successful—in school and life.

Sixty parents and 121 students attended the Project Fair in May 2007. Eremita expects that by
raising awareness of student and family needs, more students will leave Joseph R. Bolger Middle
School headed for success.
Principal Linda Flowers noticed several things about Thomas Elementary School that she believed needed improvement. She saw that the pressure of meeting academic learning standards was crowding out time for arts education—which she knew was an important complement to students’ academic learning. And, while the school met its adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals under No Child Left Behind in 2005, the achievement gaps among students of different races remained large. Nearly 78 percent of white students in the school met AYP in reading, but only 45 percent of African-American students met that same goal. Flowers also recognized that the large public university in her community had virtually no involvement in Thomas Elementary’s planning processes and activities. She wanted to tackle these challenges using arts and student performances as a lure to encourage parent and community involvement in the school. In summer 2006, Flowers received a Sharing the Dream grant to help her address these challenges and make improvements to the John L. Thomas String Program, a recently established music program in the school.

The string program was developed to strengthen partnerships between the school, university, parents and the community by giving Thomas Elementary students string instrument instruction. Beginning three years ago, university music students, a university music professor and the district music teacher instructed students in biweekly lessons. Flowers used Dream funds to augment the program by establishing a performing arts program community advisory council. Community members planned and participated in weekly lunchtime art instruction and performance activities in the school. Students also presented quarterly school performances and art shows, which parents and community members were invited to attend. Dream funds were used to purchase costumes, sheet music and play scripts for students’ quarterly performances, and to pay stipends to instructors and artists who visited the school during the lunchtime events.

According to Flowers, attendance at parent-teacher conferences, family nights and other school activities rose significantly. Over the course of the 2006–2007 school year, the advisory council grew from six to 21 members. Student attendance also has increased since the start of the school year, which Flowers attributed to this augmented arts program. According to surveys, students enjoyed having the opportunity to learn, perform and watch others perform. Parents believed the program provided excellent training for students and said they look forward to the program’s continuation. Flowers says there is strong evidence that the advisory council and arts program has helped close gaps between the school, parents and community. Based on this, she hopes council members, parents and community members will feel comfortable visiting and volunteering on a regular basis, as well as attending school activities.
A 2005–2006 parent survey told Principal Mark Giles that 65 percent of Crockett Intermediate School’s parent population had a negative attitude toward the school and schools in general. Giles also knew that language barriers kept many parents from participating in the school. Giles developed a Sharing the Dream project to change parents’ attitudes about school and spread his and other school staff members’ excitement for teaching and learning.

Giles and his staff used Dream funds to host family learning nights. At these events, parents can borrow resources, win door prizes, and receive information—in English and Spanish—about the school and subject areas such as math, reading and science. Dream funds also helped establish a parent resource room in the school with book bags, resources and refreshments available to parents.

According to the Institute of Education Sciences, parents are more likely to attend events that feature interaction with students’ teachers.

Throughout the course of the year, Giles saw increased parental involvement, especially among the Hispanic community, improvement in the accelerated reading program—91 percent of sixth graders met the passing standard on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading test—and growing cooperation between teachers and parents. Giles is convinced that increasing parent involvement—especially parents of at-risk students—will help improve children’s academic performance, and he is committed to fulfilling his goals for higher parent involvement and student achievement.
Principal Wanda Grant realizes that many North Forestville Elementary students come from homes with scarce learning resources. She believes that her students need more educational and emotional supports to complement and enhance their classroom learning experiences. With this in mind, Grant used technology—and a Sharing the Dream grant—to arm parents and students with new learning supports.

Project UTOPIA—Using Technological Options: Parents Involved Academically—brought parents to the school to help with their children’s learning. Using Dream funds, the school hosted eight Project UTOPIA parent workshops. Parents learned how to use the school district’s Web site and other Web sites that support children’s learning in reading and math, receive information about online safety for children, and use multimedia equipment, such as personal digital assistant devices, to support student learning. The project also allowed parents to interact with one another and with teachers, building a strong adult learning community within the school.

