

## PLN and Upper Darby School District Partner to Support Family Literacy and Numeracy

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**Upper Darby, PA** – The Penn Literacy Network (PLN) and the Upper Darby School District (UDSD) recently partnered to offer PLN’s Family Literacy & Numeracy program to the families of Bywood Elementary School in Upper Darby. As part of the program, veteran PLN facilitators worked with families to support their children’s literacy and numeracy development through the integration of a variety of reading, writing, and talking practices and strategies. The workshops took place during two evening sessions, one in October and another in December 2010.

“Parents are their children’s first teachers,” said PLN Executive Director, Dr. Bonnie Botel-Sheppard, who co-facilitated the literacy workshops with PLN literacy facilitators Mattie Davis and Beth McGonagle. “We’re not expecting parents to take the place of what’s happening in school, but to complement it.” The PLN program recognizes that the partnership between families and schools can help prepare children for classroom success.

The PLN Family Literacy & Numeracy program was developed by PLN Founder and Senior Advisor Dr. Morton Botel, Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. Based on Botel’s co-constructionist frameworks, the program is designed for parents, teachers, tutors, after school staff, and parent educators.

While the PLN program was offered to all Bywood families with early elementary-age children, the majority of parents who attended the workshops were English Language Learners (ELLs). To

accommodate ELL families, the school district provided interpreters so that parents who did not speak English could fully participate in the program.

“It was helpful and supportive to have the interpreters assisting and enabling the parents to ask questions, clarify their doubts, and participate in discussions,” said Elizabeth Gali, an ELL teacher at Bywood.

Meghan Tomescu, also a Bywood ELL teacher, commented on the particular importance of the workshops for ELL parents. “The PLN nights were a great way to get parents from our community to learn new strategies to teach math and reading to their students at home.”

Tomescu added that participating families were grateful for the supportive materials provided to them at the sessions. The extra materials from the sessions are currently being used by Tomescu and her colleagues to support students during Bywood’s intervention time and before school tutoring program for ELLs.

Erika Yepremian, an ELL teacher at Charles Kelly Elementary, another UDSD school, attended the sessions at Bywood and was moved by the parents’ optimism and enthusiasm during the sessions. “It was just really inspiring to see these parents come out and want to work with us in order to help their children,” Yepremian said. “So many of them said, ‘I can actually do this. I can actually help my child.’”

The PLN Family Literacy and Numeracy program engages parents in validating conversations about how they can help their children with literacy and numeracy practices. PLN literacy facilitator, Mattie Davis, emphasized that the program helps create a common language between the families and teachers.

In the literacy workshops, PLN facilitators modeled a variety of activities and strategies that families can engage their children in using the provided paperback books and supportive materials. The literacy activities modeled by the facilitators included read alouds, choral reading, sentence-making, and word-making. Botel-Sheppard noted that the PLN activities and strategies are transferrable to other books and materials that families have in the home.

During the workshops, parents were given the opportunity to practice the modeled PLN activities and strategies with other parents by engaging in parent-child role-play. “It was a wonderful experience because the parents were so involved in the activities. They were experiencing them not just as parents, but really as students themselves,” said PLN literacy facilitator, Beth McGonagle.

During the numeracy workshops, the PLN math facilitators stressed the importance of engaging children in the language of math at home and helping them recognize that math is a part of their every day. “We asked parents some questions at the beginning of the session: How do you do math with your kids?” said PLN math facilitator, Kathy Genzano. “Do you count sticks? Do you throw down beans and say how many? We gave them suggestions like counting change in the car, or having their child measure with teaspoons and tablespoons.”

PLN math facilitator, Lynn Rosenblum, praised the workshops because of their direct benefit for parents and children. “The parents didn’t have to spend money; they can be the tutor, and the program gives parents the resources they need to work with their children at home.”

Both the participating UDSO teachers and PLN facilitators commented on the tremendous gratitude that parents showed for being a part of the Family Literacy and Numeracy sessions. Bywood ELL teacher, Christina Giorgio, said, “It was really neat to see the ELL parents come to a special event at the school with their entire family. I sensed their gratefulness to the presenters for teaching them strategies to help their students with reading at home.”

Giorgio expressed her own gratitude for the sessions because of the opportunity they provided for the school to connect and build a stronger relationship with families.

UDSO’s Jillian McGilvery also commented on the importance of the PLN Family Literacy and Numeracy program and its benefit to parents. “Our parents value our school system, but do not always have the information and tools they need to support their children at home.” McGilvery added, “This program gave parents an opportunity to learn strategies they can use at home to help their children be successful in school.”

PLN and UDSO plan to offer another session of the PLN Family Literacy & Numeracy program to district families in May 2011.

To learn more about the PLN Family Literacy & Numeracy Program, view the brochure at: [http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pln/docs/Brochure%20for%20print%202-17\[1\].pdf](http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pln/docs/Brochure%20for%20print%202-17[1].pdf)