

DADS, DONUTS, AND DISCUSSION

WATKINS-NANCE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
COLUMBIA, SC

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Watkins-Nance Elementary aimed to increase the number of fathers and other father figures who were active partners in education at school and at home. Studies and fieldwork show that dads and male role models have positive influences on student learning and behavior. They are wanted and needed in ways that will enrich the school and benefit students. The ATP did not want to conduct a “one and done” event. Rather, the team wants to build strong and sustainable participation by fathers for the long term.

To begin, “donuts” with dads—a common way to meet students’ fathers—came to mind. The ATP elaborated this idea by organizing Dads, Donuts, and Discussion. This would extend breakfast with purposeful interactions to show fathers just how much the school wanted them to be involved. The ATP also reached out to parents and community members for suggestions about how to welcome and engage dads in their children’s education at school and at home.

With good input, the ATP created flyers for students to take home, uploaded event information to the school website, invited local businesses and other potential partners from the community to attend, and sent reminders including Robo-calls to parents.

At Dads, Donuts, and Discussion, fathers first mingled to meet each other. A speaker from the community presented an inspiring talk to the assembled dads about being raised in a single-parent home with less than perfect conditions. He talked with the fathers about breaking the cycle of poverty, redemption, and the importance of fathers in their communities, school, and families. The speaker commented after the talk, “This is what it’s all about. Educating these men so that they may educate their children.”

The visiting fathers were served juice, breakfast casserole, donuts, fruit, biscuits, and coffee. Then, they went to their child’s classroom as a volunteer for from 15-45 minutes, depending on the dads’ schedules. Students enjoyed having their fathers in the classroom almost as much as the fathers loved being there. Teachers reported near-immediate improvements in student behavior and classroom participation. The principal assessed the scene, “This event was great. It was wonderful seeing all the dads and their children’s reactions to having them in the classroom.”

Teachers distributed surveys for the men to complete and were glad to see the dads’ high satisfaction. Several fathers expressed interest in volunteering more often at the school. These positive responses were exactly what the school was hoping for as a first step toward more lasting relationships with students’ dads.

One of the biggest challenges with this activity was finding the best time of day for the most men to attend. The 9 a. m. breakfast time seemed best. Dads were given several weeks advance notice to make this happen. The ATP is considering conducting the activity a few times during the year so that more dads can find at least one convenient time to attend. Dads, Donuts, and Discussion was successful in shining a spotlight on the importance of men’s roles in the school and in their children’s education. It was a good first step for the school to make some good new partners.

TYPE 1

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

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