



DPI VISTA Project
Promising Partnership Practices
2010-2011



Site: *Wausau School District*

Promising Practice: *“World Day of Snowman” Celebration*

The “World Day of Snowman” Celebration was developed to be a morning of family fun that incorporated learning activities. It was also a new way to allow families to spend time at the School Forest and attract families that have not attended previous Family University Network (F.U.N.) events. All families at Title I schools in the district were invited to attend. Mad Science presented their “Wacky Winter Science Show”, which family members of all ages enjoyed. The interactive show featured a mysterious North Pole rock and static electricity experiments along with other entertainment. Following the show, stations were available that represented a variety of learning subjects, such as reading, science, and art. Children and their families participated in activities such as a wildlife museum scavenger hunt, examining snowflakes under a microscope, making paper snowflakes, reading winter stories, and making slime. Books were borrowed from the local public library and included stories in Spanish and English. Throughout the morning, families could enjoy a snack with hot cider in the lodge. Before leaving, each family received a new book, activity book, and coupon for a free “Blizzard” from Dairy Queen.

VISTA: *Amanda Vandehey*

Site: *Wadewitz Elementary School*

Partnership Practice: *Parent Volunteer Database*

To increase the prevalence of parents volunteering in the school, the Action Team decided to create a parent database for grades K-4. The database is part of an effort to make parents more involved in the school community by improving the communication methods with families. To obtain the information for the database, surveys were sent home to families. The surveys included questions about volunteering in the school, when parents were available to volunteer, and a place to include their contact information if they would like to volunteer. Students received a treat if they returned a survey from their family. This was done to encourage a high number of returned surveys. The information collected was then put into a database that all staff in the school can access. This will be a great tool for staff to use when volunteers are needed next year.

VISTA: *Bethany Bridges*

Site: *Cunningham Elementary School*

Partnership Practice: *Family Fitness Night and Food Fair*

At Cunningham, teachers were excited about a wellness focus and saw an opportunity to involve parents in wellness efforts. For the event, teachers could design their own physical activity to host in their classroom, or choose from a list of ideas. Title I funds were available for teachers to purchase any needed materials for their activity. Two teachers took the lead in securing donations from local businesses and organizations for raffle prizes. We focused our attention on natural partners such as the YMCA, organic grocery stores, and the Parks and Recreation department. A culinary student from the local technical college volunteered to help prep snacks and answer questions from parents for the food fair. A local grocery store offered a discount on fresh produce, which allowed us to purchase enough to send samples home with every family in a gift bag. We also included recipes in the gift bags that showcased those fresh ingredients. On the night of the event, families were welcomed and given a card with a list of activities in each classroom. They circulated through the school, getting a stamp on the card when they completed

that activity. There was also a walking track through the school with posters from www.mypyramid.gov about healthy eating and exercise. The NFL's Let's Move campaign also provided free posters and stickers with the Green Bay Packers' logo on them, which were quite popular! The food fair was set up in a larger classroom and featured a quiz game about local Wisconsin fruits and vegetables. 4-H also had a booth with games and information about whole grains. We ordered samples of the fruits and vegetables that students were trying in the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables program so they could show them to their parents and have a healthy snack at the fair. Families, students, and teachers all enjoyed the wellness event.

VISTA: *Emily Caragianis*

Site: *Milwaukee Public Schools - Metro Region*

Partnership Practice: *Region Newsletter*

In an effort to help high schools identify successful practices, we have started the Metro Region bi-monthly newsletter. The Metro Region, which is comprised of nine high schools, has been the first Region to implement a newsletter. This gives the high schools not only a chance to showcase their work, but it also serves as a resource to other schools that may be looking for fresh ideas. In addition to highlighting promising practices, we have also included sections on upcoming partnership events, and a question and answer section that are relevant to Action Teams. Two AmeriCorps VISTAs at the Metro Region have worked hard on developing a newsletter template, collecting promising practices, and distributing the newsletters. The newsletters are primarily distributed at the Regional meetings that happen the first Thursday of each month. These Region meetings include parents that are involved with their school's Action Teams who then share with others members. In addition to distribution at the Region meetings, the newsletters are also given to each principal to share with school staff, and placed in parent rooms for other parents that may be interested. Schools have been excited to see their hard work showcased, and have also appreciated tips on new partnership activities.

