

## Family Outreach Workshops

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*Meadow Hall Elementary School  
Rockville, Maryland*

At diverse schools like Meadow Hall Elementary, one of the biggest challenges is providing outreach to all families, especially when language issues create challenges to participation. Meadow Hall was aware that not all families attended PTA and other school meetings but needed the information shared. The school also wanted to provide families with strategies to help children at home and to be aware of and able to access community services. To this end, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) established a series of eight Family Outreach Workshops to open lines of communication between parents and the school and provide opportunities for families to network and support each other. It is critical that all families have the knowledge, strategies, and information to best support their child's success in school.

Parents were surveyed at Back to School Night about possible topics and they indicated that they were interested in subjects such as helping children succeed in school, homework tips, community resources, citizenship, nutrition, summer learning, reading, peer pressure, bullying, special education, and test-taking tips. Teachers presented information according to their expertise, which was particularly helpful for the special education and ESOL workshops. Administrators attended several of the workshops, observing and participating in the presentations and the question and answer periods. To accommodate parents' schedules, the workshops were held both before school and in the evening. The morning workshops began

with breakfast and the evening workshops with a potluck or catered dinner. Community members provided childcare and food.

The NNPS liaison, school counselor, and community specialists coordinated and implemented the workshops, inviting families to bring food for some of the sessions. The program was publicized through newsletters, RSVP fliers, and the school system's multilingual computerized communication system.

The Family Outreach Workshops succeeded in bringing many families into the school who had not previously felt welcomed. The school attributes this to its careful attention to language issues in implementing the workshops. Most of the invitations and workshop materials were presented in both Spanish and English, and some of the workshops addressed minority issues, such as ESOL and citizenship processes. Language interpretation headsets, purchased through a grant award provided by the Montgomery County Public Schools, were provided upon request for Hispanic parents and materials presented were translated into Spanish. As one parent said, "My strategy is to buy an English dictionary, and that way I can learn along with my child."

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