

Increasing Parent/Community Involvement with the Homeless and Highly Mobile Families at Ashley Park University Learning Center

Charlotte, North Carolina

Presentation By

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Abstract: A presentation on actions taken by an elementary school to support academic achievement of low income students and increase school-community relations. Highlights include, building partnerships with the faith community to recruit reading tutors and donate school supplies; developing training sessions to build parenting skills and increase family involvement in education, and expanding after school programs to serve all students.

Key Words: Academic Achievement; Access to Resources, After School Programs; Community (Awareness of Homelessness/High Mobility); Elementary School; Parent and Family Involvement; Poverty and Surveys

School and WBPD Profile

School: **Ashley Park Elementary**

Grade levels: **K-5**

School District: **Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools (CMS)**

City/Town: **Charlotte** State: **NC**

School enrollment size for 2006-07: **320**

Number of students experiencing homelessness/high mobility at your school in 2006-07: **50**

Number of students experiencing homelessness/high mobility involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **50**

Total number of students involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **320**

Number of educators/teachers involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **50 staff members**

Number of administrators involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **3**

Number of parents/families involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **45**

Mobility rate for 2005-06: **11%** Mobility rate for 2006-07: **15.6%**

Percent of students eligible for free/reduce lunch: **97%**

Title I School: **yes**

Annual Yearly Progress Rating: **Goals met**

Number of community members involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **80**

Number of non-profits involved in 2006-07 WBPD projects/actions: **2**

Homelessness rate of community: **Most recent Point in Time (PIT) count = 9000**

Unemployment rate of community: **4.9% of labor force Source:ESRI**

High school graduation rate: **2005-2006 = 74.6**

Introduction

Ashley Park University Elementary School is located in Charlotte, North Carolina in the Piedmont region of the state. The city of Charlotte is the county seat of Mecklenburg. Charlotte is part of what is referred to as the Charlotte Metropolitan Area or Metrolina area. The city is located in south-central North Carolina near the South Carolina border. Charlotte is called the “Queen City” or “the Q.C” or the “Hornet’s Nest”. These nicknames honor Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg who was the German-born wife of King George III of Great Britain during the revolution. During the American Revolution the British are said to have confronted a “hornet’s nest” of opposition when they tried to occupy Charlotte. Presently, Charlotte has become known, also, as “The City of Trees” and “The City of Churches“.

Charlotte’s breakdown by race according to the 2000 census is as follows:

- 58.26 % White/Caucasian
- 32.72% Black/African American
- 7.36% Hispanic or Latino
- 3.41% Asian (Gujarati Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese(Hmong))
- 0.34% Native American
- 0.05% Pacific Islander
- 3.56% from other races;
- 1.66% from two or more races

The school system is referred to as Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools or more frequently called CMS. Charlotte-Mecklenburg has a population of 2,120,745. The city proper has a population of 664,332.

CMS has 150 schools with 130,000 students. Four to five new schools are projected to open every year for the next decade or more. Due to an explosion in population growth, the school population increases by at least 5,000 students per year—thus the need for ever-increasing new schools.

At present there are approximately 2200 homeless and highly mobile students in CMS served through the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987 and its 2001 reauthorization.

Economically, Charlotte has become especially predominant in financial services. The headquarters for Bank of America and Wachovia Bank are located in Charlotte. Retail commerce presents its prominence with interests such as Lowe's, Time Warner Cable, Muzak, Harris-Teeter Grocery Stores and Belk Department Stores. Lowe's Motor Speedway and The U.S. Airways Hub are major businesses, as well, headquartered in Charlotte.

