

SPARK PLUG

*Park Junior High School
LaGrange Park, Illinois*

“**A**ll work and no play makes Jerome a dull boy.” Not a problem at Park Junior High School, where basketball games with police officers and community volunteers follow after-school tutoring sessions. To add to the fun, family members join their children and the volunteers for post-game dinners and parenting workshops.

Once a month, 25 students received tutoring for an hour and a half in the school’s library. A few tutors were teachers, but most came from the community and local police. The principal, social worker, and assistant principal organized SPARK PLUG (Support Parents And Reach Kids: Play, Learn, Unite, Grow) as one strategy to help Park Junior High make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) invited all students who qualified for the at-risk summer school and their family members to meetings at the end of the summer, hoping that SPARK PLUG could hit the ground running at the beginning of the school year. The ATP also contacted the police chief to solicit his help. With the chief’s consent and the help of the department, the ATP Chair wrote a grant to cover the cost of the dinners. Prior to receiving the grant, the ATP asked each vendor who serviced the district to sponsor one dinner. The ATP also reached out to the school’s Parent Teacher Council (PTC) to advertise for tutors and arranged for a parent volunteer to make reminder calls to families before each dinner.

Several benefits emerged from the SPARK PLUG program. Students looked

forward to working and playing with their adult mentors. Positive relationships formed between the school, police, and the parents. Additionally, parents and the school improved communication, which helped parents feel more connected to the school and their children’s education.

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