

# Passport to the World of Math

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*Suring Elementary School*

*Suring, Wisconsin*

**S**uring Elementary School introduced Family Math Night in April. In the past, Family Reading Nights have been successful at Suring, but the Family School Community Partnership Team decided it was time to focus on other academic areas, and all agreed that math was a great place to start.

The team also decided that after the long winter the event should be lively and fun, with students and their families moving from station-to-station as they completed games and solved puzzles and problems in a carnival-like atmosphere.

Each family received a passport at the door. As families completed each activity, they received a stamp, and a certain number of stamps qualified them for a goodie bag to take home. Stations included: estimate your weight, count jumps completed in a minute (using a jump rope), measure and make snacks, decorate a math bookmark, complete Sudoku puzzles, toss bean bags, fold a paper airplane, complete math games, and guess how many candies are in a jar. The area library sponsored the Sudoku puzzle station and held a drawing for two books. Twelve animal-shaped candy containers were awarded to the lucky family guessing the number of pieces in the jars. All of the stations were designed to enhance students' math skills. The passport gave families a guide and kept them moving, and trying new activities, as they wanted to get enough stamps for a goodie bag.

Many people helped to make this such a successful event. Parents and the partnership team did most of the overall planning. Commu-

nity members set up and staffed stations, as did teachers, parents, and students. Parents made signs, displaying them both in the school and throughout the community. The local Lioness Club and the Parents Group helped the school pay the math night expenses, which totaled about \$150.

## FAST Program

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*Rosemont Elementary School  
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Potluck dinners brought more than 190 parents and students from Rosemont Elementary together last year for some targeted discussions on family health and wellness. The school's FAST program—short for Families and Schools Together—provided a group of families with a variety of social skills and tools to help their children thrive.

The city's FAST program coordinator recruited Rosemont Elementary to join the program. As a Title I school, administrators sometimes had difficulties reaching out to parents. They hoped that with this program, families would feel more comfortable at the school and, consequently, more empowered to influence their children's education.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) advertised the program to parents through fliers and informational packets sent home. They also hung posters in the school hallways. Prior to beginning classes, staff from FAST came to the school to talk about the program with parents. They handed out gift baskets to families in the audience. Once parents indicated interest in the program, ATP members followed up with personal phone calls and fliers that reminded families of the class's start date. They also approached area grocers to solicit food donations for the event.

For nine weeks, families came to the school to attend a series of Tuesday-night workshops. Class ran from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Each session included a confidential meeting with a mental health coordinator, 15 minutes of uninterrupted parent-child activity (usually a game), and 25 minutes of parent-to-parent meetings where families could discuss child development and parenting issues without their children present. Every week, FAST staff presented information on a different topic of interest to parents, such as preventing bullying behavior among students, drug abuse prevention, and communication tools.

Potluck dinners served during every session helped the ATP and FAST staff members create a welcoming environment for all of the participants. One family created the main potluck dish per week. Staff provided each family a gift certificate to an area supermarket to cover the cost of the meal. FAST team members contributed sides and desserts to go with the meal.

# Breakfast with the Principal

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*Berendo Middle School  
Los Angeles, California*

The principal of Berendo Middle School wants parents to feel comfortable and be involved in the school, so he invites them to breakfast once a month. This gives parents an opportunity to meet the principal, teachers and staff and learn first-hand what's happening at Berendo.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) initiated the breakfasts, which run just over an hour. They include a principal's update, a guest speaker on topics such as school safety or grading policies, or a hands-on demonstration. The April breakfast, for instance, showed parents how technology is used throughout the curriculum. Then, the parents have an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns. By telling the principal their ideas, parents can also influence decisions on school activities and policies.

The urban middle school has a majority of Latino students, many from low-income neighborhoods. The open door policy of the breakfasts helps parents get acquainted and discuss issues that are important to them. "Having parents participate will enable them to feel at home when visiting the school," said the principal. "I want them to be part of our school community."

At the beginning of each breakfast, the principal introduces himself and his guests of the day. He also updates parents on what is happening at the school and tells them about upcoming events. After the guest speaker or presentation, the principal opens the floor for questions, comments or concerns from parents and community members. On other occasions, the parents receive a form on which they can write questions and comments. Students, teachers, administrators and parents contribute ideas for discussion at each breakfast, which increases the sense of partnership.

Effectively publicizing the breakfasts is key to parent participation. Berendo has many ways to reach parents and community members, including a monthly parent newsletter, a school brochure, a school web site, the Phone Master system that generates calls to all students' home phones and take-home fliers. In addition, representatives from the Parent Center make personal calls to families.

# A NIGHT AT THE OSCARS

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STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PASCO, WASHINGTON

In the evening twilight, as over 300 parents and students began to gather outside the doors of Stevens Middle School, a tingling sensation surged through the crowd. Anticipation mounted as rumors circulated of celebrities who'd been sighted on the school campus, all dressed in their finest gowns and suits. When 6:00 finally came around, the doors swung open, and down the red carpet they went, stepping into the blinding lights of the school hallway.

For the night, classrooms at Stevens were transformed into "venues," each with a different theme and set of activities that related a connection between reading and the silver screen. A number of them were themed after books—including the immensely popular *Twilight*, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *Marley & Me*—that had been adapted into movies.

Visitors were treated to images from video stills, information or trivia questions about the movies and their stars, human and animal alike, and re-creations of objects or scenes from the films. Like every room at A Night at the Oscars, all of these venues had been designed by the students themselves. For example, the *Because of Winn-Dixie* room included a "bottle tree," into which ESL students had written positive messages that could be revealed with a flashlight.

Other venues provided other exciting opportunities. One, a celebrity Wax Museum, featured students who were dressed as figures from biographies they had recently read. When attendees pressed a paper button on the student's costume, the statue came to life and told, in the first person, that historical celebrity's story. The *Jeopardy* room pitted students against parents in a book-to-movie trivia contest for fun and prizes.

Attendees also had the opportunity to learn a little more about life in the movie industry from the Behind the Scenes room. Here, visitors learned about the range of career opportunities that happen off-screen, including screen writing.

In another room, a local newspaper reporter held a session on interviewing skills, and gave students pointers on how to write their own interviews.

The evening also provided the school an opportunity to share with parents some of the reading services available from the wider community. The school's computer lab was ready and loaded with a variety of reading-related web sites that parents could use as resources for any grade level; they also were shown how to use the school's Parent Portal software to keep up-to-date on their children's grades. Elsewhere, the public librarian managed a booth where families could sign up for library cards.

Finally, once guests decided it was time for intermission, the cafeteria offered sandwiches, chips, and punch, with live Mexican folk dancing provided by the school's Baille Folklorico dance troupe.

Of course, none of the night's successes would have been possible without joint efforts by the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO). Spearheaded by the school's Literacy Coach, with a theme selected and designed by students, the annual Literacy Night took on a whole new life with the Night at the Oscars theme. The success of the event was apparent, based on how well it met the goal of Stevens' Balanced Literacy Action Plan: "to promote enthusiasm and student performance in relation to reading and writing."