

2013 Parent Involvement Matters Award Local Honorees

Carla Eckard – Flintstone Elementary School Allegany County Public Schools

Carla Eckard, a parent volunteer at Flintstone Elementary School, is the mother of two who works as an engineer and shares her knowledge of science during Integrated Science Days and Career Day. Ms. Eckard plans Science Days that include physics, chemistry, and life and earth science. The goal is to engage students in hands-on science activities that integrate science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and to increase parent involvement. When not busy with Science Days, she is capturing school memories in her role as photographer and editor of Flintstone's yearbook.

Carol Streeter – Crofton Elementary School Anne Arundel County Public Schools

Carol Streeter facilitates a variety of programs at Crofton Elementary School, which include the annual Talent Show; E-cubed Program, which includes yoga, Lego building, sewing, cooking, scrapbooking, recycling and matchbox car racing; and publishing the school's directory. She also coordinates the NASA Best Club which allows students – regardless of their math and science abilities – to have an opportunity to participate in the twelve-week after school program that introduces them to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Ms. Streeter modified the curriculum so that all students have the opportunity to participate and has helped parents understand that STEM is not just for gifted students.

Vera Smith – Steuart Hill Academy Baltimore City Public Schools

Vera Smith has a spirit of teamwork and works diligently to ensure parent and community members have a voice within Steuart Hill Academy – so much so that she canvasses the neighborhood informing parents of the great things happening at the school. Ms. Smith's demeanor is pleasant and she consistently demonstrates her ability to interact positively with students, staff members, and other parents. Serving on the School Family Council, she gives freely of her time in a variety of capacities, such as arriving early to serve breakfast, helping with lunch, and then staying late in the day assisting the afterschool program.

Mary Kavanagh – Perry Hall High School Baltimore County Public Schools

Mary Kavanagh chaired the Project LOVE initiative at Perry Hall High School. In the aftermath of a shooting in the cafeteria on the first day of school in 2012, Ms. Kavanagh collaborated with local artist Michael Owen to replace the images of violence – with an image of love for the students and community. She outlined a plan of work to complete a mural painting and celebrate it with a large ceremony in the cafeteria. For several months, she helped to raise more than \$12,000 from eight local businesses to secure Project LOVE t-shirts for every student and staff member. She also received in-kind donations from a local video and photography production studio to professionally capture the event unveiling

the mural. Students now walk into a space that is covered with “love” and filled in with over 500 handprints of students and staff.

**Julie Elbrecht – Sunderland Elementary School
Calvert County Public Schools**

Julie Elbrecht serves as the foundation for the recruitment of school volunteers and the coordination of family fun and fundraising activities. She is also involved in the decisions to allocate Family and School Organization resources to support the students and school environment. Ms. Elbrecht’s efforts to recruit and train a cadre of assistant volunteers are rewarded by her strong organizational skills, her personal commitment to Sunderland Elementary School students, and her amazing ability to find a special way to make “her” volunteers feel appreciated.

**Emily Phillips – Federalsburg Elementary School
Caroline County Public Schools**

Knowing the importance of parent involvement in a child’s education can have the greatest impact upon their lives, Emily Phillips has served as homeroom parent, member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and member of the Parent Advisory Committee at Federalsburg Elementary School. In addition, Ms. Phillips prepares students, in grades one through five, for a successful future through the Six Pillars of Character Program. Because of her volunteerism, children understand that citizenship includes civic virtues and duties that prescribe how we behave as part of a community. The Golden Rule – do unto others as you would have them do unto you – nicely illustrates the Pillar of Respect for Ms. Phillips.

**Joanie Mayle – Northwest Middle School
Carroll County Public Schools**

Joanie Mayle is a parent, volunteer, Advisory Council representative, and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) president at Northwest Middle School. Ms. Mayle organizes all fundraisers, and social events, which include Arcs and Sparks from the Maryland Science Center; annual assemblies on the Civil War – part of the Social Studies curriculum, and Bullying; Diversity/Multicultural Day, and the annual Veterans Day Celebration. In addition, Ms. Mayle serves as president for the Band Booster Organization at Francis Scott Key High School where another one of her children attends. She is a great supporter of Northwest Middle School and Francis Scott Key High School in the Northwest Region of Carroll County.

**Jennifer Guite – Conowingo Elementary School
Cecil County Public Schools**

Working directly with students in the classroom brings Jennifer Guite her greatest joy. Ms. Guite works with small groups and individual students assisting with homework, learning basic math facts, practicing reading and writing skits to be performed school-wide. In addition, she demonstrates true leadership skills as the co-advisor of the Fuel Up to Play 60 Initiative – a school nutrition and physical activity program that emphasizes health and wellness. The Fuel Up to Play 60 Initiative has spawned the creation of interdisciplinary instructional units that are student-based and relative to the Common Core State Standards. Her efforts have resulted in a better educational experience for all students at

Conowingo Elementary School, as well as helped to create a healthier and more educated community.

