
YEAR OF THE FAMILY

Oakdale Elementary School

Cincinnati, Ohio

"Year of the Family" was the Oakdale Elementary P.T.A. theme for the 1997-98 school year. We noticed a lack of volunteers, especially new volunteers, who help out at our school.

Therefore, the "Year of the Family" originated with these goals:

- Encourage volunteerism, especially among parents who had never become involved
- Enhance the family atmosphere at Oakdale
- Make parents feel more comfortable at our school
- Let children know their parents are committed to their schooling
- Encourage repeat volunteerism

We implemented three programs to help develop family involvement. The first, "Helping Hands," was our way of encouraging parents to contribute their time. "Helping Hands" challenged all families to volunteer two hours sometime during the year. We sent letters that explained the program to every family two weeks before the start of school. Pledge cards were included in the letter, and after parents finished the two hours of service, they completed the card with their family name and sent it to school. We placed the cards on a bulletin board at school and continually added them as the year and program progressed. To date, more than fifty percent of the families at Oakdale have participated in "Helping Hands."

The second family program was a social event combined with a service project. Our Family Picnic (started three years ago) has become a traditional icebreaker for the new school year. The P.T.A. invited families, teachers, and administrators to spend a Sunday afternoon at Oakdale on the playground. The day consisted of a picnic, chalk drawing on the blacktop, and face painting by Oakdale Alumni (Junior High students). The week before the picnic, "plots" of blacktop were sold to families during school hours for \$5.00/plot, and we sent "deeds" home with the children as a reminder of the event. On Sunday, families created chalk designs on their plots. Together, the drawings combined to make a huge mural on the playground.

This year, a local business contributed supplies for the day. Biggs Foods supplied hamburgers and hot dogs and sent employees to man the grill. Students from school-sponsored scouting groups sold soft drinks and desserts. Besides having some quality time with their own family, parents and students had a chance to mingle with teachers and their families. This relaxed setting made for a wonderful way to get to know the teacher and helped remind parents that teachers are approachable. Money collected through the sale of family plots, face painting, and food went to funding school programs. This is a great way to open the school year and include the whole school community!

The third program took place in February. The Family Dinner was held to provide an opportunity for families to enjoy a dinner together and to be with other families. We also wanted to increase attendance at the P.T.A. meeting that was scheduled to follow the dinner. We felt this would help improve communication of school information to parents. Informed parents are more likely to be actively involved in their children's school.

Tickets went on sale three weeks before the dinner and were priced so that cost would not prohibit families from attending. Tickets were advertised and volunteers solicited in the P.T.A. and school newsletters. Advance ticket sales accounted for most of the three hundred tickets sold. We gave complimentary tickets to Oakdale teachers and staff. Many teachers bought additional tickets for their family members.

Again, Biggs Foods volunteered to help our P.T.A. The store donated all food and supplies, except desserts and beverages. Four Biggs employees helped with the meal. Set up was accomplished with the help of teachers, parents, and students. P.T.A. volunteers, former students and Biggs employees worked together to serve spaghetti, sauce, bread, salad, and the desserts that Oakdale families contributed. A paid school cafeteria employee supervised volunteers in the kitchen.

As the dinner ended, a short P.T.A. business meeting began. Following that, a 4th Grade class put on a program. Of course, parents of those 4th Graders stayed to see the performance. So did many other parents and students who may have otherwise not come.

We feel the dinner was a success as we accomplished our goals. Families enjoyed themselves, the P.T.A. meeting was well attended, and many new and familiar volunteers helped with the event. Income from ticket sales exceeded expenses, and profits were given to a fund used by teachers for an existing school program. We plan to make the Family Dinner a yearly event. With more advance advertising, we hope to increase participation.

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