At the end of the 2006–2007 school year, Grant collected both quantitative and qualitative data. She learned that parents most appreciated the opportunity to meet and network with other parents. The skills they learned in Project UTOPIA helped them at home and on their jobs, and feedback indicated that all participants would like the program to continue into the next year. Grant plans to honor this feedback and continue Project UTOPIA with sessions for beginners, using the previous group as “teaching buddies,” and sessions for intermediate learners.
In Aliquippa, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Principal Rachel Gray saw that her students needed more academic and personal support. High unemployment rates and the vanishing local steel industry led to a dramatic decrease of school funding. Community violence and crime rates, meanwhile, were rising at an alarming rate. Gray developed a plan to align community resources with academic supports that would help students overcome the challenges they increasingly faced outside of their eight-hour school day.

With Sharing the Dream funds Gray conducted a “nurturing and support group” for parents of the school’s kindergarten students at risk of falling behind. Funds helped transport parents to the school, provided refreshments and paid for the group leader’s staff time. Through this Dream project, Gray helped parents learn positive parenting skills that enabled them to communicate more effectively with their children and support their academic success.

Gray believes that by fostering more positive relationships between parents and their children, students will develop better classroom behavior that will, in turn, help them become better learners.
In rural Loretto, Tennessee, new Principal Gina Haddix noticed that parental involvement in the school had hit a historic low. She knew that parent involvement was critical for students’ success. She also knew that parents had to be informed in order to make positive contributions to student achievement. With this in mind, Haddix set out to make a space for parents in the school, where they could learn and, in turn, help raise student learning.

The South Lawrence School Parent Resource Center was established using Dream funds. Haddix led the effort to transform a portable classroom space into a parent powerhouse. Dream funds allowed the school to:

- Paint and decorate the portable classroom to give it a warm, inviting atmosphere
- Purchase magazines about parenting
- Offer opportunities for parents to listen to guest speakers on topics including discipline, homework and parenting skills
- Purchase tools to support learning, such as CDs, arts and crafts supplies, and books

Haddix worked to vary resource center supplies and provide other offerings to keep parents coming back. She explored new partnerships with the local department of children’s services and an adult learning center to increase interest among parents and community members in being involved with the school.

Ultimately, Haddix was pleased with number of parents and grandparents who came to the resource center and participated in various programs. More than 75 visits were made during the first three months alone. According to Haddix, this is what it’s all about—having parents get involved with their child’s education. During the 2007–2008 school year, Haddix plans to act on the lesson she’s learned: she will offer new programs and personally invite parents to use the resource center.
Principal Theresa Harden saw that many of Rosinton Elementary School’s kindergarten students were entering school without having mastered many important school readiness skills. More than 40 percent of kindergarten through sixth grade students had been identified as needing special education services. Harden knew her school needed to do more to ensure that students met grade-level achievement targets—especially in reading.

With the help of a Sharing the Dream grant, Harden implemented Parents as Reading Partners, a reading resource program in the school. The program provided parents with reading resource materials—books, games, videos and other literacy materials—that they could use at home. Parents also took part in October and February reading workshops where they learned how to best use the materials to increase students’ literacy skills.

Harden and school staff members measured program success by looking at how frequently resources were borrowed, changes in students’ reading fluency as measured on tests such as the Dynamic Indicators Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment, and a parent questionnaire. They found that parents learned about reading strategies and the importance of literacy at home and school. Furthermore, they learned that there is a great need for adult reading and GED classes among their parent population. Harden plans to continue Parents as Reading Partners in the 2007–2008 school year with a goal to get every prekindergarten and kindergarten parent involved in his or her child’s reading success.

Challenge parents to read with their children each night. Prepare a “reading log” and reward parents and students for excellent participation.
Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children’s learning.