**Victoria Kelly – Mary H. Matula Elementary School
Charles County Public Schools**

Wanting to create the best environment possible for her children, and realizing the importance of parent involvement, Victoria Kelly serves as the PTO president at Mary H. Matula Elementary School. From organizing Meet & Greet Socials to hosting "Donuts with Dad" and "Muffins with Mom" events to make parents feel welcome and to create a sense of community, Ms. Kelly not only keeps parents crossing the threshold, but also keeps them in the loop by maintaining the school's Facebook page and publishing the monthly newsletter. She keeps the entire community informed by submitting photographs and articles to the local newspaper about the great things happening at school.

**Diana Creighton – Warwick Elementary School
Dorchester County Public Schools**

Diana Creighton has played a significant role in the revitalization and rejuvenation of the parent organization, recently named P.A.W.S – Parents Assisting Warwick Students. In addition to raising more than \$8,000 in just four short months, additional fundraisers are providing field trips, classroom materials, pizza parties, festivals, and assemblies to students at Warwick Elementary School. Because of her enthusiasm and leadership, more parents want to be involved and are taking an active role in the school and in their children's lives. Ms. Creighton serves as the driving force of new traditions that are beginning, as well as the cultural change taking place in the community.

**Jana Sheffer – Frederick High School
Frederick County Public Schools**

Known as the mastermind of communication and consensus-building, Jana Sheffer has been PTA President for multiple years at three schools. Ms. Sheffer not only championed the two-year \$91.9 million Frederick High School Renovation/ Modernization Project, she also helped manage and market the Care For Kids Campaign. The campaign was launched in 2010 by a small group of parents who recognized the economic disparity of the student population, and provided gift cards, toiletries, and donations to underprivileged students. Ms. Sheffer spearheaded spreading the word through the community to help the kids in need. She is ever present in communicating the need, volunteering, and collaborating with the community to provide student resources that benefit Frederick High and the county at large.

**Jeanine Sisler – Broad Ford Elementary School
Garrett County Public Schools**

Jeanine Sisler is the epitome of a caring and involved parent and a real asset at Broad Ford Elementary School. As the PTO president, Ms. Sisler has made great strides to improve the school's PTO budget, as well as the life of students. From working with a local dentist to offer dental services to students of families with limited resources to orchestrating a Gold Fundraiser to assist with the health costs for a student with a serious medical condition –

Ms. Sisler wears a smile every day, shows that she has a heart of gold, and gives without an expectation of receiving.

**Carol Vach – Ring Factory Elementary School
Harford County Public Schools**

As the Vice President of Ring Factory Elementary School's PTA, Carol Vach is hailed as a "jack of all trades," and has been the backbone of all school activities for five consecutive years. Her events help provide a wholesome family evening and make the school a home away from home. Ms. Vach not only spends countless hours soliciting donations from local businesses to support school activities, and organizing the annual Fall Festival; Spring Fling; Laps for Learning; Teacher Appreciation Week; Winter Wonderland; and Parents Night Out events, but she also promotes goodwill and a feeling of unity in others through her parent involvement.

**Tami McClatchey – Waterloo Elementary School
Howard County Public Schools**

Tami McClatchey knows the benefits of a healthier lifestyle and she shares it with others as Chair of the Wellness Committee at Waterloo Elementary School. Ms. McClatchey recognized the importance of getting young children started early in making good choices regarding nutrition and physical activity. With her leadership, procedures for indoor recess were adjusted; a movement room for exercise and dance videos is available for students; balls and jump ropes were purchased for outdoor recess activity; and the Wellness Committee organized its first Family 5K Walk/Run with proceeds being donated to two charities that benefit cancer treatment.

**Dennis Walters – Galena Elementary School
Kent County Public Schools**

As the PTA President, Junior Achievement Coach, and a Character Counts! Coach, Dennis Walters has made a huge impact on the students, families, staff, and community of Galena Elementary School. Not only did he promote physical activity and healthy behaviors in and out of the school by leading the charge for the NFL Play 60 Program and Kent County Public Schools Wellness Council, but he also found many ways to bring the school and community together. And his dedication did not end there; he has served on several school board committees keeping in the forefront the best interests of the most important stakeholders...the students.

**Marilyn Whitted – Wheaton High School
Montgomery County Public Schools**

Known to many simply as "Taylor's Mom," Marilyn Whitted wears many hats--from chauffeur to cheerleader to advocate at Wheaton High School. In addition, she has served as NAACP liaison, Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) board member, and is currently Chair of the Post-Prom Committee. Ms. Whitted's participation in a six-week Study Circles Program, designed to engage diverse staff, parents, and students in discussion and problem-solving, has been instrumental in developing outreach approaches

and encouraging relationships, awareness, and strategies needed to address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement, as well as parent involvement.

