

## Community Connections

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*Flintstone Elementary School  
Flintstone, Maryland*

**T**hey live far apart—in rural and mountainous parts of western Maryland where the trip to school can be a burden—but that didn't stop the members of the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) at Flintstone Elementary from connecting with the parents they served. Last spring, while urban and suburban families went back and forth to schools for PTA and other meetings, the Flintstone ATP took its Community Connections workshops to the parents.

Flintstone Elementary serves students from three communities in Allegany County: Flintstone, Little Orleans, and Oldtown. As a Title I school, Flintstone is committed to its mission to build parents' capacities for involvement in their children's education. Nevertheless, administrators and teachers have struggled to connect with parents who live far from school. In addition to the long commute time, many families in Flintstone juggle work and childcare responsibilities.

That struggle to unite parents and teachers eased a little in 2007 when the school's ATP scheduled meetings in three community locations. From spring 2007 through the end of the 07-08 school year, the ATP held 18 meetings in three different locations

Teachers met with community leaders, and after some negotiation, arranged to use a restaurant and firehouse (both former school buildings) to host the workshops. They sent surveys to parents asking what topics they were most concerned about and would like to see addressed in these sessions. Once the topics were chosen, the ATP sent letters to parents advertising locations and times and listed them in the monthly newsletter.

The response was overwhelming. Nearly 100 parents attended the monthly workshops that covered topics such as diverse as phonics, volunteer opportunities, and child asthma. Guest speakers included the school psychologist, a county reading specialist, and a

technology specialist, among others. A particular standout was a workshop conducted in partnership with the local middle school to help parents of fifth-graders ease the transition to middle school.

The ATP aimed to make the meetings informal and encouraged parents to participate in discussions and ask questions. Refreshments were served, and each parent received a small thank you gift for attending. Many left the meetings with calculators, mugs, key chains, and informational pamphlets with ideas to help them support their children's learning and development.

Parents completed an evaluation form at each meeting. They seemed impressed: "Eased anxiety for my wife and me," one parent noted. "Very informative," another said.

Teachers, too, found the sessions helpful. "This was a great opportunity to meet with a small group of parents and help them understand the demands our curriculum places on their children," a teacher said.

The project cost about \$1,000 to implement in 2007. Flintstone used state grant money to cover the costs. The off-site sessions will continue as long as parents are interested and willing to attend.

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