



# DPI VISTA Monthly



## Five Tough Questions about Student Achievement Every Action Team Should Ask

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

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The Partnership Action Team is a great place for parents and teachers to look closely at how families can help children learn. Use your Action Team's formidable knowledge, experience, and power to ask tough questions, get answers, and mobilize resources to improve student achievement.

Closing the achievement gap between students of color and their peers is an especially important Action Team goal. Wisconsin has gained national headlines for having one of the widest achievement gaps in the nation between white students and students of color. Poverty's role cannot be overstated.

Here are a few questions related to student achievement that your Partnership Action Team might want to explore with school administrators and staff:

1. What progress is our school making in closing achievement gaps between different groups of students at different grade levels? Where are the gaps?
2. How does student achievement in our school compare to other schools in the district or to schools of similar size statewide (visit the DPI [WINSS website](#) to view and to compare student achievement and other data about your school)?

3. What evidence do we have that the programs or strategies to improve student achievement and address poverty issues are working?
4. What are our school learning goals? How do we engage families help all students reach school learning goals?
5. What practices of family-school-community partnerships can help children achieve targeted learning goals?

Discussing these questions over several meetings will help your Action Team come up with partnership goals for 2011-12, and design activities, events, and efforts to expressly meet those goals.

**Need ideas for how to assemble an Action Team?** See pp. 106-108 in your copy of *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* by Joyce Epstein and Associates.

\*Continued on top of next page



### Save the Dates!

September 21-23  
In-Service Training  
Green Lake

October 20  
VISTA Check-In Webinar

October 17  
Quarterly Reports  
and Asset Maps Due

## Continued:

### Five Tough Questions about Student Achievement Every Action Team Should Ask

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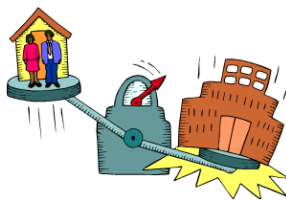
**Searching for what the Action Team should do at its first meeting?** See pp. 109-110 in the handbook. Here are a few helpful forms you'll also want to use with your Action Team, all available in the handbook:

- Starting Points: An Inventory of Present Practices of School, Family, and Community Partnerships, pp. 174-177
- One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships, pp. 181 and 185
- Examples of activities that help schools meet student achievement (and other goals), p. 160, elementary; p. 226, middle and high school.

**Wondering what an Action Team does?** Visit the online *Partnership Action Team Toolkit* for information, ideas, and activities to get yours underway.

## DPI VISTAs Really DO Make an Impact

by Betsy Prueter



Over the summer months and in the last few weeks before the start of a new school year we get some time to reflect on the previous years, how our VISTAs have impacted the communities and how we can strengthen the program for the following year. It's a time-intensive process- we write a renewal for funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, we develop new performance measures to assess the work our VISTAs do throughout the year, we hold focus groups with VISTA members to learn about their experiences with our program, we survey former sites to learn about their own progress and sustainability, and we put together an [Impact Summary](#) that documents some of what we have learned throughout our evaluation and review process. I'm excited by our data this year- and I am hopeful for a successful and productive year ahead! The work we all do to improve the relationship between community, home and school is more urgent than ever. I encourage you to read the full Impact Summary (linked above) but I have featured some of the biggest highlights below. For you alums and former sites, give yourselves a big pat on the back! For you current members and sites- get inspired and motivated!

- **School improvement:** 100% of former sites reported that their partnerships program and efforts improved after hosting a DPI VISTA member.

- **Increased attendance:** 90% of former sites reported that the percentage of families attending school wide family nights or workshops increased after hosting a DPI VISTA member.
- **Two-Way Communication:** 70% of former sites say that now they are making good progress towards communicating with all families in their school, including those who do not speak English.
- **Decision making:** 90% of 2010-11 VISTA schools indicated they are making progress towards ensuring that all major groups of families were involved in school decision making.
- **Addressing Language Barriers:** 90% of 2010-11 VISTA schools reported an *improvement* in communicating clearly with all families, including those who do not speak English.
- **Parent-Teacher communication:** 77% of teachers at 2010-11 VISTA schools conducted a one-on-one parent meeting with each student's family while the VISTA was serving.

