Tried & True

A selection of best practices to boost student achievement through school, family and community partnerships.
A Note from the Editors:

Please enjoy this complimentary copy of Tried and True! The Kennewick School District created this publication to showcase stellar activities that capture school, family and community partnerships in action in Kennewick schools. All schools that are featured, in addition to the district, are members of the Johns Hopkins National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) directed by Dr. Joyce Epstein.

If you have any questions, compliments or would like more information about any featured activity found in this booklet, please contact us. For more information about NNPS, please visit www.partnershipschools.org.

Yours in partnership,
Sarah and Veronica

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*The activities in Tried and True were published in NNPS collections of Promising Partnership Practices between 2011 and 2013, reprinted with permission from NNPS at Johns Hopkins University.
Awards

The Kennewick School District and several schools have received Partnership Awards from the NNPS at Johns Hopkins University.

Schools, districts, state departments of education, and organizations with excellent programs of school, family, and community partnerships are invited to apply for NNPS’s Partnership Awards each spring. These awards recognize members that have worked with NNPS for at least two years, demonstrate high quality plans and practices, and make continuous improvement in their partnership programs from year to year.

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A Note from NNPS

NNPS loves to see leadership grow as good leaders guide schools in engaging all families in productive ways. It has been a pleasure to see Kennewick’s leadership grow under the direction of Sarah Del Toro, Key Contact to NNPS, and with strong support from Superintendent Dave Bond; Federal Programs Administrator, Jack Anderson; and other district colleagues. It has been exciting to see leadership grow in the nine schools with Action Team for Partnerships (ATPs) that are members of NNPS.

Kennewick captured national attention this year. The district and four schools earned NNPS Partnership Awards in 2013 for outreach to families and attention to student achievement. Moreover, all nine NNPS schools have had activities published in the NNPS annual books of Promising Partnership Practices. This is a remarkable record of excellence in the district and across all schools in the network.

Kennewick took another step forward with this edition of Tried and True A Selection of best practices to boost student achievement through school, family, and community partnerships. By sharing best practices, Kennewick schools will see that many of their colleagues are developing and implementing creative, well-planned, and important activities to reach all families and increase student success in school.

At NNPS, we hope to see the “partnership spirit” grow to include all Kennewick schools—elementary, middle, and high schools. Kennewick has shown that it knows what excellent programs look like, and we imagine the best is yet to come!

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.
Director NNPS
Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement

Keys to Successful School, Family, and Community Partnerships

**Parenting**
Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

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

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

**Learning at Home**
Involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.

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

**Collaborating with the Community**
Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with business, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

Academic Goals
Math
For students at Westgate Elementary, cultural diversity is part of the culture. Twenty-two different languages are spoken as first languages in students’ homes. This ensures many opportunities to learn about others, but many families that are new to the country are unfamiliar with U.S. schools. They seek assistance in many areas, one of which is how to help their children prepare for standardized tests. At Breakfast for Champions, more than 100 students and parents came together to share food for breakfast and food for thought.

When Breakfast for Champions opened at 7:30 a.m., students, parents, and some other family members signed in with teachers’ assistance, helped themselves to donuts donated by local grocery stores, and looked at students' posters hanging around the gym. Students had worked with the school counselor to create recipes for “Smart Cookies” on the posters. The math specialist created posters with released math test items that showed students' work.

At 7:45 a.m., the principal welcomed everyone. He shared a PowerPoint presentation explaining what tests the children would be taking, test dates, how the school used test results, and how parents could encourage children to perform at their best. From 8:00-8:15 a.m., parents talked with their child’s teacher, visited with other families, and picked up a card with information on getting their children to school on time and well-prepared on test days.

Parents filled out cards of encouragement for their children. The cards were donated by a local drugstore, labeled with every student’s name in grades three - five, alphabetized by classroom, and placed on grade-level tables. Clipboards were available for parents to complete their cards and return them to the baskets. One parent said, “The cards of encouragement were a great idea. Now [my children] know that I’m thinking about them during the test.”

For students whose families were unable to attend, a staff member or Homework Center volunteer filled out an encouragement card, ensuring that every student received a positive message on the first day of testing.
Breakfast for Champions modified Muffins for Moms/Donuts for Dads by featuring useful information for parents. This year, the school invited moms and dads of students in grades three through five and provided information on math skills and state tests. Parents also were offered strategies to support their children’s test taking.

To overcome the language barrier, headsets were available for Spanish translations. Para-educators contacted many Somali families and the ATP worked with community members who had ties to other cultural groups. Interpreters also were available at the Breakfast. The ATP encouraged teachers to call at least five families and personally invite them to Breakfast for Champions.

One teacher reported that, “It was wonderful to see so many cultures represented at this event.”

In the future, even more is planned to welcome all families. The ATP hopes to print invitations in English and Spanish and to have translation headsets for Spanish, Somali and Burmese families.

With more and better information about state tests, it is hoped that more parents will support their children’s learning and more students will demonstrate that they are test-taking champions.

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“...the cards of encouragement were a great idea. Now [my children] know that I’m thinking about them during the test.”

-Parent
Every year, Sunset View Elementary partners with the American Heart Association to host a popular Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser. This year, the school’s newly formed ATP decided to jump on the bandwagon by adding a math enrichment component to the popular activity.

