

IEL National Family Engagement Conference – July 12, 2018

Taking Steps for Success: Developing Effective Family-School Partnerships within Rural School Districts

Presenters

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Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network

PaTTAN's Mission

The mission of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) is to support the efforts and initiatives of the Bureau of Special Education, and to build the capacity of local educational agencies to serve students who receive special education services.

PDE's Commitment to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Our goal for each child is to ensure Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams begin with the general education setting with the use of Supplementary Aids and Services before considering a more restrictive environment.

Learning Objectives

Examine barriers to the engagement of families in rural areas

Discuss family engagement development strategies within rural districts

Explore reduplication and expansion techniques for building family-school partnerships

Reflect upon family engagement strengths and needs within participants' LEAs



Family Engagement in Rural America



Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network

Why Family Engagement?



“At the end of the day,
the most overwhelming
key to a child’s success is
the positive involvement
of parents.”

Jane D. Hull, former governor of Arizona

Benefits of Family-School Partnerships

**Reduced drop-out
rates and higher
graduation rates**

(Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison,
2006)

**Increased student
achievement**

(Hill & Tyson, 2009)

Reduced absenteeism

(Sheldon & Epstein, 2007)

**Better attitudes
towards learning**

(Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, &
Childs, 2004)

**Fewer behavioral
problems**

(Casper & Lopez, 2006)

**Better student-
teacher relationships**

(Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008)

**Improved trust in
schools**

(Payne & Kaba, 2001)

**Increased cultural
competence**

(Marschall, 2006)

Strengths of Rural Schools in Family Engagement

- Schools are often central within rural communities
- Centrality provides many opportunities for community communication and participation
- Teachers and administrators are often highly accessible and may work with smaller number of students
- “Everyone knows everyone else”



Barriers to Family Engagement in Rural Communities

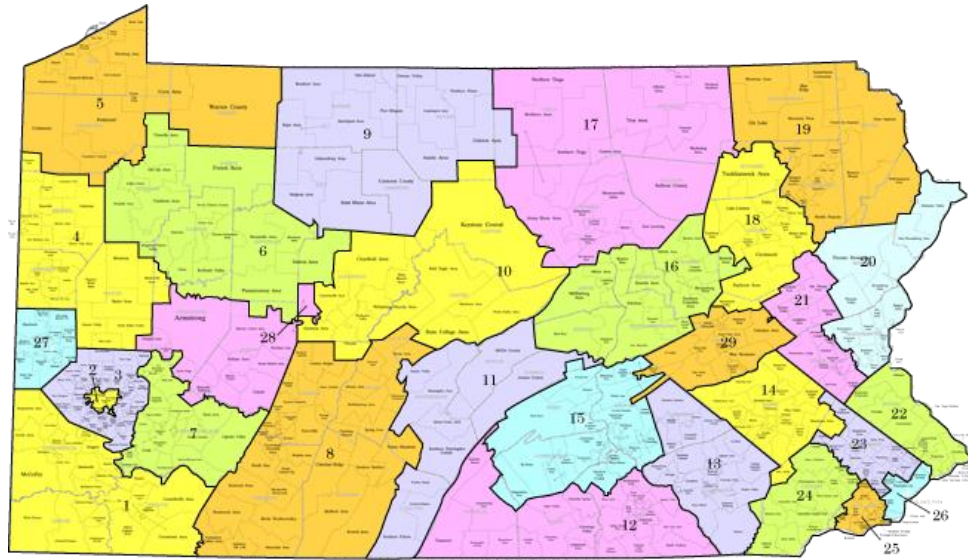
Isolation and geographical barriers (Beloin & Peterson, 2000)

Poverty and lack of resources (Lowe, 2006)

Culture of family uncertainty and mistrust (Owens et al., 2007)

Logistical barriers (Beloin & Peterson, 2000)

