

**Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty
Francis Marion University**

NATIONAL NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

Spring 2009 E-brief

**To: Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) Members
in the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)**

**From: Markey Bee - COE Associate Director & NNPS School, Family, and Community Liaison
Tammy Pawloski - COE Director**

Greetings NNPS Colleagues!

We often hear the saying, “March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb.” The first few days of March certainly lived up to this adage with the icy rains and even some snow flurries! Hopefully, the month of April will bring milder and warmer weather.

Spring is also a great time to consider strategies to **warm up your school climate of partnerships!** This e-brief contains some practical suggestions and activities to help your school become more “family-friendly” and help you create a welcoming school environment that reaches out to ALL families and the community. Also included in the e-brief are some important dates you will not want to miss this spring and an update on some recent partnership activities around the area.









**Climate of Partnerships:
Creating a Welcoming School Climate**

How family-friendly is your school? Does your school atmosphere make families feel welcomed, respected, and needed? Does your school reach out to include ALL families and the community?

Research has proven that children are more successful in school when their families and communities are supportive of and involved in the work of the schools. Research also shows that families and communities are more likely to be involved when the school climate is warm and welcoming. School climate is defined as the social and educational atmosphere of a school. It is one that makes families feel welcomed, respected, trusted, heard, and needed. With a welcoming atmosphere, schools make families feel more comfortable and let them know they are important partners in their children’s education.

Using the NNPS framework of the Six Types of Involvement, the activities suggested below are aimed at helping you connect with all your families and community members.

Creating a Welcoming School Climate*

	<p>PARENTING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place a “Welcome to Our School” sign at the school entrance to encourage visitors. • Organize parent support groups to discuss parenting approaches and school issues with other families (e.g. a single parent or grandparents group).
	<p>COMMUNICATING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep communications positive. Use “good news” postcards, phone calls, and other two-way communications (e.g., e-mail, voice mail, websites) to connect teachers and families about student progress and success. • Answer school phones promptly in a courteous and friendly manner. Make sure visitors are greeted in the same manner. If this is a problem in your school consider in-service training for school staff in community relations and image building. Go to http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/2007/pdf/93.pdf to read about one NNPS school’s promising practice “Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through.”
	<p>VOLUNTEERING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a school survey to take parents’ needs and interests into consideration when planning activities. (If your school does not already have a parent survey, adapt the attached survey from Grove Elementary School, an NNPS school in Wisconsin, to meet your needs.) Offer incentives to encourage completion of the survey.** • “Buddy up” current parent volunteers with new parents or “hard to reach” parents to introduce them to the school (facilities, policies, staff, etc.) and encourage active participation within the school. The buddy system will help them feel comfortable sooner.
	<p>LEARNING AT HOME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information for and exchanges with parents on homework policies, how to help at home, and whom to call with questions. • Go to http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/tips/index.htm to view over 500 TIPS interactive homework assignments and instructional activities in language arts, math and science for elementary, middle, and high school grades.
	<p>DECISION MAKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine PTA/PTO potluck dinners with School Improvement Team meetings to encourage more parents to participate in decision making. • Place suggestion boxes in key locations in the school and community. Assign one staff member to follow-up and respond promptly.
	<p>COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct periodic community forums for educators, students, parents, and other community members to discuss issues such as school improvement topics and family and community support for education. • Serve breakfast at school for different community groups to promote school-community cooperation. These meals – maybe one a month– can be annual events for each invited group.

*Table adapted from Epstein, J. L. et al. (2002). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition*, 193 and 257.

** The attached Grove’s Parent-School Partnership Survey was shared by Nicole Stachurski, Americorp VISTA Volunteer at Grove Elementary in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin during a recent NNPS web conference. Feel free to adjust it and use it to meet your school’s needs.

Make visitors feel good and they will come again!

If you want to learn what other NNPS members are doing to create a welcoming school climate in their schools go to the NNPS website <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/PPP/index.htm>, click any one of the Promising Practices books and then on Climate of Partnerships.

Mark Your Calendars!
COE 2009 Events



- **April 8 – COE NNPS One-Day New Member Team Training**
8:00 - 2:30 – Pee Dee Education Center, FMU

The Center of Excellence is conducting a one-day workshop for Partner District elementary, middle, and high schools who wish to join the National Network of Partnerships Schools on Wednesday, April 8, 2009 at the Pee Dee Education Center from 8:00-2:30 pm. During the training, school team members will become familiar with the basic components of the NNPS School Model, write a One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships for the 2009-2010 school year, and learn how to link family and community involvement to student achievement and other school improvement goals.

Although this training is especially designed for new members, current NNPS members are also invited to attend. Attending this workshop is a great opportunity to introduce new members of your team to the components of the NNPS model and/or to use the time to evaluate this year's Action Plan and "refresh" your Action Plan for 2009-2010.

A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided. If you have not already done so and are planning to attend, please contact the COE by April 3 at 843-669-3391 Ext 28 or email coe@fmarion.edu.

- **April 22 – COE NNPS End-of-Year Breakfast Celebration**
8:30 - 11:00 am – Pee Dee Education Center, FMU

Come and enjoy good food and good company at the COE NNPS End-of-Year Breakfast Celebration. Plan now for your NNPS action team members to attend. You don't want to miss this opportunity to share your school's best practice and learn about what others have done this year to reach all families and to support student success in school.

- **May 15 - Submissions due** for the 2009 Promising Partnership Practices. Watch your e-mail for these forms or contact the Center of Excellence.

- **June 29 – COE Summer Institute**
8:00 - 2:30 – Chapman Auditorium, FMU

The COE Summer Institute is designed to provide participants with practical, research-based information focused on the needs and abilities of children of poverty. The program includes a keynote address by Marsha Greenfeld, "Climate of Partnerships: Creating a Welcoming School Environment" and over 19 breakout sessions.

- **June 30 – 2009 UPDATE due to NNPS to renew membership for 09-10.**

Please remember that we are always available to assist you in any way either on-site or by phone!



Working Together for Student Success,

Markey and Tammy

Thank you in advance for distributing this E-brief to all school ATP members!