The ATP wanted to engage more and different families in the school and enable them to do more at home to help their children strengthen their math skills. The ATP agreed that adding an academic element to an already well-attended event would be the perfect solution.

The team began by examining the school’s results by grade level on a math test required by the district. They identified specific skills at each grade level that needed improvement, such as sequencing numbers from zero to 20, counting money, and measurement conversions. Next, they worked with the school’s math teachers to develop a dozen jump rope games that children could play to practice these skills.

The Jump Into Math With Purpose event was scheduled to take place in the evening, immediately after the Jump Rope for Heart fundraiser. All students and their families were invited via emails and fliers. The ATP also made a special effort to reach out to 50 families that had not previously been involved much with the school. They asked teachers to provide lists of students who could especially benefit if they attended the event with a parent. The ATP made sure that these students’ families received personal phone calls and even home visits to invite them to Jump Into Math with Purpose. Their efforts were successful—150 students and 75 parents attended, including over one-fourth of the targeted families.

Families were welcomed to the school by an ATP parent, the school custodian, and the principal.

“The fact that there was a parent, the custodian, and the principal standing side-by-side greeting families was unique and cool,” one parent commented. “People noticed that.”

This welcome committee gave each student a passport, which provided the locations, description, and difficulty levels of all 12 math-jump rope games. A teacher supervised each station and initialed participants’ passports. After
playing at least four games, students could trade their passports for free jump ropes. There also was an Estimation Jar for each grade level that aimed to help students think mathematically and win a prize.

Parents looked on with pride as their children showed off their math skills. “My kids had a blast,” one parent said. “I liked how you did the activities for each age group.”

The event cost $500. It was a valuable way to positively engage families with the school, help students strengthen their math skills, and support physical fitness.

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“The fact that there was a parent, the custodian, and the principal standing side-by-side greeting families was unique and cool”
-Parent
Academic Goals
Reading
On the second Friday of every month, families and school staff gather at Amistad Elementary School for a night of fun and education. While their children participate in activities in the gym, parents meet with the principal and teachers to learn how to support their students’ learning. This past year, Fabulous Family Fridays drew 70 parents, 120 students, and 24 teachers and administrators.

Initially, the sessions for parents focused on building a sense of community. The classroom filled with chatter and laughter as parents and teachers played icebreakers such as People Bingo to get to know one another. Once a comfortable and safe environment was established, teachers asked parents what they hoped to learn at Fabulous Family Fridays. The parents agreed that their top priority was to better understand how to help their students at home with reading.

The school staff members were happy to help families meet this goal. Teachers began by sharing strategies with parents on how to help students improve reading fluency. They modeled fluency strategies for every grade level, and warned parents about potential pitfalls. Parents also learned about the appropriate rhythm, volume, and pace students should exhibit when reading aloud.

At the next session, teachers explained how to coach students on reading comprehension. They encouraged parents to ask students questions related to character development, setting, predictions, inferences, and cause and effect.

The meetings were conducted in English and Spanish so that all parents could understand the information. Parents were also encouraged to actively participate in the question-and-answer session that concluded every gathering.

Parents were pleased with the strategies they learned. “Now I know what to do when my kindergarten student comes home with those little books,” one parent said.

“Coming here to learn has really helped me know how to help my kids at home so they can do better in reading,” another parent added.
Improved reading skills were not the only benefit for students. Teachers noticed that after parents were more engaged in the school community, their children’s classroom behavior improved. Teachers also reported having warmer relationships with the families of their students.

Fabulous Family Fridays could not have occurred without the collaborative work of the ATP, school staff, family members, and students. The school counselor and secretaries distributed invitations to the families, and students helped encourage their parents’ attendance by delivering reminder stickers before the event. The principal and teachers contributed by facilitating each meeting, and parents provided feedback about what they wanted to learn.

The meetings created a strong partnership between school staff and families, and equipped parents with strategies to help their children learn at home. In other words, Fabulous Family Fridays lived up to their name.

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Rappers Rap: A Night of Poetry and Giving
Park Middle School

Last holiday season, the Park Middle School community enjoyed an evening of poetry and giving. The event enabled students to perform raps and poems of their own creation while also providing families with an opportunity to serve the community by gift wrapping books for foster children.

The idea was suggested at an October meeting of the ATP. A local Target store gave the middle school $500 to purchase books. The ATP decided to donate the 160 books they purchased to charity, and recruited students, families, and community members to spend an evening gift wrapping the books. They added a literacy component to the event by inviting local rap artist, Jordin Chaney, to
inspire students to perform their own raps while everyone worked.

“How delightful it was to see parents, students, and community members celebrate the written word!” exclaimed the school’s literacy coach. “All who came had the opportunity to experience the joys of the season.”

The event provided a fun and relaxed way for 125 students, 85 parents, and 20 teachers to embrace literacy and strengthen their community. This was indeed a collaborative effort.

School administrators and other staff generated buzz about the event via flyers, website announcements, press releases, and YouTube videos. The school’s literacy coach taught students in the after-school program how to write poetry, including raps. The day before the event, ATP members rented outdoor heaters and shopped for cookies, cocoa, napkins, cups, and gift wrap. These supplies cost just over $240.

On the night of the program, 20 eighth-grade student leaders came to school early to help set up. They arranged gift-wrapping stations and refreshments inside, and organized an area for poetry performances in the courtyard. The rented heaters kept the audience warm despite the chilly weather. Throughout the event, teachers mingled with families and helped supervise progress.

