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September 5, 2023

Vanessa Smith, Family Service Advocate/Key Contact to NNPS
Janet Brown, Principal
Ladson Elementary School
3321 Ladson Road
Ladson, SC 29456

Dear Ms. Smith and Ms. Brown:

GOOD NEWS! Ladson Elementary School earned a **2023 Partnership School Award** from the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. This is your school's 2nd Partnership School Award, indicating that Ladson is emerging as a leader in developing and improving its partnership program over time.

The NNPS School Awards Committee read the documents that you submitted. Please note: Ladson is the only school this year for which we approved two activities in the new book of *Promising Partnership Practices 2023*. Reviewers praised *Donuts and Dreams with Deputies and Dads* for its comprehensive program and thoughtful outreach to male figures in students' lives. They also thought that *Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging Our Hispanic Families* was exciting, important, and very well-organized. They were glad to see that these and other activities were accounted for in your *One Year Action Plan for Partnerships*. They saw evidence that your team is going beyond isolated "activities" to support teamwork and thoughtful evaluations from families to continually improve your school's program and practices.

Please note:

- You will receive a **2023 NNPS Partnership School Award Certificate** via e-mail. Please share this honor on your school website.
- Along with the Award Certificate, your school will receive a **Certificate to Renew Membership** next year for the 24-25 school year at no cost—a \$400 value.
- Your program will be recognized on the NNPS website with a summary of both activities.

*If you take a photo of your ATP for the NNPS website, please send it to **Brenda Thomas** at nnps@jhu.edu by Friday, **September 29**. Include the **names of each person, left-to-right, by row**. Please identify the ATP chair(s) and principal.

Educators and reporters who see your program featured on our website may call you for information about your work. We hope that you will draw from your 2023 Award Application to help others understand how to develop a goal-linked program of family and community engagement for student success in school, and your connections to NNPS.

Attached is a sample press release with ideas to let your colleagues, community, and local media know that your school received a 2023 NNPS Partnership School Award. Please publicize your award to share the good work you have done with your community.

NNPS is proud of your school's progress in developing a strong and sustainable partnership program to engage all families in ways that support student success in school. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joyce L. Epstein".

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D.
Co-Director and Professor of Education

cc: Rosa Fulmore, Title I Parent & Family Engagement Coordinator
Dr. Eric Gallien, Superintendent

PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES



An annual collection from the members of the
National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University

2023

Edited by Brenda G. Thomas, Jovce L. Epstein, and Zhe Zhao

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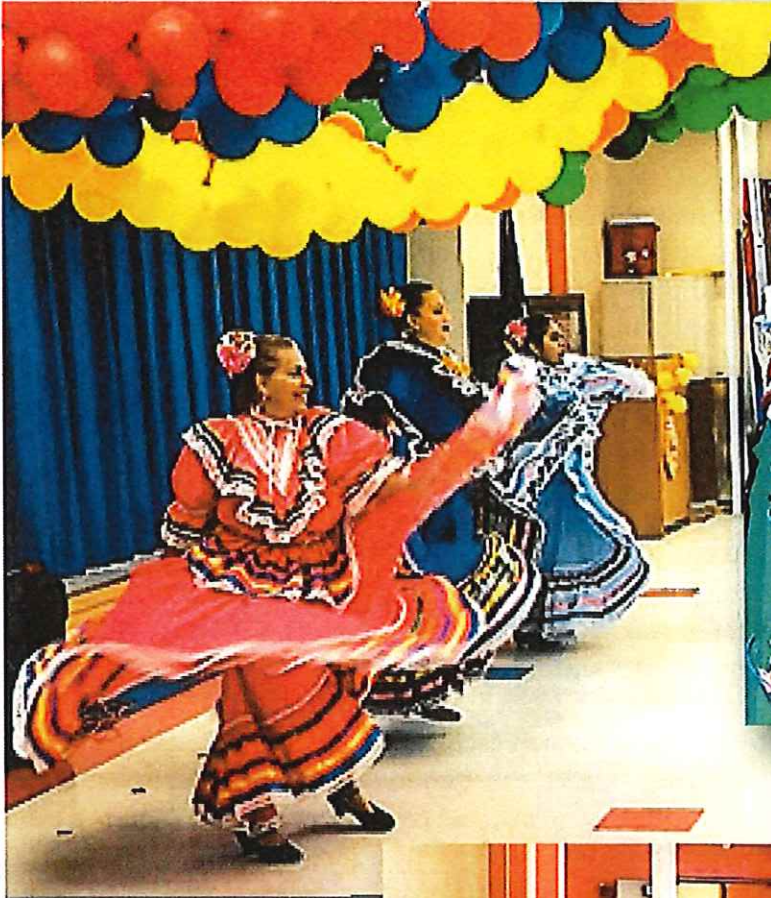
CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



