



## SAMPLER

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

**Moving to the next school—new experiences in sight!  
School and family partnerships will help make it right.**

Making a smooth transition is a challenge that students meet at every school level. They wonder: Will I be prepared? Make new friends? Be happy?

Working with educators, parents can help ease students' transitions from home to pre-k, pre-k to kindergarten, elementary to middle, middle to high, and high school to post-secondary programs. Community partners also may provide guidance and resources to help students and families move successfully from school to school.

Changing schools is both frightening and exciting. Leaving a familiar, comfortable school to go to the next—often larger—school may create anxiety for even the most confident students. At the same time, progressing to the next level may bolster children's self-esteem—making them feel more “grown up” at each stage of schooling. When well-planned partnership practices for transitions are in place, the “feeder” and “receiver” schools can help alleviate students' and parents' concerns.

Parents should be invited to learn about the new school their child will attend *before* the transition takes place. They may attend welcoming activities at the new site, meet teachers and administrators, and learn about the curriculum, programs, and services. These simple activities, when well-planned and conveniently-scheduled, reduce parents' and students' worries about changing schools. Siblings and friends who attended the new school also may provide useful information and good guidance about the people and programs that await the incoming students and parents.

In addition to major transitions to new schools, all students make annual transitions to the next grade level and new teachers. Some make unexpected transitions if the family moves to a new community. Good partnership programs welcome all families at the start of each school year and newcomers at any time.

Transition activities should aim to maximize students' positive adjustment to the new school. This not only helps the student set a positive course for learning, it also helps teachers focus on instruction, rather than on students' distressed or distracted behaviors. Thus, it is worth working on transition activities to support students, parents, and teachers.

The activities in this *Sampler* were reported as promising partnership practices by schools that have worked with NNPS across the years. They illustrate how the six types of involvement may be used to enable parents to take different roles in transitions across the grades. The activities include readiness for kindergarten, a get-together picnic before school starts, orientations to middle and high schools, strengthening academic skills for high school, choosing high school courses, and other activities to welcome students and parents.

#### Improve Classroom Teaching

The sample activities were conducted by schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) and engaged many teachers, students, parents, and administrators working together to improve students' transitions at all school levels. Individual teachers and grade-level teams (particularly at key transition points) may adopt, adapt, and improve the activities to meet the needs of their students and families. For example, sixth grade teachers could plan a pre-session for new students and families prior to a general Back to School Night. At any transition point, teachers could adapt the Parent-to-Parent Night where a panel of parents whose children made the transition last year talk with the parents of children who are about to transition to the next school level.

The ten examples in this *Sampler*, arranged alphabetically, are a few of many excellent activities in NNPS collections of *Promising Partnership Practices*. Visit [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) and click on Success Stories for more ideas.

This *Sampler* was developed by Marsha D. Greenfeld, Joyce L. Epstein, and Steven B. Sheldon.  
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## Review of Research: Family and Community Involvement to Improve Student Transitions

Joyce L. Epstein and Frances L. Van Voorhis

When students move to the next school level, families make the transition with them. Parents need to know that their child's new school welcomes them as partners in their children's education—starting with the transition process. Then, parents and school personnel can work together to support students' successful adjustment to and achievement in a new school. Educators' activities to prepare students and parents for any transition include *individual* and *group* communications, school visits by parents and students, home visits by teachers, and exchanges of information among partners conducted *prior to the transition*, *at the time of transition*; and *throughout the transition year*.

### Effects of Transition Activities Across the Grades

**Early Grades.** Studies confirm that transition activities are important when children enter preschool and when they move to kindergarten. Studies show that, with background variables accounted for, kindergarteners had higher achievement if their schools implemented family involvement activities, compared to similar students in other schools (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Schulting, Malone, and Dodge, 2005). At the preschool level, parents had concerns about how to help their children follow directions, get along with peers, relate to teachers, and how they—as parents—could remain involved in the new school (McIntyre, et al, 2007).

A major study of over 16,000 children in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten (ECLS-K) sample revealed that the number of school-based transition practices conducted in the fall of kindergarten was associated with children's more positive academic achievement scores at the end of the year, after controlling for background and demographic variables. Effects were stronger for children from families with low and middle incomes (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005) and for children who visited the kindergarten classroom with a parent *before* they officially entered the school.

A study of over 3500 kindergarten teachers found that those who had some professional development about the transition process conducted more and different transition activities with parents compared to teachers who had no preparation on the transition process (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001).


**Older Grades.** Students made more successful transitions into middle and high school if their parents talked with them about schoolwork and helped them navigate the growing expectations and new experiences at each school level. A study of over 17,000 eighth graders in the NELS:88 data set revealed that, with background variables controlled, teens transitioned to high school at higher math levels when parents and middle and high school educators communicated with each other in two-way and three-way exchanges of information about high school (Crosnoe, 2009). In “triangulated” communications, parents and students learned about course options from high school personnel, and high school personnel learned about the strengths and needs of incoming students from parents and middle school educators. These connections helped teachers place students in math and science courses that matched their skill levels and resulted in less “slippage” in learning due to incorrect course placements. This was important for all students, but particularly important for ELL students and those from families with low incomes.

Another study using the (NELS:88) data reported that, in general, middle and high schools' emphases on parental involvement significantly increased students' math skills across the transition point and through high school (Holt & Campbell, 2004). Other studies, too, confirmed that middle grades students made smoother transitions and adjustments to high school and achievement in high school if their parents were positively engaged with the school and with the students (see a full review and references in Smith, 2006).

**All Transitions.** Based on research to date, educators may conclude:

- At all major transition points, communications of parents and educators in feeder and receiver schools help more students adjust to and achieve in their new school.
- Teachers need in-service education and on-going technical assistance to improve the design and implementation of practices that effectively engage parents and students in the transition process.

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# BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

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## GREENBRIER WEST HIGH SCHOOL CHARMCO, WEST VIRGINIA

**A**t Greenbrier West High School, the students came up with the idea to welcome incoming freshman with a Back to School Bash. Having made the difficult transition into high school themselves, Greenbrier West's students knew how important it was for incoming students to start the year on the right foot.

The night before school started, 189 parents, 154 students, 16 teachers, and 22 community members gathered together to pave a smooth path to high school. Staff members served parents and the new freshman hot dogs, chips, and drinks. Administrators welcomed all participants in the school gym and presented information on pertinent school policies. After this formal gathering, cheerleaders enthusiastically took groups of families on a tour of the building so that the students would feel comfortable finding their classes the next day.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) created packets for participants, including students' schedules, county and school policies, and other important information that would help the adolescents and their parents join school functions and become active in decision making.

In the past, Greenbrier West's ATP struggled to get parents involved in school activities. Abundant publicity helped to encourage families and freshmen to attend. Local newspapers and radio stations announced the bash; parents received voice messages from the school's automated phone system; and County School Board members received personalized invitations in the mail.

The ATP reached out to school staff, parents, and community partners to help make Back to School Bash a success. Volunteer parents and staff made and served dinner, which was donated by a school partner—Rainelle Medical Center. One teacher made coleslaw and another cooked chili. Area businesses contributed ice and cups,

and the cafeteria staff helped set up for dinner and made tea. Communities in Schools (CIS) staff provided nutritional information to include in packets.

Students played an important role in developing this event. A group of high school students was chosen at random for an advisory discussion about ways to improve the school and student achievement. They compiled a list of activities that might help. The newly formed Academic Achievement Association used the students' suggestions to plan several events—including the Back to School Bash—for the new school year.

The ATP's goal of involving community members paid off. The Back to School Bash served as a jumping off point to recruit new Partners in Education. As a result, nine new partners joined the Local School Improvement Council (LSIC).

Several parents, students, and community members reported how nice it was to have an activity right before school started so that everyone began on the right foot. The principal praised all planners and participants for helping freshmen make a smooth transition to the school.

The ATP and its many partners plan to continue this practice, but will add more fun activities for the students. They also intend to highlight more Partners in Education and encourage even stronger school-community ties.



## Back to School Night

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*Northstar Middle School  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

To strengthen partnerships with its Hmong families, Northstar Middle School expanded its annual Back to School Night to include a special session for new sixth-graders and their families. Scheduled a half hour before the regular meeting, this information session enabled parents—with the help of interpreters, bilingual parents, and staff members—to meet the teachers and staff, and learn about school routines and policies.

The practice also opened the door to parent involvement at Northstar for these new families, many of whom did not fully understand the school system or how they might participate because of cultural and language differences.

The orientation session was the brainchild of the English Language Learners Parent Involvement Action Team, a subcommittee of the Action Team for Partnership (ATP), formed in 2005 to address the needs of the school's large Hmong population. This subcommittee works throughout the year to help families understand the school system. It schedules interpreters to help families with paperwork and has bilingual members who phone families about school events and policies.

