

## **Planning for a Successful Family Literacy Night**

### **By Gina Molinari-Schiano**

As a Literacy Coach at Dr. William H. Horton School, I have had the unique pleasure of interacting with ALL staff members throughout the year in grades K-8. I had the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues to organize our **Family Literacy Events**. With any "event planning" experience, creating a warm and welcoming space, engaging activities, and serving up some delicious food could seem a bit daunting. Thinking back to my beginning days of teaching and thematic instruction, we began to sketch out details for how our events would run and keep families coming back for more. Our events were set for **Winter, Spring** and the **End of the School Year**. Collaborating with teachers and sharing ideas also increased engagement and set up a strong volunteer core.

Since many of the children at Dr. William H. Horton School are Emergent Bilingual Students, we wanted to ensure that all of our families felt welcome and at home in our school. We created a warm and cozy reading space for families to gather and to set the tone for our event. We began each event with a theme related read aloud in English and Spanish and always included tips and techniques that families could use at home. The joy on the faces of our parents was priceless, and children exhibited great pride engaging in the interactive stations with their families.

Our "**Winter Wonderland**", "**Spring into Reading**" and "**Family Picnic**" evenings were all tremendous successes. Authentic reading and writing activities were at the core of each event. Students moved through independent reading, partner reading, poetry reading, and journal writing workstations just to name a few. Children and families always left our events with tools to take home to continue this work in their own homes.

For our final event in June -- The First Annual "**Dr. Horton Family Picnic**" -- 3rd graders put on a short play based on the book *Wolf* by Becky Bloom, a story about a Wolf who desperately tried to impress Duck, Cow and Pig on their farm by practicing his reading techniques and strategies and never giving up on learning. During this event, over 125 children and families came out to see the play, work in interactive literacy stations, take home a book, and enjoy a Family Picnic of sandwiches and salads!

If you would like further information on how to organize Family Literacy Events, please email Gina Schiano at: [gschiano@nps.k12.nj.us](mailto:gschiano@nps.k12.nj.us)

## Family Literacy Night

Duration: 2 hours

Create flyers and distribute to students at least one week prior to event. Talk up the event in each classroom. Collect and tally responses. Secure a core group of volunteers to help set up and run stations. Decorate the spaces in your school and create a **Winter Wonderland!**

**Theme:** Winter Wonderland

**Opening Activity:** (Auditorium 20 minutes) Decorate the auditorium in a Winter Wonderland theme: build a fireplace on stage, lights, snow scenes, etc. Prepare a slide show of pictures of students reading in class. Run slide show as families gather in the Auditorium. Opening remarks by Administration. Begin reading aloud winter poems in English and Spanish with a short discussion to follow.

### **Stations: Participants move to Gym**

- Welcome table: Sign in on class attendance charts and enter a raffle by signing a ticket. (We gave away two baskets of books.)

**Stations (one hour) Students move to each learning station in the gym with their families. Two volunteer teachers are at each station to provide directions, model strategies and support for students and families.**

- **Journal Writing Station:** decorate a journal with winter themed stickers and decorations. *\* At this station, discuss with parents the importance of having a space, materials and place at home to write down thoughts, ideas and stories.*
- **Poetry Station:** Winter themed poetry. K-2, 3-5  
Read a poem with someone, illustrate and paste into a writing journal. *\*At this station, discuss with parents the importance of reading poetry with children. Take turns reading with your child, and practice reading with expression! Share poetry websites with parents.*
- **Word Work Station:** Winter themed words, unscramble
  - Boggle:** making words
  - Vocabulary:** winter themed words, Students do a four square vocabulary activity. Students write the word, draw a picture of the word, write a synonym and antonym of the word. *\*At this station, discuss with parents the importance of building word knowledge with students. Select 2-3 vocabulary words when reading with your child at home and discuss. Encourage your child to write words down that they have questions about. Share 4 square vocabulary with parents.*
- **Bookmark Station:**  
Materials: card stock, ribbon, hole punch, markers  
Create a bookmark with reading strategies (For grades K-2 print strategies, for grades 3-8 comprehension strategies) or motivational bookmarks about reading. *\*At this station, parents create a bookmark with their child. Discuss with parents the importance of setting time aside for reading each day. Have adult books available for parents to read as well.*

- **Buddy Reading Station:**

Materials: rug, baskets of books

Location: center of the gym

*At this station, discuss with parents the importance of having books available and organized for children. Encourage other siblings to read together and share a special reading time together. Create a special "Family reading time" each day.*

**Dinner and raffle:** (40 minutes) (Participants move to cafeteria for dinner followed by the raffle)

Enjoy: Sandwiches, fruit, cookies and hot chocolate

Share conversation starters (English and Spanish) on tables and enjoy!

**Final activity:** Raffle