

Forming a PTA

*E. Russell Hicks Middle School
Hagerstown, Maryland*

Parents and teachers at E. Russell Hicks Middle School turned a struggling PTA into a flourishing parent involvement machine last year as part of an effort to improve the learning environment for students. Over the course of the 07-08 school year, the revamped organization hosted seven events to benefit 750 students and many families at the school.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) decided that their school needed a larger PTA to increase parent involvement for student success. In past years, the PTA lacked active members, but when the ATP needed parent input to their plans and assistance for school events or programs, more parents were needed. The ATP wanted more direction and advice from a larger audience. Accordingly they saw that growing the PTA could create a potentially important ally.

The ATP began recruiting for the organization by reaching out to parents who had expressed interest in helping in the past. From there, the small group began making announcements to students over the school's loudspeaker system, asking them to convince their parents to participate. As an incentive, students whose parents attended a PTA meeting were rewarded with a free soda at lunch.

Members of the ATP helped organize the first PTA meeting of the year, asking all parents to come and give input about meeting times, events they might like to organize or support, and other improvements they envision in the school.

Word of mouth about the PTA spread from teachers to parents and then from parent to parent. By the end of the year, 13 parents were working together to help solve their school's toughest problems. Over the course of four quarters, the PTA and ATP collaborated to conduct a movie day, selling popcorn and water to students. They also organized a free ice cream event for the entire school, a dance for

which local businesses donated raffle items, and a skating party to reward students for getting good marks on their state achievement tests. The crowning achievement for the year was a walk-a-thon fundraiser where they raised over \$1,500 for the school.

Forming a PTA did not cost the school any money. In fact, over the past year the organization netted approximately \$12,000 for the school! Some of that money was to improve the school's technology center. Fortunately, the PTA and ATP have about \$3,000 to support involvement activities next year.

The extra money brought to the school through PTA-sponsored fundraisers is only one benefit of this practice. Teachers also appreciate having parents' views on different school-related topics in order to best serve the students. ATP members feel that the PTA is a valued partner. The PTA has had such a positive impact over the past year that it should be much easier to recruit more parents to join next year.

*Mark Lysiak
NNPS Coordinator
(301) 766-8110
lysiamar@wcboe.k12.md.us*