Reach Them to Teach Them:
Creative Connections with Families and Children, 2007-2014

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A former member of the Charlottesville School Board, Muriel D. Wiggins established Reach Them to Teach Them to assist Clark, Johnson, and Jackson-Via Elementary Schools in developing strong connections with pupils and their families. Launched during the 2006-2007 school year, the program was funded privately for three years and subsequently has received grant support from the Grace D. Riggs Fund in the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation. The program has had a significant impact on students, families, teachers, and administrators. We hope that this collection of ideas submitted over the last seven years serves to encourage the development of future submissions for the Reach Them to Teach Them program.
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The two of us have developed a tight bond with students and parents through our Books on Bikes project. Last summer we donated our time on this project which directly involved and benefited students, and led to increased parent involvement at Clark this year.

During the summer we visited low-income neighborhoods weekly and gave out hundreds of books to a large number of children. The Friends of the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library donated books, which we combined with private donations. We pulled them around in our red wagon, armed with ice pops and bookmarks explaining our cause. Each student received between one and three books per week.

Students followed us around on their bikes, selected their books, and pedaled thereabouts, stopping to proudly show off their books, helping spread the word that we were nearby.
We recommended books to the children based on their reading level and interests, and some of them started reading to each other and their parents right beside the red wagon, on the sidewalk. They made it hard for us to leave each week, but we assured them we would be back with books in tow the following week.

Each week, when we returned to the neighborhoods, we felt the positive impact of the Books on Bikes project. Students told us about the books they had received the previous week, looked for similar titles, or for titles that their friends were reading.

This shared reading experience among teachers, students and parents is what helped strengthen the bond among us. Parents and children were very excited to see us on these routine summer visits to their neighborhood. This paved the way for future home visits during the school year concerning academics or behavior.

Books on Bikes creates readers and fosters positive relationships among teachers, parents, and children. Our mission is to put the books kids love into their hands so they are excited about reading and want to continue reading throughout the summer, into the school year, and throughout their lives. Families will create libraries in their homes with the books we are giving away.

The Books on Bikes project has helped us build a lasting relationship among our school, students, and parents. We have increased parent involvement at Clark this year. By giving the gift of literature to our students in this unique way, we are creating a community culture in which students are passionate and excited about books, sharing books with others, and becoming lifelong lovers of reading.
Our first-grade team reaches out to our parents throughout the year.

**Weekly** – Our team submits a weekly newsletter to all first-grade parents to keep them informed and updated on first-grade news, upcoming events, and important content skills the students are working on in the classrooms.

**August/September** – We held an Open House on August 19th from 1:00-3:00, and Back to School Night was held on September 17th from 5:30-7:00. We gave a presentation to our first-grade parents, had information on display, and provided our parents with a print-out of the first-grade skills in the form of a refrigerator curriculum. By September 27th, we made contact with every first-grade parent, either in person, by phone, or by mail.

**October/November** – We held a Reading Night on October 15th from 5:35-7:00. We read aloud the story *Tops and Bottoms*, retold the story on a flannel
board with a story puppet set, and engaged the children in other reading experiences. The week of November 4-8, we held parent-teacher conferences. We either met with parents in person or spoke with them over the phone. On November 15th, we held a Sock-Hop and Book Fair event from 5:30-7:00. As a first-grade team, we volunteered our time in the library to support and help with the Book Fair.

**December/January** – On December 19th, we held a breakfast for parents. We invited our parents to join us for a holiday breakfast to celebrate the success of their students in fall 2013. We had a great turnout for this event! January 14th was our Content Night, from 5:30-7:00. We focused on science and featured matter. We showed a Brainpop jr video on matter, talked with our students about solids, liquids, and gases, and made oobleck with them.

**February/March** – We held our annual Soul Feast on February 14th from 5:30-7:00, and paired it with Kid Pan Alley. Our first-grade team volunteered in the kitchen and helped serve food to our parents and students. We then enjoyed the Kid Pan Alley concert that was held in our school gym. On March 18th, we held our Math Night from 5:30-7:00. We provided activities for our students and parents to practice fractions. In an effort to reach out to more parents, we held parent-teacher conferences at the Friendship Court community center on Wednesday, March 26th, from 3:30-4:30.

**April/May** – On April 18th, we held our Spring Fun Fair from 5:30-7:00, and May 20th is our Fine Arts evening.

**June** – We plan on having our end-of-year awards ceremony on Tuesday, June 3rd, from 1:00-3:00, followed by an ice cream social with the parents to celebrate the end of a terrific school year. Lastly, we will plan a picnic lunch with parents. We intend on walking to a neighborhood park, having a picnic lunch with our students, having our recess time, and inviting our parents to join us.
The Bully Nots program was started at Jackson-Via seven years ago as a way to strengthen our school community and give students an integral role in spreading an anti-bullying message. Over time the program has grown and evolved and, with it, our goals have broadened. We would like to share three primary goals of the Bully Nots program and how parents have been engaged through our efforts this school year.

Goal #1: Increase the number of students who participate in the Bully Nots program, and effectively engage their parents over the course of the year.

This year we changed our model. We gave all students in 4th grade the opportunity to be a Bully Not. Twenty-three students participated. Parents were involved in the process from the beginning as information about the program, as well as expectations and opportunities for their children,
were regularly sent home. The students wrote invitations to their parents before each performance and The Bully Nots, with most of their parents in attendance, performed this year at a PTO meeting, Martin Luther King night, a December showcase performance, and at a picnic party for parents.

Also, we continued to build on our idea of “Bully Nots in training” by involving Ms. Franklin’s eighteen kindergarten students in our program. We feel strongly about the importance of teaching our youngest students the skills of being kind, how to be a good friend, and how to peacefully resolve conflicts. We recognize that many kindergarten parents are experiencing school with their children for the first time, and their child’s involvement in the Bully Nots program has a dual purpose: it conveys how much Jackson-Via values the principles of kindness, respect, and tolerance, and it provides an occasion for parents to come to school to see their children perform. One hundred percent of the kindergarten parents attended at least one performance this year.

**Goal #2: Harness and highlight the creative talents of our students and give them the opportunity to shine.**

The Bully Nots create, choreograph, and perform songs, skits, raps and dances that spread positive messages. This year the Bully Nots were featured on NBC 29 News, CBS 19 News, and in Albemarle Family magazine. This positive recognition helps us reach a larger audience and reinforces with our students and families what we already know: their message is important and so are they as people. Students, families, and the school are doing meaningful work together.

**Goal #3: Spread an anti-bullying message by teaching students, and sharing with parents, the concept of what it means to be an Upstander.**

Being an Upstander is an integral part of the Bully Nots message. It means taking a stand against bullying behaviors. We shared this concept with parents through newsletters, a PTO meeting presentation, and student performances. It is also reinforced across our school with a weekly “Upstander of the Week” award. Many parents across grade levels are talking with their children at home about taking a stand against bullying, reinforcing the message students hear at school. In December, we surveyed the parents who attended our showcase performance (44 surveys total) and 100 percent said they understood the
purpose of the Bully Nots and what it means to be an Upstander. One parent wrote, “I can now successfully communicate a clear message to my child about what to do when they encounter another student who bullies.” Another said, “The Bully Nots program has successfully influenced both of my children… The content of the program has contributed to our language and discussions concerning bullying and prosocial behavior.”