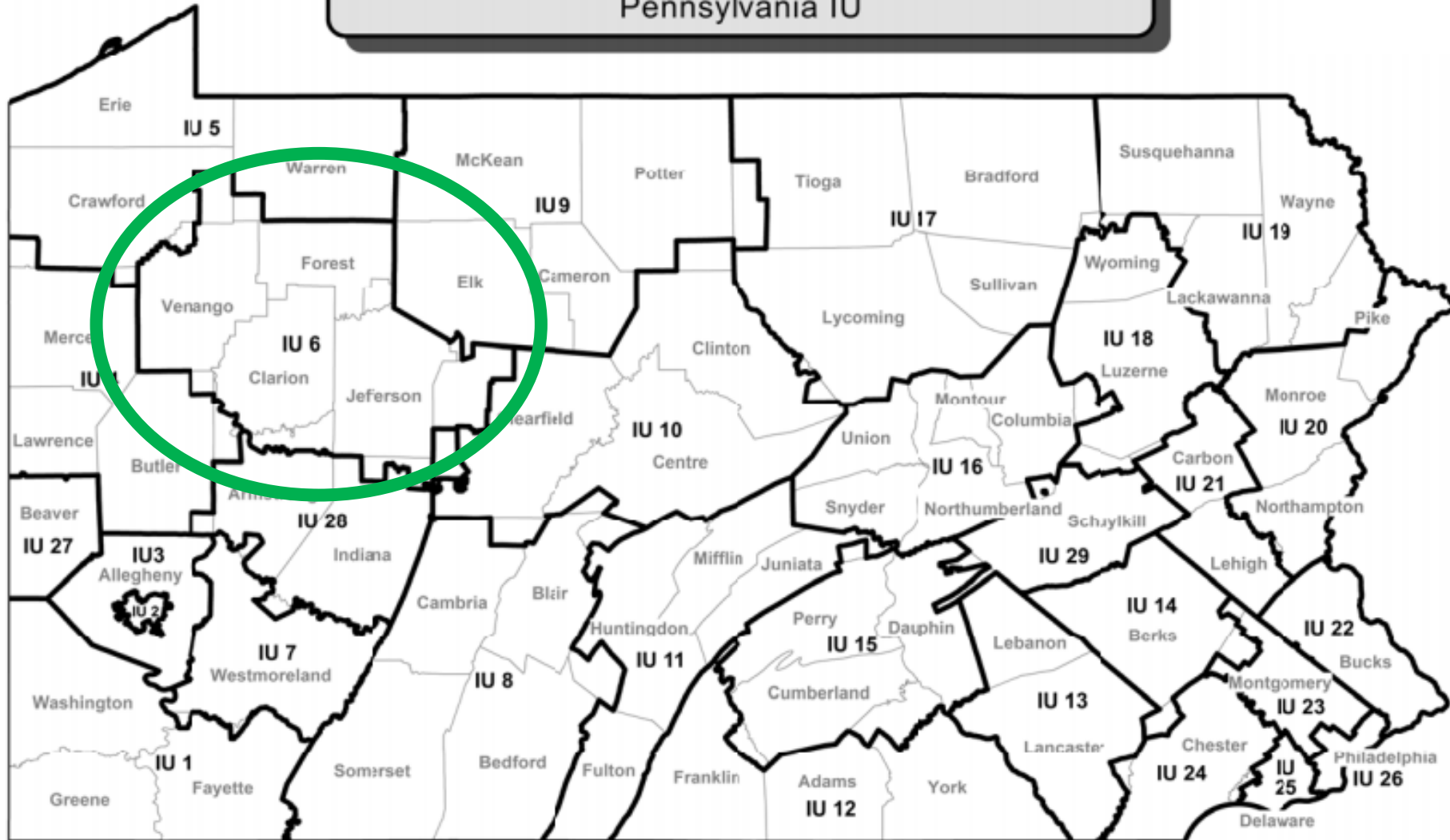
What Is an Intermediate Unit (IU)?



- Educational agency in Pennsylvania, which typically provides district support *regionally*, encompassing several districts
- Purpose of an IU is to provide cost-effective instructional and operational services to school districts, charter schools, and even non-public schools
- Collaborative relationship allows for joint purchasing efforts for high cost items
- Permits the provision of instructional support in a variety of educational topic areas

Pennsylvania Intermediate Units

Pennsylvania IU



IU 1 Intermediate Unit 1
IU 2 Pittsburgh-Mt. Oliver
IU 3 Allegheny
IU 4 Midwestern
IU 5 Northwest Tri-County

IU 6 Riverview
IU 7 Westmoreland
IU 8 Appalachia
IU 9 Seneca Highlands
IU 10 Central

