

---

## Getting Working Parents and Community Members into the School-Career Week

Gardenville Elementary School  
Baltimore, Maryland

Students' experiences with career visits at school had not been centrally coordinated before the 1997/98 year. Teachers in higher grades had sometimes coordinated visits from working people to share their professions on a small scale, but no school-wide effort had been organized at Gardenville Elementary. To draw more working parents into the school and to encourage involvement from community members, the P.T.O. sponsored a weeklong schedule of classroom visits from March 16-March 30, 1998.

At the beginning of the school year, school staff sent parents interest forms that identified volunteer opportunities. In addition, the form included the question, "Would you be willing to talk to a class about the work you do?" Names of those people who answered affirmatively were put on the career resource list to be used in March for scheduling class visits.

Two weeks before the visits were scheduled; a survey form detailing the format of the visits was distributed to teachers. Also, the survey allowed teachers to indicate preferences on professions or individuals they wanted to visit their classes. The P.T.O. gave teachers the complete career resource list, which had been supplemented with community members who had been contacted and were willing to visit the school to speak. The coordinator worked with the information to schedule two visits per class (or more if requested) by making phone calls.

We advised speakers to bring props, save time for questions, emphasize the importance and relevance of education in elementary school, and work with teachers to integrate their talks with lesson plans. Teachers were encouraged to contact their speakers ahead of time to prepare them for what the children at that grade level are like and what the class has been studying.

We provided the office at the school with a central schedule of all visitors coming to the school to participate in Career Week and suggested morning announcements. The purpose of the announcements was to inform all students, teachers, and staff about the visitors so that they were aware of the many fields being discussed at school each day. All in all, twenty-seven visitors gave presentations to classes, and many of the visitors presented information to two classes.

Results were reported both formally and informally. Many classes felt moved to write thank you notes to their speakers. Students spoke with enthusiasm and great interest on the visits to their classes. A formal evaluation form distributed to teachers came back with comments like the following:

"Great idea! Presentations were excellent!"

"I would like to recommend the same speakers to come back next year or to visit other classes."

"Very worthwhile!"

Teachers also offered information on the reliability of individual speakers (including lateness), specific speakers we should ask back, resource people they knew personally whom we could add to our list, and communication with the coordinator. All teachers were in favor of repeating the event, organized in the same way again next year, and the PTO Board voted to repeat this event next year, finding it a success for all participants.

There really was no budget for this activity. The school provided copies of the lists and forms distributed to teachers, and a volunteer's home phone was used for all phone calls to coordinate the event. A real "cost" was classroom time – but teachers utilized the visits to cover parts of the curriculum, like constructing "webs" on information gathered in the presentation or working on letter-writing skills in thank you notes.

We hope to improve Career Week next year by having more visitors to each classroom and by extending the time period to two weeks. In addition, a kick-off event will be held for the entire school. We will provide participants with written advice on their presentations, not just verbal, to improve communication from the coordinator and increase reliability of their commitment to be there and be on time. Publicity at least one month ahead of career week through school newsletters and a local newspaper will also ensure a larger pool of resource career people to choose from. (We did have a few parents that felt left out when they were not invited to share their profession at the school, but they were not parents who had let us know they were interested in coming). Specifically, we will target more of those who work in the arts and in animal-related careers, which are especially exciting for elementary children.

*Chris Lindberg, Action Team Chair*  
(410) 325-7520