Nonetheless, many inner-city schools in CMS have low achieving students from families that live in poverty. Ashley Park, our school of focus here, is one of those schools. Ashley Park is located on the west side of Charlotte in a predominantly minority and diverse neighborhood. Demographic information from Ashley Park is charted below:

- 97% of Students Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Lunch
- 99 % Minority Students
- 2003-2004 56% on grade level in Reading
- 2005-2006 78% on grade level in Reading
- 2003-2004 71% on grade level in Math
- 2004-2005 86% on grade level in Math.
- 310 students enrolled
- 10-12% homeless and/or highly mobile

Until this school year (2006-2007), Ashley Park was in what is called "School Improvement" in North Carolina. School Improvement means a school has failed to meet AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) in the same subject for two or more consecutive years.

Structure of Our Project

The homeless and highly mobile students had been identified before school started for Ashley Park by the CMS McKinney-Vento office. In our initial meeting after attending the training in Colorado we decided on the following:

1. Since virtually all of our families were in poverty, we would spread the project to the whole school.
2. The principal at Ashley Park noticed the progress her students were making in after-school programs. Therefore, the school would apply for funding for a second after-school program. This grant was funded and the second program began shortly after

- we returned from Denver. Now, **all students** at Ashley Park were eligible for after-school programming.
3. The school would use the funds from Title I for parenting programs to initiate our study. We scheduled monthly Thursday night meetings on the third Thursday from 5:00-7:00 p.m. in conjunction with the PTA to conduct parent trainings, student presentations, data collection and generalized assimilation of information. .
 4. We reached out to the faith community for tutors in reading, our weakest area. We were really fortunate in that a congregation with great financial and humane prowess adopted Ashley Park. This congregation provided uniforms for our students and reading tutors.
 5. Through our mentor from Carolina’s Medical Center and our connection with the faith community, we were able to train parents in the workings of the school and its place in the community, as well as, inform them of the educational, parenting and curricular needs of their children. To our surprise social and cultural enrichments developed between the two groups. It appears longstanding relationships are developing. Trainings took place monthly at our parent nights (3rd Thursdays) from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Parents completed questionnaires during the meal we provided for families before they broke up into groups to allow our trainer from Carolina’s Medical Center to work formally with groups of parents on parenting skills he called N.E.S.T., which stand for -

N- Nurturing a Positive Self Image & Building Self-Esteem

E- Commitment to EXCELLENCE

S- Necessary Characteristics for STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

T- THEIR (Students’ Families) Advocacy

What We’re Finding Out

Our parents completed three questionnaires developed by our district-level administrator who has a background in developing cognitive instruments (see attachments). We did not realize, however, that low income parents in this area had little to no exposure to Likert Scales. Our second questionnaire was a Likert Scale and extremely difficult for our parents. At least thirty (30) parents at each training session completed the questionnaires. The results of the second questionnaire were not as reliable as the first and third which were

true/false. Each questionnaire had one short answer question at the end. Based on the responses, we discerned the following conclusions:

- Parents actually expect us to raise their children.
- Parent’s perception of a school’s responsibility differs from educator’s perception.
- Most parents have no idea about curriculum.
- Parents and staff perceive involvement as very formal.
- We need to define parental involvement for parents and staff.
- We need to strengthen the parent/school/community connection.
- Our parent workshops are opening platforms for communication.
- We need to know the barriers to parents getting involved.
- Parents who visit to get involved rarely have to visit for behavior issues.
- After school programs have an impact on student achievement and behavior referrals.
- Networking among parents has begun.
- Parents have learned to model positive school behaviors.
- We have opened racial and economic doors that we had planned on doing.

See attachments for more details on survey responses.

Significance of Our Findings

When we started this small study we had no idea the time, the energy, the concentration and research this would take. Of course we have all of these doors open now that we have to enter and train to fulfill our original goal of increasing school/community relations. We have positive outcomes in academics and student behavior. Behaviors are still a problem on the buses. However, school is from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for most of the students in the school.

