

Parent/Teacher Collaboration Dinner

*Deal Island Elementary School
Deal Island, Maryland*

A series of dinner meetings helped Deal Island parents envision a brighter future for their children, and a school where everyone involved had the students' success at heart. During the dinners, more than 50 parents gave their input on how they would improve the school.

School officials were looking for ways to increase effective parent involvement in their small island school. They knew that in such a tiny community it was important that everyone was working for students' success.

Over several months, 56 parents and 25 staff members attended three collaboration dinners. A local caterer served dinner, as parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members socialized. After dinner, child care was provided for the students, who worked on their homework or participated in leisure activities.

Meanwhile, the adults divided into small groups. They were asked to discuss a series of questions: What is the mission of Deal Island School? What does a perfect school look like? What does a perfect parent/teacher/student look like? The group reconvened as a whole to share their results. The participants were surprised to see how similar each group's answers were. "They then discussed what it was that they wanted for their students and wrote statements about what each subgroup's role was in insuring that all students are successful," the principal said. From this process came an action plan.

At the end of the three dinners, this process was completed. Evaluations forms reflected a new collaborative mood in the school.

"I enjoyed working in groups and hearing opinions and concerns of all involved in the educational process," the principal said.

Many parents were thankful to be led through such in-depth discussions.

"I especially liked that we did not lose

focus. We moved in a thoughtful productive manner," one parent said.

The school advertised the dinners with fliers in local businesses and on the school's marquee, and sent invitations to parents and other community figures. The town's web site also promoted the dinners and their purpose for improving education.

The Collaboration Dinners cost \$1,000. The school used Title I funds and money from school fundraisers to cover the expenses.

The school will survey parents to identify speakers and topics of interest to them. They will continue to encourage teacher and parent collaborations and discussions with dinner.

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