Practices for Types 1-6 in this section involve families and community partners to help create a welcoming, family-friendly school. These practices aim to reach out to involve all families and the community.

Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging Our Hispanic Families
Ladson Elementary School
Ladson, SC

TYPE 2



CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



CELEBRATING, EMPOWERING, AND ENGAGING OUR HISPANIC FAMILIES

LADSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LADSON, SC

Ladson calls its diverse community of families with different racial and cultural backgrounds “a place of beauty.” The school is always working to strengthen school, family, and community partnerships with all of its families. In the past school year, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Family Advocate worked to ensure that the school’s Hispanic families were welcome, respected, and felt a sense of belonging.

Knowing that good partnerships contribute to students’ academic and behavioral successes, the ATP and colleagues planned a celebration of the school’s diversity. They wanted to highlight the strengths of Hispanic families, and, at the same time, learn what these families wanted from the school to feel more welcome and to create a more collaborative school climate.

They planned Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging Our Hispanic Families. Teamwork was key to the success of this activity. The planners sent home letters in English and Spanish to invite parents and family members, and advertised the celebration with emails, texts, phone calls, Zoom, and in-person meetings.

The ATP and Family Advocate knew there were untapped talents and strengths among the school’s Hispanic families. These parents could help the school’s partnership program strengthen mutual understanding and trust between educators and families.

To help Hispanic families feel welcome, respected, and important to the school, the celebration was conducted entirely in Spanish. The ATP and planning group worked closely with their district-level leader for partnerships, who served as MC, hostess, and translator for the activity. Students participated, too. One student read a poem in Spanish. Others assisted with sign in. A student and family danced the *Macarena* and taught everyone to dance along. The principal and district leader shared information with parents about what it means to be

a Title I school, parents’ rights to be involved in school decision making, and what programs and resources are available to their children.

A highlight of the celebration was a performance by a community dance group—*El Grupo de Dance-Viva Mexico!* The reaction? “They were awesome—asombroso!” This group also owns Mexican Cuisine, a local restaurant, which provided delicious food for the event. Other parents also contributed Hispanic specialties for the celebration.

A Community Engagement Specialist from the Charleston County Sheriff’s Office read-aloud a book in Spanish and played the Hand Pan (i.e., a version of a steelpan played by hand) for a musical treat. An officer spoke about how the group called Hispanic Families and The Community affected her, personally, since the beginning of the COVID crisis. Each family took home backpacks and gift bags containing books, reading packets, and ideas to encourage children’s reading and learning at home.

Over 70 parents and family members, more than 40 students, and 60 teachers and community partners participated in the celebration of school diversity. Parents completed a Spanish language evaluation and noted their satisfaction with the event. They mentioned feeling more comfortable at school. One parent gave a comprehensive response: “We feel more at ease knowing the school is communicating with us and celebrating our culture. We loved the performances, food, and decorations. We are looking forward to more events and resources to meet our needs!”

Lots of meaning and lots of fun—a winning combination. Say it again? “Asombroso!”