Clearly, the work VISTAs (and supervisors...and sites) are doing is making a difference and an impact on the students, teachers, and families.

## Making the Transition

By Katherine Foster

Over the past four to five weeks our new DPI VISTAs have started their year of service in public schools across the state to build capacity for family and community involvement. Like many past VISTAs they are starting to feel the effects of embarking on an experience that is new and different. Starting a new job and for some, moving to a community they are unfamiliar with, is generally a big adjustment to endure.

As a VISTA, here are a few tips to keep in mind when making this transition into a new community and job:

**EMBED YOURSELF IN THE COMMUNITY** – Put yourself out there and meet as many people as you can. School and community events are always a good place to meet people and research where people in the community like to spend their time so you are better equipped to relate to their living styles.

**TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE RESOURCES** – Every community has assets and resources to offer to make community involvement a success. Walk around the community and see what businesses and organizations it has, what they offer, and how you can collaborate with them to benefit you both.

**BE CREATIVE** – As a VISTA you quickly pick up on the fact that you need to get creative when finding fun and cheap activities to participate in. There are lots of free activities out there! Network with your fellow VISTAs, other AmeriCorps members, co-workers and the community.

Making the transition can be rough at first, but one thought to keep in mind is, you will get out of your VISTA experience what you put into it.



## “Hey! That’s a good idea!”

### Scaling Up

**VISTA:** Jon Peters

**Site:** Racine Unified School District

Jon Peters has begun to meet with principals at six Racine schools who will be implementing family-school-community partnerships this coming year. They are getting trained and learning about the support they can receive from the VISTA and supervisor at the district level.

### Summer Celebration

**VISTA:** Bix Firer

**Site:** Parents Plus: MPS Metro Region

Bix Firer organized a celebration event for the Milwaukee Public Schools student interns who worked in the community garden this summer to recognize their hard work- and the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor!

### Relationship-Building

**VISTA:** Heather Keyes

**Site:** Indian Community School

Heather Keyes just returned from Family Camp, an annual event put on by the Indian Community School to help staff and families bond together before the school year starts. The group participated in a lot of family friendly activities including hiking, crafts, swimming and parent breakout discussions.



### Community Partnerships

**VISTA:** Brandon Jackson

**Site:** Milwaukee Parent Teacher Association

Brandon Jackson continues to build a strong community partner network for the Milwaukee PTA. He is working to connect with various organizations, businesses, and community agencies which would be interested in working with the PTA and have similar goals to increase family and community involvement in schools. Recent partners have been the Human Development Corporation, Wheaton Franciscan, and the Argosy Foundation.

# VISTA to VISTA with Betsy Prueter and Katherine Foster

## Betsy's Interview

Katherine: What do you like most about living in Madison?

Betsy: I love the spirit of Madisonians. It could be negative 30 or 90 degrees and people are outside, biking, running, ice fishing, canoeing. You can't convince me that biking as icicles form on your eyelashes is a good idea but hey, I'm from Ohio.

Katherine: What is the best part of your job?

Betsy: The view of Lake Monona from my desk. Just kidding (sort of). I love working with a program I once served in (I was a VISTA in Boston in 2004) and being able to continue to work with people who want to change the world.



Katherine: What is your idea of a relaxing day?

Betsy: Sleep, eat, drink iced tea, go for a bike ride, watch Netflix. Repeat.

Katherine: Where is the most extravagant place you have traveled to?



Betsy: My husband and I went to Paris in 2007 and it felt pretty extravagant sitting along the Seine drinking wine and eating amazing food (I never turn down a good crepe).

Katherine: What would you say to someone who is thinking of becoming a VISTA?

Betsy: If you commit yourself to this experience 100% and immerse yourself fully in the community, you will succeed. There will be immeasurable challenges along the way but it is undoubtedly a rewarding and fulfilling "job." Not everyone can do it well, so be sure you are joining VISTA for the right reasons (you know, for the money :)).

## Katherine's Interview



Betsy: What did you love the most about living in rural Minnesota?

Katherine: I loved the people! From the first day that I moved to rural Northern Minnesota everyone was so warm and welcoming. There is something about small rural communities where you feel like a member of a family no matter if you grew up there or not.

Betsy: What is the biggest difference between being in NCCC and being in VISTA?

