

## Coffee with the Principal

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*Lincoln Junior High School  
Naperville, Illinois*

A change in leadership did not deter Lincoln Junior High from continuing its work to strengthen home-school connections. In fact, the School, Family, Community Partnership (SFCP) team capitalized on the change by instituting Coffee with the Principal, informal gatherings at Lincoln families' homes to discuss school-related matters.

This past school year, the principal and two assistant principals were new to Lincoln Junior High. The SFCP felt that it was imperative to immediately create a positive relationship between the parent community and the new administrators.

Four coffee-get-togethers were held during the 2006-07 school year. Families of students in grades 6-8 volunteered to host the coffees in their homes and provided light refreshments. The first coffee, though open to all, was geared for sixth-grade parents. The last of the get-togethers focused on current fifth-grade parents, whose children would be coming to Lincoln in the fall. Among the topics discussed were issues about the transition from elementary to junior high school. Holding the coffees in families' homes rather than at the school created a friendly, inviting environment.

The SFCP and principal purposefully did not set a formal agenda for the meetings, hoping that the parents would bring their own questions and concerns. The open forum proved to be successful in generating new thoughts on ways to improve the home-school connection. Consequently, several ideas have been implemented as a result of the discussions, including a periodic calendar update sent home every other month.

Planning for Coffee with the Principal involved many people. To begin, a parent volunteer coordinator sought families who were willing to host each event. The principal then worked with the families to set convenient

dates. Publicity included the use of Talk 203, an e-mail notification system. The individual hosts also personally invited parents in the community.

Every activity has accompanying challenges, and Coffee with the Principal was no different. Time seemed to be the biggest difficulty in scheduling the meetings as the teachers, parents and principal were all busy. Thanks to perseverance on all sides, however, the practice was implemented to everyone's satisfaction.

The school hopes to have more coffees next school year and will ensure that the get-togethers remain open to all who wish to attend, especially to parents from feeder elementary schools in the community.

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