The students were thrilled to meet Mr. Chaney, a successful performer with a background similar to their own. The feeling was mutual. After the event, Mr. Chaney, who donated his time, posted on his Facebook profile that he had “just spent a beautiful evening of poetry with Park Middle School students!”

Rappers Wrap was a great way to package lessons in literacy, leadership, and giving in one special evening. The program motivated students to develop their writing and performance skills and taught them the value of community service. It helped parents recognize and celebrate many students’ talents. It helped a community charity bring books to children whose families could not afford them. That’s a wrap!

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Academic Goals

Science
Every school is working to increase students’ interests in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Often Engineering is overlooked as schools focus on science and math. Edison Elementary School’s ATP received a fun-filled engineering kit that included suggested activities, a supply list, and a video. The ATP decided to put the kit to use to focus on Engineering as an important field for applying math and science to improve our lives.

Taking Science to the Home was designed for 4th and 5th grade students and families. The planners wanted to include learning activities that could be enjoyed in school and taken home to strengthen and extend student learning.

One evening in February, over 120 students and their families came to the school gym and hallways to participate in challenging, educational, and—yes—fun engineering activities. Six stations, all from the Zoom Engineering Kit, were set up, and students were given related take-home activities and supplies.

Stations included Polishing Pennies, an experiment to see which household liquids could best shine up a dull penny. The take-home kit for this activity gave students different liquids to test. At Hoop Glider, students manipulated a straw, tape, and two strips of paper to create hoop gliders that flew down the hallway. Then, they measured the distance flown. Students and families raced their Puff Mobiles—vehicles powered by a simple puff of air—which they made from straws, Lifesaver candies, paperclips, paper, and tape.

Students used gumdrops and toothpicks to create their own Gumdrop Dome structures. The Paper Tower task challenged students and families to construct the tallest structure possible using only two pieces of newspaper. Finally, students filled bottles of water with packing peanuts and paper clips, finding the right balance to suspend the peanuts in the middle of the water—making not a floater, not a sinker, but a “Flinker.” A volunteer engineer from the community circulated among the students and families to talk about the field of engineering. Each station provided a take-home activity to reinforce the engineering concept at home. To make sure that all students had access to the same great activities, the ATP provided take-home bags to all students, including those who were unable to attend.
had access to the same great activities, the ATP provided take-home bags to all students, including those who were unable to attend. Each kit included a plastic bag, instructions, and materials for the specific activity. Some kits provided the same supplies used at school, and other kits had slightly different activities—e.g., marshmallows instead of gumdrops—so that students and families would find something new in the experiments at home.

In preparation for Taking Science to the Home, the ATP scheduled a kit-making party and gathered volunteers to put together enough kits for every 4th and 5th grade student. The local UPS store donated packing peanuts for the Flinker station. Each classroom volunteered to collect one kind of supply needed for the event. The ATP committee chairs collected the donated supplies and made any necessary additional purchases. The ATP promoted their practice in two unique ways. One week before the event, the ATP went to each 4th and 5th grade classroom with a traveling cart of all the activities to pique the students’ interest. The day of the event, every student went home wearing a bracelet with a reminder about the time and place.

After completing the activities, one parent said; “This was so fun! I can’t wait to do these at home with all of our kids!” That was exactly the point of Taking Science to the Home!

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“This was so fun! I can’t wait to do these at home with all of our kids!”
-PARENT
In the fast-paced technological twenty-first century, paper flyers and phone calls home can be incredibly outdated, as well as time and resource-consuming. Highlands Middle School decided to utilize technology to keep parents updated and connected with their children’s teachers, assignments and academic progress.

The practice of getting parents to consistently know what their students' are doing in school in order to increase accountability of students at home was created out of a need to communicate with families. When Highlands took a look at how many parents had access to their student's grades online, they found that only about 100 of the over 900 students had parents who were receiving information from the school.

With the goal of connecting parents with their children’s teachers and academics, the ATP came up with responsibilities for parents, teachers and administrators to implement this practice. Parents spread the word to other parents, letting them know about this opportunity. Since over 40% of the student population is Spanish-speaking, an ATP parent assisted in translating. The teachers attended school events and activities and spoke with parents about the importance of knowing what their students are doing in school. Teachers also would explain to parents how to connect to the internet and how to navigate the school site where the grades and attendance are located.

During meetings with parents, administrators would ask if they were receiving weekly grade and attendance emails, as well as make sure that the school has all of the current contact information for parents. If the parents needed to create an account, the administrators would ensure that one was made for them.

In order to connect with parents and make sure as many families as possible were reached, the ATP members set up stations before and after various school events that parents
would attend. Between “Honor Roll Assembly” and “Panda Express Reading Night,” the ATP ensured maximum connectivity with parents. At these events the team would stand in front of the school where parents were entering, in the cafeteria where they were congregating, and wherever else they could speak with the parents. The ATP left no means overlooked when it came to publicizing the practice of internet communication between families and schools. Conversations and stations set up at events and conferences in the fall, in addition to posters and flyers sent home and word-of-mouth publicity, all allowed for opportunities to connect with parents and implement this practice.

