

Family-School Partnership: Link and Learn Summit

Ohio Department of Education
Columbus, Ohio

Cutting edge research from the Harvard Graduate School of Education drew about 150 adults to the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) Link and Learn Summit. Principal-parent-teacher teams from 31 schools across the state attended the Saturday conference in Columbus, Ohio last December.

The ODE advertised the event in district newsletters, e-mails, and personal phone calls to school officials. They distributed "save the date" cards and registration forms at other major conferences prior to conducting the Link and Learn Summit.

Karen Mapp, a lecturer at Harvard, presented her research on the importance of school-family-community partnerships. In her 6-hour workshop, Mapp covered ways to help parents feel more welcome at school and to recognize and optimize their connections to student learning.

Principals received tips of effective marketing strategies targeted at parents and other community members. Schools' Action Teams for Partnerships used some of this information to complete the annual NNPS evaluation of progress. The school teams also developed action plans for their schools, based on the partnership assessment and goals in their School Improvement Plans.

While administrators and parents worked in the conference room, their children enjoyed a fun-filled day at COSI, a hands-on science center in Columbus. About 200 children spent the afternoon calculating their body mass index and operating rockets and Martian rovers through a virtual spacecape. The COSI education team also developed age-appropriate scavenger hunts through the science center for the children to enjoy.

Evaluations completed by team members at the end of the summit proved that the conference was a success. Just about all found the presentations on parent partnering

helpful. "The workshop was wonderful!" one team parent said. "This has helped our school and our parents," a principal commented.

The ODE knows that follow-up is necessary after any professional development conference. State officials have already received several school's One Year Action Plans for Partnership for the 08-09 school year. They contacted many schools to re-engage their partnership efforts and plan to conduct more school-based site visits beginning in the fall.

The conference cost about \$35,000 to produce. The Ohio Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC) covered expenses for the event, including copies of Dr. Mapp's book, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, for each school team. The PIRC also gave each school a stipend of \$450 to support activities in the school's Action Plan for Partnerships. ODE and the Ohio PTA supplied in-kind human resources to support the coordination and marketing of the event.

In addition to the possibility of another Link and Learn Summit, ODE hopes to develop a detailed technical assistance plan to assist more districts and schools across the state accomplish their partnership goals.

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