

Racing to Success

*John B. Cary Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

The John B. Cary Elementary School celebrated the contributions of male figures in students lives. Racing to Success—an event for Cary students and their dads, grandfathers, uncles, guardians, and older brothers—drew 24 adults to the school cafeteria last January for some quality time.

The event, featuring dinner, adult-child activities and a motivational speech, also introduced some of the men to the school, which they had not visited previously, and encouraged them to return and participate in other activities.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned the event after taking note that the number of men involved at the school was decreasing, while the number of students who did not have fathers in their homes was increasing. After researching potential solutions on the Internet and through NNPS's *Promising Partnership Practices*, the principal met with a speaker who specialized in men's issues, and the idea for Racing to Success was born.

As the two dozen adults and 17 students arrived, the staff invited them to grab a book from a large display and spend the next 15 minutes reading together. Once most guests had arrived, staff and ATP members served pizza, salad, and cookies. After dinner, the adults and children had time to either play a question-and-answer game or design their own personalized license plates using crayons, markers, and stickers.

An hour into the evening, children went to the art room for a special picture-frame-making project. The adults heard the guest speaker, who talked about the important roles men play in children's lives. He also offered helpful tips for getting and staying involved, and he encouraged and praised those who attended. After the presentation, children rejoined their family members to show off their original racing car picture frames. Staff members took a photo of each adult-child pair

and sent the photos home later for the students to put in their picture frames.

Although turnout was not as high as organizers would have liked, those who did attend were enthusiastic. "I loved [having] her spending time with her stepfather! They never have time for just the two of them together," one parent said.

In response to the parents' enthusiasm, the principal designated one day to mark the event. "This is great! From now on, the last Thursday in January is Men's Day at Cary!" he said.

Big plans are already in the works for next year's celebration. Administrators and the ATP want to make it an all-day event, linking a fathers' breakfast, a reading activity, and a sporting event to the evening program. They plan to invite a former member of the Oakland Raiders (and father of two) as the keynote speaker.

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