

Popcorn for Parents Day

*Saeger Middle School
St. Charles, Missouri*

America's favorite fluffy white snack food helped parents pop into Saeger Middle School more frequently last year. The school's monthly Popcorn for Parents Days made the adults feel welcome and the students less self-conscious about having their parents at school.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) wanted to boost parent involvement and their comfort at the school building. The staff found that although many parents wanted to volunteer, they thought their children would consider it "uncool."

Popcorn Days are traditional for students at Saeger, with the cafeteria staff serving the snack at lunch on special occasions. ATP members were confident they could use the same treat to invite parents to school. They hoped that with a few planned activities, parents would relax and see that even their students appreciated their coming to school.

Once a month, a handful of parents came to the school cafeteria during the students' 20-minute lunch period. At the door, ATP staff gave the adults two bags of popcorn—one for themselves and one for their student.

Parents then sat with their child at the cafeteria table, ate popcorn and talked. There was no agenda; it was just a time to be together in school. The principal toured the room, stopping to chat with parents.

Once they entered the school setting, most parents realized that visiting with their students was a pleasant activity. The popcorn—and students' enthusiasm for it—made their children surprisingly chatty. Many parents were surprised to see their neighbors and friends visiting their children too.

Administrators were happy to see so many parents taking the opportunity to come to the school. Popcorn for Parents drew a double-digit crowd each month—one that staff members hoped would translate into a small army of parent volunteers. But even if

all parents do not participate as volunteers or assist the school in other activities, the staff was happy to have extra adults in the cafeteria.

The only cost was the price of popcorn—about \$100 for the whole year. The school used money from its budget to cover the expense. The Parent-Teacher-Student organization (PTSO) provided the popper and made the popcorn.

Administrators plan to continue the pop-ins next year and may branch out to offer other foods to attract parents with different tastes.

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