

District Parent Involvement Essay Contest

*Pasco School District No. 1
Pasco, Washington*

Parents are the number one key to unlocking the door to their children's success in school. Therefore, they need to be involved with their children's learning.

These words were not written by a teacher or a school administrator, but by a fifth grader at Longfellow Elementary in the Pasco School District. They were part of an essay he wrote that won his school \$1,000 in the General Mills Boxtops4Education Parent Involvement Essay Contest.

Students from around the district entered the national contest through a district-wide competition created to promote new ideas from students about parent involvement.

Pasco's district coordinators for school and family partnerships first heard about the essay contest through *e-Brief*, the monthly e-mail newsletter to NNPS members. After researching this opportunity, they decided to try to involve as many of their schools as possible in the competition.

The district coordinators decided to set up a local essay contest to supplement the one offered by General Mills. Students worked with their parents to answer the following question: "If you and your parent or guardian were made principals for a day, what would you do to increase parent involvement at your school?" Thirty-nine students entered the district contest; all of their essays were entered in the national competition, as well. Students practiced their writing skills and brainstormed ways they would want their parents to be involved at their

schools. After students wrote their essays, they gave them to the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) chair at their schools, who sent them to the district. District coordinators forwarded the essays to the national competition, making copies for their local contest.

Five essays were chosen as finalists and from them three grand-prize winners. Interestingly, the essay that won the national award was not among those winners. The finalists were honored at assemblies at their schools, receiving gift certificates from Best Buy. The grand-prize winners and their families were invited to a special awards luncheon where they shared their ideas with district leaders and the superintendent. They received plaques and \$500 for their schools to use on family involvement programs. Shortly after the luncheon, Pasco learned that the Longfellow student was named the state winner for Washington.

Among the students' suggestions were forming a Bilingual Club, with parents participating as coaches and mentors; opening school libraries in the evenings so families could use them; and starting sports and reading clubs that parents would contribute to. Some schools have already implemented some of these ideas, such as keeping libraries open evenings.

Despite learning about the Boxtops4Education contest only two months before its deadline, Pasco's district leaders did an admirable job publicizing the contest and encouraging students and their families to participate. Next year they will begin working on the district contest earlier.

“I was thrilled with the essay [contest] because it gave all students a chance to share their ideas,” said one school’s principal. “Some students are not afraid to orally share an idea, whereas others are not confident sharing in that format. Two of the three students that won are students who, for the most part, are quiet and don’t always voice their great ideas.” The contest brought academic benefits to students by giving them a chance to hone their writing and communication skills. In addition the program brought greater recognition to Pasco’s parent involvement efforts in the community, nationally, and among the district’s most important group—its students!

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