

## Back to School Bash

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

**F**or a school with only a handful of involved parents, an event that attracts 150 parents and 200 students represents a huge success. With the help of the Hamilton County Family and Children First Council, St. Bernard-Elmwood Place School did just that.

The school threw its first Back to School Bash two weeks after school started, drawing such a large crowd that some of the events were moved outside. There were games, food, and activities, such as face painting. Students received donated school supplies.

For the parents, there was information galore, plus food and door prizes. The teachers played a big part in the bash, staffing booths on parent involvement and the importance of literacy, and making the families feel welcome. Community organizations such as the Girl Scouts, the Urban Appalachian Council, the public library, and social service agencies acquainted parents with their programs. The door prizes were books and gift cards to a local grocery store.

“Kids were so excited to see their teachers there and to have their parents meet their teachers. Community and business partners seemed to feel a sense of pride to be able to help the families in their community and to know they were helping with such an important event,” said the coordinator for the council, which worked with the School-Based Health Center and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLCs) on the event.

School and community organizers staged the back-to-school festival as a way to

meet the students’ needs for school supplies and the school’s need for more involved parents. “The school has identified that our students are coming to school with more needs than ever before. Parent involvement in our school...has declined greatly. We only have two or three parents who stay involved in the PTO,” said the council coordinator.

Pulling it together took a tremendous effort with donations and contributions coming from the whole community. Grocers and bakers donated food; social service agencies contributed school supplies; the teachers pitched in, with about 45 staff members participating; and several families volunteered as well.

It also took a concentrated advertising campaign—a flier was sent home three different times in the first two weeks of school; teachers promoted the event in their classrooms, getting the students excited about the bash; and the school billboard advertised the event for two weeks. Organizers also talked to parents who picked up their children at school.

The results were positive. “One parent commented to me that she had never been in a school that felt so ‘welcoming,’” the coordinator added. District officials were so impressed with the turnout, estimated at 75 percent of the school’s families, that they requested that the school throw this “bash” every year.

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