We have discussed ways to improve this situation. I think we are going to have to help parents with things in the home environment before we see significant changes on the buses. For 8-10 hours these students are given instruction, training and problem solving for a world they never see. School has met most of their basic needs this year for the first time—even mom and siblings have been there and made it more like a family environment. Then, we send them back to neighborhoods where most of the things we have taught them mean nothing. Survival is their main task from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. We are at our wits end about what to do. It is difficult to teach a child the significance of education when they sleep

on the floor unless we have adults and teenagers who have overcome these barriers, like members of our team, constantly reminding them that they can make a difference for themselves and their families.

Through WBPD, our district liaison found another dimension to her job - the McKinney- Vento Act only helps people when you stop doing the paperwork of homelessness and start doing the human contact work of homelessness. One makes a lasting impact when one makes direct connections with the “haves and the have nots” and becomes the liaison for both, not just the homeless.

School is community. If we are willing to get our hands dirty and out of the office, we empower those with and those without. Our tutors, who were wealthy, white, females, grew as much as our children did. Next year, we are going to develop some instruments for them so that we can measure their perceptions of what they have done and want to do. We are going to have to follow-up with parents and correct some of their misperceptions about what a teacher can and cannot do as well.

Our parents need a means to connect with community resources. When the principal invited representatives from the colleges to attend the evening and weekend programs for the adults/parents, these sessions opened the door for people who thought they had no way to go back to school and were destined to remain in generational poverty. Education is going to help them end their poverty. If we can help just one parent improve their economic status, we have in essence saved one family whose impact on the community will be exponential.

Some of our parents had children receiving McKinney-Vento services and didn't know about the McKinney-Vento Act. However, all that attended the training session know now what McKinney-Vento is and how it works for their children. They know the possible impact of being highly mobile on their child's achievement and school life, but most parents said they had no other options when they moved. This year our children made significant gains in reading and math regardless of their housing status. School has to be more than six hours for improvement to happen for children in poverty.

We have a process for working with families in poverty and who are homeless and highly mobile. We are starting this spring to plan the 2007-2008 school year. When school starts, the interventions and trainings we started in October 2006 will be in place. The church that worked with us this year has adopted the school as their responsibility. They have requested a list of what we need to start school with no child entering school without whatever it is that he/she needs. We will provide this list. Also, we want our faith community contacts to go in the neighborhoods and see how these children are living. Then, we will not need to make lists.

This project is long term. We will have to conduct school as we have this year to assure the success of our children and their families.

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ATTACHMENTS:

- Parent Survey 1
- Parent Survey 2
- Parent Survey 3
- Finding from Parent Surveys

**Path to Increased Achievement in Reading and Math
Baseline Survey for WBPB**

Instructions: Circle True or False to the statements provided.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. I fully understand the McKinney-Vento Act. | True False |
| 2. Highly mobile and upwardly mobile are the same thing. | True False |
| 3. We were evicted but, we live with family; so, we do need or qualify for McKinney-Vento services. | True False |
| 4. The reason my child didn't get McKinney-Vento services is the school wanted me to provide too much private information about where we live and what we make. | True False |
| 5. We have (own) a house even though it is without heat and indoor plumbing. So, we are not homeless. | True False |
| 6. As many as 1.4 million families experience homelessness in any given year. | True False |
| 7. Continuity of learning is not important as long as my kids are in school somewhere. | True False |
| 8. Whether I have a job or not has no impact on how well my child learns because I stress learning in my house. | True False |
| 9. There is no free legal counsel for families with housing issues. | True False |
| 10. No one has the time to read to my child at night because I work at night. That's okay. They always do their homework. And, they always pass. This is good. | True False |
| 11. My child is always congested this time of year. The doctor says he has allergies and is developing asthma. But, this has nothing to do with how we live or how he learns. | True False |
| 12. Families that have a working mom and dad do not experience homelessness. | True False |