IU 11 Tuscarora
IU 12 Lincoln
IU 13 Lancaster-Lebanon
IU 14 Berks County
IU 15 Capital Area

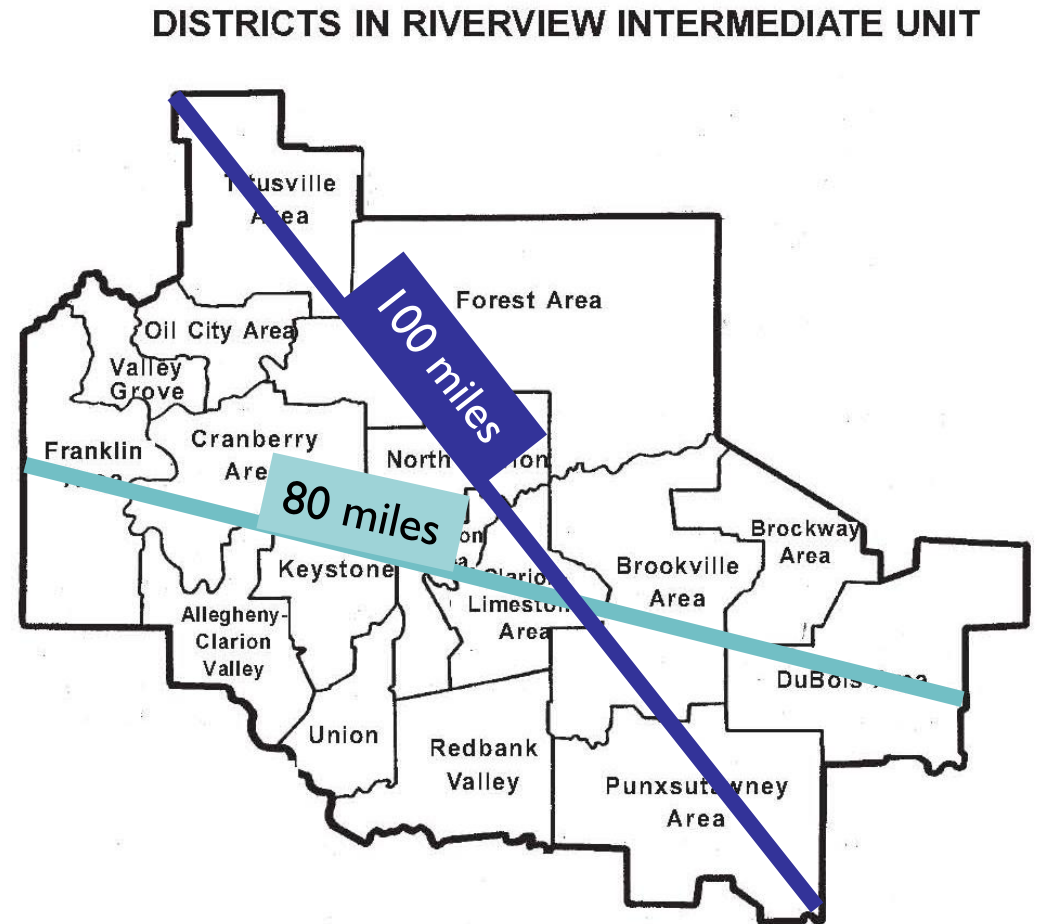
IU 16 Central Susquehanna
IU 17 Blast
IU 18 Luzerne
IU 19 Northeastern
Educational

IU 20 Colonial
IU 21 Carbon-Lehigh
IU 22 Bucks County
IU 23 Montgomery County
IU 24 Chester County

IU 25 Delaware County
IU 26 Philadelphia
IU 27 Beaver Valley
IU 28 Arin
IU 29 Schuylkill

Getting to Know Riverview IU6

- Supports the needs of seventeen rural school districts and three career
- These districts serve approximately 23,000 students from Pre-K to twelfth grade
- Promotes IU-based classes within other LEAs, as well as APSs
- Covers a wide geographical area of 3,200 square miles

