
LET'S PLAY BALL

The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania School for the Deaf faced a dilemma a few years ago about how to involve students' fathers more in school events. As in many schools, fathers rarely attended the daytime school meetings or classroom activities designed for parent involvement. Five years ago at a regional one-day conference for school-family liaisons, a staff member learned about a golf fundraiser that one school sponsored every year to promote the involvement of fathers. Since the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf has primarily an urban population, the staff felt that a golf fundraiser would not be very interesting to these families. However, a basketball fundraiser might be something that the dads would enjoy.

For the past five years, the school has held an annual basketball game between the students' fathers and the male school staff. In the first year, the game was called a fundraiser, and there was an admission charged for school and family members. Between the minimal admission cost and concessions, the event organizers were able to break even after purchasing a T-shirt for all of the players. They were not disappointed—many people participated and the event reached its main goal of bringing fathers into the school.

The basketball games have been a positive partnership practice for this school for several reasons. The dads and staff enjoy playing together. Every year, new players participate and many dads return to play. Fathers and staff meet on the court on equal footing and also set up practice schedules for a couple of months before the game. The game of basketball appeals to the students because of its fast pace and physical nature. Furthermore, even though it is titled a game for fathers, any significant adult male such as a stepfather, uncle, grandfather, mom's boyfriend, older brother, or friend of the family can participate.

The Fathers versus Staff Basketball Game has become a mainstay of the school's family involvement program. Because many of the students study at the school for ten or more years, activities such as the annual basketball game give parents and staff a chance to know each other. Now, more dads attend other school events. They seem to feel more comfortable and welcome in the school—a positive step toward partnering for student success in education.

Tina Pakis, Action Team Member
(215) 951-4765