We love the work we do with the Bully Nots program and will continue to work to increase parent involvement at Jackson-Via.
Children are influenced by their daily experiences and, most importantly, by their relationships with others. As a kindergarten teacher, I get to witness these relationships unfold in many ways, including their interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. Often overlooked is their relationship with their grandparents. A grandparent’s love and support is so vital in helping nurture a child’s emotional being.

This year as part of the overall parent committees currently in place in my room, a committee that truly stood out was “Grandparents in the Classroom.” My goal for this committee was to not only increase the involvement of grandparents in the classroom but, overall, to ensure and nourish that special bond between those two different generations. I believe wholeheartedly in reading and meeting the whole child, and that should include every aspect of a child’s life, including the elders that surround them. The grandparents in my room participated in the following three areas: weekly reading, cooking with grandmas, and learning about a culture through a grandmother’s experiences.
I am so happy and fortunate to have a pair of grandparents who came weekly to read to our classroom. Not only did I witness my children’s joy in listening to the stories they read, I was also able to see the impact this had on my students. With each story the grandparents read, my students became more caring and nurturing individuals. I was able to see right before my eyes what empathy truly means; as my children huddled around these grandparents, they were respectful and understanding of each other. These grandparents taught my students important character traits that will hopefully continue to flourish as they grow into responsible citizens of a classroom and, most importantly, responsible citizens of our world.

It has been delightful watching the grandmothers in my room take part in helping my students learn through cooking. This activity was performed on a monthly basis and was always related to a particular unit being studied across the content areas. Some examples include baking gingerbread cookies after listening to various versions of *The Gingerbread Man*, making personal pizzas after learning about how chefs help our community, baking bread in small groups to learn about cooperation after reading *The Little Red Hen*, or last, using fruits and vegetables to further our knowledge of patterns.

The last example of how my students were impacted by grandparents is very dear to my heart. I was humbled to watch unfold, how a grandmother shared her experiences about her life as a Chinese immigrant coming to America. This was a magical journey, a memorable one for my students, and one that will leave them with a lasting impression about, once again, what empathy truly feels and looks like. Each month she shared about her culture, recounted her experiences, all of which my students found fascinating. For example, she taught them Chinese words, Chinese calligraphy, and other important cultural traits. But the most important lesson she taught was how to be understanding of one another and respectful of each other’s differences, and how special we all are regardless of where we come from.

The impact of having grandparents in my room has been one I will never forget and only hope to continue in my teaching profession. I believe in the importance of working together with the families I come across every day; parents and grandparents are important educators. As I reflect on why I chose this path as a teacher, what stands out is my hope for not only teaching
my students vital academic skills, but also those important character traits that every human being is capable of possessing. By exposing my children to different life experiences across different generations I know that I am raising good children, caring citizens of our world who will, one day, impact the lives of others as they do daily with mine.
Open Doors, Open Hearts, and Encourage Open Minds: Welcome to Room 7!

Nikki Franklin, Kindergarten (currently, Third-grade Teacher)  
Jackson-Via Elementary School

My approach is ongoing and strategic. It stems from a teaching philosophy that values the total development of each student as an intellectual and as a valuable and passionate member of our community.

The cornerstone of my personal teaching philosophy is: an open door will open my students’ hearts as they develop meaningful bonds with classroom guests. In turn, their open hearts will encourage open minds and create a willingness to explore, take risks, and maximize each learning experience.

I developed a safe and loving environment for my students by using and expanding a concept that is familiar to them: Family. I have enjoyed positive learning outcomes in my classroom by making deliberate choices
to incorporate the engagement of family, school principals, and community members in Room 7.

Research has proven that students flourish when they feel safe and loved. Kindergarten is a valuable grade as it marks the beginning of every student’s academic career. From very early in our school year I taught my students to think of our classroom as a Jackson-Via family unit. The idea of family was a concrete concept for us to build upon for the rest of the school year. I encouraged healthy and positive relationships (whole family bonds), reciprocal teaching between grown-ups and children (parental bonds) and peer teaching between classmates (sibling bonds). We all benefited from different perspectives and I saw immense growth in the academic and social success of my students over time. Strategic and thoughtful planning ensured a welcoming atmosphere for parents and students.

I used music to teach my class the benefits of working as a family. My class discussed how working as a family could result in a successful school year. We even performed our own version of “We are Family” for our families and friends. The school counselor and I collaborated on the new Jackson-Via lyrics. Students were excited to sing their own version of this classic hit. One of the verses highlighted the impact of good friends on your own success:

\[
\text{Learning here is fun, and we've just begun to walk our path on this road of life} \\
\text{High hopes we have for the future and our goal is in sight} \\
\text{Every day we do our best} \\
\text{Here's what we call our golden rule} \\
\text{Have faith in you and the things you do} \\
\text{Call on your friends, they will see you through} \\
\text{We are family, I've got all my friends here with me.}
\]

My students performed this song in a play along with the Jackson-Via Bully Nots, which is an organization the school counselor and I created in 2008 to promote positive social inter-actions. The play highlighted the importance of kindness, friendship, and family. Local news covered this event. This song showed families and students the importance of bringing the familial frame of mind to school. This song inspired smiles and hugs on-stage and off. The entire process of learning and performing this song brought my class closer.
together. Parents and community saw this as we sang and danced on stage. Students often want to sing this song in class, and so we do! The song has become very personal to my students and serves as a reminder of how to achieve true success in each learning experience: by being a good friend and family member. Rather than just discuss and perform our feelings about family at school, I make it come to life for them.

I have ensured that they see parents, siblings, and extended family as crucial to the learning that happens inside and especially outside of Room 7. I open my classroom doors to students’ families without reservation. Our classroom values come to life with each visitor who crosses Room 7’s threshold. This year I had two parents who volunteered weekly during our math block. These parents ran a station that involved a structured choice for students. I designed independent activities at various learning levels so every student could discuss math concepts in a casual and comfortable way. The parents were responsible for facilitating each activity as much as needed. I planned the math block to allow students to feel protected and supported throughout the learning cycle. Parents provided praise, guidance and reinforcement. Students felt secure and confident as they determined each new step. They experienced a deeper sense of accomplishment; they made parents proud of them. Parents often shared helpful ideas and techniques from a “mother’s perspective” after working with children other than her own. My students would beam with excitement after learning a new skill. They would announce with pride “So and so’s mom helped me use a ruler!” or “So and so’s mom showed me a new way to add!” I’ve enjoyed witnessing the powerful experience of learning from a friend’s mom. I’ve also seen the powerful impact of a child seeing their mom bask in the respect, hugs, and admiration of friends. In Room 7, students see their parents as important agents in the community and they are inspired to master skills so they can do the same someday.

Parents also volunteer in our blocks and engineering center, and an imaginative play area. The parent role is one of supervision, strategizing, and empowerment. Parents guide students to solve their own problems, while giving the comfort of an adult presence and a feeling of safety (I’ve seen students take greater learning risks when they know a parent can intervene and assist with problems if necessary.) The questions, ideas, and experiences that flow between students and parents are boundless. Our classroom is a safe and collaborative environment where students learn that knowledge can
be delivered from any one at any time. They experience for themselves that meaningful knowledge does not come exclusively from Ms. Franklin.

Students enjoyed seeing their parents help with class performances. A parent volunteer managed our sound system, and others helped with production for our class play. My students were energized and motivated to display their best performances!