The ATP sub committee promoted the orientation session through e-mails, phone calls, and announcements made at important end-of-year meetings. Staff members called Hmong families who were new to the school to remind them about the orientation.

On an evening late last August, about 17 students and 30 of their family members attended the special session. Staff members introduced themselves and explained school services and parent volunteer programs. Translators were on hand to help out. All guests watched a video, created by former sixth-grade Hmong students, which showcased daily activities and explained school policies, such as dress code, lunch times, discipline procedures, and the school schedule. Each family received

a “welcome bag,” containing two books from the school's language arts curriculum, a pocket dictionary, and a magnet containing the school's contact information. At the end of the session, parents and students joined the Back to School Night activities for all parents and students.

“We found talking directly with the student to be highly effective, too. The kids were excited to attend in hopes of learning more about sixth grade and alleviating nervous feelings,” said the school psychologist, who was a key player in the activity.

Teachers and administrators are quite pleased with the program. Between 2005 and 2008, the orientation sessions have been attended by 80 to 100 percent of the Hmong families with sixth-graders.

The welcome bags are the only expense. Although the school spends between \$300 and \$400 every year to buy the bags and their contents, a local church often supports these costs.



# Crossing the Bridge

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*Hamilton County Family and Children First Council  
Cincinnati, Ohio*

**N**inth grade is pivotal. Much of what happens throughout high school is influenced by the start students get academically, socially, and emotionally. To put students at Aiken High School in Cincinnati on a sound footing, the Hamilton County Family and Children First Council sponsors Crossing the Bridge, a two-week transition program.

In half-day sessions during the two weeks before school officially begins, the incoming ninth graders spend time on academics, learn study skills, get acquainted with school procedures, find their way around the building, and tackle social skills, such as conflict management, healthy relationships, and decision making.

“Our Crossing the Bridge program is a comprehensive program designed to provide students and parents with opportunities to assist with the improvement of student outcomes,” said the council coordinator who works with Aiken High.

Parents are included, too. During the second week of the Summer Bridge, parents and guardians are invited to a family dinner and orientation. Parents tour the building, meet teachers, and learn about extracurricular activities and facts of high school life, such as grade point averages and what it takes to get credit for courses.

The Bridge program does not end when school starts, either. Ninth graders who would like to have a “big brother” or “big sister” are paired with older students, and all ninth graders continue to meet throughout the school year for team-building classes. Social service providers teach these sessions, focusing on social skills, conflict management, goal setting, and violence prevention.

The goals of the Bridge program are lofty:

- Increase student achievement and decrease the drop-out rate
- Increase parental involvement in high school
- Increase social skills and enhance positive behavior of students

To meet these goals, Crossing the Bridge enlists the whole community, drawing on resources from colleges, private industry, and social service agencies. The Council serves as a catalyst and coordinator of services in this and other projects in Cincinnati area schools.

At Aiken High School, a Council coordinator and the principal planned the Bridge program to reduce the large number of students who regularly repeat ninth grade, and to reduce the dropout rate. Aiken teachers and area social services providers planned the curricula; engineers from General Electric and engineering students from Ohio State University developed hands-on science projects and worked with students; the vice provost of The University of Cincinnati lectured and demonstrated the study of bones in solving crimes, and local students worked as junior staff members and served as big brothers and sisters. Several of these partners helped the school pick up the \$14,000 cost of the program. About 180 students and 260 parents and guardians took part, along with more than 30 community members and 15 school staff members.

The biggest challenge is convincing students and their parents of the importance of beginning school two weeks early — even for half days. The school met this challenge by enlisting students from the upper grades to call incoming ninth graders to talk about the program. This direct phone contact was a big success.

Some parents did not have to be convinced: “This program is the main reason we selected this school for our son.” Even students who may have been reluctant to attend saw the value of the program. “I’m glad I came in the summer because, then, I already knew a lot of stuff when the school year began,” said one student. “I like this anger management stuff. I used it at home ... and I get along better now with my mom,” commented another.



## Grill and Chill

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*John B. Dey Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

John B. Dey Elementary School cooked up a get-ready-for-school activity to help families, students, teachers and administrators make a smooth transition into a new school year. Grill and Chill turned into a “big reunion,” as one student said, because students had an opportunity to be with friends they had not seen all summer.