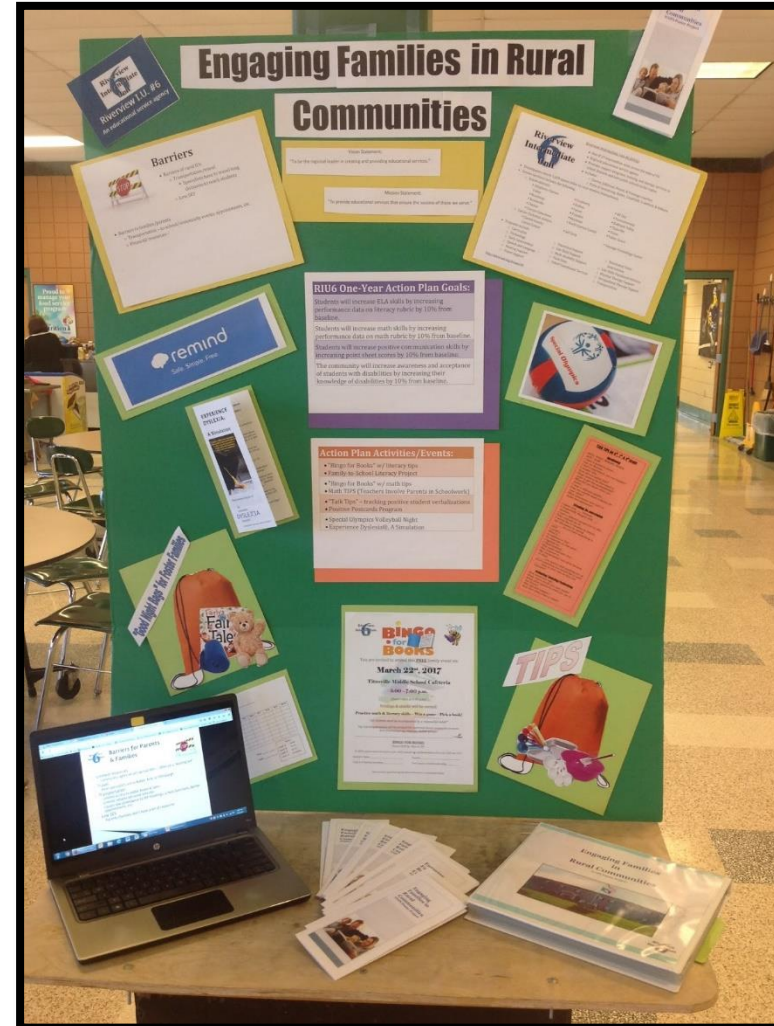


Beginning the Journey: Increasing Family Engagement in Riverview IU6



Why Family Engagement in IU6?

- Acknowledgement that family-to-school partnerships were weak in the region
- The understanding that family engagement needs within rural districts are complex
- Development of strategies to overcome logistical and demographical barriers



Barriers to Family Engagement in IU6

Lack of resources

High poverty area

Inadequate transportation

Geographically-large region

Widely varying school cultures

Strengths of IU6

Teachers live and work in the same communities

Familiarity and rapport between teaching staff and community members

IU6 has a strong presence within all districts and IU6 classrooms are housed within all areas

IU6 administrators were very supportive of increased involvement in family engagement

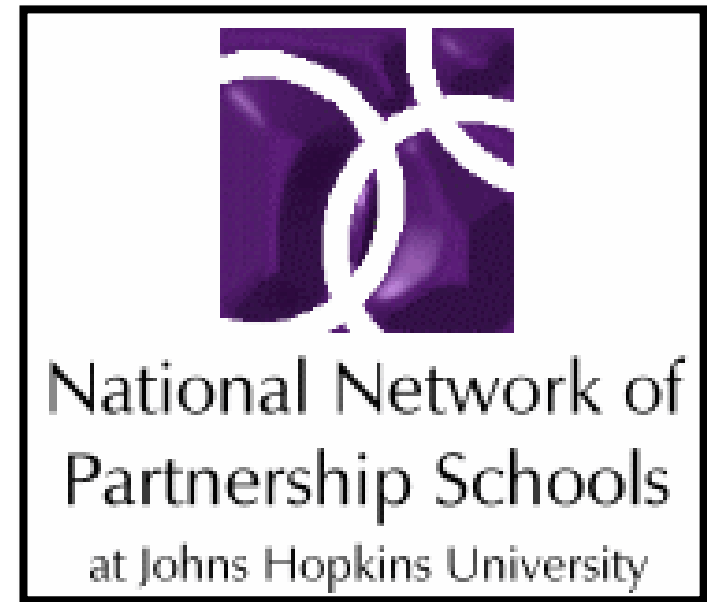
IU6 supervisors and teachers are very motivated in regard family engagement