13. **Being homeless and/or highly mobile has nothing to do with how well my child learns to read and do math. It is in the genes.** **True False**
14. **Our family has always moved a lot. It is a cultural thing That has no effect on learning at all.** **True False**
15. **I don't know what the agencies do in this town. There is nothing they can do for me anyway because I don't have a constant address.** **True False**
16. **The language we speak at home has nothing to do with how well my child learns at school.** **True False**
17. **We ran away from our abusive parents. So, we can't go to school because we will get turned in to the cops** **True False**
18. **There is no law(s) that protects the privacy of poor people who move about a lot—especially my kid's school records.** **True False**
19. **We're undocumented. So, I can't enroll my kids in school.** **True False**
20. **I'm going to put my child in foster care because I know he/she will have a structured home until s/he graduates.** **True False**

Frequency Distribution Chart/Ashley Park – Parent Survey 1

n= 29

Item #	Frequency True	Frequency False	% True	% False	NR	Sum of T/F	%NR
1	4	23	13.79%	79.31%	2	93.10%	0.93%
2	6	22	20.69%	75.86%	1	96.55%	0.97%
3	8	18	27.59%	62.07%	3	89.66%	0.90%
4	3	23	10.34%	79.31%	3	89.66%	0.90%
5	7	22	24.14%	75.86%	0	100.00%	1.00%
6	25	4	86.21%	13.79%	0	100.00%	1.00%
7	2	25	6.90%	86.21%	2	93.10%	0.93%
8	19	8	65.52%	27.59%	2	93.10%	0.93%
9	4	21	13.79%	72.41%	4	86.21%	0.86%
10	1	26	3.45%	89.66%	2	93.10%	0.93%
11	7	21	24.14%	72.41%	1	96.55%	0.97%
12	3	26	10.34%	89.66%	0	100.00%	1.00%
13	5	24	17.24%	82.76%	0	100.00%	1.00%
14	2	25	6.90%	86.21%	2	93.10%	0.93%
15	1	16	3.45%	55.17%	12	58.62%	0.59%
16	10	18	34.48%	62.07%	1	96.55%	0.97%
17	3	24	10.34%	82.76%	2	93.10%	0.93%
18	6	18	20.69%	62.07%	5	82.76%	0.83%
19	3	23	10.34%	79.31%	3	89.66%	0.90%
20	2	24	6.90%	82.76%	3	89.66%	0.90%
Totals	121	411			48		

We gathered data like this on all three questionnaires. This is how we came to the conclusions in the “What we are finding out section”.

PARENT SURVEY 2

Instructions: Respond to the following statements by checking 1. Strongly disagree 2. Somewhat disagree 3. I don't know 4. Somewhat agree 5. Strongly agree					
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Families that have a working mom and dad do not experience homelessness.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. I fully understand the McKinney-Vento Act.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Highly mobile and upwardly mobile are the same thing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. We were evicted but, we live with family; so, we do need or qualify for McKinney-Vento services at school.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. No one has the time to read to my child at night because I work at night. That's okay. They always do their homework. And, they always pass. This is good.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. We have (own) a house even though it is without heat and indoor plumbing. So, we are not McKinney-Vento homeless.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. I will always find somewhere for us to stay. So, we will not be considered homeless in any given school year.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Changing schools during the year is not important along as my kids are in school somewhere.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. We ran away from our abusive parents. So, we can't go to school because we will get turned in to the cops.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	1	2	3	4	5
10. There is no free legal counsel for families with housing issues					
11. Families that have a full-time working mom and dad do not experience homelessness.					
12. My child's having asthma has nothing to do with how he he learns or how we live.					
13. Whether I have a job or not has no impact on how well my child learns because I stress learning in my house.					
14. Being homeless and/or highly mobile has nothing to do with how well my child learns to read and do math. It is in the genes.					
15. I don't know what the social agencies do in this town. They can't do anything for me anyway because I don't have a permanent address.					
16. The language we speak at home has nothing to do with how well my child learns at school.					
17. There is no law(s) that protects the privacy of poor people who move about a lot—especially my kid's school records.					
18. We're undocumented. So, I can't enroll my kids in school.					

19. Children in foster care					
have a more structured home until graduation.					
20. The reason my child didn't get McKinney-Vento services					
is the school wanted me to provide too much private					
information about where we live and what we make.					

