

# Reaching Out To Rideout Heath: Language Arts Activities To Go

*Bryant Woods Elementary School  
Columbia, Maryland*

This year, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Bryant Woods Elementary School worked hard to improve its students' language arts skills by engaging families in home learning activities. While the ATP developed reading nights, the team realized that some of the ELL families living farthest from the school did not participate. So, the team decided to take its new literacy workshop on the road.

Residents of the culturally diverse Rideout Heath neighborhood speak many languages. While some of the families attend events at school, they are often hesitant to speak in the larger group. Many have transportation and childcare issues that prevent them from attending workshops. By holding an event in the community center at an apartment complex, the ATP worked around these issues, creating a small, comfortable setting to explore literacy development. The ATP invited area families to attend and share strategies to support literacy at home. Snacks and childcare were provided.

The literacy discussion brought out a rich dialogue, and ELL families spoke candidly. Teachers shared four areas of the language arts program with the parents: reading aloud, comprehension, vocabulary development, and journal writing. They talked about the importance and impact of each and demonstrated games and activities. There was time, too, for questions and comments. Families received free books, games to make and play at home, journals, and informational materials. The ATP sent these materials home to families living in

the neighborhood who could not attend the workshop.

To publicize this event, ATP members sent out two fliers, called families, hung posters in the school hallways, and gave each student a reminder sticker to wear. This activity, which cost \$100 for books, journals, and snacks, was paid for by Title I and support for a collaborative research project with the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

The staff's willingness to participate in such an event generated a positive feeling about the school's commitment to the community. Parents discovered new ways to support learning through games and other activities, and were more willing to discuss learning issues now that they felt they were partners with the school.

Meanwhile, the teachers learned more about the challenges faced by some of their students' families and began to look for alternative methods of reaching out. The community center became an excellent bridge between the school and the neighborhood. One teacher said "This was an awesome opportunity. Walking into the students' neighborhood was incredibly motivating. I'd do it again and again!"

*Linda Hawthorne, Title I Teacher  
(410) 313-6859  
linda\_hawthorne@hcpss.org*