

Grill and Chill

*John B. Dey Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

John B. Dey Elementary School cooked up a get-ready-for-school activity to help families, students, teachers and administrators make a smooth transition into a new school year. Grill and Chill turned into a “big reunion,” as one student said, because students had an opportunity to be with friends they had not seen all summer.

The weather did not know about Grill and Chill and momentarily turned the event into a grab-and-go. Heavy rains forced everything to be moved indoors to the school cafeteria. The team’s back up planned worked, and many families opted to picnic on the sparkling cafeteria floor.

Grill and Chill was a get-together, with hot dogs and chips on the agenda, so that students, parents and teachers could get acquainted before school started. Specifically, the goal was to create a welcoming climate for all members of the diverse population. Families and teachers had met briefly before dinner.

“The event allows the kids to get rid of the first day jitters. They were very excited and couldn’t wait to get to school and meet their teachers,” said one parent. “It was nice for us too!”

Another parent added, “The event was a good idea. It put the students at ease and made them comfortable for the first day of school. . . It also made moms happy since they don’t have to go home and fix dinner!”

One teacher said that she enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in which to meet parents and students.

The School Planning Council, school staff, community and business partners were instrumental in Grill and Chill. Partners and businesses provided the food and beverages, so there was no cost to the school.

The idea for this activity originated at an ATP meeting. The school sent invitations to all parents along with their children’s class assignments for the upcoming year. Information also was posted on the school website and marquee. The planning committee kept the staff informed.

“We wanted everybody to connect in a positive setting. It was supposed to be beautiful outside, but everybody enjoyed the conversation and we had a lot of spirit inside,” said the principal. “It was a phenomenal start to the school year.”

It is obvious that the Dey community agreed: 800 parents and family members and 500 students took part. Community support was important, too, as 15 community members participated and all 90 staff members were involved.

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