

## Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents/Guardians  
From: Mark McQueen, Superintendent  
Date: December 14, 2023

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Everyone has heard the adage “it takes a village to raise a child,” and here at Bay District Schools, we’re incredibly fortunate to have so many caring stakeholders who count themselves as members of our Team of Teams, which is, in fact, our village.

While I am very grateful for ALL of our community leaders, business partners, mentors, volunteers and others who support the incredible work being done by our students and employees, I’d like to highlight one extraordinary team this week.

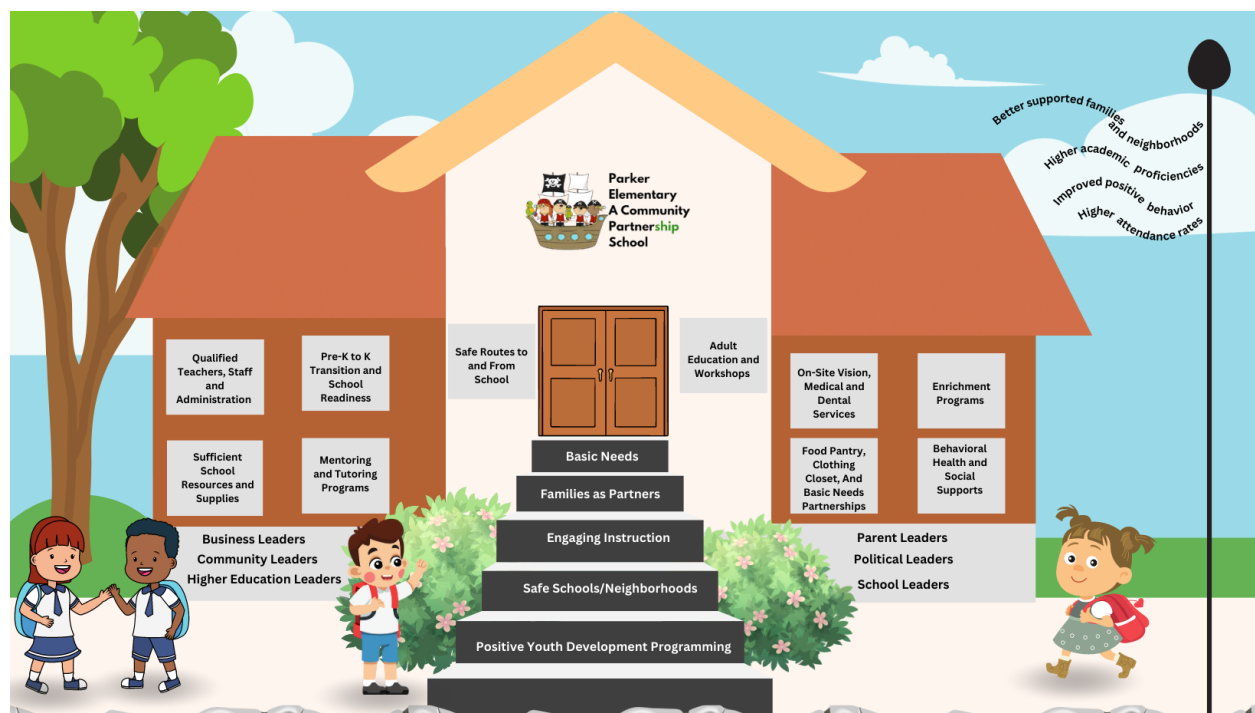
Did you know that BDS is home to a Community Partnership School, one of only 27 such schools throughout Florida? Our Community Partnership School is Parker Elementary, led by Principal Chris Coan. I could not be more proud of their incredible work for their students, their families and the entire community of Parker. Shortly, we will be highlighting a NEW Community Partnership School at Rutherford High School, but today, I want to talk about what’s already happening at Parker.

The Community Partnership idea is founded on four pillars: Expanded learning, wellness supports, family and community engagement and collaborative leadership. Leveraging all four pillars under the leadership of School Director Sharis Robinson, Parker Elementary is making great strides toward serving the students of their school in unique ways that extend well beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom.

Using data from climate surveys, a needs assessment conducted by partner Gulf Coast State College and an annual Title One survey, Coan and Robinson and their leadership team have developed a comprehensive outreach plan generating impressive statistics.

Last school year, for example, 388 of Parker’s 493 students received medical and dental services from partner PanCare and other local providers. More than 220 students participated in academic tutoring, and the entire school participated in almost 1,700 hours of educational enrichment activities. “We’re going beyond the normal clubs,” explained Robinson. “We’ve got a math club, dance club, and activities like that. They all have an academic focus, but students don’t realize they are learning because they are having so much fun.”

As you can see from the image below, a student's academic success is built upon several foundational steps and supports, and this partnership seeks to ensure all of those are met.



Primarily funded by \$185,000 from the Florida State Department of Higher Education, Coan said the program has generated at least that much in matching donations. “Our challenge,” he said, “is to make sure we’re doing whatever it takes to meet the needs of our families ... all of them.”

They are accomplishing that lofty goal with an incredible combination of family events and constant outreach. Last year the school garnered more than 81 different volunteers and generated almost 3,000 hours of volunteerism at the school and in the community.

And it's paying off.

Parker Elementary School students have raised their academic achievement on state-mandated tests from 29 percent proficient in 2020 to 42.5 percent proficient last year. Their goal for this year is 54 percent proficiency which, when they achieve it, will significantly increase their school grade as measured by the Florida Department of Education.

Additionally, the partnership outreach regarding the importance of punctual attendance is also paying off. Coan said morning tardies school-wide are down by a staggering 70 percent. “We’ve seen significant changes in all grade levels,” he said. “And that’s helping on the academic side as well.”

Many key partners have made significant contributions to Parker’s partnership. Coan is particularly grateful for United Way, the St. Joe Community Foundation, Refuge Church, Florida

Power and Light, Tyndall Credit Union, Chris Walker Electric and the “East Side Boys,” Marco’s Pizza, Coca-Cola United and the City of Parker.

What’s going on at Parker is the quintessential example of what can happen when a community invests in its school and when the school invests in its students and families. I am so proud of the Parker partnership and very grateful to Sen. Jay Trumbull and Rep. Griff Griffiths, who toured the school earlier this year to learn more about the work there. Their commitment to high-quality education is unwavering.

I hope everyone reading this will stop for a moment and consider contributing to our schools because every school deserves the village that Parker currently enjoys. You don’t have to be wealthy, or retired, to make a difference at a school because the needs are significant, and every small need met is a GIANT step forward for the student who was helped.

If you’re interested in getting involved, please contact us at [BDScomm@bay.k12.fl.us](mailto:BDScomm@bay.k12.fl.us), and we will be glad to pair you with a school in need. I guarantee you will get more out of the experience than you will give, and you can rest assured that you’re making a difference in a child’s life, which is one of the most extraordinary callings any of us can have.