VISTA: *Angie Domagalski*

Site: *West Milwaukee Intermediate School and Longfellow Elementary School*

Promising Practice: *Language Classes*

There are several community programs that offer adult ESL classes, but none of them specifically focus on effectively communicating with schools or on how to promote learning in the home environment. The goal was to create partnerships between schools and Spanish speaking families in order to provide positive learning environments for the students. Two sessions of ten classes each were held from November through March and included parents from four different schools in the district. An ESL instructor was recruited to design the curriculum and teach the classes. Each class was designed around learning key English phrases that are used to communicate with schools (i.e. My name is ____, and my child is _____. He/she is sick today.). Classes also explained how to fill out important school forms that are frequently only available in English and taught important reading strategies that would allow the ESL parents to read with their child. The instructor also spent time explaining cultural differences. Five classes were dedicated to working on the computer and showing parents how to view the school's website and how to access educational computer games. Almost every class ended with a game that reinforced the class lessons. Bilingual volunteers were also recruited from two local colleges to work one-on-one or in small groups with the students during class time. Bilingual parents from

Longfellow Elementary and West Milwaukee Intermediate also volunteered. These volunteers worked with the small groups on completing assignments given by the instructor. Parents were very pleased with the language courses and how much they learned and they are excited for them to continue next year.

VISTA: *Amanda Shapiro*

Site: *Grove Elementary School*

Promising Practice: *Explore the Library Night*

The specific goal of this practice was to provide information to parents as well as fun, educational literacy related activities for the whole family. The first session of the event was a half hour block that was broken up into an informational session for parents to learn about online resources and a read-aloud session for children. The school librarian led a parent informational session in the computer lab, showing parents how they could access resources online from home. The school principal and a kindergarten teacher each read a story aloud to students in the gym which had been transformed into an enchanted jungle full of trees, monkeys, alligators and snakes. Students sat or laid on pillows and beanbags that classroom teachers had lent for this event. After the parent session ended, children were able to meet up with their families in the library for some fun literacy related activities including scavenger hunts to help learn about the library, literacy crosswords, word searches and scrambles, flashlight reading, library book check out, page estimating, and bookmark making. The lights were turned off in the gym and string lights were turned on to create a twinkling jungle atmosphere perfect for flashlight reading. Students received a free book for attending and could earn raffle prize tickets for participating in many of the activities. A small snack was also provided. One teacher greeted families as they arrived and directed them where to go while another helped students select a book to take home. Two community members helped to run different activity tables. Students were encouraged to dress up like an explorer or bring a flashlight for an extra raffle ticket. About a dozen raffle prizes consisted of educational resources that tied in with our “Explore the Library” theme and were awarded to students the next day at school. We also provided a parent resource table with free parenting magazines, newsletters and brochures for our city public library, as well as information to promote our PTC (Parent Teacher Council). During the event, parents were able to sign up for a school library card and check out books to read at home with their children.

VISTA: *Jennifer Orcutt*

Site: *Milwaukee Public Schools – Metro Region*

Promising Practice: *Silent Art Auction and Concert Fundraiser*

This fundraiser was designed to successfully raise money to operate a community garden internship for high school students and to cultivate local support for the program. A local establishment volunteered to host the fundraiser on a Friday evening and allowed us to hang art on the walls for a silent auction early in the evening and bring in local musicians to play later in the evening. They also agreed to let us keep all cover charge profits from the night. The venue donated the service of a sound person to handle the music, as well as a door person to collect donations. We approached local artists, who participate in community projects, and donations came in. We also approached local musicians who are active in the community. Prior to the event we did promotion and the bands and artists who supported the project did their own promotion. We held the silent auction for a couple of hours, after

which we began the music. Due to great promotion efforts, we completely filled the venue and raised nearly \$1,300. This amount will cover nearly all of the internship's costs, including the stipends. The communities surrounding those targeted by our program were instrumental in coming out to the event, donating, buying art and showing interest in our program. The fundraiser would have not been such a great success without this sort of community support.

