

# PIZZA FOR PAPAS

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**EMERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
PASCO, WASHINGTON**

Type 3

If anyone doubts that fathers and other male role models can be persuaded to accompany their sons and daughters to a school event with little more than some basketballs and a few stacks of hot pizza, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Emerson Elementary has a message for them: Try it.

One evening in March, for about an hour, students were encouraged to bring a significant male figure in their lives to the school gym. Having recently completed a P.E. unit on basketball, they brought their “Papas” to school to show off their newfound skills. After everyone worked up an appetite, pizzas were delivered to the school—enough for all 200 of the students and fathers that attended Emerson’s Pizzas for Papas night. The activity demonstrated how far a simple, inspired idea can go to create new family partnerships.

At the door, the principal and vice-principal were on hand to personally greet the invitees as they arrived. Students introduced their guests before continuing to the gym, where the basketballs started flying. While teachers and other volunteers were on hand to explain activities as needed, the focus was on the students. They personally demonstrated what they had learned in P.E.—and explained to the dads how the skill helped them.

After the demonstration, the children and fathers played specific games together. Teachers walked around the gym to meet the fathers of students they had in their classrooms. For many fathers and teachers, this event served as the first point of contact between the two. Event organizers credit the informal, relaxed atmosphere for the Papas’ willingness to chat and ask questions, both of the teachers and of the other parents.

“More reserved fathers were challenged to participate with their child as they observed how other fathers interacted with their own,” wrote the ATP Co-Chair.

A number of the teachers had their students create personal invitations for their fathers and father-figures to complement the flyers they brought home, making their guests feel all the more welcome in the school building.

The vice-principal took a head count and ordered the pizzas once the dads had all entered. After the food arrived, pizza and drinks were served. While everyone ate, the principal welcomed the crowd and spoke about the importance of a father’s involvement in their children’s education, as well as their importance to the school itself. The principal then mingled with the families, speaking individually with visitors and answering questions.

The ATP Co-Chair reported that the practice “was a definite hit . . . Students came to school the next day talking about how much fun they had with their dads.” Dads had the opportunity to make new friends and run into old ones. The only problem the organizers faced was a higher-than-expected turnout. They recommended and plan to implement RSVP cards for future events. They also are considering how to capture the father figures’ interest and involvement earlier in the year.

“There was an obvious feeling in the room that fathers were proud to be there,” she wrote. No doubt, after spending some quality time with their children at Pizza for Papas, they continued to be both proud and involved.

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CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS