

## From the Executive Director

Joe Murchison

### **It Feels Good to be a Toddler**

**Side by Side** took its first baby steps during the past year, beginning our Family Academy and Almost Home programs as the first phases of our mission to strengthen Prince George's County public schools in the Laurel area.

As we enter our second year, no longer a newborn, I look back with gratitude at all of the support we received, all that we learned and all the families and children we touched.

We've just started. To reach our goal of helping our public schools to be the best that they can be, we need to reach more families, expand to more schools, offer more programs and make our programs better. We are excited about the coming school year, continuing our Almost Home homework club, expanding our Family Academy and launching a tutoring program for elementary students in need of extra help.

Generous volunteers and donors have made our work possible. Thank you! We'll keep it up as you keep it up. Working together with each other and the school staffs, we will have schools that serve our children well and make us all proud.

## **Parents Back in School**

How to stop their children's negative behavior. How to motivate positive behavior. How to help their children become better readers, and how to get them excited about math. How to better manage family finances.

These topics rose to the top as a "core curriculum" for parents from seven elementary schools at our first nine Family Academies.

The 2009-2010 academies, which provided free meals, parenting workshops in English and Spanish, enrichment activities for students and child care for preschoolers, drew 131 families, with an average of 84 parents and children at each academy.

Continued on page 3



Photo by Judy Sinkovitz

A family enjoys the meal at the Family Academy.

***Visit our website to view the 2010-2011 Family Academy schedule.***

## An Exciting 'Club' for Children

"My son loves you all," says Angel Moneé Small. "He tells me how nice everybody is. The homework is always done. He's doing good!"

"Veronica likes it here," adds Flora Hernandez. "The days she was not here, she had a sad face at home."

These are two parents' reactions to **Side by Side's "Almost Home"** after-school program, which began in April 2010. Created in partnership with **Southern Management Corp.**, the program provided 20 elementary-school children with a homework club three afternoons a week at a community room in Laurel Park Apartments.

**Side by Side** volunteers, primarily current and retired teachers, joined Southern Management personnel to offer help on assignments and lead children in reading and enrichment activities. Some of the children would have spent the afternoons in empty apartments.

"Our staff saw the great improvements in student achievement and homework completion," writes Laurel Elementary School Principal Melinda Lee. "My staff was so pleased with the results – that 79% of the students showed an increase on their report card in at least one of their classes and 68% of the students showed an increase on their report card in at least one of the following areas: math, reading, reading level, oral and written communication and/or literacy."

Fifth-grader Tonesha Nolan commented, "I like that I get lots of help with my homework. We do lots of fun activities. I've met a lot of new adults. I liked helping the littler kids with their homework. I liked reading to the littler kids."

**Side by Side** and **Southern Management** will continue **Almost Home** in the 2010-2011 school year. Side by Side also will launch a tutoring program for students who need extra help in all of our local elementary schools. Volunteer tutors will work with students on reading and math once or twice a week during the school day, after school or in the evenings. Our goal is to recruit 50 volunteers during the coming year.

### It Just Got Harder!

Newly released standardized test scores reveal that three of Side's seven elementary schools failed to make "adequate yearly progress" required by the national "No Child Left Behind" law. This is up from one failing school in 2009. At the same time, budget cuts have just eliminated all the Prince George's schools' parent liaison and lunchroom monitor positions. Side by Side's programs are needed more than ever.



Photo by Joe Murchison

Retired teacher Linda Aston helps Catherine Saravia during an Almost Home session.

## New Staff

**Jane Hanfman** became **Side by Side's** first program director as of Aug. 1, 2010. A founding member of Side by Side and a retired teacher with 23 years in the Prince George's County Public Schools, Jane has been crucial to the success of our first year. Among her many assets are a high energy level, a wealth of teaching experience, a broad network of contacts in the school system and a passion for the well-being of children. Jane's primary focus will be to oversee Side by Side's tutoring and homework club programs. She is Side by Side's second employee, joining executive director Joe Murchison. Both positions have part-time salaries.

Photo by Joe Hanfman



Jane with friends at the 1<sup>st</sup> Family Academy in Sept. 2009

### Did You Know?

“Up until the end of third grade, most children are *learning to read*. Beginning in fourth grade, however, they are *reading to learn*. ... Three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school, according to researchers at Yale University. ... A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by (the end of 3rd grade) is unlikely to graduate from high school.”

– “*Why Reading By the End of Third Grade Matters*,” special 2010 report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

## Parents Back in School

...continued from page 1

“We got to share about how to handle discipline, and how to keep homework from being so frustrating,” said Maria Brooks, a grandmother and guardian of two elementary children. “There was a wealth of networking. I’m looking at Boy Scouts for Malique, who is 11, and that’s from a flyer I got at the academy. I learned about tutoring that’s going on at a nearby church. It was a great way for the community to come together and network together.”

“I learned not to stress myself out when I deal with my grandson,” said Maggie Thomas, also a guardian. “I learned how I can sit and actually talk to him about things even though he’s 10 years old. I’m looking forward to the academies starting again.”

“I thought a lot of the seminars were useful,” said parent Wilnetta Thomas. “I liked the one on reading. My daughter, in the second grade, was struggling with reading. I learned a lot about myself – that I was short on patience. Working with a tutor and with me, my daughter got up to speed by the end of the year.”

Side by Side’s Family Academies for the 2010-2011 school year will add some new topics to the core curriculum: science projects, Internet safety, social networking, bullying and etiquette. New children’s activities will include a theater night, finances for children, math game night, indoor Olympics, astronomy and etiquette. The academies also will expand to include middle-school parents.

“Your organization has done so much for our students and community,” wrote Principal Tom Tucker of Deerfield Run Elementary School of the Family Academy program. “Don’t give up the fight to bring the needed services our community desperately needs. Thanks again for all your hard work and dedication in making this project a success.”

## Ways to Give

You can now support **Side by Side's** work through contributions to the fall campaigns of the United Way of the National Capital Area and the National Capital Area Combined Federal Campaign.

Designate funds for Side by Side with these numbers:

- United Way: 8810
- Combined Federal Campaign: 75348

We have adopted a 2010-2011 budget of \$60,000, almost double our first-year budget, as we expand and deepen our programs. We rely on the continued, and increased, support of our wonderful donors. You can always give to **Side by Side** the old-fashioned way: by mailing a check to 15808 Kerr Road, Laurel, MD 20707. Or you can give by credit card or PayPal on our website, [www.sidebysidelaurel.org](http://www.sidebysidelaurel.org). Bless you!

## Ways to Serve

In as little as one hour a week, you can make a big difference in the life of a child. Side by Side is recruiting volunteer tutors to work with an elementary-school child during the school day, after school or on a weekday evening.

We also need volunteers for our 'Almost Home' homework club and at our monthly Family Academies. At the academies, volunteers check in families, help serve a meal, supervise children, make follow-up calls to families between academies, and pray for our families. You can help once, or once a month.

For more information, go to our website, [www.sidebysidelaurel.org](http://www.sidebysidelaurel.org), or call Linda Engstrom at 301-931-1399.

### 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 by Side partners with Prince George's County Public Schools, our local principals and school staffs, Laurel's religious congregations, its business community, other Laurel community organizations and many individual volunteers and donors.

