

# VISTA Quarterly Report

Please submit as a Word attachment via e-mail to your VISTA supervisor or leader by the due date.

Quarter 1: Oct. 1–Dec. 31 Quarter 2: Jan. 1–Mar. 31 Quarter 3: Apr. 1–Jun. 30 Quarter 4: Jul. 1–Sept. 30

**VISTA Member:** Ima Vista

**Site Name:** Madison Elementary School

**Quarter:** 4

## I. Data Collection/Research

Initial research was conducted at the school, by the school, in the spring of the 2005–2006 school year titled *Connecting Families and Schools: Parent and Teacher Feedback*. The report is a product of the Families, Schools, and Communities United for Students (US). I used this research to glean insights and highlight strengths and challenges that currently exist with regard to school, family, and community partnership practices at Madison Elementary School. After familiarizing myself with the research, I used the data to develop a PowerPoint presentation to report major findings back to the middle school staff and teachers. I used this as a springboard for recruitment of members of the Action Team for Partnerships, and to help staff understand what areas of partnership are currently strong within the school, and those that are in need of strengthening. Data from the parent-teacher survey will also be used in the coming months as the Action Team for Partnerships establishes the 3-year vision, and 1-year action plan.

One area of weakness within partnership practices here was in volunteer recruitment, training, and retention. According to the survey, only 10% of parents had volunteered at any point in the past year, and only 10% of parents felt invited to volunteer. In an effort to strengthen this area I developed a survey (see appendix A) of teachers to assess current needs with regards to volunteers. I had a survey return rate of 19%. Of those, 83% expressed interest in having a volunteer work with them to support various classroom activities. When asked what activities they would use the support of a volunteer for, core academic teachers preferred volunteers to work one-on-one, offering assistance to students who would benefit from extra support. Outside of core academics, staff requested volunteers to be used as chaperones, and to provide additional support at high-activity times such as lunch and recess.

Data from the survey of teacher needs was then used to develop a comprehensive survey of parent volunteer interests (see appendix B). This survey provides a wide range of volunteer opportunities as well as varying levels of time commitment to best meet the needs of possible volunteers. Results will be used to create a database of interested volunteers to access for recruitment. This survey will be distributed at parent-teacher conferences. Parents will have the opportunity to fill out surveys as they wait to meet with their child's teacher, and then return the completed surveys as they leave the building. This procedure was planned to optimize the return rate.

## II. Training and Meeting Attendance *(Please note when each event occurred, by whom it was presented, and a brief synopsis of the purpose.)*

- **8/28:** The District and School In-service was presented by the superintendent, John Henry (a.m.), and the middle school principal, Peter Walker (p.m.). The day consisted of a kick-off speaker, introduction of new staff, and a discussion of district, and school policies.
- **8/29:** A school in-service was presented by a consultant from the company responsible for the Responsive Design Curriculum. Our time was spent reviewing and participating in the important procedures and steps involved with implementing the Responsive Design framework. This framework is implemented in Madison Elementary School to establish a caring, relationship-centered environment within the school among students and staff. In the afternoon, a question and answer forum was held regarding special education issues related to grading and retention. The director of pupil services was present to field questions.
- **8/30:** The district in-service was presented by a consultant for MAPS (the measure of academic progress) testing. The presenter provided background about the assessment, which is being conducted for the first time during the current school year. She then facilitated discussion groups that focused on effective implementation strategies within each individual school.

- **9/6 and 9/7:** My supervisor and I attended the DPI (Department of Public Instruction) training regarding school, family, and community partnerships conducted by several DPI staff members. The purpose of the training was to develop familiarity with the Joyce Epstein model of developing comprehensive programs of partnership. Time was also spent working with asset mapping and resource sharing.
- **9/11:** I took part in the education meeting at the Madison Chamber of Commerce facilitated by Karen Johnson of the UW-Extension. The meeting was called to discuss plans for several business-education partnership fund-raising activities that will be held at various points throughout the year. The fundraisers are specifically aimed at successfully carrying out the Junior Achievement program in Madison.
- **9/12:** I was the presenter at the school staff meeting. The purpose was to give a brief PowerPoint overview of some of the major findings of the spring 2006 parent-teacher survey on involvement. I briefly discussed the six types of involvement associated with a comprehensive partnership program, and clarified my role within the school. From the information that was presented, I explained the purpose behind the action team for partnerships.

