



Two years ago, a dynamic partnership was formed between one chapter of Kappa Delta Pi and one elementary school. The chapter was seeking a way to involve its members in meaningful ways that benefit education, and the elementary school was seeking ways to involve parents at school. A partnership was formed, and the rest is a success story.

The partners are the Eta Omega Chapter of Kappa Delta Pi at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Walnut Hill Elementary School. This Title I elementary school, located in the heart of the city of Omaha, has 350 students in grades pre-Kindergarten through sixth. In this diverse, integrated school, 86 percent of students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Parent Involvement

The relationship began in 2004 when Deidre Reeh, then KDP Chapter President, contacted School Liaison Deb Bentley and asked what chapter volunteers could do to benefit the school. This open-ended question paved the way for what has become an ongoing collabora-

Karen Sprunger is Chapter Services Coordinator at Kappa Delta Pi Headquarters.

tion between the chapter members and the school. At that initial stage, the classroom teachers conducted a needs assessment and determined that parental involvement, including an active Parent Teacher Association, was the school's primary concern.

To address this need, KDP members help to increase parental involvement by volunteering in a number of programs throughout the year. For example, to help parents and other family members understand the importance of school involvement, volunteers model techniques and provide opportunities for participation. Volunteers also help parents to understand the impact their involvement in the school has on their children and their family relationship. Chapter members offer a Media Awareness Day where families commit to no TV or video games.

The volunteers provide parents and students with meaningful literacy alternatives tied to Dr. Seuss's birthday.

To boost attendance at parent-teacher conferences, KDP members conduct literacy activities with children so that a greater number of parents are able to attend. Chapter members developed literacy strategies to occupy the children in response to the classroom teachers' challenge to provide more than just babysitting.

At school-wide events, chapter members step in so that all the parents and families can spend time with the teachers. At the beginning of the school year, chapter members staff booths at the annual Welcome Back Party. Similarly, during the Health Fair, members provide family activities for more than 500 attendees. On Parent Partnership Day, when parents shadow their children for a day to understand what and how they are learning, chapter members serve continental breakfast.

Literacy

In addition to supporting parental involvement, volunteers participate in the school's literacy efforts. Two or three times a month, chapter members visit classrooms and facilitate



Victoria Ring, member of the KDP Eta Omega Chapter, works with students at Walnut Hill Elementary School to encourage literacy.

literacy activities that include recording, reciting, and review. When working in the classroom, the ratio is one member for every three students. At the onset of this program, the teachers viewed it as "one more thing to fit into their schedule." However, the pilot classroom teachers were so impressed with the results that the word spread. In the program's second year, the number of classrooms and students served has nearly doubled, and interest by other classes continues to grow.

The chapter, which is a recipient of a 2006 Reading Is Fun Grant from Kappa Delta Pi, uses these funds for literacy initiatives in the classrooms. At the beginning of the semester, each group of grade-level teachers identifies what type of literacy focus is needed in their classes. Each month, 6–10 members facilitate a theme-related literacy experience that touches both the heads and hands of students. For instance, in a second-grade classroom, the students read the book *Nate the Great and the Boring Beach Bag*, engaged in a scavenger hunt, completed a crossword puzzle, and then made an edible beach cup for a treat. Volun-

teers leave the classroom teacher with extension activities, ideas, and projects to accompany rereading the book.

Service Learning

While other KDP chapters may struggle with how to keep members actively involved, the Eta Omega Chapter found service to be the key to increasing participation. Through their engagement with the elementary school, chapter members—including elementary through secondary education majors—act on their strong sense of service as well as gain valuable hands-on experience with students and an understanding about the needs in a low socioeconomic school.

According to Chapter Counselor Sandra Wetig, "structuring activities around service triangulates the chapter's efforts." Members have a strong desire to be involved in this program, which provides a clear vision of what they can accomplish. The volunteers are able to make a significant difference in the lives of students in this diverse population. "The project is an embodiment of power," explained Wetig. "The

members take the theories and strategies learned in the college classroom and apply them in the school setting." By participating in this project, members learn literacy strategies such as how to work in small groups, how to work one-on-one, vocabulary building, authentic assessment, close activities, and oral assessments. At the same time, the activities fully engage the elementary students with no loss of instruction time.

Wetig encourages other chapters to choose one organization and collaborate over an extended period. She mentors the students, and advises and assists as necessary. Wetig empowers the officers and members to carry on this important project. Reeh and Copresident Brooke Wiseman Dowse were the lead facilitators and coordinators of activities at the elementary school.

About the collaboration, Bentley commented, "Many groups offer to help the school without first asking what the school needs. With Kappa Delta Pi, the members looked at our goals, and together we determined how to meet them." Parents of the Walnut Hill students have experienced a change in family dynamics. With an increase in parental involvement, the school receives more support from home for their children's education. The expanse of this project needs many hands to make it happen. The chapter members made this a reality and the students enjoy seeing the same people return to their school. ■

Ideas for Chapter Activities

For a how-to guide on planning and executing a variety of successful programs, visit the Chapter Services area of KDP Online at www.kdp.org. You are sure to find an idea that is just right for your chapter. Also, use the online form to share details about your own successful programs.