



PRACTICAL PARENTING PARTNERHIPS

Working Together for Our Children

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When we internalize the assumption that students want to learn and participate, we begin to see that beneath their complaints about the lesson, homework, or seating chart, students are saying one thing:

“Please care for us today.”

...Rick Smith and Mary Lambert, “Assuming the Best”, Educational Leadership, September 2008

TRANSPARENCY AND OVERSIGHT

By Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

We are today confronting the results of a lack of transparency and oversight (along with an overabundance of greed) in our nation’s economy. No one knows yet what the outcome will be of any congressional action. What we can learn from this national “crisis” is that a lack of understanding, good communication and shared expectations will certainly spoil almost any endeavor, including the education of our children.

Transparency within our schools is essential. Parents and community members, as well as students and teachers, need updated information to allow for continued support and the ability to work as partners. The state-required Report Card is one good tool; but it is only a beginning. Relationships are built through an inviting and open school climate throughout the year. Opportunities to communicate must be many and varied.

Sometimes overlooked is the importance of building teacher collegiality that demands time to communicate. If all work to align curriculum, design and share successful techniques, support one another’s initiatives and plan for parent involvement is set to be accomplished outside of the regular school day, the chances for positive outcomes are slim. Structured time for teachers to meet allows them to develop as professionals. For example, more experienced teachers can mentor newer ones; a majority of staff can give input to school projects and policies; they can use their collective data to develop assessments; and they can create curricula for diverse learners. Additionally, they need this structured time to reach out to parents.

Understanding the benefits of such time and fitting it into the constraints of the school day are two different issues. A few schools currently have at least set professional development days. Others have scheduled one day a week for students to start an hour or more later. Many other schools already allow teachers an hour’s planning time each day that perhaps is not being used to its full potential. Greater cooperation and collegiality among school staff will likely promote a more welcoming climate for parents and others who enter the school, who will, in turn, tend to become more supportive of the school and find it easier to help and support students.

Open communication within the school community promotes shared expectations for students. When everyone is aware of what students are to learn and how they are to behave, along with the consequences of meeting or not meeting these expectations, a positive learning environment develops. Students need to know that adults in their lives care about them enough to set expectations and spur them on to meet them through consistent encouragement and oversight. Teachers who are “warm demanders” as described in the September issue of Educational Leadership are often especially successful in engaging struggling students. They develop relationship skills - a smile, a personal greeting to a student in the hall, a question or comment that shows they remember something a student has mentioned earlier. They learn about students’ cultures and learning styles

and monitor their own reactions to students' behavior. They show they expect students to succeed by giving them specific feedback and reviewing difficult concepts. Most importantly, they insist that students meet their expectations. They provide enough supports to make sure students can learn; they set nonnegotiable rules of respect for one another; and they approach problem behavior by seeking solutions rather than blaming.

Transparency and oversight in schools mean that ongoing communication between students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members provides opportunities for constant evaluation and improvement of students' educational experiences. Using PPP as part of the overall school plan will support communication and improvement efforts.

PPP CENTER UPDATE

by Janet Shepard, Director

PPP was pleased to join with PTA and our PIRC partners, LIFT-Missouri, PAT National Center, and ParentLink for the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Week proclamation signing with Governor Matt Blunt. PTA worked with key legislators for three years to get the bill passed which declares the second week in September as Parent and Family Involvement in Education Week. The organizations and agencies present at the signing agreed we need to work together on a marketing campaign to help schools plan their observation for next year. Watch for details!



One of many professional development opportunities PPP will be participating in by presenting and exhibiting is the Missouri Coordinated School Health Conference in December. You will find the conference program and registration form on the coalition's website at www.healthykidsmo.org. We still have several regional meeting dates and locations from which to choose and hope to see you at one of these. This is a great time to network with your colleagues in parent involvement!

The staff at PPP is well aware of the challenges presented by conference and travel expenses this year. We are exploring options for continuing to offer good professional development opportunities for you while being mindful of new travel restrictions. Training will be offered in Kansas City, Kirksville, St. Louis and Webb City through the end of the year. Second semester we will travel to Springfield, Maryville, Kansas City and St. Louis. We are also currently working with one district to schedule on-site training for June, 2009. We would be glad to work with your district, too. Just give us a call!

PPP SITE NEWS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

Mountain View-Birch Tree R-III has a “Reading and Family Together” night once per month. They also host an Education Fair each fall.

Scotland County R-I held a K-6 All-School Reading around the World Family Fun Evening. Volunteers from Truman State University included several international students and their advisors. Approximately 106 children and their parents attended the evening which presented reading and reading activities from other cultures. Refreshments also were centered on an international theme.