Katherine: I don't know where to begin. For myself the biggest difference is that as a VISTA it felt like more of an average job because you do not have to move to a different location to work for a new non-profit organization every two months. VISTA is not as formal as NCCC either because you do not have to wear uniforms.

Betsy: What are you looking forward to about your VISTA Leader term?

Katherine: I had a wonderful VISTA experience in Minnesota and I am excited to support the new DPI VISTAs for this new year in hopes that they will have just as much of a fulfilling and rewarding year as a VISTA that I did. Additionally I have a strong passion for the work that DPI does and I am excited to be part of the work they do for the next year.

Betsy: What reality TV show do you think you could be a contestant on? Why?

Katherine: Dancing with the Stars. I love to dance and with the right dance instructor I'm sure I could land some pretty sweet dance moves.

Betsy: What book do you think all VISTAs should read?

Katherine: The Glass Castle – a real eye opening story as to how families with a rough home situation survive.

Betsy: Who do you really look up to (personally or professionally)?

Katherine: Personally and professionally I look up to people who make the best out of a bad situation no matter how tough it is.

## ART ALLEY

## New Beginnings

by Gertrude B. McClain

It's only the beginning now  
...a pathway yet unknown  
At times the sound of other steps  
...sometimes we walk alone

The best beginnings of our lives  
May sometimes end in sorrow  
But even on our darkest days  
The sun will shine tomorrow.

So we must do our very best  
Whatever life may bring  
And look beyond the winter chill  
To smell the breath of spring.

Into each life will always come  
A time to start anew  
A new beginning for each heart  
As fresh as morning dew.

Although the cares of life are great  
And hands are bowed so low  
The storms of life will leave behind  
The wonder of a rainbow.

The years will never take away  
Our chance to start anew  
It's only the beginning now  
So dreams can still come true.



### Schools Cannot Do It Alone

by Jamie Vollmer

Outlines the process for having a conversation with communities about how imperative it is that schools be funded adequately.

Recommended by Juanita Peck

### Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences by Leonard Sax

In *Why Gender Matters*, psychologist and family physician Dr. Leonard Sax leads parents through the mystifying world of gender differences by explaining the biologically different ways in which children think, feel, and act. He addresses a host of issues, including discipline, learning, risk taking, aggression, sex, and drugs, and shows how boys and girls react in predictable ways to different situations.

Recommended by Katherine Foster

## Books Around The Corner

### RTI Success: Proven Tools and Strategies for Schools and Classrooms

By Elizabeth Whitten, Ph.D.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an innovative instructional method that enables educators to assess and meet the needs of struggling students before they have fallen too far behind. An all-in-one resource, this book offers tools that can be used by all school staff in carrying out Response to Intervention.

Recommended by Heather Keyes





## Recipe of the Month:

### Lime-Honey Glazed Chicken

By Samantha Aguirre

The sweet and tangy lime-honey marinade is simmered on the stovetop and then used as a sauce to baste and glaze the chicken. Don't let the chicken marinate any longer than 2 hours; over marinating in soy sauce and lime juice can make the texture of the meat spongy.

#### 8 servings

| **Active Time:** 30 minutes | **Total Time:** 3 1/2 hours (including 2 hours marinating time)

#### Ingredients

- 6 tablespoons honey
- 6 tablespoons reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons freshly grated lime zest
- 6 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 4 6-ounce bone-in chicken thighs, skin and excess fat removed
- 2 12-ounce bone-in chicken breasts, skin and excess fat removed, cut in half crosswise

**Preparation** Mix honey, soy sauce, lime zest, lime juice and crushed red pepper in a large bowl. Add chicken pieces; stir to coat. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours, stirring occasionally.

About 20 minutes before you are ready to grill, preheat a gas grill (with all burners lit) to 400°F or build a fire in a charcoal grill and let it burn down to medium heat (about 400°F).

If using a gas grill, turn off one burner (leaving 1 to 2 burners lit, depending on your grill). If using a charcoal grill, move the coals to one side. Remove the chicken pieces from the marinade (reserve marinade) and place bone-side down (with the thick part of the meat facing up) on the unheated side of the grill rack. Close the lid and roast undisturbed for 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, place the marinade in a small saucepan over medium-high heat and boil until reduced by about half and thickened to a glaze, 8 to 10 minutes.