### III. Action Teams for Partnerships

When was your ATP formed?

Our ATP was formed in September 2005.

Name of member	Position	Involvement/contribution this quarter
Dana Johnson	Elementary Principal	Provide assistance and background information about our school community, as well as guidance on initiatives.
Nancy Bitney	Guidance Counselor	Provide information and act as secretary for meetings
Linda Lutz	Special Education Teacher	Provide wisdom and background information on the perspective of helping our special needs families fit into the big picture of our school.
Rhonda Carlton	Early Childhood Teacher	Provide focus and information on the perspective of helping Preschool families to fit into our school setting.
Stacey Wucherpennig	Teacher/Early Ongoing Collaboration and Assistance Grant Coordinator	Clarify issues and provide information about general education and needs of our student body. Helps us to keep in mind the variety of ways that we are involving parents in our school to be a partner in education.
Dianne Parker	4-H Afterschool Leader, and Para Professional	Provide perspective of how our school district fits into the community and connects us with various community organizations.
Annette Bjorklund	4-H Youth Educator	Acts as a resource to youth issues and community perspective.
Joan Wilson	Human Services Coordinator	Provides background information about the needs of our children that struggle with family issues.
Patty Cummings-Rienert	Dane County Family Resource Center Coordinator	Provide connection to our community and background information for initiatives with families.
Dawn Wacek	Parent	Volunteer efforts and leadership for parents.
Mary Kay Latzka	Parent	Volunteer efforts and leadership for parents.
Janet Weiberg	Parent/CESA District Parent Liaison	Resource for children's issues, such as ADHD and LD, and literature.
Ima Vista	VISTA Member	Provide training and help to carry out initiatives for ATP.

When has your ATP met this quarter?

I will be setting up our first meeting this week.

When did your Team complete the One Year Action Plan?

This will be on our agenda for our next meeting.

Please list each of your ATP/Work goals. Underneath each goal, discuss actions taken toward realizing the goal.

**ATP Goal 1: Provide Parent Education Opportunities.**

Spread the Word About Parent Workshops

There is an up-coming workshop in December entitled “Parenting with Flexibility” by Dr. Chris Babbitt.

**ATP Goal 2: Create and Strengthen Partnerships with Our Families and Community.**

Strengthening Families Classes at Madison Elementary School

This program actually meets goals one and two. These classes are based on research through Iowa State University. We are leading three different sessions each night of the seven-week class. Parent sessions use videos, large group and small group discussions, and activities in order to help parents expand their effective use of positive discipline through setting limits and showing love for their children. Youth sessions focus on helping children to see that goal setting and wise choices can lead them to a great future. Family sessions are based on helping our families bond and recognize one another’s strengths through activities such as family meals, games, art projects and discussions.

Dane County Family Resource Center, University of Wisconsin Extension and Madison Elementary School started this partnership project during July when four of us attended the two day workshop to receive training in leading the classes. We met a couple of times during this quarter in order to plan and schedule the classes, advertise, order supplies, create menus for the family meals, pull materials together, recruit volunteers and prepare lessons for our October and November classes. I am helping with leadership in all of the roles mentioned during the planning stage and teaching the youth segment with another action team member during each night’s class. I also contacted hesitant families that showed an interest in order to answer their questions and reassure them that the classes are an enjoyable experience and worth their time investment.

Our goal by providing these classes for our school and community families is to provide parents and children with the tools they need to succeed in today’s fast-paced world. We have reached our target audience of low-income families as well as others that struggle with parenting issues. These classes allow families to witness positive role-modeling from other parents and learn about such techniques as logical consequences, limit setting, and having fun together. Families have already expressed that they are gaining some great insights about parenting issues even though we have only met for two weeks now. We will evaluate our program through youth and parent surveys at the last session in order to gather data on its effectiveness and improvements for next year’s program.