Many parents have come to our classroom to share and discuss their role as community helpers. I openly invited all families to visit and share their daily community impact with the class, and we hosted a nurse, an architect, and French Literature professor. Earlier in the year we visited a parent’s pottery studio. Students were pleasantly surprised to realize that their parents were a VERY important part of our larger community. By reaching out to parents, students were able to immerse themselves in the concepts of our Community Unit in real time. We were not only reading and writing about nurses and architects in the abstract, we had the real deal in our classroom! Students were able to ask questions, make generalizations, and aspire towards these occupations. Imagine the sight of an actual professor smiling at you and telling you that you can be a professor, too!

When a mom or dad steps over the threshold into room 7, often times their biological child is not the first student to rush forward with a hug. Parents are frequently encouraged to come to school and eat lunch with their kindergartner, to eat with the class, or to eat lunch with a small group in a special area. Parents often bring siblings, too. These lunchtime interactions allow students to practice social skills in a safe and appropriate environment. I have seen the direct impact of having a child enjoy one of these lunches and then give 100 percent effort on every activity for the rest of the day or even the week. Allowing family into our classroom boosts the energy and willingness to try our best. Not only do my students feel supported, but I do as well!

An open door policy in my classroom has fostered open hearts among my students (and myself) as we practice social skills to welcome, attend to, and learn from classroom visitors. Mothers and grandmothers of my students have conducted read-a-louds and sing-a-longs. I purposefully make a big deal in front of my students about how much I’ve learned from these read-a-louds and sing-a-longs. In one instance, while “Grammy,” a pre-school teacher,
was leading circle time, I paid careful attention to her behavior management techniques and signals. Instinctively, I made a mental note about new things I could incorporate into my practice. I also learned the titles of new books that I’d never considered before. I plan to add them to my classroom library, as well as some of the songs they shared with us.

I also make sure to be extremely vocal about the things I learn from THEIR families and how this new information will make me a better teacher. I am always met with looks of pride and gratitude from my students. During a challenging moment, it is easy to re-direct them with reminders and words of encouragement from the lessons and time we’ve shared with their family and mine.

The open door, open hearts and open minds philosophy also extends to my assistant and myself. Between the two of us, students have met our husband, father, brother, sisters, and nephew! These connections allow students to see their teachers in a familial setting. Students benefit from seeing that my assistant and I deliver the same love and respect to them as we do to our family. This has helped to anchor my behavior management system as well as to add credibility to the high expectations I have for each student. I appreciate being able to draw on family experiences in our classroom to encourage effort, tenacity and high performance in each content area we are expected to master.

My students are exposed to many diverse family combinations. They learn to respect and embrace this diversity. Knowing the mom or dad of your classmate strengthens the bond between friends and creates learning partnerships. Understanding the impact that your mom or someone else’s mom has on the classroom or in the community, is a precursor to accepting the various roles and opportunities you can make as an adult who has finished education. This is important because my kindergartners are focused on their future impact as well as their present achievement and growth.

The future success of my kindergarten students will depend on their aptitude, personal motivation and the rigor of the learning situations they master. Each day we open the doors, and reach out to our community for all the knowledge they have to teach us.
This year I put in place several projects to increase the parent involvement in my classroom. Mainly, this parent involvement was organized through four, focused, parent-led committees.

It all began at Open House when I formed volunteer committees within my room, each with a designated goal in mind. These included: Weekly Readers, Room Parents, Guest Speakers, and Grandparents in the Room.

Weekly Readers come in once a week to read stories by the authors we cover each month. This year, these parents had the opportunity to present a related activity that added to their visits. For example, after reading different versions of *The Little Red Hen*, a parent and I coordinated and helped students make a loaf of bread and discussed the importance of cooperation and working together. I believe this kind of communication is vital and helps parents feel that their involvement is highly valued.
Grandparents in the Room led to frequent invitations not only to read stories but also to help with monitoring independent literacy stations. I have been so fortunate to have grandparents whose grandchildren were in my room 3 years ago continue to come and read to my current class. It is so important to instill in our children’s lives the importance of our loved ones and this year having grandparents to help in the room has been a very endearing experience for my students.

In addition to parent committees, this year I also put in place Parent Partners, which will be a project that will expand across all grade levels next year. After our first quarter, I decided to create a classroom directory to facilitate communication between parents and from this directory stemmed the Parent Partners, where parents had the choice of being partnered up with another family in order to create a stronger bond between both families. At Johnson, we’re so fortunate to have such a diverse student population and what better way to celebrate this diversity than to partner families together so that, in turn, they will not only learn about each other’s culture but also work together to strengthen their children’s bonds as well. This year I was able to set up 4 Parent Partners, and throughout the course of the year, they have attended school events together and have used each other to coordinate play dates and even help one another in need.

In addition, this year I continued to send home Monthly Family Projects. Every month, I send home a project themed around a particular subject area. These have included: Creating a Map of Your Room, Disguising a Turkey for Thanksgiving, and my most recent, Earth Day’s Cardboard Challenge. These projects have been successful in ensuring that parents have quality time with their children. Parents who cannot come in to the classroom because of work constraints have appreciated these projects immensely as it is one of the ways they are able to foster their relationship with their children.

Room parents have helped with planning and coordinating special events and celebrations. For example, they were able to make our annual “Kindergarten Soup Supper” a success by volunteering their time to help my students with chopping and dicing veggies to prepare the soup. They have also volunteered their time as fieldtrip chaperones.

Establishing a good relationship between the parent and the teacher is essential, primarily for parents with children entering kindergarten. Every year,
I try to increase the opportunities for parental involvement in my classroom. I wholeheartedly believe that taking time to get to know my students’ families, both in and out of the classroom, is key to building a strong, foundational, positive relationship.
2011-12

Outreaches to Parents

_Ida Cummings, First-grade Teacher (currently: Gifted Education Specialist)_
_Jackson-Via Elementary School (currently: Johnson Elementary School)_

This year I used a number of efforts to attempt to increase parental outreach. I would like to highlight three areas of involvement.

Throughout the year students wrote _Friday Letters_ to their parents and family. In them, the children wrote about a new subject they learned about during the week, along with something they greatly enjoyed, and included a picture of that event. Not only did these letters increase the literacy and writing skills of the students, the feedback from parents was meaningful. One parent said she loved receiving the letters, as each week she looked forward to discussing the topics with her daughter.

Another wonderful outreach focused on celebrating the diverse cultural backgrounds of students within the classroom. I invited parents to visit the classroom to share about their cultural heritage. Here are a few highlights. A mother and father came in to discuss their Korean heritage. They had their
daughter and her sibling dress in traditional Korean clothes, brought in Korean food for students to sample, had coloring maps and pictures representing Korea, and shared a Korean folktale.

In addition, an African-American grandmother of a student shared about growing up in Tennessee. She recalled how African-Americans had to fight for the right to vote, and explained that when they did register, they were often forced out of their homes/apartments. Her family owned land and they allowed African-Americans to set up tents on their property where they could live without fear of retribution from registering to vote. She brought in pictures, had coloring materials of a map of Tennessee, and showed us an old kerosene lamp that residents of the tents used.

These types of presentations greatly impacted the students and increased their respect for various cultural backgrounds.

Lastly, parents and students from my class will celebrate all of their efforts in a culminating school lunch picnic. Today, parents will visit our school, bring blankets, and sit picnic-style for a classroom celebration. Each student will make their parent a card thanking them for their help during the year and each parent will receive a special flower as a token of appreciation for all of their support.