Vanessa Smith
Family Advocate
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Charleston County School District

TYPE 2

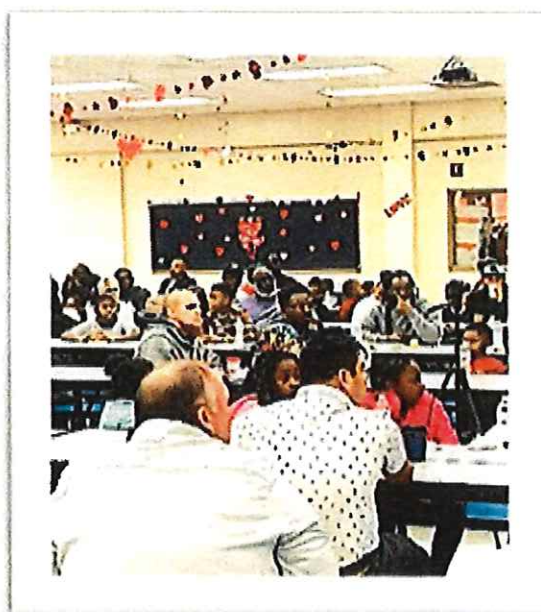
CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Donuts and Dreams with Deputies and Dads
Ladson Elementary School
Ladson, SC

TYPE 6



CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS



DONUTS AND DREAMS WITH DEPUTIES AND DADS

LADSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LADSON, SC

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Family Advocate at Ladson Elementary School met to discuss how to increase the participation of students' dads and other key male figures in their education at school and at home. This is a "forever" agenda item in most schools. To strengthen these partnerships, Ladson's ATP designed Donuts and Dreams with Deputies and Dads—a worthy and tasty activity.

The activity had several goals. First, the ATP, teachers, and administrators wanted to meet students' dads. They also wanted to welcome these visitors with useful information on how to become more active partners at school and at home in their children's learning and development.

Ladson is a large school with over 800 students. The planners agreed to identify students who were in need of extra family support. The Family Service Advocate on the ATP contacted the parents of these students and asked them to select a key male figure to attend Donuts and Dreams. A bilingual colleague contacted the Spanish-speaking families. Teachers were concerned about support for students whose dads were not at home or not available to come to school. The invitations, then, were open to dads, grandfathers, uncles, and other important male figures in students' lives. The planners titled the session carefully, citing a well-known quote: "Any man can be a father, but it takes a real man to be a Dad."

Some community partners presented information, stories, and advice to the dads. These included a local pastor, deputies from the Charleston County Sheriff's Office, and an expert on financial planning. A guest speaker inspired the father figures to build positive relationships with their children to make a difference in their lives. Students participated, too. They gave the welcoming address in English and in Spanish, and read a poem about the student-dad relationship. The selected students attended the sessions

with their dads. The event was informative and emotional. One dad who worked as a truck driver surprised his son, who jumped into his arms. It was a moment that melted hearts.

Community groups and the school district set up tables with information about their services. They also donated resources for dads and school supplies for students. These included backpacks, pamphlets, dictionaries, Bombas socks, school supply kits, and gift bags with two books to encourage students and dads to enjoy reading together at home.

The school already organized a dad's group called Ladson Elementary Dads. This group shared their experiences, joys, and challenges with the visitors, and welcomed new partners to their group.

Doughnuts and Dreams was successful. About 95 dads, grandfathers, uncles, and others attended along with 131 of the selected students, and about 50 educators and community partners. The evaluations were positive. One parent noted, "My heart was so full to be able to spend time with my children at their school. I will make it my business to visit the school more and stay in contact with the teachers."

Teachers expect the selected students will improve their classwork, complete homework, and study for tests. They expect them to have more positive attitudes and behaviors, feel less stress, and have stronger self-esteem and social skills. The messages from dads indicated that more of them will volunteer to help the school, and more will attend student activities through the school year.

Doughnuts and Dreams was more than a feel-good event. It was a well-planned do-good activity.

Vanessa Smith
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Charleston County School District

TYPE 6

CLIMATE OF PARTNERSHIPS