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## **Parents at northeast Portland school have plan to help close achievement gap**

- **King School PTA urges parents to commit 10 hours per year to their child's school**
- **Parent and community involvement summit planned for Jefferson Cluster Schools**

(Portland, Oregon) – Members of the King Elementary School PTA are preparing for the upcoming school year by launching a project to increase parents' involvement in their children's education. PTA members are gathering pledges from parents and community members who are willing to commit 10 or more hours volunteering in school. Their hope is to increase parent and community involvement in every school in the Jefferson cluster, and to provide a model for other schools in the district that want to increase student learning. The Jefferson cluster area includes Beach, Boise Eliot, Chief Joseph, Faubion, Humboldt, King, Vernon and Woodlawn elementary schools; Ockley Green and Tubman middle schools, and Jefferson High School.

Lakeitha Elliott, president of the King School PTA is frustrated that many parents think the best way to provide a good education for their children is to send them to a school outside the neighborhood. She says, "If you look at the data you'll see that many minority and low income children still aren't meeting benchmarks even at schools where the average test scores are higher than at our schools. The reality is if parents are not involved in ensuring their child's success, it doesn't matter what school they attend." The answer she and other King PTA members say, is to invest time, energy, and resources into improving the schools within the community.

Research has shown that parental participation improves student learning regardless of the parent's wealth or own education level, and also that parent involvement is needed from pre-school through high school. Based on a national non-profit program called Project Appleseed, the King PTA will be urging parents to pledge to spend at least 15 minutes each school night reading to younger children or being involved with homework or other school related activities for older students.

In addition, they are asking parents and community members to pledge 10 hours per year volunteering in the schools or getting informed and involved in school decision making. Even if a parent doesn't have time to volunteer in a classroom, the PTA members hope that more parents will get involved in school events, parent-teacher conferences, or just monitoring the school district decisions that impact schools in the neighborhood. King School teacher and PTA member Rose M. Murdock says, "Parent involvement shows your child how important they are and how important their education is to you. Parents need to be involved to ensure that the teachers and the school district are providing a good education for their children."

The King School PTA has two initial goals for its pledge drive. First, to raise \$2,275 to allow every school in the Jefferson cluster access to the resources of the national Project Appleseed Parent Involvement Toolbox. The Parent Involvement Toolbox includes web based parent involvement software, copyright to the Parent Involvement Pledge for mass distribution including a Spanish version of the pledge, a master copy of a volunteer activity log, personal assistance from the staff in the National Project Appleseed office, and more. The second goal is to get 1000 parents or community members to sign the pledge by December 2005, which would mean more parents' involvement in their children's education, and 10,000+ hours of volunteer time in Jefferson cluster schools this year. Eventually, the group would like to fund a Jefferson Cluster parent involvement coordinator who would offer guidance and assistance to parents of students attending Cluster Schools.

The PTA isn't counting on the pledge alone to increase parental involvement though. They are also organizing a schools involvement summit for all the Jefferson cluster schools that will take place on Saturday, October 1<sup>st</sup>. Speakers will present information about the importance of parental involvement, various ways parents and community members can get involved, and strategies that PTAs and school administrators can use to encourage and facilitate parent involvement. The event will also feature break out sessions where parents, teachers, community members and students can share information and ideas about how to improve their schools and increase student learning. Members of the Jefferson Middle/High School Design Team will be invited to participate in the summit.

For more information about the resources available through Project Appleseed visit [www.projectappleseed.org](http://www.projectappleseed.org). To get involved with the parent involvement pledge drive or to help plan the October 1<sup>st</sup> summit, contact PTA President Lakeitha Elliott at 503-287-1430, lakeithae@yahoo.com.