VISTA: *Bix Firer*

Site: *Madison Metropolitan School District, Midvale Elementary School*

Partnership Practice: *Intercambio: Language and Cultural Exchange Program*

The Intercambio: Language and Cultural Exchange Program had its first year at Midvale Elementary School from the fall 2010 semester through the spring 2011 semester. Each of these two sessions consisted of 18 classes that were taught over a period of 10 weeks at Midvale Elementary School. Intercambio (which means "exchange" in Spanish) is a program that aims to teach English and Spanish as a second language to adults who are school staff or students' parents. To provide certified teaching instruction of ESL and Spanish, three teachers are hired by the Literacy Network, a Madison literacy organization, to lead an hour of formal language instruction. There are typically two ESL classrooms (divided into beginner and intermediate levels) and one Spanish classroom. The adult participants often are native Spanish or English speakers, so that they can each attend an hour of an ESL class or a Spanish class and then exchange their new language skills in conversational practice with one another for the second hour of the program. However, the program also consists of participants who speak Nepali, Japanese, Arabic or Hmong as their native language who wished to improve their English language abilities. There is a need to overcome language barriers in order to better communicate about the students' education and to make all of our school's learning partners feel welcome at the school. Through the Intercambio Language and Cultural Exchange program, our learning partners improve communication with one another and with their community, increase literacy achievement, and learn about and effectively use cultural practices that are relevant to education and practices that increase language acquisition. Some especially positive outcomes from these classes were the strong bonds and warm friendships that arose from the participants learning from one another.

VISTA: *Katrina Waldron*

Site: *Ashland High School*

Partnership Practice: *Creating Caring Communities*

Creating Caring Communities (CCC) is a violence-prevention program that teaches concepts and techniques that empower bystanders to become the caring majority and effectively intervene in bullying situations. CCC's overarching goal is social climate change within the Ashland community to reduce violence, harassment, bullying and suicide. To secure tolerance within a diverse community, common language and attitudes need to be community-wide. The program is guided by concepts of 6 homeroom lessons and driven by a cadre comprised of students, staff, administration and community members which in turn implement all school and community-wide campaigns. The program aims to 1) create a safe and respectful learning environment in the schools of the Ashland School District and 2) transform the climate of the greater Ashland community into one of respect, empathy and inclusiveness. Some ways that the CCC Cadre achieves these goals are by: developing contacts with area businesses, newspapers, radios in

order to promote & publicize CCC efforts and activities to the public, developing community-wide workshops aimed at educating parents on school & student resources, CCC, violence prevention and school climate, establishing a 'Caught Caring' campaign to recognize students who were caught showing random acts of kindness, and providing inter-group field trips to bring diverse student groups together in order to alleviate tension, break down barriers, and improve relations.

VISTA: *Kathy Lewis*

Site: *Milwaukee Public Schools*

Partnership Practice: *Parent Involvement Report Cards*

While parental involvement activities are carried out regularly at school and district levels, its importance to student achievement is not always readily vocalized. Key district staff members were trying to think of a way to reiterate that parental involvement is a priority in Milwaukee Public Schools and came up with the idea for the Parental Involvement Report Cards. The template for the Report Card was a simple half-page for each school in the district and each card was completed with individual school's data. Schools were graded based on how many of six specific parental involvement activities they completed and submitted to the district (an "A" for all six completed, a "B" for five, and so on). The activities included sending delegates to represent the school on the Title I District Advisory Committee and having a functioning Action Team for Partnerships, among others. The superintendent distributed the report cards to school leaders at a monthly principal's meeting after giving a speech on the importance of parents to student success. This venue has previously been used primarily for information on curriculum and instruction, accountability, and data. Setting aside one of these meetings for a discussion on parent involvement was another way to make clear that the district takes this work seriously. The report cards got the principals thinking about how their school was doing in terms of parental involvement. Those with high grades were reaffirmed that they were on the right track, and those with lower grades were reminded of some valuable activities in which they should be participating. It was also discovered that many schools with lower grades had actually been participating in the practices all along but hadn't been sharing the information, so this practice was also a way to get forms and documentation turned in to the district office for accountability.

