

# **BES Goes to Work**

*Ballentine Elementary School  
Irmo, South Carolina*

BES the bear goes to work. And nearly every week she has a different job — firefighter, nurse, construction worker, office manager. BES is a busy bear. Just ask the students at Ballentine Elementary School who keep track of BES's travels and adventures.

BES is a miniature version of the school's mascot, and BES Goes to Work is a program designed to involve hard-working parents in the school and also showcase the parents' diverse careers to its student body. Ballentine Elementary encourages them to take turns each week bringing BES to their workplaces. Each parent photographs BES at work, whether she's donning a construction cap, standing at a lecture podium, or sitting at a television news anchor's desk, and writes a short summary of what BES saw on the job.

"BES had fun learning about all the cool jobs in a bank," reported a parent who is market development manager of a bank. "BES went to class and saw how college students take notes. The students were curious why BES was there," reported another parent who is a professor of criminology.

Inspired by a similar idea shared at a counselors conference, BES Goes to Work was developed as an extension to Ballentine's career program. The guidance office sends out a questionnaire about the program several times each year. Interested parents respond and the guidance office works out BES's busy travel schedule. Families from all grades may participate in the program, but, because of high demand for BES, only one parent from each family may participate.

The week that BES goes to work, the participating child receives a special blue bag that contains the bear, a T-shirt, a disposable camera, and a BES Goes to Work folder with a sheet that the parent fills out to tell students at the school about his or her job. The child wears the T-shirt to school so everyone can see whose family has BES for the week. When the student returns the bag, he or she has a photo taken in front of Big BES, the school's full-sized bear mascot. Once all the pictures of BES at work are developed, they are pasted into a collage along with the parent's write-up. Everyone can enjoy the collages, which are displayed prominently in the mini-theater.

Since the program began, BES has visited high schools, churches, hospitals, police stations, a local television station, and many offices. The program has effectively improved the home-school connection at a small-town school where many of the working parents commute 30 minutes or more and cannot take time off to visit the school.

In addition to providing busy parents with an opportunity to involve themselves in the school, BES Goes to Work teaches students about various jobs and careers and gives them another reason to take pride in what their parents do. The program is a definite community builder—increasing school spirit and enhancing Ballentine's image.

*Susan Weaver, Guidance Counselor  
803-732-8251*

[sweaver@lex5.k12.sc.us](mailto:sweaver@lex5.k12.sc.us)

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