

PARENTS AS ALLIES



KIDSBURGH, DECEMBER 2022

An 8-minute read!

Your hacks, so many strategies!

The time spent thinking and planning together was worth it. That's what you told us in office hours with HundrED.



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NEGATIVE COMMENTS

From Grove City parents after the school welcoming event

100%

ENTHUSIASM

From kindergartners & fire fighters at the Woodland Hills event

23

PARENTS

Are trained and ready to serve in Northgate's maker space

Reflections with HundrED's Crystal Green

YOUR STORIES

Crystal hails from Indiana but has been a Finlander for the last 10 years. She is a researcher and is leading HundrED's effort to capture the work of the cohort teams for re-telling far beyond PA.

Your stories did not disappoint. Inside, hear about the diverse ways you are making family-school engagement come alive.

(Photo left) The Burrell team staged their event in the high school parking lot around fire pits, creating the opportunity for Fireside Chats.

Reflections on the check-ins with HundrED, by Crystal Green

"It was a pleasure to meet with all of the district co-leads of the Parents-as-Allies project in November! I was so encouraged to learn more about how each of the districts is working to improve relationships between families, teachers, students and the wider community. Here are some reflections from the check-ins."

"We'll come to you"

5 district teams found new ways to meet their communities where they are

AMBRIDGE AREA organized their hack - a tailgate party - in one of the communities where parental engagement has been low. The result was record-breaking attendance, eating, talking, and impromptu dancing where a majority of the participants came from the two communities that don't usually engage. Parents who usually participate still came out! Surprisingly, many families didn't even stay for the game, but were just happy to have a school event closer to home.

The success of the tailgate led to a Halloween event at the Ambridge Area middle school, and parents offered to help with decorations. For co-lead **Nate Harmon**, who went to the school himself, that was amazing.

"This is the first time I have ever seen Halloween decorations at the school. For parents to offer to do that, we are already seeing results"...Nate Harmon

DUQUESNE CITY brought the community to the school, hosting a resource fair on the same day as parent-teacher conferences. (Right) The Duquesne team of Erica Slobodnik, teacher; George Little, principal and Le'tresha Dean, parent, were thrilled.

With over 20 local vendors, people came out in droves, and teachers were even able to offer specific support to students in the moment, connecting them with organizations within the community.



“We’ll come to you!”

NEW BRIGHTON

The team hosted an event similar to Duquesne that included 30 community groups with the dual aim of establishing the school as a trusted hub for the wider community and families to meet, and to improve information flows for parents about the kinds of activities that are available to families.

NEW CASTLE

For New Castle, meeting parents where they are meant **changing their strategy online**. **Tabitha Marino** realized that communication was breaking down between parents and the school because parents weren’t logging on to the school portal where important information was being shared. Gathering feedback from the parents, they realized that posting information on Facebook is a better way to reach families. Posting photos on the school’s new Facebook page has generated positive vibes, and the parents have sent back shout-outs to the school.

CALIFORNIA AREA

California Area **partnered with community organizers** and hosted a booth at the popular Holly Days celebration on December 9.

Families enjoyed a maker opportunity, and gained a tech-clever snow globe memento. It was about making memories.



The biggest takeaway from the spring hack?
Meet your community where they are.



These district teams learned that, “A little whimsy goes a long way.”

In **NORTHGATE**, so many of the hacks sounded like an absolute blast! Northgate is **organizing parents to be facilitators** of the maker space, designing the sessions in a way that the parents and the teachers are working together as equals. Learning through designing together has created some pretty silly and memorable moments at Northgate, which have been captured on Twitter!

BUTLER AREA organized an evening called STEAM & Play with a Twist, where **teachers and parents could casually mingle** and chat in the hallways surrounded by the kids’ artwork, or go into the classrooms and look around. The kids loved going from station to station in a relaxed environment.

HOPEWELL also hosted a Family STEM/STEAM evening, with over 250 kids attending! Parents and students really got into the action, competing at the cup stacking table and pennies-in-a-tinfoil-boat challenge.