Principal Niki Hazel wants East Silver Spring Elementary School to make a difference in the lives of the families it serves. She believes that if the school does a better job of supporting families, family members will be more likely to play a significant role in their children’s education. Located just outside of Washington, D.C., Silver Spring is a diverse community. Many East Silver Spring families are immigrants who are new to the area and to learning English. Because of the number of parents who do not speak English, including significant immigrant Hispanic and Ethiopian populations, communication between parents and school staff is difficult. The school hired translators in the past, but translating conversations was time consuming and cut back on the effectiveness of school activities and conversations.

Using a Sharing the Dream grant, Hazel purchased simultaneous translation equipment so that parents speaking languages other than English can communicate easily and efficiently with school staff. Hazel and her staff used the equipment at school events as well as parent-teacher conferences. During the 2006–2007 school year, the equipment was used during homework, reading and mathematics-focused parent meetings. Roughly one-half of meeting attendees reported that they used the translation equipment and found it helpful.

Hazel measured the success of the project by viewing changes in the number of parents who attended school meetings and functions. East Silver Spring found that the equipment encouraged parents to attend and stay through school events. Parents—and school staff—were pleased that school activities were not as lengthy as they had been when using human translators. Hazel believes that this increased parent involvement and more efficient dissemination of information will contribute to the success of students at East Silver Spring Elementary School.
Principal Sue Ellen Hogan wanted to decrease the high number of student suspensions, referrals to the department of social services and high absenteeism rate that has recently plagued Fuller School. By providing parents with more information about what students need to know to succeed, Hogan expected student achievement would rise—and student behavior would improve.

Hogan used her *Sharing the Dream* grant to implement a series of family workshops featuring guest speakers who presented information on how parents could support children’s learning. Parents learned skills such as how to read with their children and select books that are appropriate for children’s reading level. Parents also received information about the school’s curriculum, giving them a better understanding of students’ classroom learning goals.

In the past, Hogan found that very few parents attended programs. But during the 2006–2007 school year, more parents participated in workshops than ever before. Hogan attributes this success to allowing parents to bring their children with them, finding topics that were of keen interest to parents, holding a raffle at each session, marketing the workshops in school flyers and phone message systems, and providing meals. Because of budgetary constraints in Gloucester, Fuller school is closing for the 2007–2008 year and many of Hogan’s students will attend a new school where Hogan will serve as principal. She hopes to use the knowledge she has gained this year to help acclimate her new parents and ensure that parent involvement will remain high.
Southside Elementary School is located in the far northeastern corner of rural Montana on the Fort Peck Reservation, home to members of the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes. Nearly 80 percent of students are eligible to receive free and reduced-price lunch benefits and the unemployment rate on the Reservation often rises above 60 percent. Members of the community have historically distrusted the school and school staff members, a residual effect of a time when Native American children were removed from their homes and taken to boarding schools to become assimilated into Western culture. Knowing that positive partnerships are essential for student success, Principal Eileen Karge is seeking to break down this historical barrier and strengthen relationships between parents, the community and the school.

Building on research showing that a cornerstone of Native American culture is social gatherings, Karge and her staff used Sharing the Dream funds to gather parents, community members and students at two family and community barbeques. At the first gathering, held in September 2006, attendees enjoyed entertainment that incorporated elements of Native American culture. They were served food and given information about learning and literacy. Southside Elementary staff members also hosted games and involved students, parents and community members in educational activities. Nearly 250 parents, students and community members came to the fall barbeque. In November, the school sent surveys to parents to gather feedback on the event and other school-home communication. Karge got back six percent more surveys than she had expected, which she interpreted as a sign of progress.

At the end of the 2006–2007 school year Karge looked at student test performance data to analyze changes in student proficiency in math and reading as a result of the parent and community involvement activities. Although the increase was not consistent across grade levels, Karge knows parents’ belief in the importance of their children’s education is steadily growing. Karge understands that attitude shifts do not happen overnight, but she is committed to strengthening the relationship between parents and the school and plans to include the barbeques as an integral part of the school’s “cultural nights.”

Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children’s learning.
Jeanne McKenzie, Principal
Washington Elementary
Coshocton, Ohio
Student Enrollment: 150
Grades: K-6

Principal Jeanne McKenzie sees that parents in her community want to be involved at Washington Elementary. The school has the reputation of having a small, family-like atmosphere. And parents are encouraged to not only communicate with the school but also to be meaningfully involved. McKenzie was looking to tap into the school’s strong parent base to support student learning—especially in math. She used her Dream grant to build and sustain active parent involvement in the school, and put parents to work helping students succeed in math.

The school used Dream funds to host an orientation for parents of kindergarten students. The orientation focused on the school’s expectations for student performance and parent involvement. At this event, parents also learned about newly instituted parent communication folders, which students brought home every day and provided a regular avenue for communication between the school and parents. Washington Elementary conducted math study groups for students to prepare for achievement tests. Teachers met with parents to discuss the importance of math and how parents could support their children’s math achievement at home.

McKenzie found the results of this project to be quite encouraging. As the short-term assessments were administered, the students’ grades and confidence improved, and they indicated that they felt more prepared to take the Ohio Achievement test in math. Preliminary results showed that three out of four grade levels improved their overall scores. As McKenzie prepares for a new year, she intends to use the materials they purchased and lessons learned to further improve students’ scores in 2007–2008.
Data from Bristol Public Schools’ benchmark assessments showed that Ivy Drive Elementary School’s kindergarten students were not meeting state and district reading goals. Principal RoseAnne O’Brien Vojtek knew that parents were part of the solution to this challenge. In March 2006, she piloted a program to teach parents strategies for supporting their kindergarteners’ learning. The school hosted three evening events for kindergarten parents. Spring 2006 data showed that the pilot was a success—students’ performance on benchmarks moved from one of the lowest to one of the highest groups in the district.

O’Brien Vojtek used Sharing the Dream funds to expand the pilot program and involve parents and students in two grade-level groups: K–2 and 4–5. In the 2006–2007 school year, the school hosted four family literacy nights with activities for each grade-level group. At the sessions, parents learned games and activities to improve children’s reading, writing, and math skills. They also learned what their children need to know to be successful on standardized achievement tests. O’Brien Vojtek and school staff worked to make learning fun at the evening events. They transformed learning objectives into games that parents and students enjoyed playing—at the school and at home.

O’Brien Vojtek can point to data that shows the Dream project promoted parent engagement and improved students’ literacy and reading comprehension. From September 2005 to December 2005, Ivy Drive students logged 1,120,340 minutes of reading in the school book club. From September 2006 to December 2006, students logged 1,186,738 minutes—more than 66,000 additional minutes. O’Brien Vojtek reported that Ivy Drive exceeded its goal of logging three million minutes of student reading time for the school year. Also of note, 74 percent of kindergarten parents attended at least one family literacy night, and by year’s end, every kindergarten student was reading at or above the state benchmark. O’Brien Vojtek says she was disappointed, however, that parents were unable to attend more of these events. Through conversations with students and parents, she learned that low attendance was because of families’ busy work schedules and other after-school activities. In response, Ivy Drive staff plan to implement a program that O’Brien Vojtek learned about from other Dream grant recipients. Using remaining funds, O’Brien Vojtek purchased equipment to create and duplicate DVDs to send home to parents to model strategies and discuss how parents can best support their children’s learning. She sees this as an opportunity to create an even stronger home–school connection while helping parents become more meaningfully involved in the school and their children’s education.
Encourage parents to become meaningfully involved in the school and in their own children’s learning.

Gail Roberts-House, Principal

John Tyler Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia

Principal Gail Roberts-House believes parents reading with their children at home makes a big difference in students’ classroom achievement. According to Roberts-House, at-home reading is especially important for the 80 percent of John Tyler Elementary School students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch benefits and need extra supports. She secured a Sharing the Dream grant and set out to make reading a common practice in her students’ homes.

