

An Organization E-Brief

*Frances Marion University Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children in Poverty
Florence, South Carolina*

E-news briefs filled with event calendars and congratulatory shout-outs were the key to uniting 13 school districts in rural South Carolina in their quest to increase family and community involvement and students' academic achievement. Run by a handful of student volunteers at Frances Marion University's Center of Excellence (COE), the e-news briefs brought 22 Action Teams for Partnership (ATP) a little closer to success last year.

Staff at the university knew that the districts in the state could benefit from consistent communication. Located in an extremely rural and low-income area known as the Pee Dee, schools in several districts faced many challenges to connect better with students' families.

On top of this, district support was spread thinly over the region, making it difficult for many administrators to stay connected to one another. After an "Ah-Ha" moment at a recent NNPS Leadership Development Conference, the Center of Excellence liaison decided that a little e-encouragement would be just the thing to encourage and advance ATPs across the region.

Beginning in October of 2007, a small team of administrators and graduate students at the university worked together to write and disseminate news from across the region. They had some practice in the e-news-writing department as they already released a quarterly educator newsletter. However, the leadership team at Francis Marion wanted to communicate with schools and other district and university-level leaders more frequently. The administrators and students realized that there is no point reinventing the wheel. They decided to design their monthly e-newsletter after the NNPS monthly e-brief that is sent to all members of the National Network.

The first issue of the COE e-brief, released in the fall of 2007, detailed the purpose of the e-mail and announced conference and

training opportunities for improving partnership programs. Later e-briefs announced the enrollment of new schools in NNPS, detailed small grant opportunities for ATPs, and recognized outstanding ATP members from across the region. Each e-brief also included a calendar of important ATP events, such as administrator luncheons and NNPS evaluation deadlines.

District facilitators, principals, and ATPs received the e-briefs with enthusiasm last year, praising the COE for keeping all parties informed and sharing ideas that schools could borrow from one another. One superintendent, in particular, expressed appreciation for the monthly communication. Initially, he believed that all of his schools were members of NNPS. This superintendent discovered through an e-brief that one school's membership had lapsed. He quickly contacted the school and scheduled a One-Day Team Training for July 2008.

The best part about this promising practice is its price tag: \$0. The e-briefs don't cost the university any money to plan and send. The only 'cost' is the volunteers' time. The university plans to continue to send e-briefs next year on a quarterly basis. They will encourage schools to contribute more news so that the messages continue to recognize good work and progress on partnerships.

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