BURRELL hosted fireside chats for a **cozy evening** around ten fire pits. The firefighters who attended to monitor the event even joined in the chats! Groups were mixed with parents and teachers, and in this atmosphere some parents started opening up about their experiences and challenges at the school.

For **DEER LAKES**, the **informality** made all the difference for their fall open house, allowing parents to walk freely in an open format, with the possibility to sign up for conferences if they wanted to talk to the teachers more privately. The feedback....?

KEYSTONE OAKS used their grant to provide teachers with a stipend and a budget for creating activities related to their department on the Night to Unite. Over 180 people came, showing the families’ commitment to come in to the school and participate with their children.

After the event, student participation in the after school science class went from 10 to full capacity.

“That was the best after school activity ever! There was something for everyone to do.” 13-year-old boy, Hopewell

Where 75% of teachers are in the last third of their career, Deer Lakes teachers said it was the best open house they’ve ever had!

Three teams saw “Kids lead the way.”

SHALER AREA

Shaler Area hosted Sunday Funday for their incoming 4th-grade families to get to know each other and the teachers. Just putting everyone together in the same space, the **kids were modeling for the parents** how to interact. As parents watched the kids hang out, play and let their guards down, they saw that the kids felt safe and they jumped in, too.

BRENTWOOD BOROUGH

Brentwood Borough’s focus on bringing in middle school families from international backgrounds starts with the kids. **If the kids are excited, they will pull in the parents.** At that age, the students facilitate the parents coming together.

WOODLAND HILLS

Woodland Hills (*photo above*) hosted their kindergarten welcome event at the local fire station in November, once the school year was well underway. Since the kids already knew each other and their teachers, the **kids led** with their enthusiasm, noticing their classmate’s names on the roster and **leading their parents to see the real celebrities - their kindergarten teachers!**



Other clever strategies worked to connect families and schools

Moving at the speed of trust

CRAWFORD CENTRAL has been working through how to get more parents cleared to be volunteers. As **Thomas Washington** observed, “**You first have to set up a trusting relationship.** How do you establish trusting relationships? It has to come around social gatherings. Our schools are a fortress behind safety. How do you let parents in? If you don’t let them in then you don’t create those relationships. If I am only inviting you in to talk when your kid is struggling, that already sets up a dynamic when we come to meet.”

Data for decision making

FRANKLIN REGIONAL district came to the idea for their hack through an analysis of parent surveys. For their fall hack, they **engaged staff from the Mentoring Partnership as a third-party to facilitate conversations** where parents could freely share their thoughts. The Mentoring Partnership also collected data anonymously from the participants to share with the district.

Welcome to my world!

GROVE CITY’S open house welcomed parents into the school, and for co-lead **Marisa Jackson**, that was the first time she had been in the building. After the event, Marisa noticed a change almost immediately. Her daughter started sharing more about what’s going on at school: “She wants to tell me more about her work because I’ve seen it.” Now mom knows and remembers the places and things she is talking about. That **common experience of being in the school together** has increased the availability for Marisa’s daughter to talk about her daily school life at home.

SOUTH FAYETTE led parents through an activity using Holland’s RIASEC, a tool for gauging personality and vocational choices that the students are also using in their own classes. It was a beautiful way for **the parents to experience what their kids are doing at school** by doing it themselves

Doughnuts for Grownups was a success at **CHARLEROI**, where they held the event in the morning during the school day. It was **important for the parents to be able to see the positive atmosphere at the school**, how the school works, and to be with the kids in the school. Parents were also seen exchanging phone numbers, extending the relationships outside of school.

“Food brings people together” — it’s a tried and true practice.

AVONWORTH

The Avonworth team organized a family ambassador evening and dinner, where **families were paired** to get to know each other better. Then they separated the kids and the parents, so the parents had time to talk.

WEST ALLEGHENY

West Allegheny hosted McKee Dine and Dialogue. These monthly gatherings for ESL families provided a **safe space to ask questions, share experiences, access resources and information, and advocate for their children**. The gatherings also helped McKee staff develop understanding, empathy and appreciation to better support the ESL community. Coming together to enjoy the traditional foods and recipes of the ESL families had the lovely feel of celebration.