The weather did not know about Grill and Chill and momentarily turned the event into a grab-and-go. Heavy rains forced everything to be moved indoors to the school cafeteria. The team’s back up planned worked, and many families opted to picnic on the sparkling cafeteria floor.

Grill and Chill was a get-together, with hot dogs and chips on the agenda, so that students, parents and teachers could get acquainted before school started. Specifically, the goal was to create a welcoming climate for all members of the diverse population. Families and teachers had met briefly before dinner.

“The event allows the kids to get rid of the first day jitters. They were very excited and couldn’t wait to get to school and meet their teachers,” said one parent. “It was nice for us too!”

Another parent added, “The event was a good idea. It put the students at ease and made them comfortable for the first day of school. . . It also made moms happy since they don’t have to go home and fix dinner!”

One teacher said that she enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere in which to meet parents and students.

The School Planning Council, school staff, community and business partners were instrumental in Grill and Chill. Partners and businesses provided the food and beverages, so there was no cost to the school.

The idea for this activity originated at an ATP meeting. The school sent invitations to all parents along with their children’s class assignments for the upcoming year. Information also was posted on the school website and marquee. The planning committee kept the staff informed.

“We wanted everybody to connect in a positive setting. It was supposed to be beautiful outside, but everybody enjoyed the conversation and we had a lot of spirit inside,” said the principal. “It was a phenomenal start to the school year.”

It is obvious that the Dey community agreed: 800 parents and family members and 500 students took part. Community support was important, too, as 15 community members participated and all 90 staff members were involved.



# KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PROGRAM

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## MACDONOUGH SCHOOL MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

**T**urning tears into smiles was the goal of the Kindergarten Transition Program at Macdonough School. By all accounts, the extensive series of events preparing youngsters for kindergarten was a rousing success.

Not only were there a lot of smiles—from parents and children—on the first day of school, but also there were better-prepared students, families comfortable with their new school, and teachers who had a smoother start to the year.

“Being able to bring my daughter to school so many times to meet new friends and new teachers has made the transition go so smoothly,” said an obviously pleased parent.

The Kindergarten Transition Program at Macdonough is a series of events that began in spring and continued until the first day of school in September. The events included:

- » *Parent/Caregiver Tour: Small group tours of the school with stops for conversation at the library, cafeteria, and other key areas.*
- » *Kindergarten Arts and Crafts: The first of several activity visits, when the children meet the arts teacher, hear a story, and do a project.*
- » *Kindergarten Music and Movement: Another activity visit when the children meet the music teacher, enjoy some music and a snack.*
- » *Kindergarten Read-Aloud: Children visit the library, meet the staff, and receive a book to take home.*
- » *Raising Readers Program: A six-week summer program to help families promote literacy at home and ensure that literature is part of their child’s experience.*
- » *Back to School Bash: Kindergarten students receive their school T-shirts at the annual get-together just before school starts.*

The program doesn’t end there. Just before school opens, parents and caregivers are invited to individual parent-teacher conferences to address questions and concerns about school and to review routines.

On the first day of school, parents drop off their youngsters in classrooms and then enjoy a breakfast in the school cafeteria. After that, parents, students, and staff attend the First Day assembly in the school gymnasium, where the newest members of the school community are officially welcomed.

It’s no wonder one youngster was quick to say, “This is MY school,” after such a whirlwind of get-acquainted activities.

Family and youngsters can attend all or some of the activities, though the staff observed that the families that participate in most or all of the events seemed to handle the first day easily. Some of the later activities were better attended because word of mouth promoted the program. About 80 parents and 40 children participated.

The program cost approximately \$10 per child, with local businesses donating money and materials and the school’s parent-teacher organization making a major contribution.

“The practice is here to stay,” Macdonough’s principal declared. Perhaps a Smiley Face will become its mascot.



# MARCHING INTO MIDDLE SCHOOL

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## **BULLARD TALENT SCHOOL FRESNO, CALIFORNIA**

**T**he transition into middle school is a process that begins in the spring and continues through the first quarter of sixth grade at Bullard TALENT School. The first event is Marching into Middle School in May, an informational meeting for fifth-graders who will enter Bullard Middle School in the fall. Because Bullard is a K-8 school, some of the students continue from the school's early grades; other students are new to the building.

In May, students and their parents and guardians gathered in the school's performing arts center for an evening of videos, demonstrations, discussions, and introductions, topped off deliciously with an ice cream sundae social.

