

FIRST THURSDAYS AT THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

Baltimore City Public School System
Baltimore, Maryland

It had come to my attention that the Baltimore Museum of Art might be interested in helping schools with their Family Fun and Learning Nights. With this in mind, I contacted the educational department at the museum and arranged to speak with someone. We met for a delightful lunch at the museum and discussed many possible programs that could be established. I was particularly excited about the offer by Stacey Shellnut to bring families to the museum to participate in "First Thursdays". Every Thursday admission to the museum is free, and on the first Thursday of each month, museum hours are extended until 9pm. Additional events and programs are conducted that relate to current exhibits. The museum has been hosting this event for years, but we knew that the families in my area were not participating in great numbers.

The museum had received a large grant. This grant was awarded for the purpose of bringing the underserved population to the museum, specifically targeting children and families in the Empowerment Zone. Many schools I serve as district facilitator are in or border this area of the city. Plans were put in place to bring ten schools to the museum beginning in November and ending in May. The museum sent two free buses to each participating school so that the families would have transportation to the event.

I invited Ms. Shellnut to come to my Action Team Kickoff Breakfast and share the objectives of this program. Other schools in my area, not bordering on the Empowerment Zone, were invited to attend First Thursdays at the museum, although free transportation could not be provided. Throughout this program, Ms. Shellnut sent information about the program and free transportation to the schools.

Since November, hundreds of families have attended First Thursdays at the museum. For most of these families, this was their first experience with the museum. Their discomfort in the beginning was obvious, but you could see how quickly this disappeared and they eagerly became part of the experience. It was very rewarding to watch the families participate in the various activities that are set up for this event. The comments I have heard and the reports from my Action Team Chairs have all been positive. Many families talked about going back to the museum on their own.

The only thing I would like to change about this design is to make sure that dinner is part of the experience. The buses came to the schools by 4:45pm and that often

didn't give families time to eat dinner. Some schools provided a light dinner or snack as part of the evening, but not all of the schools did this. Food at the museum was very expensive, and there was not a large enough variety of foods available. Plus, eating dinner at the museum would take time away from the planned activities.

Another service that the museum offers is called "Art Stops". This program brings art activities directly to the school. We have been able to utilize this service in our area with six schools during Family Fun and Learning Nights. A representative from the educational department of the museum, Cash Hester, brings all the materials and teaches the lesson to the families participating. This has been another extremely popular and well received activity. It is hoped that this association with the museum can be repeated next school year.

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