

# School Activities Promote Involvement

*By Roger Pacella, Principal at Buckingham Elementary School*



Each school in the Worcester County Public School system understands the importance of involving all community stakeholders in the educational process. We believe that when our stakeholders are active participants in our schools, our children will benefit in all aspects of their educational experience.

This belief is represented in Buckingham Elementary School's motto: "Children, Families, Community: Together for Success." Everyone in our school works toward the goal of having all stakeholders impact and support the success of our students. In order to achieve this, we offer a variety of opportunities for families and the community to become involved in the life of our school.

Families are encouraged to participate in opportunities such as the Back to School Carnival, special events directed to specific family members, our after school program, theme programs, and awards celebrations. Our community members are also welcomed into our schools. In fact, our community partners provide valuable services to our children, as well as support programs which enrich our children's experiences.

Family involvement begins with our Back to School Carnival at the onset of the school year. The carnival brings everyone together for rides, food, and fun. It is a wonderful way for folks to get to know each other in a relaxed setting. The carnival also sends an important message to our families: We want them involved.

Throughout the school year, Buckingham Elementary School holds special programs directed to specific family members such as grandparents, dads, and moms. For example, Golden Grahams for Grandparents is a program held every October at our school. Grandparents are invited to have breakfast with their grandchildren, followed by classroom visits. This activity enables our seniors to continue to be involved with our school. They usually discover that much has changed since they were in school!

In addition to Golden Grahams, our school offers Donuts for Dad in January and Muffins for Mom in May. Both of these programs follow the same model as our Golden Grahams program; they promote involvement. All three events allow our children to celebrate their school with the important people in their lives.

Project Outreach is our school's successful, long-running after school program. The program connects our children and their families with our faith-based community. Participating children in Grades 2 and 3 are transported from school to one of three local churches, where our students receive extra help in reading and mathematics. Parents, who pick up their children, also have an opportunity to interact with the educational process in a place other than our school. Project Outreach has been honored by the Maryland State Department of Education for promoting minority achievement.

Theme programs are excellent opportunities to get families involved in the education of their children. At Buckingham, we offer two family nights – one for reading and one for math, both connected to Project Outreach. During these special nights, parents and children work together and learn strategies for reading or math. Art Night, held twice a year, is another theme program designed to have families work together to make arts and crafts.

In addition to these theme programs, our school holds Vehicle Day every spring. This is an excellent opportunity for parents and community members to bring their work vehicles to school and help educate students during our study of communities. A firefighter may showcase a fire truck; a police officer, a patrol car; a mail delivery person, a mail truck; and a construction worker, a work truck. Vehicle Day is a fun and educational way to bring parents, community members, students, and faculty together.

Celebrating successes is another important family involvement opportunity. Families are invited to celebrate the accomplishments of their children during our awards assemblies, held every grading term. Awards assemblies focus mainly on academics, but also recognize good attendance, sportsmanship, and achievements in technology, drama, music, and art.

During our Student of the Month luncheons, the development of our students' characters is celebrated. Parents and family members are invited to have a slice of Boomers' pizza, while reflections about their child's wonderful character are shared.

In addition to family involvement, Buckingham Elementary School promotes community involvement. Our school is proud to have many outstanding community partners such as the Ocean City-Berlin Optimists, the Berlin Lions Club, and the Kiwanis Club.

The Ocean City-Berlin Optimist Club offers a youth identification program every autumn. This organization also sponsors three, free book distributions each year through its Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) program. Additionally, the organization contributes to our Chance to Dance Academy and our Perfect Attendance Trip to Busch Gardens. In the area of character development, the Optimists sponsor our “Being Unusually Good” program. The Berlin Lions Club helps our children by providing vision screening each year, while the Ocean Pines Kiwanis Club sponsors our K-Kids Academy.

Our school also receives community support for our drama and chorus academies. This support comes in the form of donations of equipment, props, materials, and time. In turn, our participating children perform throughout the community at churches, retirement homes, and stores. Community service is also taught through fund raising activities. Our children not only plan the activities, but they also decide to which organization they will donate the earnings.

Here at Buckingham Elementary School, we treasure our relations with the community for which we serve. We know that each relationship offers support to our children, and we are very grateful.

If you have any questions about the parent and community involvement opportunities at Buckingham Elementary School, please call me at 410-632-5300.