"In past years, we observed that incoming students and their parents were unaware of the many facets of our middle school program, including choosing classes, scheduling, computerized grading, extracurricular activities, and performing groups," said one teacher. "This event aids a smooth opening to the school year and gets programs, groups, and activities in place quickly."

The principal opened the evening with a video of Bullard's showcase choir—one of the many musical groups at the school. The principal also reviewed the school's academic and behavior expectations, and how to access students' grades online. Families met the staff and learned which staff members were associated with which programs and activities. There also were presentations on the sports program, course electives, and other details, with time for questions.

Families learned about events that will be conducted in August to continue the get-acquainted process. Back to School night is held before school starts, followed by orientations on each of the core classes for both parents and students. Students have "clinics" in the first week of school to learn about electives and auditions for music groups that are available to them.

Parents and students learn about a special

trip for sixth graders that is conducted at the end of the year to Camp Ocean Pines. The camp director provided information on this activity at the Marching Into Middle School event in May, showing photos of camp activities and bringing a special guest--the Great Horned Owl--to meet the parents and students.

"Since we began Marching into Middle School in May, followed by the events in August, the number of questions and misunderstandings has decreased and more of our youngest students . . . are participating in the activities offered," said a teacher.

"I can't wait to go to middle school. There's so much to do," said one student after attending the May meeting.

"This school gets an 'A' for communicating with parents. You guys are really great," commented an obviously pleased parent.

About 140 parents and 100 students participated in the May event, which truly brought together the Bullard community. Teachers, administrators, and camp partners worked on the program. Families learned that *everyone* is a part of a caring learning community that has one goal—students' school success.





## Navigating the Course Selection Process

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*Naperville Central High School  
Naperville, Illinois*

Selecting courses, resolving schedule conflicts, handling the stress of academics, and making time for extracurricular activities were all topics addressed in “Navigating the Course Selection Process,” a presentation for students and parents at Naperville Central High School. The School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) team established the program in response to surveyed parents’ requests for a better understanding of what courses students choose and how they make those selections.

“We are a comprehensive, high academic high school with 97 percent of our graduates going on to secondary education. It is important for students to select the courses that fit their ability and extracurricular plans,” said one of the SFCP team members. The SFCP also hoped to spark discussions between parents and students and between parents and the panel members.

Among the questions addressed were:

- What is a regular college preparatory curriculum?
- What are Advanced Placement (AP) courses?
- What electives should students take?
- What courses are best for students considering the military?
- How can students handle the stress of high school?

The presentation took place at two Parent Huddles, small-group events the school uses to get parents together with an expert or experts on a particular topic. There was a morning

get-together in the school district office and an evening gathering at the school. The panels consisted of students, teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and community members.

At first, both eighth-grade and high school students and parents were invited to the huddles. Later, eighth-grade families had their own session, and nearly 350 parents and students attended.

In addition to fostering better communication, the program prompted students to think about the courses they would need and want over all four years, not just freshman year.

Parents reacted positively to the program, seeming to gain a better understanding of the scheduling and course selection processes. “I always learn something new at every event I attend. Thanks,” commented one parent.



# PARENT-TO-PARENT NIGHT

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## JEFFERSON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, ILLINOIS

**T**ransitions are always challenging. When they move from the elementary to middle grades, students must leave the familiar for the unknown. They enter a middle or junior high school wondering about their work, their friends, their teachers—everything about their new young lives. Parents, too, move with their children from their old school to the new one. They must feel prepared for the transition.

Jefferson Junior High School thinks parents are key to students' success in the middle grades. To support students' and parents' transitions, the school conducts Parent-to-Parent Night. This meeting provides an informal venue for parents to learn what is in store for their early adolescents.

For Parent-to-Parent Night, six parents of junior high students are selected for a panel of experts. Their children must have come to Jefferson Junior High from one of the three elementary "feeder" schools. Their children also must have been active at Jefferson in many activities so that the panelists know about the programs and services at the school. Finally, the panelists must be articulate and helpful people who are willing to speak to a large group.

The panel meets with the in-coming students' parents to clarify how the new school works for and with students and families. They aim to ease parents' concerns by presenting good information in a caring environment.

At Parent-to-Parent Night, the elementary school students' parents receive information about the school and a short "bio" of each panelist. This includes their experiences at Jefferson Junior High as parents and their students' activities. After short presentations, parents may ask the panelists questions directly or write questions on cards for the panelists to answer. No topic is taboo.

