

Dads Club Camp Out

*Mableton Elementary School
Mableton, Georgia*

The promise of an old-fashioned campfire enticed dads from Mableton Elementary to the Dads Club Camp Out—an opportunity to spend time with their children and be involved with the school. Perhaps it was memories of s’mores and ghost stories that brought the large crowd.

The camp out was designed by the principal and parent coordinator, who wanted to find a way to get more fathers and other male role models involved in the school. They decided that an outdoorsy event—like camping—would be a good way to draw more men to the school.

The school’s parent liaison publicized the event in fliers and e-mails to parents. She also used the school’s parent calling tree. “We advertised, advertised, advertised,” she said.

Clearly it worked. On a Friday night in October, children and their family members set up tents in a big, open field near the school. The principal greeted the campers. The school charged a \$5 fee for each campsite. From there, parents and students got busy pitching their tents and rolling out their sleeping bags.

There was a bonfire, which the fathers tended, and plenty of snacks: popcorn, candy apples, and cotton candy. The youngsters carved pumpkins, watched movies in the school’s media center and played on a Jumpy Jump. A local arts center sent a storyteller to tell stories around the campfire.

The dads socialized and spent time with their youngsters before they had to extinguish the bonfire. Dads Club volunteers recruited new members. At 11 o’clock, it was lights out.

The next morning volunteers went to the local fast food restaurant, which sold the food at a huge discount, to pick up orange juice and biscuits for the waking and hungry campers.

The event was a success. “Parents loved it,” said one of the organizers. “They were

excited to feel invited into our school.”

The school called on its business partners to provide food, firewood, and hay. A local chiropractor sponsored the Jumpy Jump game. The sponsors advertised at the camp out and many also volunteered to work there.

The event will be on the Mableton calendar next year, and the school will recruit more businesses and plan new activities for the campers.

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