
TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

George Washington Carver Elementary School Cleveland, Ohio

George Washington Carver Elementary School developed a comprehensive volunteer training for teachers, parents, and community leaders to support a reading program being piloted at the school by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The practice linked to the school's Academic Achievement Plan by specifically focusing on the goal of increased student achievement in reading.

The volunteer training program engaged parents and community members in strategies to support a love of reading in elementary students. Twice a month during the school year, all of the family and community volunteers participated in a two-hour session, held Tuesday mornings. Teachers, administrators, and others trained the volunteers on rapport building, child development, book handling, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary development. Volunteers learned how to make reading games and other fun activities to use with children in the classroom. Over 100 parent and community members have participated in the training and volunteered daily in the classrooms.

The school has always had an abundance of volunteers, but we did not always use volunteers effectively. This reading-focused training provided structure for volunteers to reinforce classroom instruction.

An action team approach allowed par-

ents to become fully engaged in the planning and organizing of this partnership practice. A staff person coordinated the efforts of the Action Team for Partnerships. The team promoted the training through fliers, volunteer open houses, and sharing information with other organizations and groups. Teachers and community volunteers assisted with recruitment and the initial training. Neighborhood businesses provided financial resources.

One challenge initially was maintaining parents' interest. The Action Team realized that some of the parents had low literacy levels. In response, these parents were given with resources to improve their literacy skills.

In connection with the program, students' reading test scores increased, students received books for their home libraries, they became excited about reading, and developed positive relationships with adults. Governor Taft visited the school to show his approval.

The practice was a success for the adults involved as well. Teachers had additional support in the classroom, and parents learned about content standards and how to support their children in learning to read. As one parent put it, "It's great to be on the same page as the classroom teacher."

Mary Zachary, Volunteer Coordinator
(216) 391-2916