
Family Fun and Learning Days

Baltimore City Public School System Baltimore, Maryland

The idea for Family Fun and Learning Day originated with one of the schools I facilitate, Harriet Tubman Elementary School, #138. The Action Team of this school planned many successful Family Fun and Learning Nights and saw how popular and motivating they were. The Action Team wanted to plan an activity that could include all the children, not just those who could attend at night with their families. Their goal was to create an exciting and stimulating partnership activity that would include all stakeholders during the instructional day. They planned a Halloween activity for the last 2 ½ hours of the school day as described below.

Time	Pre-K-1	Grades 2 and 3	Grades 4 and 5
12-12:30	Community Walk for the...	...entire school in costume	Neighbors were told in advance and cheered them on
12:30-1:00	Gym	Cafeteria	Classroom activity
1:05-1:35	Cafeteria	Classroom activity	Gym
1:40-2:10	Classroom activity	Gym	Cafeteria
2:10-2:30	Cleanup for all		

The community walk was very exciting to see. All of the children, administrators, and many staff and parents were in costume, and they all paraded around the community. Many neighbors were out, cheering them on, taking pictures and shouting encouragement. Cars stopped, waved, and honked in support. It was nice to see this in our inner-city neighborhood. Upon their return, the children began to follow the schedule above. The Action Team and a cadre of parents had everything ready. The gym had been transformed with Halloween decorations and many carnival-like activities. Some of the activities were planned to reinforce skills needed on our state proficiency test. Parents and staff without homeroom responsibilities had been recruited to facilitate the activities. The children were invited to go from one activity to the other as their teachers helped monitor the flow. Here is a sampling of some of the 12 activities that were planned for the gym:

- Pin the nose on the witch
- Guess the number of pumpkins in the jar
- Decorate a cookie in Halloween colors
- Complete a pumpkin art activity
- Jump as far as you can and measure the distance
- Face-painting

In the cafeteria, the half hour was divided into two parts. For the first 15 minutes, half of the children had a snack of cookies and punch. The other half went to an area where a haunted house had been created by the parents, and the librarian read them a scary story. After 15 minutes the children switched.

In the classroom, the teachers were asked to develop a fun activity with the children which would support the theme. Teachers were encouraged to work together to create an instructionally appropriate, motivating lesson or activity. Many parents played a part in this Family Fun and Learning Day by helping set up, running a booth, or distributing cookies in the cafeteria. Others accompanied their children as they went from activity to activity.

The principal financially supported the efforts of this Action Team from the school's budget. Money was needed to purchase the cookies and the punch. Most of the decorations were donated by teachers or were already in the school. Small, inexpensive prizes for games were donated by the Action Team Chair. Prizes were only awarded for a few of the games, and they were often just a piece of wrapped candy. The child who made the best guess won the jar of pumpkins. At an art activity in the gym, the children were encouraged to keep their art project.

This activity was very well planned and implemented. The children thoroughly enjoyed the various activities, as did the staff and parents. Unfortunately, we did not have a sign in sheet for parents, but it is estimated that at least 50-60 parents participated in some way. All of the children were able to participate in all of the activities, as opposed to only those whose parents are able to attend a Family Fun and Learning Night. The children were able to participate in instructionally appropriate, engaging activities—many of which were designed to enhance problem solving and reasoning skills. The parents were asked to complete a survey about the activity, and those responding were very positive. All of the parents requested more of this type of event.

As a result of sharing this practice at Cluster Meetings, Principal Meetings, and with individual Action Teams, other schools have used this model for other holidays. Lafayette Elementary, #202 and Lockerman-Bundy, #261 decided to use this model for Christmas and Kwanza, as described in the following section. Lafayette Elementary and Harlem Park Elementary are planning to do a Family Fun and Learning Day with Easter as the theme.

Lafayette Elementary decided to do this activity, but had no budget for supplies. The Action Team, therefore, held bake sales for the three days prior to Thanksgiving and was able to raise over \$300. Parents and staff donated items to be sold. This Action Team chose to follow many of the activities conducted at Harriet Tubman Elementary School. They began their activity with a community parade led by the music teacher. Children in the parade sang Christmas Carols they had learned in music class. Parents and community members were

encouraged to join in with the children. The school was so pleased with this activity that the Action Team decided to use part of their state grant for an activity like this during Easter.

The Action Team at Lockerman-Bundy called their activity "Holiday Magic." They used funds from their state grant and additional school funds to create an entire day of activities for their school. After an hour of Language Arts instruction, they began their activity with a magician that they hired for the entire school. They had contacted two of the vocational high schools for additional support as well. The students from one of these schools came the day before the event and helped the Action Team set up the gym in holiday splendor. The gym looked like a winter wonderland—it was indeed magical! The other vo-tech school agreed to send students from their cosmetology and barber trades to paint designs on nails and give the boys' hair a shape up. These were very popular additions. Another high school was recruited to do face-painting in the gym. The Action Team also contacted community businesses, that were given booths from which they could sell merchandise, giving a small percentage of funds raised to the school. The Action Team Chair also contacted a consignment business and was sent many items to sell on consignment. Children were then able to buy gifts for their families and the school was able to make a profit. The Action Team Chair contacted the city which sent booths to the school to use for the merchants, as well as to use in the gym for games. One of the school's business partners set up a booth with items she donated to allow children to make their own jewelry. The schedule for the day was based on the time table developed by Harriet Tubman Elementary School, however each session was increased to one hour. The children were able to eat and visit the merchants and vo-tech students during the cafeteria section. The day ended with a Kwanza celebration led by a local theatre group. The day's activities were very well received and the addition of the high school students, who received service learning hours, was especially exciting.

One of the most important considerations in designing this kind of event is making certain that all of the booths and games are run by an adult. Pre-planning is essential. The Action Teams at all of the schools organizing this project wanted the staff to take ownership of this activity and encouraged teachers to participate in the planning and setting up of activities. To work best, this should be a total school effort, including parents and community members. This can be a challenge, but it is my experience that other staff members are willing to assist when they see how well received the activities are. It seems that each time a school implements this activity, a little bit of its own personality is added, which is very exciting.

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