It has truly been a wonderful year with increased outreach to parents.
Parents as Classroom Visitors and Volunteers

Kim Bronson, Fourth-grade Teacher (currently, Third-grade Teacher)
Clark Elementary School

Luckily for my students and me, many parents made themselves at home here in room 204 this year. Some simply wanted to see where their child spent a great majority of their day living, learning, and interacting with others, and I asked many to volunteer in class. Parents have been a critical part of my fourth-grade class.

With the numerous new strategies being taught this year, I have had the opportunity to teach a number of parents how we solve multiplication, division, and fraction problems in new ways in order for them to be able to help their child with homework, and to have a better conceptual understanding of these skills. For those who were unable to visit the classroom, we communicated through frequent phone calls, emails, and the student agenda books.
The relationships I have been able to establish with my students’ parents are invaluable. One student was so enthralled by my passion for reading that she shared it with her mom, and we discovered that we both love to read James Patterson novels. Creating that connection has helped this student want to see what keeps mom and Ms. Bronson wanting to read even though they are no longer students.

A parent that I have seen on occasion out of school has reassured me that their child enjoys coming to school each and every day, and thanked me for being patient through all of the emotional changes that have occurred this year. We have spoken so many times for various reasons that I am pretty sure I forgot to log some of the conversations. This child now feels comfortable confiding in me when she is getting close to losing control or when she needs to cool down.

Parents have volunteered and continue to want to volunteer. Some enjoy accompanying our class on field trips and getting to know a side of Charlottesville that they have not seen before or only vaguely remember. Others have made it clear that they appreciate the structure and consistency I have maintained throughout the school year. I have enjoyed teaching such a diverse group with different needs and different learning styles. None of the joy that has been bestowed upon me would have been possible without the continued dedication and support of my Clark parents.
The Reach Them to Teach Them project states that teachers have the power to motivate children to attend school and perform well while there. I agree completely. Research shows that students who have strong relationships with teachers work harder in school and have greater academic gains. For these reasons, I set goals for myself at the beginning of the school year to build positive relationships with each individual—and family—in my class.

In the first month of school, I made sure that every child and guardian knew my cell phone number and understood that they were welcome to call me anytime with questions or for homework help.

In addition, I made a phone call to each family before September 1st to introduce myself and make a small, specific, positive statement about the student.
I attempted to have face-to-face contact with as many families as possible before October 1st; I met with 18 out of 22.

In November, each student received a personal note home, and before Thanksgiving, I held a conference with the family of every student.

In December, I wrote a postcard to each student over vacation.

I believe it is important to reach out to every student in order to make it clear to all students and families that I am here to serve them in whatever ways I am able.

It also helps me tremendously in the classroom. The students know I care. I have taken time outside of school to cultivate relationships.

I have taken groups of students to UVA women’s basketball games, to a CHS boys’ basketball game, and for a pizza night out. For each event, I provide transportation and cover expenses. It is fun for the kids to see me outside of school, and fun for me to see them interacting outside of school. These trips are never prizes or rewards. I offer them to a group I think might benefit from spending time with me or with one another.

Like many teachers at our school, I often provide transportation to school events, including for Kid Pan Alley, Soul Feast, Winter Concert, and Minds in Motion. These events are important to our kids, and they want to come; it therefore seems important that all are truly welcome.

There are a few individual situations that might be worth mentioning. At Back-to-School Night, I had a lovely conversation with a parent who is a recent immigrant from Sierra Leone. He spoke of his desire to visit more places but was limited by not being familiar with the United States. Four weeks later, I was driving his van with his wife and two children to Richmond. We walked along the James River, visited the Civil War Museum, enjoyed lunch at a diner, and did a little grocery shopping at a specialty market.

In November, a girl in our class was caught writing profanity on our closet wall. I was disappointed and concerned. I needed to build a stronger relationship with this student. I decided to invite her to stay after school with me; on
Tuesdays, we completed homework and played games, and on Thursdays, she joined my tutoring group. It has worked out magnificently as she and I have a wonderful bond. She has not had a second referral this year.

In January, our school hosted a restorative circle to improve relationships among families in the South 1st Street neighborhood. Racial and ethnic tensions had spilled over from families and homes to bus stops and school. During the meeting, a father, who is a recent immigrant, invited his neighbors to his home. It seemed like a simple, powerful plan. On the way out I asked a boy in my class (who had been bullying a boy from that family and two other students) if he’d want to join me sometime to visit this father and his son. He agreed, and a few weeks later, I arrived at South 1st Street for our play date. My student and I walked over to the home of two other boys who are also immigrants, and we all walked to the family’s house. The family offered candies and we played cards. We later raced outside to the playground and played dodgeball. The boys were full of giggles and good spirit. When I announced that it was time for bed, we walked home in reverse order so each boy could see the others’ homes and toys.

Early in the year, several students were not completing homework, two of whom attended the Boys and Girls Club. I wrote a letter to the Club staff to introduce myself, make my expectations clear, and provide my phone number; later that week, I stopped by to follow up. The homework situation was solved immediately. More importantly, though, I formed a positive relationship with the Boys and Girls Club. Throughout the year, I’ve been in close contact with key staff and have encouraged many of my students to become members. We even took a field trip to tour the club. I often stop by to see my students and love visiting the club, mostly to show them I care about what they are doing outside of my classroom, but also to punt footballs or watch a student navigate our classroom website.

Finally, I will share about my most challenging student. At the beginning of the year, he stood out as the one kid who had almost exclusively negative adult relationships at school. He was often disrespectful—even cold. He didn’t like a few staff members in particular and would tell me, “I don’t smile at them because I don’t like them.” He didn’t do his homework and he got in trouble often. For the next several months, I tried to give him a “little dose of Mary K” (my mom)—some praise and lots of unconditional love. I worked hard to build
him up, to show him how much I cared, and to let him know that others cared, too. He called me often for homework; I also think he was testing me to see if I’d answer. In addition to my September visit, I visited again during his first suspension to let him know we missed him. I brought the Boys and Girls Club form to his home, and he joined within a week.

Reach Them to Teach Them highlights the importance of believing in kids so they will believe in themselves. To do so, as a teacher I must demonstrate this over and over, in many ways, through my actions. I believe the time and commitment I give to knowing my students and being truly accessible to them has made a real difference for them. I believe they will remember my relationship with them and I trust it will have a lasting impact.
Our Parent Nights became the highlight of our year, but our commitment to reaching families began the day we received our class lists for the upcoming school year. Before school started, we made home visits to every child’s home in our classes. The goal of these home visits was to introduce ourselves to the children and to establish a connection between home and the classroom. We explained our curriculum, what a typical day looks like, and we asked parents what their hopes and concerns were for their child entering the preschool program.

These home visits help us set a precedent for communication and establish an understanding with our parents from the outset of the school year. We expect parents to come to the school multiple times during the year; in order to encourage them and help them feel comfortable, we first go to them.

This year as we thought about how to maintain and enhance our connection with parents, we were struck by the reality that we spend about thirty-three
hours a week with our students, but parents have the bulk of the other 135 hours with their children. If we educate our parents, we can multiply our effectiveness both inside and outside the classroom!

It became our goal as a team to plan multiple outreach events for preschool families that would both educate parents, particularly in the area of literacy, and provide an opportunity for families to have fun together and with us as well.

We initially planned to have three Parent Nights, but when a small percentage of parents attended the first event, we decided to give more opportunities for parents to attend these events. Over the course of seven months, we organized six Parent Night events.

Our first Parent Night was a literacy-focused night where we brought in an expert on children’s literature from JMU to speak to our parents about the importance of reading aloud. She demonstrated techniques and read aloud several of her favorite children’s books. The most valuable part was her enthusiastic engagement of parents, helping them feel comfortable while also modeling the importance of reading with their child. Parents also received a free copy of one of the books, and we have heard from the children about reading that book at home!