VISTA: *Angela Rumsey*

Site: *Indian Community School*

Partnership Practice: *Rock the Night Away Family Fun Night*

As a school fundraiser and family night, the *Rock the Night Away* event was fun and affordable for all our families. A spaghetti dinner was provided for a small cost while the dance afterwards remained free, allowing families who could not afford the dinner to still enjoy the dance. The planning committee was able to purchase food at a discounted rate through a local pizza place and found excellent raffle prizes and bake sale items that were donated. All other needs were met through the Family Resource Center Event budget. Through staff and parent connections they were able to hire a DJ with sound equipment who volunteered his time and service. They also found a photographer from the community who agreed to take photos at the event on a volunteer basis as well. The UWM art department volunteered to create several 50's themed background displays that could be used for picture opportunities and to decorate the space. Many staff

members and families volunteered during the event while students contributed by creating decorations for the gym.

VISTA: *Heather Keyes*

Site: *Clarke Street School*

Partnership Practice: *School Newspaper*

Though school newsletters are not new, Clarke was ready to revisit this practice which hadn't been done in awhile. In both the staff and parent climate surveys conducted at that beginning of the year a school newsletter was something people indeed missed. After the survey, a committee of various staff and parents was formed to brainstorm about a school-wide newspaper. It was agreed that with a new paper, responsibilities would have to be shared, so that no one person was doing it all. Additionally, the group decided to try and find a business or businesses that would print the paper at little or no cost. Through a family connection, the committee was introduced to CH2M-Hill and IVIZE, environmental engineering firms that offered to help by printing the first edition of the Clarke Connection. IVIZE also agreed to continue printing subsequent issues. Before publication of the first issue, a school wide contest was held to "name the paper." After the first issue, students and teachers wanted to know more about how they could be in subsequent issues. There were several ways that teachers could be involved including: submitting an article summarizing what their class was currently working on, submitting student generated work to highlight outstanding efforts in the classroom and finding a student willing to be interviewed about what they are learning in class. One of the goals of the *Clarke Connection* is to be an information source for everyone in the Clarke Street community. Parents and teachers work very hard, and sometimes are unaware of what others are doing. *The 'Connection* makes sure that the efforts of teachers and parents to support students don't go unnoticed. Furthermore, the *Clarke Street Connection* serves as an excellent resource for parents of younger children and parents of students new to Clarke as they are able to see what other activities are going on school wide.

VISTA: *Mike Valente*

Site: *Washington Elementary School*

Partnership Practice: *Science Carnival*

Washington Elementary School, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh Science Outreach, hosted a Science Carnival Family Night. The goal of this practice was to involve parents in many of the students' favorite subject, science. This event brought families into the school for a positive experience and helped parents understand the science concepts their children were learning in school. The Science Carnival provided a learning opportunity for families, knowing that being "science literate" is important for both students and their parents. The ATP contacted the UW-Oshkosh Science Outreach, a group of university students and faculty advisors that provides science outreach to local schools. They agreed to come and host the Science Carnival, provided the supplies and trained students running each station. The event opened with a healthy dinner of submarine sandwiches, bananas, cookies and milk. After dinner, the families were able to travel on their own to five stations: *Oobleck*, the sticky green substance in Dr. Seuss' *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*; *Hovercraft*, students could ride a hovercraft down our school's main hallway understanding how air can be used to levitate a person; *What's in*

Blood?, students used various foods like Red Hots, breakfast cereals and Nerds candy to visualize the different components of blood; *Clean a Penny*, in which students discover what types of acidic substances best clean a tarnished penny; *Screaming Balloons*, using only a hardware nut and a balloon, could students make the balloon sound like a screaming person?; *Paper Airplanes*, how to create an aerodynamic airplane and two special shows: a *Van de Graff Show* and a *Chemistry Demonstration*. The evening ended with door prizes of science kits so the education could continue at home.