**Kimberly Hall – John Hanson French Immersion School
Prince George's County Public Schools**

Kimberly Hall, a dedicated parent of three children at John Hanson French Immersion School, served as PTSA President, School Board Liaison, and currently is the PTSA Program Chair and Room Mother in two classrooms. Ms. Hall has introduced several enrichment programs in grades K-5, including the Mad Science of Washington, D.C. Program – students learn about science through experimentation. She initiated afterschool dance programs where students learn jazz and modern dance, as well as a language program where students learn Mandarin. Ms. Hall recognized the need for students to understand the importance of Black History by directing the Black History program, and involved all grade levels in the production. Her efforts in building “the whole child” have contributed to a better awareness of the school’s staff, which represents 17 different countries.

**Annette DiMaggio – Sudlersville Elementary School
Queen Anne's County Public Schools**

Initiating the “Backpack Fridays” project to offer nourishment for at-risk students at Sudlersville Elementary School over the weekends when they are not provided the free meals at school, Annette DiMaggio collects funds from friends, community members, school staff, and local businesses. Ms. DiMaggio also purchases the food as recommended by the FDA, stores it in her commercial kitchen, and fills bags every Thursday to feed 34 students. Other outreach efforts include Community Cares, movie night at the school, and management of the school store. Ms. DiMaggio, who exemplifies the meaning of parent involvement throughout the community, also serves as the PTA president at Sudlersville Middle School where her son attends.

**Norma Sydnor – Benjamin Banneker Elementary School
St. Mary's County Public Schools**

Arriving at school before most staff members, and although her grandchildren and great grandchildren have moved on to middle school and beyond, Norma Sydnor is still very much committed to student success at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School. Her dedication to helping has not waned-- her three-day per week volunteerism and her level of energy to get things done is remarkable. Whether it is copying, filing, sorting, binding, laminating or classroom preparation, teachers are able to deliver quality instruction because Ms. Sydnor is ready, willing, and able to assist wherever needed.

**Aurelia Martinez – Woodson Elementary School
Somerset County Public Schools**

Aurelia Martinez was not assigned to the Latino Parent Outreach Project – she was born to it, serving as a role model, motivated liaison, and advocate for the Latino community and the school system. Ms. Martinez makes phone calls to Latino parents encouraging them to attend school functions – often providing personal transportation. She also acts as interpreter for families and shares resources, which has translated into better prepared

Latino students. Her volunteerism spans throughout the community – she transports Latino families to Bible study, opens her home by serving authentic Mexican food, and is collaborating with her employer on a major community project to clean-up and reopen the local beach. Latino parents trust Ms. Martinez and her outreach has increased Latino parent involvement at Woodson Elementary School.

**Megan Cook – Easton Elementary School
Talbot County Public Schools**

CarePacks is a program whose mission is to end weekend hunger among Easton Elementary School's most economically vulnerable students. Thanks to Megan Cook, CarePacks now serves 180 students in all five elementary schools in Talbot County. The program provides two breakfasts, lunches, snacks, and fruit items to eligible students every Friday afternoon. Ms. Cook began the program's fundraising efforts, researching grants, and talking to business owners, personal contacts and community groups about the program. Almost immediately, she was able to secure close to \$3,000 in funding through contacts with individuals, churches and service organizations.

**Tara Ensor – Bester Elementary School
Washington County Public Schools**

Tara Ensor is being described as a beacon of the "Making a Difference Every Day" parent project at Bester Elementary School. Even though she is a single parent of two children, Ms. Ensor has spent countless hours in assembling informational packets and cataloging items for the parent resource center, so that the families of the community are able to get information on a variety of topics. In addition, Ms. Ensor has run the weekly "Kindergarten Cash Cart" reward program independently and efficiently for the last two years, working in the classroom with students on reading, mathematics, and science activities. She is a role model of strength for other parents, staff and students.

**Lisa Mertensotto – Salisbury Middle School
Wicomico County Public Schools**

Lisa Mertensotto is known as the quintessential volunteer for mobilizing parents, as well as securing community and civic resources to ensure students receive the very best that Salisbury Middle School has to offer. She orchestrated the Alzheimer's' Walk, dances, talent shows, basket bingo, lunch on the lawn, community yard sales to meet the needs of lower income families, the eighth-grade formal, and the positive behavior incentive carnival. She also provides valuable input on school safety. One of four founding members of "Parents in Action," Ms. Mertensotto's 'can do' attitude and volunteer spirit leads the way, as she advocates for the students at Salisbury Middle School.

**Jeanne Zender – Showell Elementary School
Worcester County Public Schools**

Child advocacy is Jeanne Zender's mantra. Understanding that parent involvement is more than just fundraising at Showell Elementary School, Ms. Zender is also a positive role model and ensures that the school is a special place for students and parents alike. She brings her love of Fine Arts to the school by hosting the annual Showell Elementary Talent Show –

giving students an opportunity to display their talents in various ways that are not found in the curriculum. She cares for all students and wants them to have experiences that can make a difference in their lives, such as the Arts. In addition, Ms. Zender helped to bring to fruition the "Moms Helping Moms" program which provides meals and resources to three needy families at the school.