We followed this with another family-centered gathering where families were invited to build a gingerbread house together and receive a copy of The Gingerbread Man. We had so many fathers, uncles, cousins, and grandparents join in the fun; we rejoiced in watching families literally build community together while building a gingerbread house.

Since movement and music is a large part of our curriculum, we decided to educate parents about using song, dance, and rhythm to connect children to nursery rhymes. First we had a trained dance instructor come and teach parents movements to common nursery rhymes as well as a few new ones. There were parents crawling all over the floor and laughing with their children. It was a delight to see families so engaged and learning at the same time.

Next we hosted a singing performance for our preschoolers to show off their knowledge before a school-wide event called Read and Record.
Our final parent night was a singing night with local musician Cathy Bollinger, who used her talents to teach us songs that demonstrated literacy skills such as rhyming and alliteration.

These last two events point to two important additional goals:

- connecting families to the school-wide events that Jackson-Via hosts, and
- helping parents realize and access the resources that are available here in Charlottesville so they can pursue opportunities on their own as well.

Looking back on our year where we had 82 percent of families attend one or more events, we believe these efforts have strengthened our connections with our parents and we have put tools in the hands of families so learning and growing together can happen at home as well as at school. We hope to continue these Parent Nights in the years to come!
Interactions with Families of ESL Students

April Hoffman & Leslie Scally, ESL Teachers
Johnson Elementary School (April Hoffman is currently at Clark)

We received this Reach Them to Teach Them award two years ago, and used most of it to fund a portion of our English classes for ESL parents. Also, we used a portion of the money for our International Day. We are applying for this award again to continue to fund the above, to make our home visits more useful, and to provide transportation.

Our adult ESL classes are a collaboration between Johnson, Charlottesville City Schools’ Adult Learning Center, and Abundant Life Ministries. The class is a six-week English course, and each night all of the families who attend receive free transportation, dinner, and childcare. The goal of the class is to help parents with their English and to make them more comfortable at school. The parents learn basic English vocabulary and practice using the vocabulary by role-playing parent-school interactions, such as looking over a report card or calling the school about a sick child. The parents are also taught to read a children’s book
that they can take home and read to their children. The classes are a part of the PEP (Parent-Educator Partnership) program, and many of Johnson’s teachers and English-speaking parents help by working with the parents who are learning English. This program truly is a partnership. The ESL parents are able to practice their English, and Johnson’s teachers are able to make more connections with the ESL families. In fact, some teachers have also used this time to meet with parents and have conferences.

We just held our second annual International Day, and the students and staff really loved it. Any student who is from another country or has a family member from another country is welcome to participate. The students create posters about their countries and share their culture with the entire school. They bring food and artifacts and answer questions from their peers. Many parents also attend, some to tour the posters and others to participate with their children and answer questions about their culture. We used our previous grant to provide food from different regions of the world, as well as to buy poster board and supplies for the students’ creations.

Home visits are important. As ESL teachers, part of our job is to familiarize our students’ parents with Johnson and with how American schools work. Often they do not expect that the school would be interested in their help or concerns. Together, we have visited the homes of all of our ESL students, some many times. These visits affirm the school’s interest in their children and allow us to explain the high expectations we have for all of our students.

We are applying for this award again to continue to fund our English classes for ESL parents, to fund our annual International Day, to make our home visits more beneficial, and to help provide parents easier access to school. We could use the award money for the following items:

- Books, teaching materials, and food for Parent ESL classes.
- Poster boards, art supplies, and food for International Day.
- Books and school supplies to give to students during home visits.
- Transportation for students and their parents to school events.

Thank you for considering us!
Mathematics for Families

Tracy Watterson, Mathematics Specialist, Clark Elementary School (currently Elementary Mathematics Assessment Coordinator, Vermont Agency of Education)

As the Mathematics Specialist at Clark School, involvement with all parents in the school is part of my job.

Our Make It and Take It Family Math Games night offered K-4 games from our curriculum for twenty-five families to learn to play and take home for the family to use and keep.

Our Math Mania Month Kick-Off event brought eleven families together to solve puzzles and problem solve.

In addition we are looking forward to involving more parents this summer through our Inch-by-Inch mathematics-reading units that will go home with each rising second- and third-grade student. As soon as possible, we would like to expand these summer units to include rising first- and fourth-graders, too.

Our goal for next year is to build more parents’ confidence in mathematics so
they can better help their children. We would like to expand our evening family events. In addition, we would like to offer a parent preparation night where parents who attend a training session without their children present will feel more confident to help their children. We will teach the parents how to play games, and we will share strategies for problem-solving in an environment in which the parents will feel safe to ask questions, take risks, and learn from others before needing to do so in front of their children. We feel strongly that the parents’ improved confidence will carry over to their increased ability to help their children with their homework, and to encourage their children so they will feel comfortable asking questions and taking risks with their learning.
Leamos Juntos: Let’s Read Together

ElizaBeth McCay, Principal, Jackson-Via Elementary School (currently Head of School, Free Union Country School)

At Jackson-Via Elementary School during this 2008-2009 school year, a team of teachers, led by Amanda Sherriff, the library/media specialist, implemented a program called “Leamos Juntos,” which was funded by a Shannon Grant, an I3 (I-Cubed) Grant through Charlottesville City Schools, and supplemental funding through Jackson-Via’s Outreach Fund.

The initiative was developed because our Spanish-speaking families comprise 20 percent of our school’s population, and this percentage continues to grow annually. Our kindergarten enrollment alone during the current year was 25 percent Spanish-speaking. Additionally, assessment data for our school at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year showed a literacy gap between Spanish-speaking students and their English-speaking peers. For example, a 32 percentage-point difference existed between the Spanish- and English-speaking children in letter and letter-sound recognition.
The goals of *Leamos Juntos* were as follows:

- To empower our families to further their children’s reading development, English language acquisition, and general academic success.
- To decrease the literacy gap between English- and Spanish-speaking students.
- To bridge the communication gap between Spanish-speaking parents and school staff, thus decreasing parents’ frustration at not being able to adequately support their students’ learning at home.
- To add a wealth of Spanish language and bilingual materials to our school library, which will serve our families for years to come.

To accomplish these goals, *Leamos Juntos* held a series of evening events, each of which was comprised of these components:

- A speaker from a community organization
- A program focused on reading, math, technology, or another school subject
- Bilingual book checkout
- Dinner
- Childcare

Some of the topics that were the focus of our programs included strategies for families to use while reading to or with children, math games that families could enjoy at home, and websites to visit with children. Some of the participating Spanish-speaking community organization representatives at our meetings included a representative of United Way, a therapist from Charlottesville League of Therapists, and an interpreter from the Free Clinic.

Through *Leamos Juntos*, we reached approximately 25 families, and we had an average attendance of 50 people at each of our monthly meetings. We checked out over 1000 bilingual books and added several hundred new bilingual books to our school library. Although we have not yet obtained the spring scores to assess student progress, we expect that the scores for our Spanish-speaking students will have improved, and that the gap between their scores and those of their English-speaking peers will have decreased. We also plan to conduct a survey of the attendees at *Leamos Juntos* events, and we expect the results of the survey to indicate that parents feel that the program has reduced and helped them overcome many of the communication barriers that they previously experienced with staff.
Results from a school-wide parent survey addressing overall school satisfaction in January 2009 gave strong indication of the positive impact of Leamos Juntos and other outreach support provided to our Spanish-speaking families. We have received many positive comments from our parents and students specifically about the Leamos Juntos program, and we are pursuing the funding necessary to support continuation of this program for the coming school year.