The goal is to have a lively, honest, informative conversation that will, indeed, help in-coming students' parents feel part of and comfortable with Jefferson. Should the panel hear a question that they cannot answer, a teacher or administrator may address the issue, adding to the richness of the discussion.

The program obviously benefits parents by helping them learn the ropes from the "seasoned pro" panelists. The in-coming parents also begin to build their social network of other parents who attended and presented at Parent-to-Parent night. The exchange also helps teachers and administrators at the start of the school year connect with parents who know how the school works.

Students benefit, too, when their parents have some knowledge about the school. They may feel more secure—emotionally—if their parents are comfortable with the school, its teachers, and administrators. Students may feel more confident—academically—if their parents are aware of the schools' goals for students, teachers' homework policies, required classes, and other topics discussed at Parent-to-Parent Night.



## READY TO GO

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### **ROGER WOLCOTT EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT**

**T**he jump from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten is an important transition in children's and parents' school lives. The Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center knew that this switch required attention. Parents, too, were concerned. The Family Center Leader met with several parents who wondered how the new school would treat their children, what the children's days would be like, and how parents would be welcomed and involved.

The Roger Wolcott Early Childhood Center also houses the town's public kindergarten. Thus, orienting students and parents to kindergarten was, in large part, the Center's responsibility. The partnership team and staff wrote and produced an informational DVD—Ready to Go—to make sure that the preschool, kindergarten, parents, and children were ready for a good transition.

Every incoming kindergarten student received one of these DVDs, along with other useful information. The DVD, which included the faculty as actors, showed parents an average school day and typical activities for new kindergartners. Teachers also staged some learning activities that students would experience in kindergarten.

The DVD also provided a virtual tour of the school for parents and children. They visited important places in the building, met the new teachers, and saw their rooms. The DVD also included a collection of fun photographs of various kindergarten activities, classes, and events.

With the DVD, parents received a number of useful resources, including a calendar of fun readiness activities for parents to

prepare young students for kindergarten. The information packet also included information on health services, insurance, community resources, and registration materials.

The Center staff also included a book that was inspired by the video. It featured tips to help parents prepare their child for his or her first day in kindergarten. The book is short and clear so that parents can read it with their children to ease their concerns about their move to kindergarten. The book was so popular that it was distributed to other early childhood centers in the area, and was translated into Spanish.

The Ready to Go DVD—well named, simple, and powerful—prompted one parent to express her thanks: “I liked knowing what my child would be doing every day in school.” The DVD was distributed to over 200 students and their parents. It reduced many a fear about an early and important transition in students' school careers.



# SATURDAY SCHOOL

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## FRANCIS HOWELL EARLY CHILDHOOD FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

**W**hen you are only 3, 4, or 5 years old, going to school on Saturday can be fun. After all, that's what big kids do the rest of the week.

Saturday School, a project of the Early Childhood Family Resource Center and the Parents as Teachers organization, is a transition program for youngsters who will be going to school soon themselves. Held at all 10 elementary schools in St. Charles during January and February, the program drew more than 730 families who accompanied nearly 800 youngsters to Saturday School.

Saturday School lasts two hours and includes a bus ride, separate sessions for children and parents and, of course, a snack. The youngsters go to their kindergarten classrooms to do activities with a parent educator. The parents, meanwhile, meet a kindergarten teacher, learn about school routines and expectations, hear about school and bus safety, and pick up tips for preparing their children for kindergarten. The school principal and president of the Parent Teacher Organizations at the various schools also talk with parents.

Families report that their children are more comfortable when it comes time to go to school because they have already been there and had a good time. Children can attend Saturday School more than one year.

The adults are more comfortable, too: "I now have a good understanding of how my child's day will be structured in kindergarten," commented a parent.

"It was my fifth year in a row and I would not miss it," said another parent. "Saturday School is a great program."

The early childhood center prepares the lesson plans and supplies for children's activities, including a book and literacy activity, math manipulatives, writing materials, puzzles and play dough. The Parents as Teachers members organize the dates and times for the sessions.

The success of the program, however, depends on even wider community support—kindergarten teachers and elementary school administrators participate, middle and high school students volunteer, bus service employees work, and community organizations pick up some of the expenses.

Saturday School is indeed a large undertaking, but one that pays off in getting youngsters ready for school and eager to learn.