VISTA: *Tracy Steffens*

Site: *Sennett Middle School*

Promising Practice: *Beyond the Bake Sale Book Group*

A book study group was formed to read and discuss the book by Karen Mapp and Anne Hendersen *Beyond the Bake Sale*. To begin, one point-person who read *Beyond the Bake Sale* did research on partnerships and parent involvement prior to starting the book group. This person was responsible for organizing when and where the book group would take place, and facilitating the book group meetings by having discussion topics and activities planned out. A professional development proposal was written and submitted to the district, several months in advance, for approval of credit offerings to staff members who took the course. Once approved, they promoted the book study via flyers, email and word-of-mouth. Personal invitations seemed to work best. Support from leadership was also important. Once they recruited several staff members to be a part of the group, they began meeting every week for a couple hours to discuss each chapter of the book together. They would meet at the school, coffee shops or restaurants. The facilitator prepared for each session by planning discussion questions and activities for each chapter. They also kept a log of questions or ideas that came up from our discussions. At the end, each member made up their own informal action plan for ways that they were going to reach out to families and improve their methods of engaging parents. In addition to learning about the rationale and research behind partnership practices presented in the book, the group discussed ways that the staff and families could utilize the tools offered in the book to improve partnership practices. Finally, the group used what they learned to make a list of suggestions to present to school and district leadership.

VISTA: *Ellen Carpenter*

Site: *Alexander Mitchell Integrated Arts School*

Promising Practice: *Silly Putty Science Night*

To host the Silly Putty Science Night, planning had to begin about a month before the actual date of the event. That was when we ordered supplies and had short discussions about how the night should run. In this case, we looked up a simple recipe for silly putty. A volunteer began to break down the steps for making the putty into stations. Another volunteer collected educational information about polymers (silly putty is a polymer) from Wikipedia, videos on making silly putty from YouTube, and fun facts about silly putty from the Silly Putty University Website (www.sillyputty.com). A teacher took the collected information and put it into a power point to be shown in the computer lab, or as it was renamed for the event, "Silly Putty University." In the Silly Putty University the presentation was given to families to teach them about polymers and videos accompanied the power point to show families what they would be doing in the Silly

Putty Factory. When families finished in the Silly Putty University we thought it would be fun to do a graduation, complete with pomp and circumstance and a small diploma. The diploma was our way of making sure that people entering the “factory” had already attended the university. The Silly Putty Factory was housed in our lower cafeteria and this is where the silly putty was made and packaged. This process was broken down into six stations: 1) Collecting your supplies, 2) Obtaining the Glue, 3) Obtaining the Starch, 4) Mixing the starch and the glue, 5) Adding food coloring, 6) Packaging the putty. Families could not leave the factory until their putty underwent “quality control,” the final station. This station was incorporated into the packaging station and it made sure that no children left the factory without their parents, and made sure that all putty was in a container while families made their way to the Experimentation Lab. In the Experimentation Lab families had an opportunity to experiment with the different properties of the putty. We had balloons with experiments dealing with air, static electricity and sound in case the families finished experimenting with the putty and wanted more experiments to keep them busy.

