

FALL INTO READING

JOHN J. JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LA

Type 4

Engaging young readers in fun activities may be one way to set them on the path of life-long reading. At Johnson Elementary School nearly all students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Their teachers have set goals and are working hard to encourage their students to love learning and to love to read. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and teachers planned Fall Into Reading—a fall festival and family reading night. Teachers, parents, community members, and AmeriCorps volunteers took active roles preparing and conducting this event.

The ATP organized a many-faceted publicity campaign to attract families and community partners. Teachers put information about the event in students' report cards; reminders were posted on the school's marquee; colorful posters were hung inside and outside of the school; flyers were distributed throughout the community; and invitations were extended in the American Press newspaper. Families and community members were impressed when some teachers and school staff knocked on doors to deliver flyers about the reading night.

At Fall Into Reading, students and their families had many opportunities to participate in hands-on reading activities and informational booths organized by the teachers, students, and staff from the Calcasieu Parish Public Library. Each grade level set up a reading-themed, standard-based activity station for attendees to enjoy. The activities and games were designed to show parents what reading and language arts instruction looks like at their child's grade level and ways to practice and reinforce specific skills at home. Students were eager to demonstrate reading and language arts skills for their parents. One parent appreciated this focus, saying, "I enjoyed the

time I got to spend with my son getting to see what he does in school each day."

College students and staff from the McNeese State University's athletic department were featured guests. They came to talk with students about the importance of reading, even in college athletic activities.

AmeriCorps volunteers along with some Special Education Teachers built a hair-raising, horrifying, haunted house, and dressed for the occasion. After being scared "out of their wits," families could recover by going on a country hay ride, which was offered during the entire evening.

Hot dogs, chips, and drinks were served when participants arrived. The Fall Scholastic Book Fair was open for browsing and buying. Students and parents could explore and purchase books and educational games and toys that encouraged reading. Chick-Fil-A donated one free book for each child attending. At the reading stations, families collected ideas and materials on how to help with reading at home.

The ATP received lots of positive feedback from 100 students, 65 parents, 30 teachers and 20 community members. One parent represented many others by commenting, "I wish you all would do more activities like this one. We really enjoyed ourselves!" That certainly expresses the joy of reading.

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READING

MATH WITH MOM

**J.I. WATSON MIDDLE SCHOOL
IOWA, IA**

There is a mystery surrounding Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and parents want to know more about this new school reform. At J. I. Watson Middle School, a large K-8 school, about 400 parents came for a day-time demonstration workshop on Common Core standards in math. They learned, first, that CCSS is not a curriculum, but a set of grade-specific standards that the school will help their children attain. In so doing, their children should proceed through the grades and graduate from high school on time and ready for the future.

The ATP and all teachers hoped that the workshop, Math with Mom, would enable many parents to support their children's math learning, encourage positive attitudes about math, and, ultimately, increase students' scores on standardized math tests. Parents and their children experienced a sample math lesson on a CCSS math standard in each math class. Parents could see how the school's curriculum and the teacher's instructional approaches helped their student learn the skill and meet the CCSS standard. They also saw how the teacher taught the lesson.

The ATP posted a notice about the workshop on the school marquee and placed announcements online and in the school newsletter. Math teachers at each grade level prepared a lesson that showcased a Common Core standard and that used active learning and math manipulables to engage both parents and their children in the lesson.

At Math with Mom, parents came during their child's math block. Student council members greeted parents and escorted them to their child's math class. The classrooms were crowded with the students and their parents—the big turnout something

of a welcome surprise. The ATP, teachers, and principals could see that Common Core-related workshops would, indeed, draw a crowd.

Despite packed conditions, everyone was in good spirits and highly interested in the math activities. For example, one teacher distributed maps of the town and used the grid to explain how coordinates work. Then, the students and parents set to work to find particular locations. Other teachers explained math concepts using bingo cards or beads to explore multiples. The teachers also addressed parents' questions about Common Core standards. School administrators circulated to meet parents and show their support.

Parents completed an exit survey to provide feedback. Results were very positive and revealed the kinds of questions that parents had about CCSS and the school's math curriculum. Said one parent, "Now, I can see some of the thinking processes that go along with Common Core Standards." The ATP and teachers plan to create a Frequently Asked Questions list with answers to share with all parents.

Students enjoyed being the center of attention in each math class. According to the Assistant Principal, they "were able to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge to their parents." Having their parents come to school to learn about math standards and their math lessons made clear to the students that their families valued education. Math with Mom was a great way to inform and engage parents with students to focus on academic success.

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P.E.A.R.L.S.

McLAURIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLORENCE, SC

One of the benefits of membership in NNPS is the ability to network with other schools to learn from each other. This was important at McLaurin Elementary School for addressing its goal to improve student behavior and good health. One project focused on a group of 4th grade girls who needed to improve behavior, study skills, and healthy food and beverage choices. McLaurin modeled its approach after a successful program featured in the NNPS book, *Promising Partnership Practices 2011*. McLaurin's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wrote for and were awarded a Center of Excellence grant from Francis Marion University to support P.E.A.R.L.S.—Positively Enthusiastic, Ambitious, & Responsibly Loyal Sisters.