Data is collected and evaluated to determine the best means of engaging families within IU6



The National Network of Partnership Schools

- Developed in 1996 to assist educational organizations in engaging families
- Based on Joyce Epstein's research into types of parent participation
- Involves goal-oriented action-planning based on the already existing school improvement plan



NNPS Grant Through PaTTAN



- Applied for grants through the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)]
- Joined the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)
- Completed action planning and selected goals
- Implemented activities in several LEAs

Challenges to Goal Identification



- Planning for a diverse geographical and demographical area
- Determining what data to use in action planning
- Learning how to start small and work up
- Identifying the most motivated teachers to be leaders within their LEAs

Identified Goal Areas

Goal #1: Increase math skills

Goal #2: Increase literacy skills

Goal #3: Increase positive behaviors

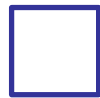
Goal #4: Promote collaboration between school,
family, and community

Continuing the Journey: Establishing Family Engagement Activities



Goal #1: Math

The Activities



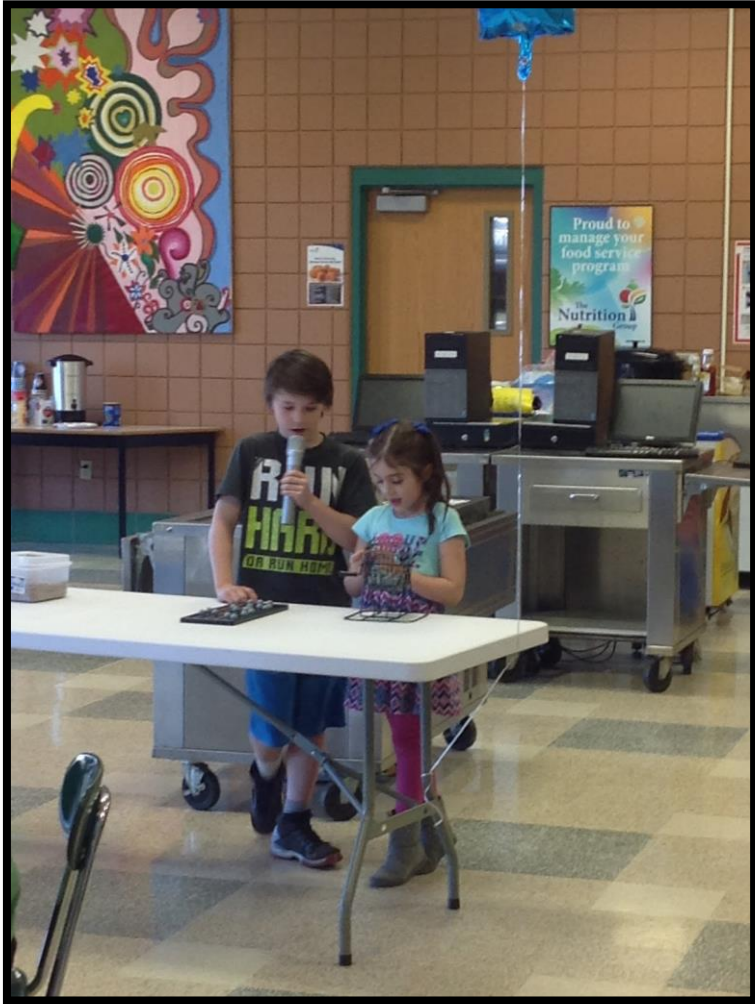
Family Game Night



TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) Math



Goal #2: Literacy



The Activities



Bingo for Books



Family to School Literacy Project

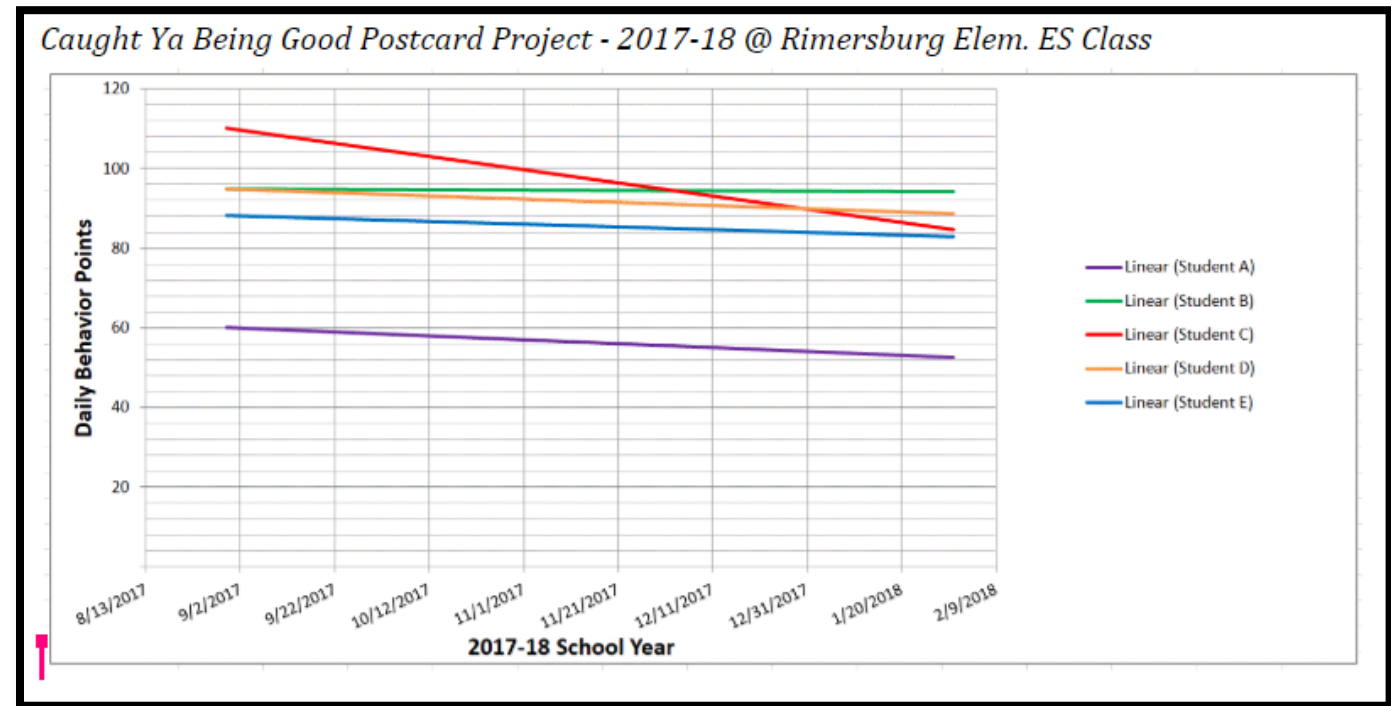
Goal #3: Behavior

The Activities



☐ ACV Family Event for PBIS

☐ Positive Note Cards Home



Goal #4: Community

The Activities

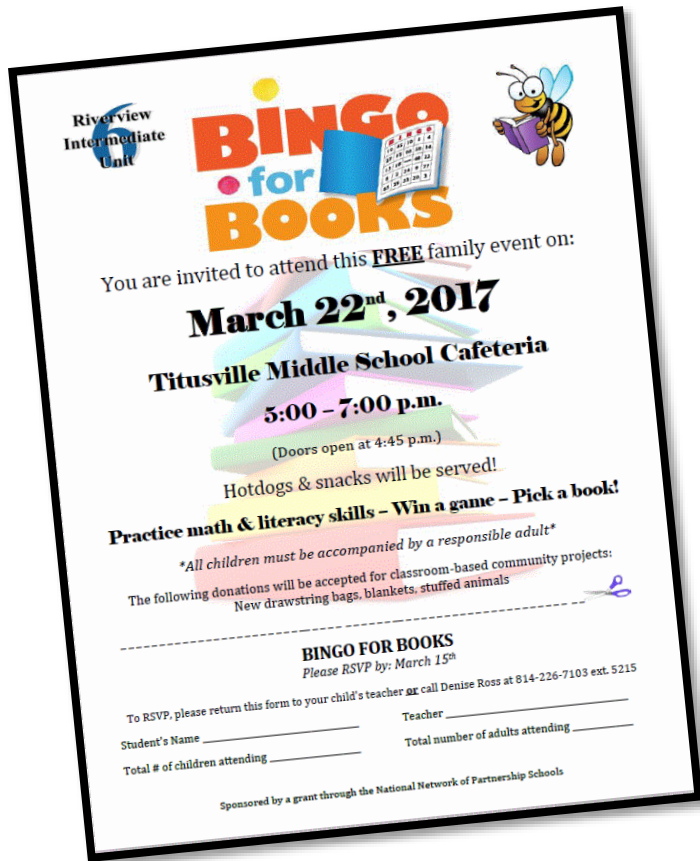


☐ Parking Lot Family Project

☐ Volleyball Night at ACV



Featured Activity – Bingo for Books



- Partnered with a district staff members
- Reached out to local organizations to have information tables and provide activities