In the 2006–2007 school year, teams of teachers visited students’ homes armed with bags of books for families. With Dream funds, Roberts-House began the Tigers READ (Reading Enhances Achievement and Development) program to create home libraries in 10 students’ homes. In addition to supplying books, teachers modeled read-aloud techniques for parents to use with their children—techniques that teachers and Roberts-House agreed would enhance the children’s reading skills.

Roberts-House was worried that parents would resist teachers’ home visits, but she learned from parent feedback that they appreciated the extra support. Teachers reported that they gained a better understanding of the kinds of supports their students needed in the home. Students were excited to have teachers visit them at home and communications between teachers and parents improved as a result of the visits. Roberts-House was confident that Tigers READ would increase student achievement, and she was right. Each student increased his or her accuracy and comprehension by at least two grade levels and only one student did not meet the spring 2007 benchmark. Encouraged by the results of the Dream project, Roberts-House intends to secure funding to continue Tigers READ in the next school year.
McPhee Elementary School is a pilot school that uses technology to engage students and help them meet grade-level objectives. The diverse school has several unique challenges: nine languages are spoken by students at the school, 81 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch benefits, and many have special education needs. In the 2004–2005 school year, the school ranked last in student achievement among all elementary schools in the district. Principal Elizabeth Scott realized that students needed help and sought Dream funds to involve parents in increasing students’ performance through a program called Technology Connects.

With Dream funds Scott leveraged technology resources already in the school and implemented a family computer lab night. In 2006–2007, the school’s computer lab stayed open late one evening each week. School staff members were available to teach families how to use professional and recreational computer programs. Families applied their new computer skills to hands-on projects that benefited the school and helped boost other parents’ learning. For example, a group of parents and students created a video that addressed common parent questions and concerns about computer use. The video will be used as a transitional tool for parents of new students at the school.

Scott looks forward to having more digital resources—such as the transition video—to share with parents and school staff. She believes that building the computer skills of families, as well as increasing the school’s digital resource library, makes the project a success. She has learned, however, that the best resources are the families themselves, and the partnerships that have been established through the Dream grant will invigorate the project into the 2007–2008 school year.
The Live Oak, Florida, community was enthusiastic when Suwannee Elementary School opened its doors in fall 2006. But Principal Lila Udell knew that sustaining that enthusiasm would be a significant challenge—especially in a community with plummeting levels of parent involvement in schools. Udell, however, was determined to overcome that challenge.

Using *Sharing the Dream* funds, Udell and school staff members held parent nights twice a month. At these events, parents and children used the school’s computer lab, participated in learning games and activities, and checked out learning materials to use at home. The parent nights provided structured learning opportunities for parents and allowed community resource providers to share information about their services. Parents received important tools to use at home to support children’s school-day learning.

Parents told Udell that they were excited about the parent nights and reported that they put their knowledge and skills to good use at home. As a new school, Udell showed a high level of passing scores on Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) math and reading tests. With more than 5,000 parent visits to the school in 2006–2007, Udell believes *Sharing the Dream* nudged families in the right direction. Suwannee will continue to leave its doors open to parents at least one night every month, and to provide training on issues such as meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind, improving children’s literacy levels and raising parent volunteerism.
Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.
11 Barbara Cook
Wurtland Elementary
Wurtland, KY

