

## Guess Who's Coming to Lunch

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*Hamilton County Family and Children First Council  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

It is one of the hottest invitations in town—the parent lunches at Rothenberg Preparatory Academy. Cincinnati area politicians, school officials, and others are eager to speak at these school and community brown bags. In fact, they sometimes invite themselves.

Started as a small parent activity, the lunch audience now includes students, who take advantage of the get-together not only to increase their knowledge of the community, but also to broaden their career interests.

During the school year, the school held at least eight such lunches, featuring the school board president, city council members, a judge, and a congressman among the speakers. These informal lunches are held in the school's Parent Resource Center. Everyone brings a lunch; beverages and dessert are provided. The guest speaks for 15 to 20 minutes and then entertains questions. This usually leaves time for socializing at the end.

"This is a non-threatening and entertaining way of informing parents and students about politics, resources, and key topics that impact their lives," said the school's coordinator from the Hamilton County Family and Children First Council, which oversees this and other projects at the school.

The council, which works with 11 schools, has a coordinator assigned to each one. The Rothenberg coordinator met with community members to brainstorm ways to increase parents' awareness of community resources. From this brainstorming session sprang Guess Who's Coming to Lunch. The coordinator

established a committee to work on the lunches. Among the members were the school's parent coordinator, other parent volunteers, and representatives of community organizations. Meeting quarterly, the committee set up the lunches, chose discussion topics, and invited speakers.

The planning team advertised the lunches on brown lunch bags, stating the speaker, topic, and other pertinent information. "This lunch bag has become an icon that is associated with the program," said the coordinator.

At first, the lunches were planned for adults only, but soon students were invited based on the topic and how it related to what they were learning in school. For example, interacting with elected officials about political and governmental issues enriches what they learn in social studies classes.

Parents have said they are feeling more connected to their communities now. Students enjoy talking with community leaders, and teachers said that interacting with politicians enhances their lessons. "We have been pleasantly surprised at the positive responses from invited guests," said the coordinator. "This is a win-win situation for all."

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