

ELA FAMILY FUN NIGHT

ALCORN MIDDLE SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Alcorn Middle School reviewed student test data. The team decided to be proactive about engaging families in helping to meet the school's goal of helping students improve skills and scores in English Language Arts (ELA). This includes reading, writing, speaking, and listening—all of which are important for student success in all other subjects.

Among the concrete activities in the ATP's One-Year Action Plan for Partnerships was an English Language Arts (ELA) Family Fun Night to introduce parents to the ELA standards, the school's curriculum, and ways to support their middle grades students at home. ELA Family Fun Night kicked off with a warm welcome from the principal and parent coordinator. They presented an overview of the state's ELA standards, the curricular content that enables students to meet the standards at each grade level, and a summary of recent test data.

ELA teachers from each grade level, the media specialist, and the Curriculum Resource Teacher elaborated with interesting examples of how the school's curriculum and teachers' instructional methods aim to help students meet specific standards and pass their classes. They also shared several ideas that families could use at home to support students' learning and ways to discuss the standards and students' ideas, work, and experiences with their child at home.

Perhaps most interesting to parents, teachers showcased exemplary student work on the ELA standards. Parents like to see students' work products and what excellent work looks like. The media specialist reported that the number of books students checked out of the library this year was about 30% higher than the previous year. She encouraged parents to support their children's reading at home and shared information on the library's resources.

She showed how parents can sign up for a public library card and how the school ID automatically served as a library card for each student. The welcoming tone and content of the presentations and time for questions was a good way to start to build parents' understanding of the ELA program and how they can encourage student learning... "The Family Fun Night was very informative and helpful," one parent evaluated.

The School Improvement Council, principal, and parent coordinator helped advertise the event through their communication channels. The school's automated communication system sent reminders, text messages, and emails home to all families. The ATP distributed flyers to students to take home with space for parents to RSVP. To encourage attendance, the ATP distributed door prizes and held a lottery for eight food gift baskets. After the meeting, all the families enjoyed a spaghetti dinner. These activities cost about \$250 covered by school funds and donations.

The ATP plans to build on the introductory ELA Family Fun Night with additional activities that will engage all families with their children to strengthen reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. They will work to continue to reach out to more and different families so that more students have support at home for their work and progress in ELA. The ATP plans to visit different neighborhoods served by the school to meet and greet families, disseminate information, and conduct some local family nights in these communities. At Alcorn Middle School, family engagement in ELA is an important goal because it will increase the success of more students.

Ebbie Hickman
Acting Assistant Principal
ebbie.hickman@richlandone.org