12 Lynsa Davie
John P. Parker School
Cincinnati, OH

13 Nicholas Eremita
Joseph R. Bolger Middle School
Keansburg, NJ

14 Linda Flowers
Thomas Elementary School
Carbondale, IL

15 Mark Giles
Crockett Intermediate School
Crockett, TX

16 Wanda Grant
North Forestville Elementary
Forestville, MD

17 Rachel Gray
Aliquippa Elementary School
Aliquippa, PA

18 Gina Haddix
South Lawrence Elementary School
Loretto, TN

19 Theresa Harden
Rosinton Elementary
Robertsdale, AL

20 Niki Hazel
East Silver Spring
Silver Spring, MD

21 Sue Ellen Hogan
Fuller School
Gloucester, MA

22 Eileen Karge
Southside Elementary School
Wolf Point, MT

23 Sherry Kijowski
McIlvaine Early Childhood Center
Magnolia, DE

24 Jeanne McKenzie
Washington Elementary School
Coshocton, OH

25 Rose Anne O’Brien Vojtek
Ivy Drive Elementary School
Bristol, CT

26 Gail Roberts-House
John Tyler Elementary
Hampton, VA

27 Marsha Sackash and Barry Bowe
Port Matilda Elementary School
Port Matilda, PA

28 Bess Scott
McPhee Elementary School
Lincoln, NE

29 Lila Udell
Suwannee Elementary School
Live Oak, FL

30 Doreatha White
Dream Keepers Academy at J.J. Roberts Elementary School
Norfolk, VA
Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.

**NAESP 2006-2007 SHARING THE DREAM GRANT RECIPIENTS**

Nkenge Bergan  
Parents in the Middle  
Godwin Heights Middle School  
Wyoming, MI

Cynthia Bernard  
All About My Child: In the Know/Parents and Teachers Together  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Charter School  
New Orleans, LA

Delores Bitsilly  
Parent Appreciation and Involvement Events  
Tohaali Community School  
Newcomb, NM

Julie Bloss  
Parent Involvement Project  
Grove Lower Elementary  
Grove, OK

Christina Burton  
Community Building Tools: Community Council and School Accountability Committee  
Denver Arts and Technology Academy  
Denver, CO

Celeste Carty  
Parent Power  
Crossroads Elementary  
St. Paul, MN

Polly Cassady  
Parents are Partners  
Hutcherson Early Learning Center  
Lynchburg, VA

Bridget Clark  
Take Me Out to the School House  
Johnston Elementary  
Johnston, SC

Judi Clark  
Community Connections  
Stemley Road Elementary  
Talladega, AL

Lynn Clark  
All Star Parents-Making Dreams Come True  
Funston Elementary School  
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Eileen Karge  
WELCOME (Wolf Point Educators Linked to the Community to Obtain Maximized Education)  
Southside Elementary School  
Wolf Point, MT

Sherry Kijowski  
McIlvaine ECC Health Fair  
McIlvaine Early Childhood Center  
Magnolia, DE

Jeanne McKenzie  
The Math Factory  
Washington Elementary School  
Coshocton, OH

RoseAnne O’Brien Vojtek  
Building Strong Readers  
Ivy Drive Elementary School  
Bristol, CT

Gail Roberts-House  
Tigers READ  
John Tyler Elementary  
Hampton, VA

Marsha Sackash and Barry Bowe  
The Pen Pal Program  
Port Matilda Elementary School  
Port Matilda, PA

Bess Scott  
Technology Connects  
McPhee Elementary School  
Lincoln, NE

Lila Udell  
Study, Try, Achieve and Read for Success (STARS)  
Suwannee Elementary School  
Live Oak, FL

Doreatha White  
Engaging the Community to Build Greater Ownership for the Work of the School  
Dream Keepers Academy at J.J. Roberts Elementary School  
Norfolk, VA
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APPENDIX 1: PRINCIPLES OF STANDARD SIX
AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

To gauge the extent and effectiveness of engagement efforts in the work of the school, principals can use the following guiding questions.

Engage the community to build greater ownership for the work of the school.
  • Do I talk about standards and high expectations for students with parents?
  • Am I engaging in ongoing conversations with various sectors of the community?
  • Do I have a regular vehicle for communication, like e-mail or a newsletter?
  • Am I honest and forthcoming in sharing information about school challenges?
  • Have I recognized a community member for their contributions lately?

Share leadership and decision-making.
  • Am I practicing shared leadership?
  • Do community members truly have a voice at the decision-making table?
  • Am I listening carefully to parents and the community?
  • Do I include representative members of the community in major decisions?
  • Do I reach out to those not often involved in the school?

