

K Prep Shows Great Promise

If you are moving to a new city and want your children in high-performing schools, you check the test scores. And what is the crucial factor that results in high scores? Usually it's the demographics of a school: whether the families sending their children there are affluent, highly educated, involved with the school and working with their children at home.

What about schools that don't serve such advantaged communities? At six of our seven elementary schools, more than half the families are low-income. What is their hope?

Good teachers and administrators, certainly. But there is more. At Side by Side, we believe another effective way to bridge the gap is to provide parents with methods for supporting their children's learning. These methods come almost second nature to upper-middle-class parents, but sharing them with all parents is by far the most cost-effective way to address student performance, not requiring the high price tags of staffing and after-school programming.

This fall we launched a parent-education program called **K Prep** that holds great promise. We believe it is a program that can and should spread throughout our county and beyond in the next five years.

K Prep provides **an in-depth orientation** to new parents coming into our schools. As a pilot this fall, we invited kindergarten and pre-kindergarten families at four schools to a series of three evening events. On each evening we served dinner for the whole family, parents attended workshops in English and Spanish, and children enjoyed fun activities. Parents learned about **managing difficult child behaviors, getting children off to a strong start in reading, and building early math skills.**

continued on page 3

K Prep Statistics

Number of schools: 4
Number of sessions per school: 3
Total number of sessions: 12
Parents attending: 70
Children attending: 87
Percentage of K & Pre-K Families Attending: 14%
Cost: \$7,750
Grant support: \$2,800 from Target for reading workshops and books to give families. Thank you, Target!



Parents attend a K Prep math workshop at Laurel Elementary School

What's INSIDE >>>>

KICKS FOR A CAUSE ... PAGE 2

K PREP KUDOS PAGE 3

‘Kicks for a Cause’ Lifts Off

Side by Side inaugurated a fun community event Oct. 8 with its first “**Kicks for a Cause**” kickball tournament. Ten teams participated in two divisions, competitive and fun. The **Kool Kats** defeated **Laurel Historical Society** in the competitive finals, and **First United Methodist Church** beat **Montpelier Elementary** in the fun finals. Montpelier Elementary took home the trophy for best finish by a school.

The other teams were Bethany Community Church, Bond Mill Elementary, First Baptist Church of Laurel, St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, Scotchtown Hills Elementary and West Laurel. Some of the teams were all-adult, others a mix of adults and children.

The games brought lots of smiles. “The atmosphere was great; everybody pretty much seemed to be having fun,” said Steve Mitzak, player-coach of the Montpelier Elementary team. “We would play again in a heartbeat.” Look for the second annual event next fall.

A special thanks to our sponsors, who helped us raise \$3,000 from the event. They were **Academy Ford**; the city of Laurel; **Laurel Presbyterian**; five Southern Management Co. apartment communities – **The Dona, Laurel Park, Laurel Court, Middletowne** and **Steward Manor** – and **Joe and Joan Robison**.



Jeremy Diepenbrock of the Kool Kats rises to the occasion at the “Kicks for a Cause” kickball tournament. His team won the competitive division trophy.



*Thanks to the many
volunteers !*

K Prep continued from page 1

K Prep challenged us logistically and financially. It meant hosting 12 Family Academy-type events in three weeks, as opposed to nine throughout the whole school year as we had during our first two years. But the results were so worth it. Parents and the teachers who led the workshops agreed that the parents came away equipped and, just as important, allied with the teachers on behalf of their children.

The teachers who led the workshops are enthusiastic about continuing next year, and they think **the program should be expanded** to six evenings at each school. We also want to place the program in all seven of our local schools. That means more planning, coordination, finances and volunteer help. The latter is key, and we're optimistic that local churches will step up to serve the dinners and supervise children's activities.

Fourteen percent of the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten parents at the four schools this fall attended K Prep. We want to increase that to 25 percent next year, and eventually to between 33 and 50 percent. We believe those numbers represent a tipping point, where the program will begin to affect, not only individual families, but entire schools.

Ambitious, yes. Challenging, yes. Possible, yes!

----- **KUDOS** -----



Selena Fizer, teacher, Deerfield Run Elementary: *“The Side by Side workshops I really believe have been beneficial to the parents. They’ve been able to see what their children have been expected to know at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year. They’ve also been given tools on how they can help at home. And these are everyday things – things you can pull from your kitchen or things you can pull from the living room, car activities they can do driving places. A lot of parents have been very appreciative.”*



Erin Brecht, teacher, Montpelier Elementary School: *“I loved it. I think the parents loved it. We had fun. We shared ideas. It wasn’t like ‘lecture and listen’; it was very interactive. Everybody was involved.”*



Melinda Lee, principal, Laurel Elementary: *“Thank you so much for providing a fabulous opportunity for our kindergarten families. We are so fortunate to partner with Side by Side. All of you give so much to the Laurel families.”*



Dione Hamer, parent, Montpelier Elementary: *“I already read to my children, but I got a lot of wonderful ideas from the teacher and the other parents in the class. We have, and will continue to, practice the things that we learned.”*

Kudos continued from page 3



Lisa Hawkins, teacher, Deerfield Run Elementary: *“We really, really thought the Side by Side math, reading and behavior nights were a great experience. It really feels like we’ve built that partnership between the parents and the teachers, sharing what they know about their students to help us work with them in the classroom and for us to transfer skills back home to really reinforce what they are learning. It was a wonderful experience.”*



Jequilah Randall, parent, Deerfield Run Elementary: *“I learned while teaching my daughter different activities – whether it’s shapes, letters, numbers – that I should have fun with her. And with doing that, I can have fun as well, with dancing and singing and counting.”*

“See our K Prep video on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-4Qu83duSE>”

Our Vision:

Schools that students find exciting, challenging and safe. Homes where motivated and well-disciplined children, encouraged by their parents, learn a love of reading and writing. Schools where children needing extra support or extra challenge receive it. A community recognized for championing public-school excellence.

Our Mission:

Side by Side is committed to the idea that the Laurel community, working alongside the schools, can substantially narrow the gap between vision and today’s reality. We firmly believe that no local issue is more important for our community’s well-being, both now and for the future.

Our Partners:

Side to Side partners with Prince George’s County Public Schools, our local principals and teachers, Laurel churches, city and county governments, and other Laurel community organizations.