This practice helped teachers feel more in touch with families and made parents aware of what the student was doing in school, therefore giving them the opportunity to hold students accountable at home. With easy access for parents to know their students’ grades on a “real time” basis, students were more likely to turn work in more regularly and ask how/ if they can make up assignments. Parents, teachers and students have greatly benefited from this practice. As one parent commented on this practice: “This is great, I get an email every week giving me a report of my son’s attendance and grades for that week. I can even click on each grade to see the specific assignments and a detailed description of each. Pretty cool and easy.” One seventh grade Math Teacher made this comment on the benefits of the practice; “Instead of having to call parents about their student’s grades, I am now receiving emails and calls from parents who got onto ParentPortal. It is great that they are able to get that information delivered to them.” These responses toward the Information Highway are precisely what the ATP aimed for!

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A group of second grade teachers at Edison Elementary School served up a great idea: a series of three family workshops designed to help parents support learning at home. They called it the Slice of Student Success Series. The goal of the series was to increase student achievement in math and reading while strengthening relationships between parents and teachers.

The workshops took place in the school library for an hour immediately after school to accommodate parents’ busy schedules. Each session focused on a different topic—homework, math, and reading—and involved a fun activity that could be replicated at home.

At the first workshop on homework, teachers explained how homework should be part of students’ routines and that students need a quiet workspace in which to complete it. They discussed homework as a way for students to practice and master skills, and how this work is the students’ responsibility. Homework also is part of students’ report card grades. All along, parents asked their questions about homework.

Students were guided to transform unused pizza boxes donated by local restaurants into homework kits. They decorated the kits using markers and stickers, and filled them with useful supplies, such as crayons, pencils, numbers charts, and more.

The next workshop focused on math, and featured an overview of district math standards for each grade level. Teachers explained that, along with all of the new math approaches, it is still the case that students need to become fluent in math facts. Many math questions were asked and answered.

Families and students were given gallon-sized plastic bags containing math games, and taught how to play them at the workshop and at home.

At the third workshop, parents received tips on how to help their children improve their reading skills. Teachers demonstrated ways that parents could ask students questions to help them share what they were reading. In this way, parents could see whether and how well students were comprehending fiction and non-fiction reading material. Teachers distributed
handouts to the parents with many ideas that they could use at home with all kinds of books and stories that their children were reading.

“Now I know what to do when I read with my child,” thanked one parent.

The families also made origami bookmarks and each student was given a book donated by the Reading Foundation to bring home. Ice cream bars made the session even sweeter.

The workshop series cost $100 to implement. It was attended by 70 students and their parents.

Any way you slice it, the practice was a success. The workshops equipped parents with good information and with tools and strategies to support their children’s learning at home. All of the interactions enhanced positive and purposeful connections of parents, students, and teachers.

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Family Friendly Trimester Goals!
Eastgate Elementary

At-home reading and math practice is essential to student success. But many parents are unsure of how to help their children at home. To equip parents with the skills and supplies necessary to academically support their students, 21 teachers at Eastgate Elementary School launched Family Friendly Trimester Goals.

The teachers began by working in grade-level teams to identify the Common Core State Standards that students were not meeting. Then, they used this information to write academic goals and activities in parent-friendly language so that parents could understand exactly what their students needed to practice and learn. Since about 70% of the school’s parents are native Spanish

872 parents received training, toolkits, and positive encouragement to help their children do their best in meeting the standards.
speakers, the teachers also translated the goals into Spanish. The goals were printed clearly on cards for easy distribution.

Next, the teachers used donations from the community to prepare related educational toolkits for parents. The kits included resources such as flashcards and bookmarks printed with reading strategies. The kits cost $2,500.

Three times a year—at an open house and at fall and spring conferences—the teachers distributed the goal cards and toolkits to parents along with tracking sheets. The teachers explained the goals and modeled how to use the educational tools. They also asked parents to work with their students every night, and to use the tracking sheets to monitor their progress. In all, 872 parents received training, toolkits, and positive encouragement to help their children do their best in meeting the standards.

The parents appreciated the information and resources. “I like that we know what [our children] are supposed to know and we are able to help them be prepared for what they are supposed to do at school,” one commented.

Teachers observed results. Setting goals each trimester inspired students to be more motivated in class.

Working with their parents on math and reading skills at home enabled students to improve their performance in the classroom.

“I do Minute Math with my first graders,” one teacher reported. “The children who have used the flash cards consistently are some of the top students.”

It is clear that when lessons from school are reinforced at home, students benefit. Through the trimester training and toolkits, teachers and parents at Eastgate effectively aligned their efforts with parents’ reinforcement of student learning. Several hundred students were encouraged to practice and improve reading and math skills at home. In the process, parents increased their confidence about working with their children. The Family Friendly Trimester Goals built a stronger school, family, and community partnership program at Eastgate.

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At Highlands Middle School, art appreciation is not limited to museum-goers and art collectors. With the help of dedicated parents, teachers, administrators, and local artists, Art in the Highlands turned middle schoolers and their family partners into art students by day, muralists by night.

Art in the Highlands took a two-pronged approach to arts education: learning and doing, during the school day and in an evening community event. To creatively implement the learning component, Highlands Middle School received district approval to invite 11 local artists to share their skills with sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students. The artists taught students many exciting skills, including pottery, water color, photography, interior design, fiber art, graphic design, mixed media, and others.

Learning about art during school hours was only the first step. The doing component continued. First, students worked with their families to paint tiles for a new, permanent mural to decorate the school’s entrance. Second, one evening, community members were invited to the school from 5 to 8 p.m. to purchase five-dollar tiles. Then, small groups of community members decorated tiles to add to the mural, which also included the school’s mission statement.