BENTWORTH

Hosting a casual welcome event instead of the usual formal info session for kindergarten parents led to significantly less crying on the first day of school, for both kids and parents!

Thank you teams for the grace of your time to conduct the office hours with HundrED. We learned that no two hacks were alike, even if the strategy was similar. You know your context best, and did it your way!

Bentworth hosted Hot Diggity Dog, serving hotdogs with all the fixings - ketchup, mustard, onion, pickles, relish and coleslaw for their kindergarten families.



Burrell

Looking ahead, new hacks will roll out AND big learning conversations will take place — all culminating in a big fall celebration!

2 0 2 3 **January: Team check-in meeting with Adha and Rachel.** The themes of the fall hacks helped us group the cohort into smaller groups to meet virtually with Adha and Rachel. All team members are invited but we hope at a minimum the co-leads can attend to reflect, exchange ideas and brainstorm about the spring hack.

January: Fall hack summary and spring hack funding. In the application you have received for spring hack funding, we also ask you to share learnings/results from your fall hack. Each team may request up to \$5000 for the spring hack. The application needs to be completed by January 31, and the spring hack will need to be completed by May 2023.

February 9: “Building Trust,” a session with Dr. Eyal Bergman. Please hold the date! Dr. Bergman from Learning Heroes will join us in Pittsburgh and host a session on how to build foundational trust between schools, families and community. More details to come.

January-May: “Big Education Conversations.” We are reworking the Great Learning Conversations to be part of the Big Education Conversation. Many of you chose to host this community conversation in the winter and spring. Yu-Ling Cheng and Lyn Krynski will be following up with you to schedule dates and brainstorm how we can support you.

May-June: Reflection on your Parents as Allies work. We will start to finalize your reflections about your Parents as Allies journeys. Templates will be provided and we’ll work on capturing visuals (photography or videography). This information will be shared with HundrED and included in their Parents as Allies playbook which will launch at their Summit in fall 2023. More details to come.

Fall: A celebration! We’ll come together to celebrate the journey and work we’ve done together the last two years. It will be a fun party!

Stay tuned for more networking events and workshops for Parents as Allies cohort members.

The helpers: The sponsor and partners supporting the school district teams

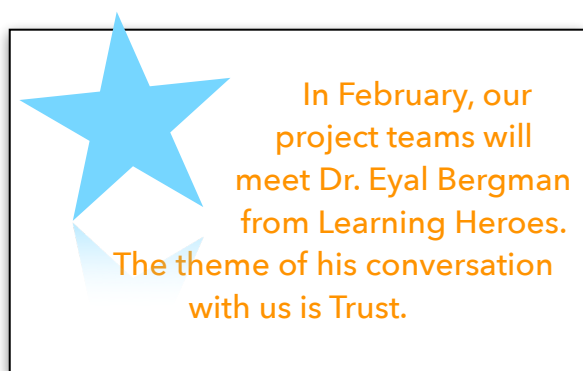
SUPPORTED BY:



LED BY: KIDSBURGH™

Through the generous support of The Grable Foundation, Kidsburgh is providing funds to each school district in support of the project: up to \$2,250 for the Design Sprint Process, up to \$1,000 for hosting a community-oriented Great Learning Conversation and up to \$10,000 in mini grant funding to test family and school engagement hacks.

Kidsburgh will also host networking events to exchange ideas, a virtual series of "Parent Academy" learning sessions, visually capture and write stories on what schools are learning. Learn more at: <https://www.kidsburgh.org/topic/parents-as-allies/>



THE PARTNERS:

hundrED

HundrED will measure the impact of the family and school engagement work in each school community.

Globally, they will launch what we learn in southwestern PA at the HundrED Innovation Summit in Helsinki, Finland, in November 2023.



Office hours with Dr. Eyal Bergman consider how to build trust and implementing impactful family engagement strategies across the district.

Dr. Bergman will also provide sessions to learn about Learning Heroes research.



Brookings will provide virtual learning sessions to dive into their research: nearly 25,000 parents were surveyed with the help of 49 organizations across 12 countries (approximately 1,600 parents and 330 teachers from SWPA participated). Many of their materials are also available for school districts to use.