Vineland Elementary in De Soto held a successful Family Game Night. The games displayed for families to play together had higher level thinking skills involved. The families and school staff members were very comfortable with each other. They had a crowd with 30 families attending. The parents took down the names of the games to purchase for use at their homes. All of the evaluations were positive.

WORKING ON THE WEB

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator

October is the “Month of the Young Adolescent”. Find ways to celebrate with ideas from the National Middle School Association at www.nmsa.org or <http://www.nmsa.org/moya/PlanYourCelebration/IdeasforSchoolsandCommunities/tabid/1182/Default.aspx>

<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com> has interactive activities for girls to become more media savvy and to develop a healthier body image and self esteem.

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/adolescence/partx2.html> The Department of Education has many helpful topics to add (free) to your Family Resource Center. This article is relevant for parents and adolescents and available for immediate download. The article maintains, “Research shows that adolescents do better in school when their parents are involved in their lives and that education works best when teachers and parents work closely with one another.” The article offers tips for parents of middle school students to stay involved.



GRANTS

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator



The makers of Hidden Valley Salad Dressings are now accepting applications for the **2008-09 Love Your Veggies grant program**. Each grant award will support an elementary school in developing a program offering fresh vegetables and fruits lasting through the 2009-10 school year. Each school grant will consist of \$15,000 in direct funding. (Purchase of Hidden Valley Ranch products is not required.) Grant awards will be based on proposals that demonstrate need, innovation, greatest likelihood of sustainable impact on the students they are serving and potential for community involvement.

Funding must be spent on any of the following: Fresh produce (vegetables and fruits), a vegetable station (such as a dedicated salad bar), kitchen equipment (primary usage must relate to proposed program), program staffing (cafeteria personnel, lunchroom staff, etc.), nutrition education supplies, or Food Safety Training.

All proposals must be submitted via the grant program’s Web site, www.LoveYourVeggiesGrants.org **Proposals must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Nov. 7, 2008.** Late proposals will not be accepted. Schools will be notified of their award status by March of 2009.

Produce for Kids (PFK) an organization that promotes the benefits of healthy eating for children, and **PBS Kids**, which provides content, resources, and tools that support the positive development of children, are partnering for a second year to raise awareness among kids, parents, and teachers of the role fresh fruits and vegetables play in a healthy diet.

As a central part of the campaign, Produce for Kids and PBS Kids have announced a contest for teachers that will seek to identify and reward original, innovative, and creative classroom projects that encourage kids to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Produce for Kids "Play with Your Produce Healthy Challenge" contest will present three grand-prize packages. Winners will each receive a class and project profile on the Produce for Kids Web site that showcases the winners' successes and offers ideas on how other classrooms can replicate this model; a mini-grant of \$500 for school-based nutrition and health promotion programs; and a PFK classroom party tool-kit featuring party ideas, recipes, taste testing, favors, and gift certificates that can be used to purchase fresh produce and other nutritious food. Every classroom entry will be rewarded with coupons and discounts for fresh produce as well as lesson plans featuring fun ways to engage children as they learn about the benefits of eating fresh fruits and vegetables.

Deadline for entry: November 1, 2008

Visit the website <http://www.produceforkids.org/teachers/contest.html> to learn more and apply for the contest!

Toyota Tapestry Grants-A partnership between Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. and the National Science Teachers Association, the Toyota Tapestry Grants for Science Teachers program offers grants to K-12 science teachers for innovative projects that enhance science education in the school and/or school district. The program will award fifty large grants and a minimum of twenty mini-grants, totaling \$550,000 in all, for projects implemented during the 2009-10 school year. Project categories are Physical Science Application, Environmental Science Education, and Integrating Literacy and Science.

The program is open to middle and high school science teachers residing within the fifty United States and U.S. territories and possessions as well as elementary teachers who teach some science in the classroom or are teaching specialists. All applicants must have at least two years' science teaching experience in a K-12 school, not including the current school year. Only the project director has to meet the above criteria. The project staff may consist of educators of any discipline, administrators, parents, students, or anyone who will be directly involved in the project. An individual teacher or a team of up to five people may submit a proposal. **Deadline-January 21, 2009**

Visit the NSTA Web site for complete application information at <http://tapestry.nsta.org>.

Picturing America

Picturing America, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities, brings masterpieces of American art into classrooms and libraries throughout the United States. The goal of the program is for students and citizens to gain a deeper appreciation of our country's history and character through the study and understanding of its art. Picturing America brings high-quality reproductions of notable American art into public and private schools, libraries, and communities at no cost.

