
REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE: NEIGHBORHOOD REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM

Park Avenue Elementary School Danbury, Connecticut

Park Avenue Elementary School developed the Neighborhood Representative Program to encourage Park Avenue families to communicate with other one another and share information about school-wide events. The Fun Connection Team (part of the school's comprehensive Action Team for Partnerships) aimed to promote a feeling of community by asking volunteers to call people who lived on the same street and inform them of school activities.

To begin this program, the team sent all families a memo requesting volunteers. The team members also brainstormed within their committee for people they could recruit as volunteers. The next step involved dividing the master student list into street addresses and assigning Neighborhood Reps for each street. Afterwards, the team assigned one committee member (school staff) per three to four Neighborhood Reps to serve as support for any questions or concerns.

With logistics set, the team threw a kick-off party complete with food and beverages. At the party, committee members introduced themselves to their Neighborhood Reps and gave them the information packet that included the neighborhood phone list, the committee member's phone number, and the first month's script. From that point on, Neighborhood Reps received monthly phone scripts with upcoming events. At the end of the school year, the team celebrated by inviting each Neighborhood Rep to a volunteer luncheon.

The program faced the challenge of communicating effectively with all families. The Neighborhood Representatives read from English-only phone scripts, and therefore were not able to communicate with families who spoke a primary language other than English. To overcome this situation, the program will implement a Spanish and Portuguese list next year. Park Avenue families that speak and read both English and Spanish/Portuguese will contact these families. The team anticipates these translations will generate more support for the families that are unable to communicate in English with school staff.

Another challenge faced was the phone list. Some phone numbers were incorrect and the Neighborhood Reps did not receive new student information. To resolve this, the team will send the Neighborhood Reps an updated phone list twice a year.

The program required approximately \$250.00 to mail the monthly phone scripts and host the kick-off party. The volunteer luncheon was covered under a different budget. The team received a grant in 1999 that supported this activity. To reduce costs, the team will send the monthly scripts home with the students' of the volunteers and will make the food for the kick-off party themselves.

Overall, the Park Avenue Elementary School has found the Neighborhood Representative Program to be a positive experience for its families, students, community members, and school staff. The program has helped to increase family attendance at school-wide events.

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