In the spirit of true artistic partnership, everyone worked together to offset the $300 cost of this activity. Donations from a local contractor and artist, as well as discounts at a craft warehouse and commercial crafts store, helped cover the cost of materials. For students and families who could not afford to buy a tile, one generous parent donated $100.

The ATP, PTO, and afterschool program coordinators worked together throughout the Art in the Highlands planning process by determining its theme, soliciting artists, planning activities, making name tags, and writing thank-you notes. Parents attended weekly planning meetings for two months, and volunteered their time to sell student- and family-created mural tiles during lunch for the week prior to the event.
Students in an after-school program also contributed to the planning process. They designed the logo for the project, which became the advertising symbol on the school website, in the local newspaper, on the school reader board, and on Facebook.

Art in the Highlands coordinators noted that other art-related activities will be conducted in the future. They plan to develop activities around the calendars of the local artists and the local artistic community, so that conflicts in schedules are avoided.

As the principal of Highlands Middle School explained; “In our classes, we are so focused on reading and math all the time that we want to make sure we had an opportunity to see that art is all around us, and it’s in our lives every day.” By bringing artists into the classroom, Art in the Highlands allowed teachers and artists to connect the visual arts with classroom-based math, science, reading, and entrepreneurial studies.

Art in the Highlands was a rich academic experience for students and an opportunity to create a beautiful project and lasting tribute to school, family, and community partnerships.

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At Hawthorne Elementary School, many students come from diversely structured families with one parent at home, usually mom. To encourage fathers and father figures to be involved in students’ lives and to promote education, health, and safety, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) hosted a soccer game and community event for dads, students, and families. The idea for the gathering, called Super Soccer Dads, was borrowed and adapted from the ATP at a nearby school, Amistad Elementary.

Hawthorne's ATP spread the word about Super Soccer Dads by distributing flyers, adding information to the school calendar, and asking teachers to promote the activity in their classrooms. On the day of the game, students received stickers printed with the start time as a final reminder.

Three soccer fields were set up for the occasion. The Dads Teams played the Students Teams grouped by grade level (K-1, 2-3, and 4-5.) To ensure there were enough players on the Dads’ Teams, the ATP invited local firefighters to join the fun. The firefighters also brought a fire truck and ambulance to the field to increase awareness about community safety and sports safety.

Families, teachers, and community members cheered the players from the sidelines, while socializing and enjoying hot dogs and drinks provided by a local church. Over 100 students, 179 parents, 15 community members, and a dozen teachers and administrators participated.

Half-time was packed with enrichment activities provided by school staff and community partners. The principal gathered the fathers and father figures to talk about Love and Logic parenting strategies. His presentation aimed to enlist the dads’ help in preventing bullying and promoting positive student behavior at school. This included recruiting volunteers for the school, but also encouraging all of the important males in students’ lives to reinforce messages of the importance of education, good school work, good behavior, and the rejection of bullying.

Nearby, local librarians promoted the library’s summer reading program and facilitated library card registration. Students helped them recruit new
library members. The class who garnered the most library card sign-ups was rewarded with a pizza party.

Representatives from a local pharmacy were also on hand. They answered parents’ questions and shared information about children’s health issues.

By the end of the game, everyone was a winner. Many parents met other parents that they did not know before. Many dads, father figures, and moms felt welcome by the teachers and more aware of community resources.

For just $250, the event fostered a sense of team spirit among families, educators, and community members alike. The event taught attendees the importance of physical, emotional, intellectual, and community health. Well-played, Hawthorne!

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AIM: Attendance Improvement Matters

The number one key to success, it is often said, is showing up. So, when the ATP at Vista Elementary School noticed that student attendance was a real challenge for 36 families, the team members decided to partner with the families to generate solutions. They called the initiative AIM, or Attendance Improvement Matters.

The ATP started by running a truancy report to determine which students were in danger of facing serious legal consequences for chronic absenteeism. Next, they invited these students and their families to come to the school for dinner and small group discussions.

“AHaving the parents come in and working with them one on one made me really understand their situations better. I had no idea of some of the barriers they are faced with!”

-Teacher
of how they could work together to improve student attendance. Every family received a handmade invitation and a personal phone call.

To encourage as many families as possible to attend, the ATP arranged childcare, transportation, and interpreters. The ATP also incentivized attendance by telling families that if they came to the event, they would receive packages of goods donated by community organizations and local businesses. Thanks to these efforts, 12 of the students and 21 of their parents came.

The evening began with a presentation by the principal about the importance of attendance. He discussed the legal, academic, and emotional consequences of not attending school, and shared a student-narrated slide show about what students miss when they are absent.

Next, the families signed compacts agreeing to make student attendance a priority. The parents agreed to partner with teachers and ATP members to create individual 12-week action plans for their children to improve attendance. In the action plan, the families set a goal for their child’s attendance, identified the challenges they faced in helping students get to school every day on time, how they might work to resolve the challenges, and how educators at the school also would help resolve the challenges. The process facilitated open communication and mutual understanding, and was valuable for all involved.

“How having the parents come in and working with them one-on-one made me really understand their situations better,” noted a teacher. “I had no idea of some of the barriers they are faced with!”