K-12 public, private, parochial, and charter schools and home school consortia and public libraries in the United States and its territories that have not yet received reproductions through Picturing America are eligible to apply to receive a set of 20 laminated pictures with artwork on both sides.

The submission deadline for the current application period is **Oct. 31**.

Info: <http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/>

RECENT RESOURCES

by Vickie Dickneite, Resource Coordinator



Knowing Me, Knowing You and *A Leader's Guide to Knowing Me, Knowing You* by Pamela Espeland are good tools for teachers or counselors working with students in middle school and high school on reducing conflict, building relationship skills, and increasing self-awareness and self-esteem. The I-Sight Personal Profile System helps students to focus on strengths and weaknesses and learn how to better get along with others.

Sleepless in America - Is your child misbehaving or missing sleep? by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka contains practical strategies to help your family get the sleep it deserves. Learn how to recognize whether your child is misbehaving or missing sleep; identify the normal, everyday activities that may be innocently disrupting your child's sleep; end the bedtime and nighttime struggles (and stop the

"misbehaviors" during the day); and get the sleep your whole family deserves. (This book is a good match with our April 2008 lead article, "Goodness of Fit" and the Parent Page, "Loss of Sleep", by Darlene Robinett.)

Respect – A Girl's Guide to Getting Respect & Dealing When Your Line is Crossed by Courtney Macavinta & Andrea Vander Pluym uses quotes, true stories, facts and advice from teen girls on how to respect yourself and command respect from those around you. Everyone deserves respect, but not everyone knows how to get it. The true stories and advice from peers bring this book to life and make it real for teen readers.

How Rude! The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out by Alex J. Packer, Ph.D. is a humorous but practical guide to good manners and social skills, discussing such areas as family life, behavior in public, manners in school, eating, and clothes.

Readers – Do you have resources or websites that you find helpful or hard to live without? Let us know, and we'll pass your ideas and reviews on in our monthly newsletters!

FACILITATION TIPS FOR SUPPORTING LEARNING IN THE HOME

by Janet Shepard, Director

One of PPP Dimensions of Parent Involvement is "*helping parents support their children's learning*". PPP conducted a research study several years ago to see how the work of PPP schools compared to Joyce Epstein's, Six Types of Parent Involvement. There is a lot of similarity between the dimensions and the six types promoted by Epstein' [National Network of Partnership Schools](#). At the time the lists were developed both organizations said that all components were of equal importance and that schools might choose to work on one or all of the kinds of involvement. Since then researchers Anne Henderson and Dr. Karen Mapp have shared findings of a meta-analysis of parent involvement. Their research shows that supporting learning in the home is the most important kind of parent involvement.

It is important to keep this in mind during a school year when attendance at parent involvement opportunities at school may drop due to travel costs and other economic factors. Here are some ways educators might help parents support learning in the home:

- Check-out activity bags sent home in backpacks
- Using planners as journals for teachers and parents to correspond with one another
- Class blogs, listservs or some other electronic group communication tool for parents and staff

- Send home a DVD of the teacher or older students demonstrating math concepts or some other curriculum content for the month or quarter
- Weekly folders with a newsletter, homework for the week, personal notes and more

Keep a flipchart in the teacher work area and invite co-workers to add their ideas to this list. Share your ideas with the PPP Center and we will send include them in the November newsletter.

HOME VISIT FOR CONFERENCES

by Janet Shepard, Director



With gas prices and parents working multiple jobs, I think we can expect that attendance at parent – teacher conferences may drop some this fall. Making a home visit with families who cannot attend the parent-teacher conference is one way to complete the conference. If your letters have not yet gone out to schedule conferences, you might offer a visit as an alternative.

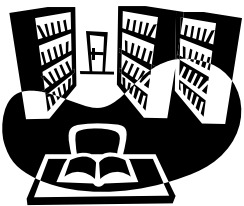
Holding conferences a location other than the school may also help families with travel. Some districts have held parent teacher conferences in the community rooms of housing complexes. If your district includes several small communities in a rural area, you might hold conferences in each of the communities rather than at the school.

Personal letters, phone calls, chatting with the parent informally when you see them out in the community are additional ways that you can maintain a personal relationship with the families of your students. One goal of any meeting with parents, whether it is the more formal parent – teacher conference or an informal chat in the grocery store, is to build a relationship so you are working on shared goals for student success.

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

by Shelly Lock, Program Development Coordinator

Does your school have a lending library or resource center for families? Are you interested in starting a center or expanding your current one? The PPP regional workshops this year are focusing on helping schools build beneficial centers for families. See the flyer included in this newsletter for registration.