VISTA: *Kristen Donat*

Site: *Alexander Mitchell Integrated Arts School*

Promising Practice: *Parent Focus Group*

In the beginning we decided to start this group as a strategy to increase parent involvement and decision making within Mitchell. We created fliers in English and Spanish and sent them home in the Wednesday folder. Fliers were hung around the school, teachers informed parents and we promoted the group at family events. One of our community volunteers canvassed the community to obtain food donations. The first group focused on “what we [as parents] want for our children” and “what we [as parents] need to *do* to get what we want.” Later we discussed what parent involvement means to us, and the difference between active and passive participation. About 8 parents showed up for the first meeting and attendance continued to grow with each meeting. As should happen when attempting to building relationships, we chose to do an ice breaker during the introductions. The ice breaker we chose is called “Memory Maps.” Each participant was asked to draw a picture of their childhood neighborhood and then share with the group what they included to their memory map and why. This is a great way to build relationships and get to know each other while also contributing to a conversation about the significance of community. At another meeting we asked parents to: “Name two things I can do with my hands, two things I can do with my brain/head, two things I can do with my heart, and two people who I can go to if I need to get something done.” These questions help the group learn assets and skills that each person brings to the table. As the meetings continued, parents began to talk more about activities they would like to see happen at the school, including: craft time for parents, English classes, GED classes and computer classes. The facilitator encouraged parents to organize themselves, stressing that the school cannot necessarily provide all of these activities without their help. We used the information gathered to decide where to start. The Principal was contacted and approved the craft time and parents have now started to have classes to learn how to make piñatas. The parent with the skills to make piñatas gathered contact information of interested parents and contacted them to set up a time. The piñatas made by the parents will be used at our end of the year community day.

VISTA: *Kristen Donat*

Site: *School District of Altoona*

Promising Practice: *Collaboration with UW-Stout Organizational Development Department*

The purpose of collaborating with the Organizational Development Department at UW-Stout was to receive information regarding best practices in surveying opinions of the various stakeholders that make up our community: families, staff, students, community members without children in school, and businesses. Our VISTA received information that a professor at UW-Stout was looking for projects for students to work on that involved surveys and focus groups. The VISTA made the initial contact by telephone, followed up with another phone call during which the project was discussed with the professor. After discussion of the type of questions necessary for our study as well as the surveys that we had at our disposal, two university graduate students were assigned to our project. Working together, the students and the VISTA divided the project into three broad areas of stakeholders based on the method with which we believed we could best interact with the group: parents and school staff, community members without children in school, and businesses. We began with a survey of families and staff because we could use an internet based survey. The university students rewrote the questions to specifications for the instrument, built the survey using the Qualtrics instrument, collected the data, and analyzed the data. In addition, they reviewed and analyzed all of the information we had previously used to communicate with the public regarding the failed 2010 referendum and gave us a detailed description of what methods to use to improve our chances of passing a referendum in the future. Our VISTA will follow up with the other stakeholder groups using the detailed information from the report, and implement the recommended changes. As school finance is a universal problem for many schools, we have been asked to remain as a client of the Organizational Development program into the future.

VISTA: *Juanita Peck*

Site: *Racine Unified School District*

Promising Practice: *Summer Activities Fair*

The Community Partners of Racine group came up with the Summer Activities Fair to celebrate and promote all the summer time youth programs in the community. RUSD and different community partners would be able to advertise their summer programs for children all in one place. As a whole, the focus was providing a one stop shop opportunity for parents to register and get information about all the activities in their community and to promote youth engagement in quality programs. The Summer Activities Fair took a couple months of planning. At the end of January, the group solidified the plan to have the event and named it the Summer Activities Fair. Different community partners headed sub-committees to help plan the event. The Logistics sub-committee was responsible for the venue, the lay out, inviting and confirming community organizations to participate. The Entertainment and Activities committee was responsible for the activities area and scheduling entertainment on the stage for the day. The Volunteer committee was responsible for recruiting and scheduling volunteers for the event. The Advertising and Promotions committee was responsible for getting the word out and making signs and posters for the event. There was also a committee responsible for food at the event. The week before the event, phone calls went out to all the exhibitors registered for the SAF to confirm attendance, booth electrical needs, and door prize donations (optional but over 80% of venders donated something). The event took place at Festival Hall in the heart of downtown Racine. It is often the center for many of the largest

community gatherings in the greater Racine area. Festival Hall was set up for the event the day before the SAF. The event was a huge success with about 100 community members promoting their summer programs, and 764 children and family members in attendance at the event.

VISTA: *Jon Peters*