In addition to the formal program of services provided through Leamos Juntos, Jackson-Via staff proposed and participated in an ongoing Spanish class for staff. This was then replicated at two other sites in the school division, in order to increase our ability to communicate with parents and make them feel welcome in our school. We have a commitment to hiring staff with Spanish-speaking skills, and provide translation by bilingual staff members at major events such as kindergarten registration, PTO meetings, and parent-teacher conferences. We also have an in-house Spanish phone line where parents can leave voicemail messages and receive responses in their primary language.

One final note: During one of the Leamos Juntos evenings this winter, a parent’s car was broken into and a significant amount of cash—that family’s rent for the month—was stolen. The Jackson-Via staff gathered a collection, and replaced nearly half of the stolen amount. This type of support is one small example of the commitment our entire school makes in supporting all children—and their families—at Jackson-Via.
If you were to walk around Johnson Elementary School, you would find that nearly 26 percent of our student body is comprised of English Language Learners. Of these students, nearly 75 percent are refugee students and many have had very limited formal education before enrolling at Johnson. There is a multitude of diverse languages we serve, such as Arabic, Kirundi, Swahili, Mandarin, Mai Mai, and Karen. Our Somali refugees speak an unwritten language called Mai Mai. These students face the difficult challenge of learning English when they have never seen a written language before. Our refugees from Thailand speak several various languages where the script and phonemes are completely different than the English alphabet. This poses many challenges when teaching our English Language Learners.

To meet the varied needs of our students, I have developed, with the support of my administration, the ESL Academy, which is staffed by 1.5 teachers and 1
instructional assistant, who is also a certified teacher. Our primary goal in the Academy is to promote language acquisition through literacy development. All Level One and Level Two students (students that are very new to the English language) receive as much as three hours of small group support daily. This consists of students rotating through various stations where they receive instruction in literacy, vocabulary development (including content-specific vocabulary that has been pre-taught by the classroom teacher), phonics, and writing. Transition between teachers every half-hour helps to maximize instruction.

To begin a day in our Academy, all second-, third-, and fourth-grade ESL students attend a morning meeting where we teach language development through read-alouds, grammar experiences, think-pair-share, and a weekly author study. Our librarian has commented on how pleased she is by how much our English Language Learners know about various authors. Also, many of our refugee students have never seen a calendar or weather chart. Thus, during this morning meeting time we go over these concepts and others, through the use of songs, chants, and poetry. We also incorporate the use of a SMART board. This has been an innovative method for our students to actively engage in learning processes, and become the teacher.

Along with SMART board technology, our ESL students have been able to use other forms of technology in our school to create projects and practice reading. The English Language Learners have used various websites to practice an array of skills in both phonics and reading. They have used Kidspiration for writing. To track reading fluency, our students have used both Garage Band to capture their voices and Flip Cameras to videotape themselves reading poetry. Students are able to look back to monitor their miscues and to increase their self-awareness in reading. We just recently began an Edu-Blog where we will be posting all of our most recent classroom videos and performances. This will be one way parents are able to see into our classroom and view the work of their child.

In researching how to improve English Language Learners’ reading fluency and pronunciation, I learned that readers’ theater is a valuable tool for enhancing reading skills. Readers’ theater consists of students reading various parts of a story to practice fluency skills. I decided to introduce Readers’ theater at the beginning of the year and found it was something most of the students had never done before. We introduce the story to the students, have them
practice their lines daily, create props, and then perform our play on Fridays. At first it was a struggle to teach how to perform a Readers’ theater, but now readers’ theater has become one of our students’ favorite experiences. It has helped enhance their pronunciation, intonation, and reading fluency, as well as improve their confidence in their own reading abilities. Our students were asked to perform a Readers’ theater at the upcoming Festival of Cultures and they are excited to show the skills they have learned throughout this year.

One way that has helped parental involvement is making home visits. At the beginning of the year, my colleagues and I made numerous home visits along with the students’ homeroom teachers. We used this time to introduce ourselves, relay important information, and discuss student progress. This helped make connections for many of our refugee families who did not have easy transportation to and from school. It also provided an opportunity for us to learn more about our students’ various cultures. I have also extended myself to our families as a contact person to help keep parents informed with the various school functions, and to help them fill out important school paperwork and forms. Additionally, I help with communication between the Abundant Life Tutoring program and some of our refugee students’ families. My assistant, Lorena Caballero, has been a vital asset to our program as well, by serving as a Spanish interpreter for many parent meetings.

More recently, in collaboration with the Adult Learning Center, Abundant Life Ministries, and Johnson Elementary, we were able to start an Adult ESL Literacy class for the parents of our English Language Learners. The goals of this class are to persuade many of our non-English speaking families to attend English classes at the Adult Learning Center and, especially, to encourage parental involvement in Johnson school. I helped recruit families to attend this six-week English course, where parents are provided free transportation, free dinner, and free childcare. Parents are taught survival skills, as well as how to read a children’s story. They are able to take the literature home at the end of the night, which enables them to continue their skills at home. Some of the refugee families had felt uncomfortable about entering the school, and through this program they have gained confidence, which will hopefully contribute to the learning processes of their children. It has been a joy to watch the parents come each week, excited to both learn and enjoy the time with their children.
First-Grade Parental Involvements

Denise Mowry, Instructional Assistant
Clark Elementary School

Parental involvement is important to the first-grade teachers at Clark, the children, and their parents. I serve as an instructional assistant at this grade level, and am writing about the achievements of two teachers this year.

Mary Johnston and Katie Rogers, along with their assistants, take pride in having initiated and kept parents involved in the following activities and events throughout the year. Plus, this involvement has benefited the children.

The teachers began the year with an increased effort to promote parental involvement and communication. They contacted, either by phone or home visit, every family prior to the open house. In this way, the teachers welcomed and introduced each family to this important year in the life of their child. The families, as a result, quickly became comfortable with the teachers and knew what to expect. They knew the person who would be there every day with their young child.
Also, the teachers became acquainted more quickly with the children. They learned about their favorite activities and their dislikes. In these early contacts with the families, the parents gave the teachers information that helped the children get off to a good start. The teachers, for example, read books to the class that reflected the children’s interests. To quickly bring the children into the world of reading was important to their success.

Then, for the traditional open house, the two teachers tried something else that was new for them. They provided each family with a “Refrigerator Curriculum,” which was an outline of the first-grade year, complete with ideas to help their child with each subject. This gave parents opportunities to be closely connected to their children’s learning experiences. They could connect what they were doing at home to what we were doing at school. They could engage in conversations about the weather, count objects while shopping, and read cereal boxes. They could help determine how much meat to buy for sandwiches. In general, when the children became educationally involved in everyday things, their success in school was more likely.

Throughout the year, more so than in previous years, the teachers invited family members to join in classroom learning, field trips, and other activities. Overall, the first-grade team at Clark invited parents, grandparents, and other family members to join us for social studies, science, writing, and field trips on both a weekly and monthly basis.

