

Watch DOGS

*John Humbird Elementary School
Cumberland, Maryland*

Forty-five father figures donated their time and their watchful eyes to students at John Humbird Elementary School last spring. As part of the nationally organized Watch DOGS program (short for Dads of Great Students), the Humbird dads and others volunteered to help with many tasks at school. In doing so, they served as male role models for the entire student population.

The school's police resource officer discovered the Watch DOGS program at a national safety conference last year. Humbird serves students from diverse families, many with low incomes. The police resource officer believed that positive male role models would help increase students' academic and nonacademic success. Teachers and administrators decided to give Watch DOGS a three month trial period from March to June of 2008.

Action Team for Partnership (ATP) members advertised the program in the school's newsletter, on bulletin boards in hallways, and at evening committee meetings. Teachers asked students to recruit a male parent, step-parent, or grandfather who might enjoy the volunteer experience. Dozens of families also received information about the program through word of mouth.

A committee of five kicked off the program with a training session for male volunteers and their children. The dads and others received information about Watch DOGS while their children played games and won prizes. The committee encouraged each dad or father figure to pick at least one day in that three month period on which they would volunteer to spend time at the school. Over 40 volunteers agreed to be Watch DOGS.

Beginning in March, Humbird had a Watch DOG for nearly every day of school until the end of the year. Each volunteer wore a sweatshirt on his day at school proclaiming, "I'm a Watch DOG and a dad of a great student." Likewise, students received a t-shirt

that said, "My Dad's a Watch DOG." Students also showcased their dads, step dads, and grand dads during morning announcements when they introduced them to the entire school as Watch DOGS!

Watch DOGS' duties varied from working with small groups of students at "center" time, to monitoring students in the cafeteria or on the playground. Fathers spent approximately one-third of their volunteer time in their children's classrooms and the remaining two-thirds of the day with other classes or in other roles. The principal made sure to meet with each father figure at the beginning of the school day to discuss logistics and the importance of confidentiality concerning the children with whom they worked at the school.

Students were excited to get the extra attention in the classroom and teachers were happy to have a helping hand. "It was great seeing the male role models participate with the students during the day," the principal exclaimed.

The program cost under \$1,000 to implement—most of that money went toward training materials for fathers and T-shirts. The school used Title I funds to cover the expenses.

Humbird definitely plans to host the program again next year. They already have a pack of future Watch DOGS hounding them for volunteer positions.

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