“I feel such a connection with the family I worked with. They seemed really appreciative!”
-ATP Member

After completing the agreements and action plans, the families, teachers and ATP members ate dinner together. The Attendance Improvement Matters (AIM) initiative didn’t end there. After the initial meeting, ATP members called the families they had worked with to check in regularly and to report student progress. At the end of the year, the families were invited to an awards ceremony honoring those who had met their action plan goals. Half met their individual targets, but every family who participated had a student with improved attendance.
The AIM program cost $75 to organize, funded by the PTO. The benefits AIM yielded were invaluable. Administrators and teachers gained insight into families’ challenges, and the families better understood the importance of attendance. Best of all, students received more opportunities to learn and enjoyed more positive classroom interactions with their teachers and peers.

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The staff at Eastgate Elementary School were active combatants against gang violence in their community. They set a goal that 90% of students will report feeling safe at school and in the community. One of their first strategies to help students reach this goal was to encourage family involvement in the Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program.

GREAT Families is a family-based crime prevention program consisting of six weekly sessions, two hours each, facilitated by police officers who were trained in the program. In three different six-week sessions, police officers taught Eastgate parents and 4th and 5th graders—as well as older siblings—about what gangs are, how they operate, and how to resist the pressure to join a gang.

Each session began with a family-style meal where all participants, police facilitators, and school coordinators ate together. The sessions included techniques for parents on setting family rules and boundaries for students; being a positive role model; and limiting negative influences of media, including some video games, music, and the Internet. The sessions included time for families to set their own goals for and with students. Also, community agencies including the public library, parks and rec, and the Department of Social and Health Services shared information about how to access their resources.

In the Eastgate community, many families did not view police officers in
a positive light. Seeing a teacher from the school who works on the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program and a police officer conduct the GREAT sessions helped build trust between families and the police. To implement the GREAT program, a local police captain wrote the grant for funding from Goodwill Industries.

The Eastgate ATP, teachers, school principal, and school counselor selected families with multiple risk factors (e.g., domestic violence, alcohol or drug abuse, gang affiliation) to call, personally, to invite them to join the GREAT program. After the first week, some of these families began making phone calls to share information from the program with other families.

Eastgate invited all 4th and 5th grade families to the final culminating session, including families with strong protective factors such as positive discipline methods and close child supervision. The diverse population of families provided an environment in which the school’s families met and learned from one another. The ATP found that the entire school staff needed to work with the planning team to implement the GREAT Families program.

The results of GREAT, to date, were noteworthy. One student with a serious truancy problem attended school regularly after his parents attended GREAT. Students’ behavior improved and rates of homework completion increased.

One parent movingly attested, “When you come over here and hear all these things about gangs, and kids, and how you can help them, it changes your life. My life is changed.”

In the end, the GREAT Families is protecting kids, families, and the community. The DARE officer in charge of GREAT said it best; “[Gangs] need a child who feels left out, alone, dejected, and not understood. There are ways to fix that...and the things we teach here makes that child a much more difficult target for the gang to take.”

“When you come over here and hear all these things about gangs, and kids, and how you can help them, it changes your life. My life is changed.”

-Parent

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Climate of Partnership Goals
In two hours, you can bake a cake, watch a movie, or—thanks to Park Middle School’s ATP—help make school a welcoming environment for all parents, including those who do not speak English at home. The Me2 program has shown that parental involvement is wanted, needed, and expected, by encouraging every parent to share two hours of their time at or for the school over the course of the school year. The program not only communicated this message to parents, but also let students know that their families remained important influences in their education in the middle grades.

At open house and at sixth-grade orientation before the school year began, Park Middle School’s principal explained the Me2 program. Park hoped that every parent would donate two hours to the school during the school year. Parents received a checklist of possible volunteer activities, including “Attend an awards assembly,” “Join your child for lunch at school on their birthday,” and many others. As guided by NNPS, the school included audience attendance in its definition of “volunteers” who contribute their time to support students’ activities at school.

Throughout the year, teachers and administrators highlighted the Me2 program at all school functions that parents attended. A large thermometer-type display at the school tracked the volunteers’ progress toward the 1800-hour goal. On a monthly basis, students brought home notes with various volunteer opportunities to inspire their parents’ involvement.

In late April, a “nearing the goal” celebration was conducted during the regular awards assembly. School leaders reported that parents had volunteered over 1,000 hours at or for the school, and encouraged further participation. Local community media was invited to the celebration.

The biggest challenge that Me2 faced was changing some parents’ mindset that they did not need to be involved in school at the middle school level. To ensure that teachers were on board with the idea that the school wanted and needed parental involvement,
the ATP asked teachers to list volunteer activities that would help them and/or the students in their classrooms.

The ATP and teachers remained attentive to the program throughout the year, often reminding students and parents about the two-hour donations of time. Next year, Me2 may invite parents to attend a class with their child for at least one hour during the school year. This will further “stretch” the concept of volunteering.

The teachers observed that students improved their academic performance and school behavior when they saw their parents at school and when they realized that their teachers and parents would in fact communicate with each other. Many parents remarked that they had a clearer understanding of school expectations because of their time at school. One sixth-grade parent said, “I never knew you guys would want our help anymore.” Another reported that, “because of the Me2 goal, I set aside one day a week to come into the school and work.”

The Me2 program at Park Middle School has helped make parental involvement a priority, without making unreasonable demands on parents’ time. Now, when middle school students say they like to go to school, their parents can say, “Me2!”

