

Family Literacy Building

*Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School
Silver Spring, Maryland*

Teamwork paid off at Col. E. Brooke Lee Middle School. When reading scores did not improve as much as the school staff had hoped, staff members formed study groups to look at the impact of poverty on student achievement and literacy development. Then the staff worked with the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and other school teams to develop activities that would motivate students to read independently and include parents in the school learning community. This collaboration resulted in a yearlong program to build student literacy by involving families.

To serve a diverse student body, the school staff planned a variety of activities, some unique to the school and others conducted with outside partners, to increase student literacy and family involvement. Lee Middle School's families participated in:

- A library card drive, which registered 240 students with the Montgomery County Library
- The Book It! incentive program, sponsored nationwide by Pizza Hut, which promotes reading through contests and coupon incentives
- The November National Young Readers' Day event, for which 10 guest readers from the community were invited to the school to read to students
- The Bowie Baysox reading incentive program, which allowed more than 100 students who met or exceeded the reading goal to go to a Bowie Baysox baseball game
- The second annual "Family Reading Week,"

when families read together and tracked their reading hours

Many others at the school and in the community assisted the ATP with family literacy activities. For example, for Family Reading Week, the pupil personnel worker designed the flier and reading log, school secretaries photocopied and distributed the materials to students, and the principal made announcements to encourage students and their families to participate. As one parent of a sixth grader noted, "Making reading a family activity helped to bring us closer together...and made reading a fun activity rather than a chore."

The school's efforts to strengthen literacy provided a base on which to build other partnerships with families. For example, in reviewing participation rates, the team learned that Hispanic families were less involved than others in the reading activities. Discussions with the Hispanic community helped the team identify topics that were important to these parents, resulting in four community forums to discuss report cards, course selection, peer pressure, bullying and gangs, and other topics that the parents selected. The principal, pupil personnel worker, a translator from the district's office for partnerships, and community members attended the forums, along with Hispanic and other parents.

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