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## **B.E.A.R. DAY (BE EXCITED ABOUT READING)**

### **The Sunset Park School PS 169**

#### **Brooklyn, New York**

We established B.E.A.R. DAY to bring community members into the school to read with children, and to emphasize to the students that adults think it is important that they be able to read well. The event supports the school's goals by placing an emphasis on reading and by showing that everyone is a stakeholder in children's education.

B.E.A.R. DAY involved the entire school, including over 1400 students and about fifty classes, each with a guest reader. Parents, elected officials and their representatives, members of community-based organizations and the business community, along with school staff members volunteered as guest readers. Some parents were concerned about not speaking English well. They read to a class where their language was spoken or they used a translator. For example, a mother from Bangladesh brought a bear, a book to read, and her older son to translate.

Bears appeared in offices, on desks, in classrooms and on posters around the building. There were big bears, small bears, brown bears, and white bears...bears everywhere! In an Assistant's Principal's office a large bear sat in a rocking chair holding a book in its paws, while another smaller bear appeared to be listening to the story. The bears literally took on lives of their own. Bears were reading by themselves! If bears could read, then so could kids. For any class that did not receive a bear on the day of the event, bears were given at a later date, compliments of a local elected official. In the future, a supply of bears will be available in case a guest reader does not bring one.

B.E.A.R. DAY required no training. However, the Neighborhood Literacy Coordinator gave classroom teachers an introduction to the project at a faculty conference. A community-based organization donated books about bears for teachers to read to their children to get everyone into the spirit of the event.

The expenses of B.E.A.R. DAY were minor when weighed against the results. They included: invitation letters mailed to guest readers, breakfast of juice, coffee, and bagels, name tags and bear

balloons, and lunch for guest readers (expense shared by Parents' Association). The parents crocheted a bear blanket, which was displayed in the front hall.

There was no formal evaluation of B.E.A.R. DAY, however, informal results were available immediately. The participants were very excited and enthusiastic. We received requests to host another B.E.A.R. DAY. Guest readers shared numerous testimonials at lunch about the success of the day. Adults connected with the school in a meaningful way; many had not been inside of a classroom for years and enjoyed the experience. Other schools and a Day Care center have already taken the idea and replicated it successfully.

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