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In these days of high-tech communications, there still are good things to do with note pads.

At Amistad Elementary School, the resourceful Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers decided to use note pads to simply and elegantly meet the challenge of increasing two-way communications between home and school.

The Communication Note Pad system guided parents to use pink note pads to send notes to their children’s teachers. Teachers used salmon (orange-y) colored pads to send notes home. At a staff meeting at the beginning of the year, the principal explained to all teachers how to use the salmon notes for school-to-home communication. He showed an example of a filled-out note from teacher to parent that would be positive and productive. He also distributed the pads for both school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

At the school’s Open House Night, parent-teacher conferences, and ATP meetings, teachers distributed the pink note pads to parents and explained the color-coded system. Thus, parents were on the lookout for salmon-colored notes from the teacher, and teachers were expecting pink-colored notes from parents. Students were active participants—aware that their teachers and parents were in touch and working together—as they delivered the notes back and forth.

Communication Note Pads addressed the concern that teachers had difficulty communicating with many students’ families. About 97% of Amistad students received free- or reduced-price lunch. Many families’ phone numbers changed during the school year; most families did not have access to e-mail or the Internet; and some parents did not speak or read English. To meet these challenges, the school counselor and secretary often translated and wrote notes in English and/or Spanish to help teachers and parents address each other in their native languages.

To meet these challenges, the school counselor and secretary often translated and wrote notes in English and/or Spanish to help teachers and parents address each other in their native languages.

The Communication Note Pads Campaign encouraged teachers to send positive notes about students to
parents. That positive reinforcement reduced disciplinary actions, because parents were informed about students’ classroom behavior. Students were more than carrier pigeons. They also wrote notes home on the salmon-colored note pads to share information with parents about their classwork and their experiences at school.

The cost of the program for one year was about $300, funded through Title I. A mid-year Communication Survey for parents helped the ATP evaluate the success of the program, as did counting the notes that teachers received from parents. By year’s end, over 580 students, 270 parents or caregivers, and 32 teachers and staff members had communicated with each other about the students’ work and school activities.

Amistad’s ATP emphasized the importance of starting this kind of activity at the beginning of the school year by clearly explaining the purposes of two way communications and by motivating teachers and parents to use the note pads. The school leaders presented the pads as a helpful tool, not a burden, by offering translation services. Teachers also could use their computers to generate and print (on salmon) mass notes that went to all families.

At Amistad, Communication Note Pads encouraged parents, teachers, and students to communicate easily and actively about students’ academic and behavioral successes and challenges. These were clearly colorful communications.

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Everyone wants to get a sneak peek before movies come out, books are released, or the new phone is available. It’s all the commercials are ranting about. At Hawthorne Elementary, students and their families get VIP treatment by getting to a look, or a “Sneak Peek,” at the upcoming school year.

With about 75 percent of students speaking a language other than English and many highly mobile families, the first day of school entails a significant amount of anxiety for students and families, especially as Hawthorne may be a new school for a great number of students, including entering Kindergarteners. Sneak Peek allows for parents and students to make connections with the teachers, as well as giving families an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the building and classrooms to reduce anxiety on the first day of school.

Everyone had a role for Sneak Peek. Hawthorne teachers had the responsibility of having their classroom ready to go and sending out letters to families, inviting them to Sneak Peek. When families arrived, teachers were in their classrooms, greeting students and families and answering any questions.

Parents brought their children to the Sneak Peek and connected with their children's teacher, signed up for volunteer opportunities and met other families. The students brought their school supplies to drop off in their new classrooms and met their new teachers.

The administrators were there to assist with set up and clean up for the event, welcome students and families and answer parent questions.

Community members donated popsicles for families to enjoy together at the end of the Sneak Peek, as well as school supplies for needy families.

In order to give invitations for families a personal feel, the students’ new teachers wrote letters and sent them out with the school supply list. The letters were also translated in Spanish in order to serve Hawthorne’s Spanish-speaking families.

Additional advertising included information up on the school’s reader board.
Hawthorne came across a few obstacles with getting buy-in from the entire staff, but once the benefits for all staff and families were clearly explained, everyone was on board for this practice. The individualized letters are a very important part to the success of the event, so all the teachers needed to be interested and willing to write up those letters and add to the success of the practice.

Hawthorne school has seen increased parent engagement from the beginning of the year due to this welcoming practice and teachers appreciate that they can get a better feel for their students and families before the first day of school. The Sneak Peak gave Hawthorne the positive contact with families before ever having to contact a family about a problem. It also benefitted the office by having students and parents familiar with the school and teachers, so there were not as many disoriented parents or students on the first day of school. To top it off, Hawthorne has seen improved behavior not only at the beginning of the school year, but throughout the year because this event established a welcoming environment where students can do their best learning beginning on the first day of school.

“We got a lot of bang for our buck,” says one teacher about Sneak Peek and boy does that sum it up, as only $400 was spent on postage and popsicles. “My child is in kindergarten this year and it was great to get to know my child’s teacher before the first day of school. It helped my daughter mentally prepare for school,” commented one parent of the 300 parents and caregivers who came to Sneak Peek with about 500 Hawthorne students. The 23 Hawthorne staff and eight community members who made Sneak Peek possible deserve recognition for the treat they provided students and families – and for those popsicles as well!