Resource centers in schools can support parents as both learners and teachers. Your center can provide materials and a space where parents check out materials and get support in many other ways. It can be set up so that parents can get together with other parents and school staff to learn how to assist in their children's learning. Your family resource center could be a place where parents learn to be the best parents that they can be. This center might provide families with informational resources and support from various community agencies that are willing to work together with your school.

When building your resource center, it is appropriate to establish what your goals for the parents who use the center might be. Here are a few possible goals to consider:

- Learn strategies for supporting their child's learning
- Improve family relationships and communication
- Increased knowledge about things happening at school
- Learn what to expect at their child's grade level
- Access resources to use with their child
- Have opportunities to share ideas with other parents

Planning your family resource center also requires you think about what your center might offer. You might include:

- a resource library
- information about school events, activities, and programs
- on-going parent support groups
- parent education classes and workshops
- volunteer opportunities
- one-on-one conference opportunities
- tutors/teachers
- telephone help lines
- homework help
- computer center for students & families to work at (include suggested websites)
- career and college information
- job opportunities
- adult education classes
- ESL classes
- Computer classes
- Family literacy classes
- educational environment for families to “hangout” doing homework or activities
- opportunity for parents to give input or ideas to the school
- support from social service agencies including medical and dental services, counseling services, domestic violence services, drug abuse services
- modeling of techniques for reading aloud with a child
- clothes closet for families in need to get clothes, shoes, coats for children

Your parent/family center can be a place to help parents build on their family’s strengths by providing them with the information they need to make good parenting and educating decisions. A resource center can send a positive message to parents that they do belong in the school and are an important asset in educating their child!

A newsletter published by the PPP Center for parents and educators participating in the PPP program.

The Practical Parenting Partnerships program was developed with funding from the Danforth Foundation, St. Louis through the MO Dept of Elementary & Secondary Education.

For information on the PPP program, please contact:

PPP Center Staff:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Director | Janet Shepard 573/761-7767 jshepard@pppctr.org |
| Program Development Coordinator | Shelly Lock 573/761-7766 slock@pppctr.org |
| Resource Coordinator | Vickie Dickneite 573/761-7765 vdickneite@pppctr.org |
| Office Manager | Patty Stegemann 573/761-7770 pppctr@pppctr.org |

| | | | |
|-------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| Phone | 573/761-7770 | Fax | 573/761-7760 |
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October 2008

PREPARING FOR A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE

by Darlene Robinett, Founding Director

October or November usually marks a time for parents and teachers to participate in a scheduled conference following students' first report card of the year. The goal of these meetings is always to help your child have the best opportunities to learn. Parents and teachers have knowledge and perspectives they can share. Thus, together, you can become effective partners in your child's education. How can you prepare for this meeting?

First, you may want to talk with your child about his perceptions of school. Does he think the work is too easy or too difficult? Does he feel comfortable at school? Does he have friends at school? Does he like to work alone or in groups? What does he think is his best subject and why?

You may also want to gather and review any past education or health records to see if anything is missing or relevant to this year. Also, know if there is a student handbook available and review it. If you have questions about anything in it, be sure to ask. If you are interested in serving on a committee or volunteering in any way at the school, be sure to mention this to the teacher or stop by the office before you leave the building.

You will probably find it helpful to make a list of questions you want to ask the teacher. Possible questions might be:

- What is my child expected to learn this year? How do you let the students know? How do I learn on a regular basis what is being studied? Do you have a way to let parents know about homework assignments?
- What kinds of projects or assignments will my child have to help her meet higher academic standards? Will you give me suggestions about how I can help with these projects or assignments?
- Is my child getting her work done? Does she seem to understand assignments? Does she ever tell you she thinks something is too difficult or too easy?
- What does my child do well at school? Is there anything she seems to struggle with? Have you provided any special help? Are there any programs available at the school that might help her? Do you have suggestions on how I can help at home?
- Does my child seem to have a good attitude? Is she meeting behavior expectations?
- Does my child seem to get along well with classmates? Does she have friends? Do you provide assignments for classmates to work together in groups? What is my child's work ethic, especially in the group assignments?
- How do you evaluate how well students are learning in your classroom? How do you determine grades?
Younger student - How do you know if my child is ready to move forward? Older student - How do you help prepare my child to go to college or to seek a good career?

In case the teacher has to tell you something unflattering about your child, try to remember the teacher doesn't really want to be a bearer of bad news. Avoid becoming defensive or placing blame. Assume that the teacher has your child's best interest in mind. Ask how you can work with the teacher to help the situation. You may want to express your appreciation for the teacher's hard work - he or she probably doesn't hear compliments very often either. Keep your conversation and ideas centered on ways to help your child perform better in school. Only then is the parent-teacher partnership effective. Be positive and know that you can help your child have a successful year!