We will continue to recruit leaders and families for this program. One of our action team parents is bringing her family to participate in these classes. Another leader has asked area businesses for discounts on the food that we are providing at meals. The leaders provided elements of the first meal that was served as well. I am living proof that this program will continue beyond my term of service; because I participated last year with my family in order to connect with the families that I serve as a VISTA. Now I am carrying out a leadership role in bringing this great program to other families. We want to continue to provide this program for seven to 10 families per session in order to ensure a quality sized group for the different activities and space available during each class. Participating families are spreading the word about its benefits which will continue to bring in more interested families for future sessions.

Number of volunteers recruited for project:	8
Number of students impacted by project:	9
Number of parents impacted:	12
Number of community members impacted:	19

Volunteer Orientation and Training

We have continued to recruit and train parent and community volunteers. I expanded our volunteer program last year as a VISTA with our Senior Tax Exchange program coordinator:

- We assisted the STEP coordinator in identifying local organizations where we could present our volunteer needs and promote participation. Three of us, the STEP coordinator, AmeriCorps member, and I went to a Knights of Columbus meeting to speak to their members. I also wrote a letter to the Catholic youth program coordinator asking her to alert the teachers that we have a need for young adults as well as adults in our expanded volunteer, after school, and tutoring program. We have also been taking every opportunity to talk to district parents about our volunteer needs whether we meet them at school or in the community. We feel that personal connections are what make the difference of whether or not people stay committed to our programs.
- The Madison Area School District, VISTA, AmeriCorps members, and the STEP coordinator collaborated on our Volunteer Orientation and Training on October 4 at Madison Elementary School. Approximately 50 people attended. We asked our building principals, volunteer coordinators, after-school coordinators, and the UW extension youth coordinator to present on important issues that affect our volunteers. These issues include: volunteer handbook, confidentiality, accident reporting and procedures, self-protection, facility expectations, transportation of students, school health, child protection, behavior management, policies, procedures, feedback/supervision, absenteeism, and 4-H leadership.

I feel that the volunteer program will continue beyond my term as a VISTA because we are energetically seeking all of the people that we can be a part of this great program. We are encouraging our teaching staff and other leaders to continue to reach out to volunteers. We are providing teachers and leaders with information about how to encourage their volunteers and guide them through their volunteer journey. The AmeriCorps members that we recruited for the 2006–07 school year have not only brought increased energy to our initiatives, but they are bringing new connections with individuals that they know would like to serve our families and children. Many volunteers agreed to come back as volunteers for this year due to the relationships that we built as a community last year and several teachers are leading the way by asking parents early on to help out. These parents are continuing as their children go through the grades.

Number of volunteers recruited for project:	87
Number of students impacted by project:	407
Number of parents impacted:	48
Number of community members impacted:	60

**IV. Volunteer Management**

Please report the TOTAL number of active community volunteers: 15

Number of these volunteers that are baby boomers: 6

Please report the TOTAL number of service hours performed by community volunteers: 85

**V. Resource Development**

Please report the TOTAL dollar amount of in-kind donated goods and services: \$270

Please report the TOTAL dollar amount of monetary grants, donations, and fundraising: \$15,000

PTO Dinner and supplies for Meet Your Teacher Night

- This resource helped bring families in by providing a free meal to the families. This resource went to the dinner at Meet Your Teacher Night.

- The PTO and I collaborate on events, I have asked for their assistance and they have committed to pay for this event in the future.
- The monetary value of this donation is \$270.00
- I work together with them and support the programs the PTO is working on also.
- We received this on August 30, 2006. The PTO has committed to continuing to provide this for this event.

#### AmeriCorps Members through a SERVE WISCONSIN Grant.

- Our AmeriCorps members have begun to recruit and train volunteers for the elementary and middle school, and tutor students in our schools. The addition of AmeriCorps members has brought more people into our After School Program and volunteer programs for tutoring students that we are targeting to bridge the achievement gap between low income children and their peers. Our High Five after school program will begin next week and we have three extra people each night to tutor, supervise on the playground, and distribute snack for our students thanks to the efforts of our elementary AmeriCorps member.
- I helped to research and apply for this grant, and actively recruit our two AmeriCorps members. I recruited for about two weeks, in which time I called several people and visited with them about the benefits that they could bring to our children and themselves by agreeing to join our volunteer team. I also helped to orientate our new members to our school environment and continue to discuss our goals and answer questions about our initiatives. We worked together on the Volunteer Orientation and placement of our new volunteers.
- The monetary value of our two AmeriCorps members is approximately \$15,000 from the SERVE WISCONSIN grant.
- We received our two AmeriCorps members at the beginning of September. They will serve the needs of our children throughout this school year in both the elementary and middle schools. They plan on implementing, supervising and carrying out service learning projects as well.