- Purchased books for the event and found community business to donate snacks, paper products etc...
- Recruited students to call bingo, work at the food stands, and read the literacy tips
- Provided magnetic literacy tips for families to take home

How Did It Go? – Bingo for Books

What Worked

- Printed math/literacy tips for families
- Involved students in bingo calling (not just adult-led)
- Strong community support

What Didn't

- Transportation or time of day may have contributed to small turnout
- Finding money to purchase books and prizes
- District administration support

How We Can Improve

- Increase district teacher participation in order to build capacity for them to become activity leaders

Featured Activity – Night Bag Project

- Partnered with a local teacher to plan a community/school activity to provide book bags for children in the foster care system
- Bags included books, blankets, stuffed animals, etc.
- Students asked for donations from community businesses, community members, churches, etc.
- Students and families came into the classroom for Book Bag Packing Day



How Did It Go? – Night Bag Project

What Worked

- Brought families and students together to receive donations and create comfort supplies for kids entering into emergency foster care

What Didn't

- Sustainability: Being able to secure donations to fill the backpacks year to year

How We Can Improve

- Secure community partners to provide ongoing donations (CYS presentation, IU point of contact, etc.)
- Build capacity of additional key people identified to oversee the activity

Featured Activity – Community Volleyball Night

- Partnered with a school to host Special Olympics teams
- Contacted community agencies to attend and provide information regarding assistance for students with disabilities
- Advertised in the community for teams to sign up to play
- Identified Global Ambassadors to discuss their personal experiences
- Contacted the school districts cheerleading squads to perform



How Did It Go? – Community Volleyball Night

What Worked

- Multiple teams participated (ACV HS students & teachers, neighboring districts' students/teachers, community agency teams, RIU6 team)

What Didn't

- Only 3 community agency info tables confirmed

How We Can Improve

- Allow more time for planning/contacting teams/community agencies
- Provide more literature regarding community organizations

Featured Activity – Parking Lot Project

- Student drivers apply to paint a parking spot
- Students and families must sign contracts that student will maintain good attendance, behavior etc. in order to keep their spot
- Money collected from this project will fund school PBIS
- A “reveal” of the artwork will take place at a school-wide PBIS event in the beginning of the school year



How Did It Go? – Parking Lot

What Worked

- Identified as an area of need in SPP
- District administration support

What Didn't

- To be sustainable, there is a student fee (which may deter involvement of some students)

How We Can Improve

- Plan earlier
- Advertise more to drum up enthusiasm
- Reduce participation fee?

Activity: How Would You Do It?

- Choose one of our featured activities and discuss it in a group.
- Consider how you would change this activity based on the demographics of your LEA
- What barriers could you foresee experiencing?
- What strategies might you use to assist in this experience?



Keep on Walking: Reduplicating and Expanding Family Engagement Success



Tips for Implementation and Expansion

Define resources early on

Determine what donations are needed

Identify key people (administration, teachers, staff)

Work with community partners

Utilize the professionals you have access to

Set goals and create timelines

Recognize the strengths and needs of families within your district

Be mindful of who is completing which task

Be flexible with times, locations, etc.