When parents became partners during writing, their involvement encouraged the expansion of their children’s writing skills and creativity. The presence of parents gave children additional opportunities to share their writing, and when parents listened to children read their writing, they gave extra confidence to the children. The children wanted to show off, and they wanted to write more! One of the first-grade girls became so excited when parents came that she wouldn’t stop writing. The teacher actually had to stop her, so she could go back to edit. It was cool to see the children’s writing become so much better when parents came. They wanted to impress them, and the parents really wanted to be part of what was going on. They wanted to be involved in the learning experiences.

The teachers invited grandparents to share holiday traditions they celebrate from other countries, bringing part of their family to the classroom, which
fascinated the children. They learned about other places and about their classmates. These occasions engaged the children. They thought of school as a place in which they found joy. They wanted to be involved, and they wanted to learn.

On each field trip, parents joined and shared in the learning experiences. Having the extra hands was always nice, but seeing the interaction between these significant adults and the children continued to be a rewarding experience for everyone. One of our field trips was to the Richmond Science Museum, and a parent connected his job to an exhibit at the museum. When we returned to school, that connection was the event from the trip that the children remembered best. The children brought back what the parents had pointed out to them. When we went to the Virginia Safari Park, one parent was afraid to touch a snake, but her daughter said, “I know you are afraid, but I’m going to try.” This child was teaching her parent. They were learning together. Later, we heard parents say, “Let’s go home and look at a map to see where that animal is from.” Parent involvement in these trips increased what the children learned, which helped them with additional learning.

Also, more so than in the past, Ms. Johnston and Ms. Rogers solicited support from parents for discipline plans. Parents were involved as soon as there was indication of a concern, and the parents provided follow-up at home to ensure ongoing success. Individual plans and actions were set up to benefit the children, including the use of charts to graph their growth. One parent who used a chart wrote a note to me daily, and I wrote back to the parent and child. The child read the notes, and his behavior significantly improved. The mom had always said the boy had short-term memory problems, but she learned that attentiveness was the issue. When the mother, son, and I became involved in our daily focus, the boy changed, and became one of the top readers in the class.

Another child, we learned from his family, was not permitted to play outside when at home, and came to school with energy to burn. I started to run laps with him before school, and he started to have fewer outbursts. Importantly, his academic work also improved.

Overall, the parents welcomed our phone calls. The initial contact prior to the opening of school had set the stage. The parents were like, “Wow! You showed
you are willing to take your time, so maybe I should.” Those visits opened the communication lines, so when the teachers brought up a problem, the parents knew they were doing it out of concern. The teachers were not picking on the children. The parents realized that it was important to keep the home-school connection strong, so if their children experienced behavioral difficulties they would receive every opportunity to succeed.

The academic success of the children was also due to the high percentage of parent/teacher/child connections with homework. We sent work home daily, and the children returned it with a signature. My own daughter was in the first grade, and I know I was sometimes too busy to help her with her homework, but she always completed it, and always got a signature. The signatures were the children’s responsibility, and the parents were part of it. Out of close to 40 children, we had 80 percent cooperation, which shows huge growth in parent participation compared to previous years.
A Myriad of Efforts

Michael Allers, Assistant Principal, Jackson-Via Elementary School (currently principal, Trevilians Elementary in Louisa County)

We have united in our school-wide commitment to reach every one of our 281 students by serving them during the school day and by meeting their needs outside the boundaries of the academic day. In several ways, the teachers and staff make it clear that they are interested in working with the parents/guardians of the students.

The best way to connect with parents and guardians is through face-to-face conferences. For this school year, the staff committed to meeting a parent conference goal of 100 percent for the second year in a row. Our staff members literally go the extra mile to reach each and every Jackson-Via parent/guardian. Beyond the division-wide parent conference day, some unique locations for conferences this year include a laundromat, CVS, and an Exxon gas station. Also, as in 2006-2007, Jackson-Via partnered with Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church to try to reach parents. Mt. Zion hosted a parent conference evening.
Once again, and they also provided a barbeque for staff to cook hotdogs for an outreach parent meeting held at the school. Importantly, we have again met our goal of holding conferences with 100 percent of our parents and guardians! This year, however, we met our goal three months earlier than last year.

Also, similar to last year, students with repeated absences and tardies are being brought to school. Principal ElizaBeth McCay, Assistant Principal Michael Allers, Physical Education teacher Randall Pitts, and Parent Outreach Coordinator Doris Dowell knock on doors early in the morning and bringing students to school. Our goal is 1,000 home visits by the end of the school year, and we are well over 800 visits already! Our commitment to bringing students to school has garnered positive press within the local community in area newspapers and on television news broadcasts.

In addition, classroom teachers promote perfect attendance. On January 25, 2008, we had 100 percent attendance throughout the school. (Our average daily attendance is 96.07 percent). Overall, we have seen a significant decrease in the number of tardies and absences this year!

This year we have capitalized on last year’s interest in parent/child reading with the Jackson-Via Reading Rabbits Read-a-thon. Each student may take home a book each night to be read to, by, or with a parent. A total of 272 Jackson-Via Jackrabbits participate in this program and, as was the case last year, many have read over 100 books with their parents.

Furthermore, during the Read Across America week in March, our students read 42,350 pages.

Holiday seasons can be occasions of anxiety for our families so, as we did last year, we offered assistance to those with financial needs, and provided meals for families at Thanksgiving and during the winter holiday break. The faculty, moved by the needs of one family, elected to collect enough money to buy Christmas dinner groceries for four families.

In addition, this December (similar to last December), Jackson-Via served 161 children (104 of whom were Jackson-Via students, representing 31 families) through the Toy Lift Foundation and 44 different families for the Angel Tree. These projects are a direct result of our community partnerships, such as
partnering with the First United Methodist Church for the Angel Tree and with our attendance officer and community members.

Our students frequently talk about visits by teachers in their neighborhoods and homes. Students are increasingly interested in school after learning that their administrators and teachers care enough to come to get them in the morning. They know that we take great measures to address their academic and physical needs. Our Jackson-Via students are energized by our many efforts to reach them to teach them!
As a school, we at Jackson-Via extend our efforts beyond the classroom in our desire to bridge the gap between school and home. Given our commitment to reach every student in our school, we give our best during the school day and dedicate ourselves to meeting the needs of our students outside of the academic day, as well. The motivation behind our efforts is for our students to achieve academic excellence by knowing that the teachers and staff serving them are interested in each child as an individual.

One of the ways we have reached out to our students and their families is through making community visits. In anticipation of the coming school year, we made our first community visit the week before school began. Bringing books, popsicles, and bubbles, the Jackson-Via staff knocked on the doors of students who live in the South 1st Street community, inviting them to join us for a time of sharing, reading, and play. Students, parents, and staff spent a wonderful morning together getting to know each other.
We continue to visit other neighborhoods. Before coming to each neighborhood, we mail postcards to each of our families announcing the date and time that we will be coming. Our ESL teacher has translated the message on the postcard into Spanish for our Hispanic families. Armed with books, sidewalk chalk, a football, bubbles, and popsicles, the Jackson-Via staff sets out to reach each student. Our students talk with excitement about their teachers coming to visit in their neighborhood!

In addition to meeting parents and students informally in their neighborhoods, the staff at Jackson-Via has committed to meeting a parent conference goal of 100 percent. Our desire is for parents to contribute to the progress of their child and to value the integral role they play in their child’s education. Our staff has taken great measures to try and reach each Jackson-Via parent. In addition to the division-wide parent conference day, staff members have teamed up to step out into the community to meet with parents after school hours, in their homes and at neutral sites. This year Jackson-Via partnered with Mt. Zion First African Baptist Church and Ebenezer Baptist Church to try to reach parents. Mt. Zion hosted a parent conference evening at the church where parents could come to enjoy dinner and to meet with teachers. Through our various approaches, we have met our goal and held a conference with 100 percent of our parents!