## **VI. Technical Assistance and Resource Sharing**

Share at least one resource or best practice that could be helpful to other VISTAs:

We have found that the more you remind parents and families about upcoming programs/events the more people you will have attend these. We usually send out for three consecutive weeks flyer/reminders which the principal adds to her newsletter. We hang up posters in the hallways, feature it on our marquee sign, and I print out florescent sticky notes to be added to the student planners that go home every night. We also see a huge increase of families that attend program/events when we organize a free event with free food, free childcare, drawings for gift cards and/or free incentive for attending.

Share at least one success story or reflection on progress this quarter:

I would say that our successes have involved getting a good start here at Madison Elementary School. I was very fortunate to be placed in a school that had already begun gathering important data about current practices of partnership within the school. A parent-teacher survey conducted last year helped me to get an immediate general understanding of current partnership beliefs and practices. This starting point was helpful, and gave me a stronger understanding of what we're aiming to do here. Our ATP was formed within the first three weeks of school, and we are getting ready for our second meeting approaching this next week. It was important for me to remember that the staff I am working with hasn't been to the DPI trainings on partnerships, hasn't read the *Handbook for Action*, and hasn't read the research text on school, family, and community partnerships. Because of this, a critical step has been to educate the people around me about what my role is, and what we're aiming to do by developing the ATP program in the school. People have responded well to that information because, just like the research says, parent involvement and strong communication are areas that people agree on, and pay lip service to, but people are unsure about how to best carry them out.

Along these lines, a teacher on the action team approached me after the meeting and explained that she had been a part of many district committees and meetings, and that many of them seemed to accomplish very little, but take up a very large amount of time. She said that she felt excited to be a part of something that made her feel as though we are

already moving towards something . . . that we are able to take action on things that are important and areas that need strengthening. That is something I have communicated to virtually everyone that I have had the privilege of talking to about this experience, and about my role within the school. The action team is about action, and that is what makes it such an exciting part of this school. It is an example of a small group of concerned people having a tremendous impact on a common challenge – ensuring success for all students. The action team is empowering by its nature, and though we've only just begun, I have complete confidence that it is going to achieve its mission of strengthening our partnerships to achieve greater student success. When people experience change that comes from within the school, versus a top-down mandate, the commitment to the process of improvement will hopefully spread exponentially.

Are there any trainings or other resources that you feel would benefit you in your service?

What has really helped me in terms of my specific VISTA role is to be able to network with other VISTAs and the VISTA leaders . . . especially those at a similar point in the whole process to where I am. I think it would be helpful to do the blog with others who are at a similar spot in the process of developing an ATP. There could be several different conversations. One on ATP development, one on volunteer recruitment, and the list could go on and on. It's sometimes difficult to know who would be a good contact as far as other VISTAs at any given point in the process. I think people are asking important questions and that it would be beneficial for everyone to hear the question and the feedback.

Please address any challenges or barriers you have faced during this quarter and how we can assist:

The main challenge initially involved misunderstandings held by school staff about my role, prior to my presentations that more clearly explained that role. This obstacle was overcome through my presentations. My other challenges have been at every new step of developing, setting goals, laying out the outlines for goals, etc of the ATP. The whole process is completely new. I have never established, or facilitated a committee of people, and at times it can be intimidating. Logistically speaking, it's taken a lot of thought and problem solving to try to ensure the most effective and efficient meetings as possible. Getting feedback from DPI staff and using my own understandings have really been the ways of overcoming these challenges up to this point. That seems to be working so far!

## **VII. Attachments**

Attachments sent via email:

1. Appendix A: Survey of teacher needs
2. Appendix B: Survey of volunteer opportunities