Notes based on responses from Survey 2:

- We have done a good job of teaching McKinney-Vento. 93% of our parents have more than just a cursory idea of what McKinney-Vento is.
- Because of the expansion of after school programs to every child and parent training workshops, 83% of our parents who responded know the purpose of homework. They realize that by being involved they not only keep their children out of trouble, their children are more positive about school and their grades are improving.
- There is a growing awareness that stability in the home and school/community involvement is important to their child's academic and social development.
- Our parents know that one reason for low scores/grades can be high mobility. They know that high mobility means more than two address changes in the last calendar year due to economic insecurity.
- Parents realize that every part of child development and developmental milestones is important to school achievement.
- They have learned that respect from their children comes when they show respect to adults and to their children, as well.
- Our parents know the importance of scheduling a time during the school day to help when they can is positive. The more they show up when there is no problem at all, the more they show ownership and respect for their school.
- We are very pleased with the parents who remarked they were showing their child how much they care about them. I don't think we have had this kind of remark in open Q&A sessions or on paper before.

Path to Increased Achievement in Reading and Math Parent Survey 3 for WBPD Ashley Park Elementary

Instructions: Respond to the following statements by checking in the yellow shaded areas:
 Check under T for true
 Check under F for false.

	T	F
1. Families that have a working mom and dad do not need after school programs for their children.		
2. After school programs are best for disabled children.		
3. Highly mobile children do not benefit in after school.		
4. Because my child is in after school, I am more a member of the school environment.		
5. There are two different after school programs at Ashley Park Elementary.		
6. I think the after school program is necessary for all kids.		
7. After school programs should be for enrichment only.		
8. I just want my child to have his/her homework done and checked by a teacher before he/she comes home.		
9. Children should only learn new things in regular school.		

10. After school programs are just dressed up, free childcare.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. There is no true curriculum used in any after school programs in this state.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. An after school program can help my child develop better reading and math skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. After school programs are not designed to help my child score better on the state End of Grade tests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. My child's grades are better since he/she started going to the after school program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. My child's grades are monitored in the after school program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Complete this thought: As a parent/guardian the After school program has:

Responses to Essay Question/Categorized

37 Responses	Frequency	%
Participating in PTA and after school activities	11	29.73%
Showing interest in child	10	27.03%
Communication with teachers and school officials	5	13.51%
Familiarity with curriculum	3	8.11%
Awareness	2	5.41%
Helping out	2	5.41%
Getting to know your child's school /community	1	2.70%
Vague/no responses	1	2.70%
Supporting the school	1	2.70%
Teachers responsible for raising our children	1	2.70%
Totals	37	100.00%

3 Es = Excellence, Education & Empowerment

Bettie Chisholm, Melissa Dunlap,
Nekeyha Davis and Reggie Singleton

Homeless and Highly Mobile

Impact of Homelessness/High Mobility on School Safety, Achievement and Character Development:



Why participate in this study?

Risks associated with homeless that cause school problems:

- Untreated mental health issues
- Drug use or exposure to it
- Hygiene problems associated with crowding
- Major depression
- Disruptive behavior disorders
- Sexually transmitted diseases and abuse
- Illegal Survival tactics
- Little concern for school
- Running away
- “Disconnected Youth”

Our Mission:

Educate and Empower
Families/Communities to produce
Excellent achievers despite poverty
and history.



HOW?

P

A

R

Participatory Action Research:

Diagnose

Act

Measure

Reflect

Where did we get this idea?

- NCDPI's McKinney Vento Liaison, Debra McHenry.
- In April 2006 she was considering ways to use data and research to help improve the academics and school climate for homeless and highly mobile students. The schools would plan strategies and evaluate the successfulness of their strategies.

NCSE/WBPD

- Debra chose 4 districts at the spring DPI homelessness conference in Raleigh
- I received an email that the schools I could chose from were 10 elementary schools and 6 middle schools.
- All of the schools had been in school improvement for at least one year.