Encourage parents to become more meaningfully involved in their school and in their own children's learning.
  • Am I creating a welcoming school climate for parents?
  • Do I reach out to parents not actively involved in the school?
  • Do I understand the language and cultural barriers parents face?
  • Am I providing resources and tools to help parents be closely involved in their children's education?

Ensure that students and families are connected to the health, human and social services they need to stay focused on learning.
  • Do I know the right people to call for health-care solutions, abusive situations, psychiatric services?
  • Do I help create structures that connect students to social services they need?
  • Have I considered more formal connections with health and social services?
APPENDIX II: STANDARD SIX SELF-ASSESSMENT

Use the Questions for Further Reflection to help you think about and rate the degree to which each Standard Six strategy is evident in your school or your practice as a school leader.

1) Not evident in my school/practice
2) Somewhat or occasionally evident in school/practice
3) Consistently evident in school/practice
4) Consistently evident, with practices that elaborate upon or exceed expectation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Assessment : Beginning of the Year</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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Leading Learning Communities:
Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do
APPENDIX III: BUDGET TEMPLATE

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<th></th>
<th>Estimated Costs as of January</th>
<th>Actual Expenses as of June</th>
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<tr>
<td>Staff &amp; Consultants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>AV &amp; Technology Costs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone &amp; Fax</td>
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<td>Printing</td>
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<td>Postage &amp; Delivery</td>
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<td>Supplies</td>
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<td>Local Transportation</td>
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<td>Resource Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Direct Costs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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BUDGET NARRATIVE:

Please explain each line item.

Staff and Consultants: (program managers, evaluation specialists, meeting facilitators, etc.)

Food: (meals and snacks for meetings and events)

AV and Technology Costs: (equipment for meetings, cameras, computers, etc.)
Telephone & fax:

Postage & Delivery: (for mailings, communication, etc.)

Supplies: (general or administrative supplies, such as paper, chalk boards, display units, etc.)

Local Transportation: (getting people to and from program events)

Resource Materials: (learning tools, such as books, videos)

Other Direct Costs: (such as child care, door prizes and gifts, technology services, advertising, etc.)
APPENDIX IV: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Effective Strategies for Engagement


Parent and Community Partnerships


Six Types of Involvement: Keys to Successful Partnerships. Joyce Epstein., National Network of Partnership Schools, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University.


**Principal Leadership**


Helping Parents and Communities Better Understand the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) and the Public Education Network (PEN).

- NCLB Action Brief: Community and Parent Decision Making: A Review
- NCLB Action Brief: Parents’ Right to Know


Effective principals actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success.
School Community


APPENDIX V: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The following national community organizations are examples of potential partnerships. Contact your local chapter for more information.

4-H
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Stop 2225
Washington, DC 20250
Phone: 202-720-2908
Fax: 202-720-9366
E-mail: 4hhq@csrees.usda.gov
Web site: http://www.4husa.org/

America’s Promise Alliance
909 N. Washington Street, Suite 400
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703-684-4500
Fax: 703-535-3900
Web site: http://www.americaspromise.org/

Boys and Girls Clubs of America
National Headquarters
1275 Peachtree Street, NE
Atlanta, GA 30309
Phone: 404-487-5700
E-mail: info@bgca.org
Web site: http://www.bgca.org/

Coalition for Community Schools
4455 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20008
Phone: 202-822-8405, ext. 156
Fax: 202-872-4050
E-mail: ccs@iel.org
Web site: http://www.communityschools.org/

Corporation for National and Community Service
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Phone: 202-606-5000
E-mail: info@cns.gov
Web site: http://www.nationalservice.gov/

Kiwanis International
3636 Woodview Trace
Indianapolis, IN 46268
Phone: 800-549-2647
Fax: 317-879-0204
Web site: http://www.kiwanis.org/

United Way
701 N. Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Website: http://www.unitedway.org/

YMCA
101 North Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606
Phone: 800-872-9622
E-mail: fulfillment@ymca.net
Web site: http://www.ymca.net/