
SALUTE TO THE ARTS

Lincoln Elementary School

Whitewater, Wisconsin

Lincoln Elementary School has many effective partnership practices including a variety of family learning nights. The theme for one of our family learning nights is *Salute to the Arts*. This event is organized through Lincoln's Volunteer Program, which is sponsored by Whitewater Community Education, a district-wide program.

The Volunteer Program engages parents and other community members in meaningful ways that support and enhance student learning. Understanding that everyone cannot be involved in the school during the school day, we look for opportunities to involve parents and community members at varying times.

For our *Salute to the Arts*, volunteers whose vocation or avocation is in the field of art or music present a series of demonstrations related to the arts. Students and their parents visit as many presentations as they wish during the evening. The family learning night, held on a Friday night, includes dinner in the cafeteria.

Students act as waiters, guides, and greeters during the night. They decorate the walls with original artwork depicting artists and musicians whom they have studied in art and music classes. The cafeteria becomes *The Artists' Café*.

Examples of presentations during the evening include:

- Band conductor - how to conduct a band; hand's on demonstration for parents and their children on how to use a conductor's baton.
- Fabric designer - how to weave on a loom; a weaving demonstration.
- Actor - play a character in an excerpt from a theatre production under the direction of a production company owner/actor.
- Watercolor artist - learn painting technique from a local artist; paint your own watercolor.
- Graphic artist - explore how a design idea becomes a final advertising promotion.

- Rock band - how five musicians came together as a rock band; learn about the criteria for selecting band members, listen for the musical sounds of each instrument in their completed CD.

The presenters were parents, aunts, cousins, and grandparents of students in the school. Other presenters included a retired teacher, a local businessperson, and students at the nearby University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

About 200 people attended our first *Salute to the Arts Night* in 1999. Next year, we plan to have volunteer students from UW-Whitewater's theatre classes walk the halls dressed in character as various historically known artists.

Expenses for this event were kept to a minimum. We designed fliers to advertise the event on a school computer, duplicated them at school, and sent the fliers home with students. We also provided a program schedule for the evening that included a brief biography of each presenter. A food service employee prepared a hot dog dinner for which families paid a small fee.

Everyone benefits from these evenings. Families feel more comfortable and welcome at school when a variety of opportunities for participation are available. Student achievement benefits from creative and fun ways to learn. We continue to strive for more and better ways to reach out to all families in the Whitewater community.

Kris Coan, Volunteer Services Coordinator
(262) 472-8534; kcoan@whitewater.k12.wi.us