The fourth grade teachers recommended girls who had leadership potential, but who were not measuring up. Parents were informed of the program and were asked to approve their daughter's participation in PEARLS. The girls and their advisor met monthly to discuss the purpose of the group and to plan activities to build leadership skills, help others, improve health, and increase their own success in school.

The students reviewed a video on YouTube produced by the Fearless Lions at the Frank Porter Graham Elementary School in Chapel Hill, NC. It chronicled the transformation of students who gained respect for themselves and others. The girls also discussed other books, materials, and websites to aim for success.

The target group of girls was said to have changed for the better. Some PEARLS met important goals for Accelerated Reading and Math Masters because of the weekly checkups on school assignments. All improved behavior, were more aware of food choices, and selected appropriate clothing to wear to school. Some improved confidence in leadership roles. One

fourth-grade teacher observed one participant: "At one point she seemed very focused on boys. Since she became part of PEARLS, I haven't heard any boy talk at all." A third-grade teacher noted: "My third-grade girls look forward to becoming PEARLS next year in fourth grade."

During group meetings, discussions ranged from etiquette and manners to healthy food choices. The girls were asked to reflect on a topic and write their views in a journal at home. Often they used the journal to begin a conversation with a family member. Parents signed the journals and added notes, views, or questions for the PEARLS teacher. One parent wrote, "Thank you for teaching my daughter to be the best she can be."

Each month the PEARLS were given a calendar to keep track of the beverages they drank. The goal is to reduce the number of sugary drinks and increase the amount of water or low-sugar beverages that the girls drink. During warmer months, the group invited parents and other family members to Table Talk luncheons. The picnics were conducted to share more information about PEARLS meetings, goals, and results.

The project engaged the community by inviting guest speakers to the group meetings. These role models shared their stories and examples with the PEARLS. Thanks to the grant from COE, the school provided T-shirts for the girls in the group, purchased health and fitness resources, and conducted a field trip. An end-of-year celebration with family members, and school and district personnel, recognized the PEARLS who completed the program. Each girl received a piece of pearl jewelry to celebrate her accomplishments.

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ELLIS TECH COFFEE HOUSE AND FAMILY GAME NIGHT

HARVARD H. ELLIS TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL
DANIELSON, CT

Type 3

H. H. Ellis Technical High School became a nightlife hotspot this year with two creative school, family, and community partnership activities: Family Game Night, which featured representatives from a local gaming store and the Ellis Tech Coffee House, which featured students' musical and artistic talents. Both activities were designed to improve the climate of partnerships at the school and meet the school's goal of increasing family engagement activities and parents' participation by at least 5%. The school serves over 500 students from 18 towns in Northeast, Connecticut. Its ATP is working to create a welcoming climate and to encourage more and different families to participate in some school-based activities every year.

Family Game Night featured traditional games such as Twister and Pictionary and new simulation and strategy games brought by local gaming enthusiasts, including some parents. The Simulation Club at the school helped to organize and publicize Game Night. The only rule? No electronics or technology allowed. This ensured that the 50 students, teachers, and family members who attended would spend get to know each other by actually talking and playing games together.

A local community organization donated its popcorn machine for the evening. The attendees enjoyed popcorn, pizza, and juice while they learned and played games. Participants enjoyed time at Game Night and learned something about the gaming industry from expert gamers invited by the Simulation Club. "This was awesome!" a student exclaimed. "When are you going to do this again?" a parent asked.

The Ellis Tech Coffee House was an important and unique activity. The idea grew from a brainstorming session of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). A teacher on the team mentioned that many of his students had artistic talents. He suggested organizing an activity to show and share their skills,

knowing that parents would appreciate the effort.

The ATP announced the event via e-mail three weeks ahead of time, distributed flyers, and made personal phone calls to encourage attendance. The school's Simulation Club, Gay Straight Alliance, and Student Council publicized the activity and helped to generate buzz.

The ATP scheduled the event directly after a pasta dinner for athletes, which was already scheduled. The timing worked well because students and families who attended the pasta dinner were happy to have coffee and dessert while listening to the students sing, play instruments, and share their artwork. The Coffee House attracted 40 students, 50 parents, and 8 teachers, and a few community partners.

Many of students had never showcased their work outside of their classes. They loved the opportunity to share their work and talents with parents and friends. "I had no idea people would like my metalwork so much," remarked one artist.

Other highlights of the evening included performances using karaoke equipment lent by a local DJ. Two students asked family members to perform with them. "Watching one father and son team play the guitar and sing was so powerful," a teacher noted.

The ATP plans more activities to feature students' work, specialties, and talents, and suggests that other schools do the same. "The best thing you can do to improve your school's climate is to feature students and their talents. It also helps to engage the staff, parents, students, and community members in planning, conducting, participating in, and appreciating the event," said a school staff member.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS