



# Pastors and Principals? You Bet!

How hosting a pastors breakfast can build community connections

By Lou D'Ambrosio



The familiar and often cited African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” is a practice we are trying to put in place this year at Arthur Middleton

Elementary School. Our school comprises 512 students in grades pre-K to 5 and is in a suburban neighborhood approximately 15 miles south of Washington, D.C. Our school staff, especially the hardworking teachers, are putting into place all the needed initiatives to increase student achieve-

ment while building relationships with students and parents. The administration is keeping things running and supporting all of our stakeholders, modeling expected actions, and keeping the school culture and morale high. Although everyone is working hard, we are always looking for mentors and volunteers to support our vision and mission.

Through networking and discussions with fellow Charles County administrators at our monthly principal meetings (and discussions with colleagues at the Maryland Association of Elementary School

Principal meetings), I’ve noticed a common concern: *How can we increase community involvement?* My colleague Kristin Shields, a former NAESP National Distinguished Principal of Maryland, suggested holding a pastors breakfast.

## Pastors and Principals Share Common Goals

Our school has worked with a few local churches in the past, and it has been the recipient of their generosity. Church members have volunteered in our school, and local churches have donated school

supplies and even agreed to the shared use of facilities in the event of a relocation emergency. The idea of a pastors breakfast was intriguing, but I was fearful that mixing of church and state might get me fired or—even worse—on the news, heading toward a Supreme Court case. I knew I needed more information.

As I researched and asked questions, it became abundantly clear that a pastors breakfast is not about spreading religion into a public school. A pastors breakfast is a time to meet with other community leaders to discuss and share our events in order to help our community thrive. My colleague and mentor told me that my job was to determine the needs of my school and to ask for help in those areas at the pastors breakfast. “You will find that people want to help,” she said.

#### Our First Pastors Breakfast

I invited four local pastors, the president of the local chapter of the NAACP, and the president of the

Parent Teacher Organization to our initial pastors breakfast at Arthur Middleton Elementary. Only two of the four pastors and the PTO president attended. The president of the local chapter of the NAACP could not attend due to a death in the family. Despite the sparse attendance, this breakfast spurred important dialogue.


I told attendees of our need for adults to volunteer as Reading Buddies for our students. One of the pastors in attendance, Pastor Anderson, volunteered on the spot and spread the call to her congregation. Several of her congregation members have since become Arthur Middleton Reading Buddies!

We also discussed how to help families in our community over the holidays. Some families need food and clothing; some have an incarcerated parent and need support. Pastor Laurie from Good Shepherd talked about the Monday morning prayer group she leads with interested staff of another local

elementary school. (Participation is, of course, voluntary.)

#### Planning for the Future

This year, we invited three other local elementary schools, a middle school, the Charles County Commission for Women, and two other church congregations to our pastors breakfast. (All initial attendees were also re-invited.) The plan is for the leaders of our schools, agencies, and congregations to combine our efforts and plan an all-inclusive community event at some date in the future. It is my hope that this shared effort will allow us to support our community on a larger scale.

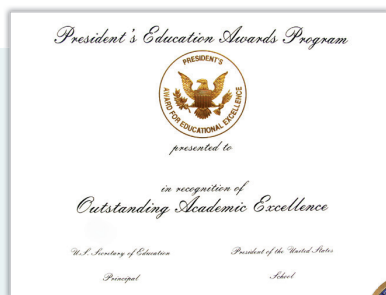
It truly does take a village to raise a child, and the pastors breakfast has helped us increase the strength of our village. 

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