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“My child is in kindergarten this year and it was great to get to know my child’s teacher before the first day of school. It helped my daughter mentally prepare for school,” -Parent
District Level Goals
What is difficult for a single school to accomplish may be easier if tackled as a district initiative. In the Kennewick School District, one school’s principal and ATP wanted to conduct workshops to help parents of students who were struggling in math, reading, and/or homework completion to gain strategies to help their children at home. The school did not have resources to plan, conduct and evaluate these workshops, so the district’s parent involvement coordinator agreed to take the lead.

Four elementary schools that are members of NNPS were invited to collaborate on a project called, Take Aim: Targeting Families for Parent Workshops.

The ATP chairpersons and the district Coordinator agreed that parents’ interest in learning how to help their children at home was highest immediately following parent-teacher conferences. They planned the Take Aim workshops to occur shortly after the conferences.

District math coordinator agreed to teach a session on math strategies that parents could use with their children at home. The literacy/language arts curriculum specialist conducted a similar session on reading. The ATP chairperson, from a school with a successful Blue Ribbon Homework Center, led a session called Making Homework Work for Your Home. The math and reading workshops were separate for parents with children in the primary and intermediate grades. Some families attended both. Each ATP hosted one workshop by greeting families, setting out refreshments, and making translation headsets available, where needed.

The district coordinator and the ATP chairpersons talked with teachers to identify parents of students who were struggling in math, reading, and homework completion. The teachers listed parents to invite, and the district coordinator took care of invitations in English and Spanish, phone calls, flyers, and other information for the targeted group. The day before each workshop, reminder phone calls were made in the family’s home language.

High school students volunteered to work with young children on educational games and activities while their parents were in sessions.
The district coordinator ordered refreshments and supplies for the presenters, scheduled interpreters, and invited local agencies to share information and resources with the families. The public librarian came to enable families to sign up for library cards. The district’s Ready for Kindergarten program representative registered younger siblings. A reading foundation donated books for each participant to take home and prepared baskets of books to use as raffle prizes at each workshop. High school students volunteered to work with young children on educational games and activities while their parents were in sessions.

In the math workshop, presenters showed parents how to use various materials with their children, including math flash cards on basic skills, and cereal and licorice sticks to practice measuring. In reading, parents worked with examples such as using a fresh-baked gingerbread cookie to prompt a child to think, talk, and write about how she or he might eat the cookie, a family tree activity, and keeping a writing journal. The homework workshop helped parents think about setting up a homework center and having useful supplies at home. Targeted families who could not attend the workshops were given copies of the workshop materials.

The district coordinator was pleased to see families who typically did not attend school meetings. The math session presenter stated, “Watching parents smile as they made patterns with colorful cereal, or laugh as they quizzed each other with fun math fact cards...[let me know] that these parents felt good about their abilities to support their children academically.”

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In the Kennewick School District, many secondary schools excel at conducting workshops and other events for families however, the Federal Programs office noted that few Spanish-speaking parents participated. To ensure that English Language Learner’s (ELL) families felt welcomed at school and received important information about their students’ education, the district leaders for partnerships organized a day-long program—Planting Hope—designed to meet and hear from these families.

Spanish-speaking families throughout the district with students in middle school and high school were invited to attend via personal phone calls, flyers, postcards, and announcements on local Spanish radio stations. A local Univision station also advertised the event by airing a student-made commercial and an interview with students and parents about the importance of attending. The publicity worked: seventy-two parents and 160 students attended.

Early on the morning of Planting Hope, a crew of migrant and ELL student and parent volunteers arrived at one high school to set things up. Some of the volunteers also served as greeters at the front door to welcome families. Others staffed student, parent, and childcare registration tables or served a breakfast of hot chocolate and Mexican pastries.

Planting Hope included several sessions for attendees to provide parents with information on their rights, school programs and importance of fostering leadership skills in their children. The day included a keynote presentation from a law enforcement officer who spoke about parent’s important roles in guiding adolescents through middle and high school.

“The information was very good,” one parent commented. “I learned about the tools that I have to help my child be successful.”

Parents and students split into separate groups for sessions of interest in English and Spanish. Parents learned about how they can help prevent drug and alcohol abuse, and about graduation requirements from high school. Migrant and ELL high school student
volunteers had been previously trained to lead younger students in leadership development activities.

Everyone reassembled for a Mexican lunch and to evaluate their experiences at Planting Hope. A completed evaluation entered the family into a raffle for valuable prizes.

The program, which engaged many parents and students cost about $700. High school student volunteers gained valuable organization, event planning, and teamwork skills. The middle school students whom they mentored became more motivated to do well in school. Parents learned about school programs, parents’ rights in various school decisions, and how to keep their students safe and healthy. The parents also reported that they felt more comfortable interacting with teachers and administrators, and understood that the district and their children’s schools valued their involvement.

This was the fourth year of Planting Hope. In Kennewick School District, this is one strategy for increasing connections with a previously underserved group in its community.

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KSD Workplace and Student Nondiscrimination Statement

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Federal Programs Citizen Complaint Procedures

In accordance with state law, KSD is required to disseminate the Federal Programs Citizen Complaint Procedures free of charge to families. If you would like a copy, download it from the KSD webpage at www.ksd.org/departments/federal/default.aspx, pick one up at the KSD Administration Center, or call the Federal Programs office at 222-5091.