Expanding Advertisement for Families

Establish a Family Engagement Website

Provide flyers in home-to-school folders

Post live from events to attract additional participants

Advertise on local radio

Use the Remind App

Pair up with parent network social media sites

Spreading the Word to New LEAs

Advertise at
Special Education
Contact Meetings

Share at
Administrative
Team Meetings

Report out at
Superintendents'
Advisory Council

Liaison with LEA
organizations

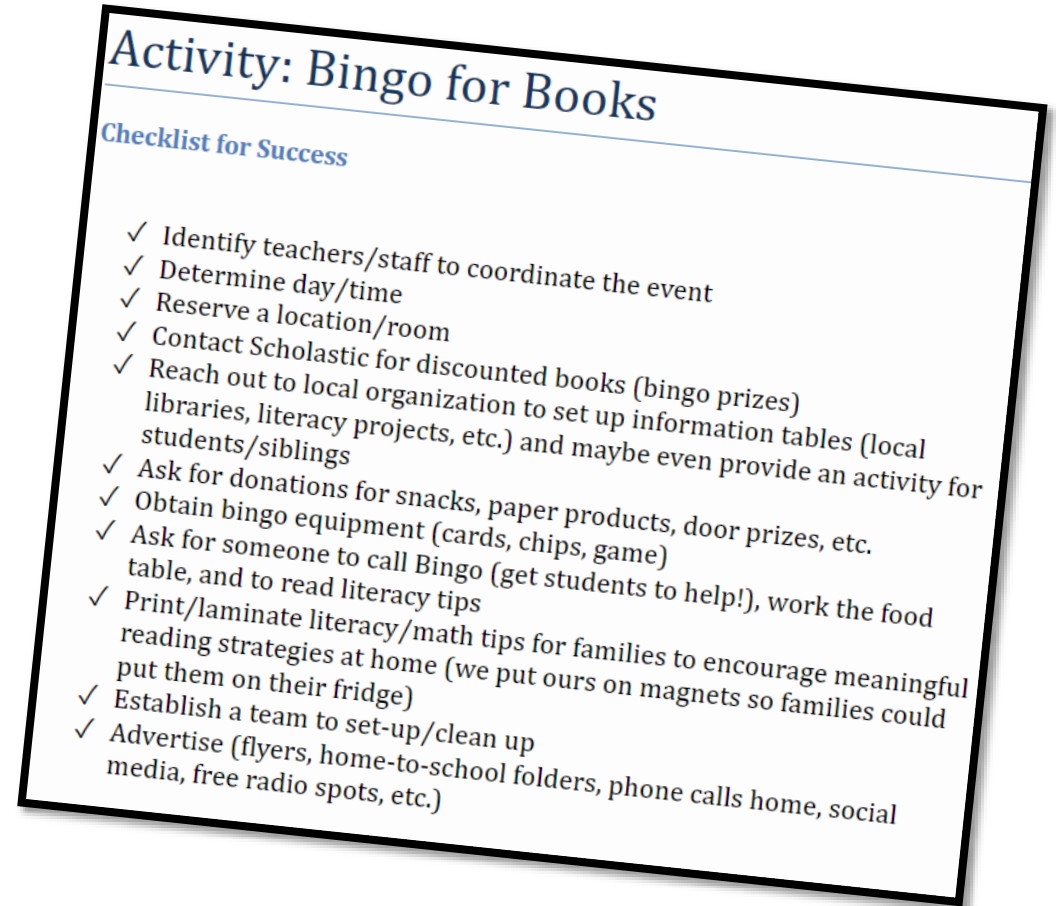
Establishing
Google Docs and
LiveBinders to
share

Host a
collaborative
event for multiple
LEAs

Establish a Family
Engagement
Webpage

Building Capacity Among LEAs

- Develop checklists and timelines
- Provide online resources
- Identify individuals motivated to do the work
- Customize activities based on the needs of the LEA
- Personally consult with interested administrators and teaching staff



Activity: Taking It Further



- Consider an activity that is already working in your school district OR choose an activity from the Promising Practices site
Discuss with a group how you might expand or reduplicate your chosen activity in different locations, venues, etc.
Think of the people who might be important to this activity, as well as protocols you might have to create for successful reduplication

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Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf, Governor