Rotate the chicken to other spots on the unheated portion of the grill to ensure even cooking and lightly brush with some of the glaze. Cover and continue roasting, basting once more about halfway through cooking, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the meat without touching bone registers 165°F, 10 to 20 minutes more.

## Grant Opportunities

### Grants

#### One by One: Making a difference every business day

Each business day 4Imprint's "One by One" campaign gives a worthy organization \$500 in promotional products to spread the word, recruit volunteers, thank donors, offer comfort to someone in need or in some other way turns one thing into something much more.

Eligibility: 501(c)3 charities, religious organizations or accredited schools

Deadline: 2 months before the event

<http://onebyone.4imprint.com/application.aspx>

#### Clorox: Power a Bright Future Grants

Clorox Power a Bright Future Grants aim to provide necessary resources to help support school programs that enrich kids' lives.

Maximum award: \$50,000. Eligibility: Anyone at least 18 years old at time of entry can nominate an accredited K-12 public or private school program. Deadline: September 27, 2011.

<http://www.powerabrightfuture.com/>



#### U.S. Government: Fulbright Classroom Teacher Exchange Program

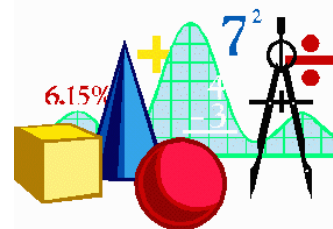
The Fulbright Classroom Teacher Exchange Program provides opportunities for teachers to participate in direct exchanges of positions with colleagues from other countries for a semester or academic year. By living and working in the cultures of their host countries, Fulbright teachers gain an understanding and appreciation of the similarities and differences in national cultures and education systems. Maximum award: year-long or semester-long direct exchange of teaching positions with a counterpart in another country teaching the same subject(s) at the same level. Eligibility: full-time U.S. teachers. Deadline: October 15, 2011.

<http://www.fulbrightteacherexchange.org/cte.cfm>

#### Prudential: Spirit of Community Awards

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honor young people in grades 5 through 12 who have demonstrated exemplary voluntary service to their communities. Maximum award: \$1,000 and a trip to Washington, D.C. Eligibility: students grades 5-12 who have conducted a volunteer service activity within the past year. Deadline: November 1, 2011.

<http://spirit.prudential.com>



#### Toshiba America Foundation: Grants for Science and Math Education

Toshiba America Foundation Grants aim to contribute to the quality of science and mathematics education in U.S. communities by investing in projects designed by classroom teachers to improve science and mathematics education. Maximum award: \$1,000. Eligibility: teachers K-12. Deadline: October 1, 2011.

<http://www.toshiba.com/taf/k5.jsp>



Let's Build Something Together™

#### Lowe's Toolbox for Education

Lowe's Toolbox for Education grants fund school improvement projects initiated by parents in recognition of the importance of parental involvement in education. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: K-12 schools (including charter, parochial, private, etc.) or parent groups (associated with a non-profit K-12 school). Deadline: October 14, 2011.

<http://toolboxforeducation.com/>

#### American School Board/ Sodexo: Magna Awards

The American School Board/ Sodexo Magna Awards honor outstanding programs developed or supported by school boards that showcase school district leadership, creativity, and commitment to student achievement. Maximum award: \$4,000. Eligibility: local school boards. Deadline: October 31, 2011.

<http://www.asbj.com/magna/>

Grants Information Collection: Grants Library at UW-Madison

<http://grants.library.wisc.edu/seminars.html>

## Important Resources

### Resources

Free and discounted cell phones for low income individuals and families!

<https://www.reachoutmobile.com/index.php>



National PTA – Family-School Partnerships

[http://www.pta.org/family\\_school\\_partnerships.asp](http://www.pta.org/family_school_partnerships.asp)



Education Northwest: Creating Strong Schools and Communities

<http://www.educationnorthwest.org>

VISTA Campus



<http://vistacampus.org/>

National Network of Partnership Schools

<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/>

Count Me in Too

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/countmein/index.html>

FINE – Family Involvement Network of Educators

<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators>



National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education

[www.ncpie.org](http://www.ncpie.org)



WINSS – Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools

<http://dpi.wi.gov/sig/index.html>