Excellence and Education

EXCELLENCE

ENSURING EVERY CHILD HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS AT ASHLEY PARK UNIVERSITY LEARNING CENTER

- 97% of Students Qualify for Free and/or Reduced Lunch
- 99 % Minority Students
- 2003-2004 56% on grade level in Reading
- 2005-2006 78% on grade level in Reading
- 2003-2004 71% on grade level in Math
- 2004-2005 86% on grade level in Math



EDUCATION

- Protected Planning Time
- Collegial Conversations
- Full Staff Inclusion
- Administrative Facilitation



Research-Supported Strategic Interventions

- Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports
- Data Informed Decision-Making
- Differentiated Instruction

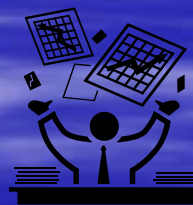
Safe Schools: Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports

- Schoolwide Implementation
- Administrative Support
- No Excuses
- Continuous Improvement



Data Driven Decision-Making

- Protected Planning Time
- Collegial Conversations
- Full Staff Inclusion
- Administrative Facilitation



Differentiated Instruction

- C & I Support
- Methodical Implementation
- Flexible Grouping
- Administrative Monitoring



Parent Empowerment

PARENT EMPOWERMENT N.E.S.T



Parent Empowerment N.E.S.T

- N- Nurturing a Positive Self Image & Building Self-Esteem
- E- Commitment to EXCELLENCE
- S- Necessary Characteristics for STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
- T- THEIR (Students' Families) Advocacy

Dinner for our families...



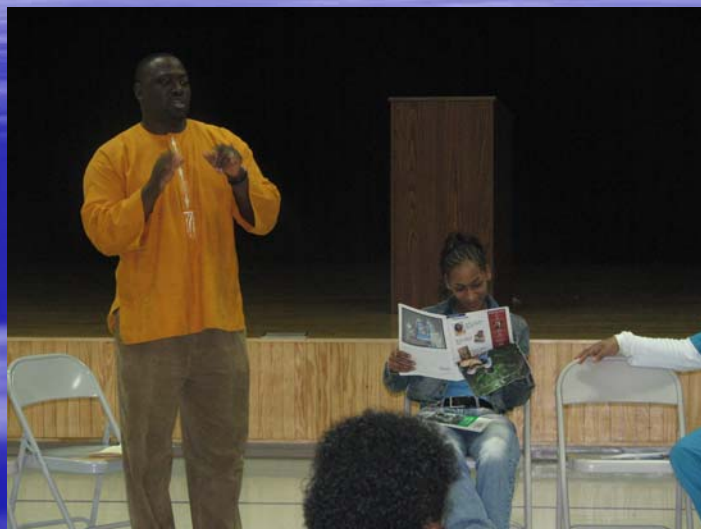
Daycare



Nurse/Medical Information



Parent Sessions



Small Group Session



What are we finding out?

Bettie Chisholm

- Parents actually expect us to raise their children.
- Parent's perception of school's responsibility differs from educator's perception.
- Most parents have no idea about curriculum.
- Parents and staff perceive involvement as very formal.
- We need to define parental involvement for parents and staff.
- We need to strengthen the parent/school/community connection.
- Our parent workshops are opening platforms for communication.
- We need to know the barriers to parents getting involved.
- Parents who visit to get involved rarely have to visit for behavior issues.
- The impact of after school programs on student achievement and behavior referrals. 3rd quarter ++++ all grade levels
- Networking among parents has begun.
- Parents have learned to model positive school behaviors.

The True Meaning of Community

Dr. M. Scott Peck

- “As a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their mask of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other, making other’s conditions our own.”
- Therefore, the great enemy of community is exclusivity. Groups that exclude others because they are poor or doubters or divorced or sinners or of some different race or nationality are not communities. “They are cliques, actually defensive bastions against community.”