Students cannot achieve academic excellence when they are not at school. The issue of being present in the classroom and arriving on time has become one of great importance to us. Students with repeated absences and tardies are being tracked and brought to school. Principal ElizaBeth McCay, Assistant Principal Michael Allers, Guidance Counselor Kristin Link, and Parent Outreach Coordinator Doris Dowell work together to identify and solve problems that keep our students out of the classroom. With a new approach in place, these staff members knock on doors early in the morning and bring students to school. Classroom teachers work alongside the office staff to promote attendance. With everyone working together, we have seen a decrease in the number of tardies and absences!

This year we have created an enthusiasm for parent/child reading with the Jackson-Via Reading Rabbits Read-a-thon. Each student has the opportunity to take home a book each night to be read to or with a parent. This school-wide program has 93% of our Jackson-Via Jackrabbits hopping along to read at
home. A majority of our students have read over 100 books with their parents this year!

At Jackson-Via we are committed to meeting the needs of our students that extend beyond academics. Recognizing that the holiday season can be one of anxiety for our families, we offered assistance to those with financial needs. This December, Jackson-Via served 197 students through the Salvation Army Toy Lift and First United Methodist Church’s Angel Tree. The Salvation Army Toy Lift sponsored 42 families and 97 students. Staff members joyfully met to select Christmas presents for our students. First United Methodist Church (FUMC) sponsored 69 Jackson-Via students. In mid-December, FUMC hosted an Angel Tree party at Jackson-Via, where students, parents, staff, and church members gathered to spread holiday cheer and to distribute gifts selected for Angel Tree children. With the support of FUMC, Jackson-Via was able to reach out to our students in need and to show our commitment to caring for the whole child.

Our students are excited about being a part of the Jackson-Via family. They talk enthusiastically about visiting with teachers in their neighborhoods and homes, with an understanding that we care. Students are eager to come to school after learning that Dr. McCay, Mr. Allers, or Mrs. Link will show up at their door to bring them to school. Our students are proud to be Reading Rabbits who read at home. Our students know that we take great measures to care for their academic needs as well as their physical needs. As a result, we see students who are energized to come to school and to learn. As a collective staff at Jackson-Via, we are reaching them to teach them!
Our motto, “We Are Family,” is at the core of everything we do. At Johnson Elementary School, it is our mission to motivate our children to come to school every day and for them to desire to do their personal best with regards to academics and citizenry. Every child that enters our building is truly a member of the Johnson Family. As the Assistant Principal, my mission is to make sure: a) that every child feels like a special member of our family; b) that every child wants to come to school every day; c) that every child strives to achieve their personal best at all times; d) that every child receives differentiated instruction to meet their individual needs; and e) that all stakeholders share this mission.

Several components are imperative to the success of our mission. These components include, but are not limited to:

a) Daily **communication** with the parent(s)/guardian(s);

b) **High expectations** for every student;

c) A positive/pro-active **school-wide discipline program**;
d) After-school enrichment and remediation programs; and
e) Community partnerships.
Below you will find a description of these components, as well as the frequency with which the components are implemented.

Communication
Teachers are expected to communicate with the parent(s)/guardian(s) on a daily basis. Every child has a communication folder/agenda in which teachers send home messages with regards to homework, daily performance, and any other important information. The students have to take the communication home and have it signed by a parent or guardian to indicate that the communication has been received. We do have some parents/guardians who are illiterate, and therefore the daily communication is made via the telephone.

One component of our communication piece is that every student has to take home something to read to or with a parent/guardian. The reading component is extremely valuable because the student has to read every night and the student and parent/guardian have to interact with each other. There are a few cases in which a babysitter fills the role of the parent/guardian due to work schedules or other conflicts. However, for the most part this interaction occurs between the student and a parent/guardian.

We want every parent/guardian to visit their child’s classroom. However, a lot of our families are unable to come to the school due to a lack of transportation or employment schedules. Knowing the constraints on our families, we make a point to accommodate their schedules with regards to conferences. Oftentimes we pay for taxis to and from school so that parents or guardians can visit the school.

High Expectations
“Schools that establish high expectations for all students – and provide the support necessary to achieve these expectations – have high rates of academic success” (Howard, 1990). At Johnson Elementary, we have high expectations for every student regardless of demographics. We do not view our students as at-risk.

This year we have been moving away from the tracking that has occurred in the past with respect to reading instruction. I believe that students need to
receive the majority of their reading instruction in their regular classrooms and that we do not need to group the students based on their current reading performance. Research shows that the lower level reader will be a more successful reader and achieve more by receiving their reading instruction in a heterogeneous class (Wheelock, 1992). If necessary, students can get supplemental reading instruction that is designed to meet their individual needs.

**School-Wide Discipline**
I implemented a school-wide discipline program called the “Super Star Program.” The goal for every student is to behave like a “Super Star” which entails: following school and classroom rules, being respectful to everyone, being positive, being honest, being cooperative, and being responsible. All students are expected to be good citizens. Students are constantly recognized for specific, good behaviors. As a result of this effort, the total number of office referrals, timeouts, and suspensions are drastically lower than they were during the previous school year. The teachers have made the program successful, and everyone has benefited from its implementation. Our students are learning to be good citizens, and they will carry what they have learned at school into the outside world.

**After-School Programs**
We have after-school classes that are designed to offer a wide variety of enrichment as well as remediation. These courses are free and are offered to all students in grades 1-4. Some of our enrichment classes include music through computers, art, sports, computer design, poetry, literature, and science.

We offer classes that are designed to give students extra help in the areas of reading and math in grades 1-4. These programs are instrumental to student success as well as to school-wide achievement on the standardized tests. All of our after-school courses are taught by our licensed teachers. Throughout the year we have over 440 students who take part in the after-school activities.

**Community Involvement**
Our school is the center of our community. We host a mosque on Sundays, various youth athletic events throughout the week, and a Hispanic soccer league on Saturdays and Sundays. During the school day we have scores of community volunteers who come into our school to work with our children on both academic and social issues.
Our volunteer base consists mainly of UVA students/graduates and people who live within the Johnson School zone. However, we do work hard to bring in policemen, firemen, and other professional members of the community to help motivate our students to achieve their personal best. Our local community supports us, and we give back by graduating excellent citizens and hosting special events. Our special events include Hispanic Heritage Night, two community picnics, African-American Heritage Celebrations, and our Community Bingo Night.

Reach Them to Teach Them: List of Awardees

2014
Mary Craig: Clark, Librarian
Kellie Keyser: Clark, gr 3

2013
Nikki Franklin: J Via, kindergarten
Lorena Caballero: Johnson, kindergarten

2012
Ida Cummings: J-Via, gr 1

2011
Katie Tracy: J-Via, gr 4
Ann Mehlin, Michel Ann Sizemore, and Shannon Gillikin: J-Via, preschool
Kim Bronson: Clark, gr 4
Leslie Scally and April Hoffman: Johnson, ESL.

2010
No award was granted since attention was focused on identifying outside funding.

2009
April Hoffman: Johnson, ESL

2008
Denise Mowry, Mary Johnston, and Katie Rogers: Clark, gr 1

2007
Emily Flory: J-Via staff

To learn more about applying for Reach Them to Teach Them awards (at Clark, Jackson-Via, and Johnson Elementary Schools), please contact your principal.