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## **STORYTELLING NIGHTS**

### **Centennial Elementary School**

#### **Wapakoneta, Ohio**

Centennial Elementary School implemented Storytelling Nights to reach several goals: encourage students to read; build better reading skills in the youngest students; support family bonding and give families the chance to connect with other families; and build stronger connections between students, parents, the school staff, and members of the community. In addition to doing all this, they also aimed to make the events fun and memorable.

Storytelling Nights began by inviting all students and staff to bring their families (including siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others) to share an evening of fun at the school. To achieve a home-like atmosphere, everyone brought sleeping bags, pillows, and blankets to use on the gym floor. Students wore pajamas and brought along their favorite teddy bears. At school the day of the event, every student received an empty plastic book bag to bring to Storytelling Night filled with books to share with their families. The book bags served as a wonderful reminder of the event—parents were sure to notice the bag versus an event flyer. The school library provided a selection of books for those students who did not have books at home to bring to Storytelling Night.

Storytelling Nights were scheduled for the first Friday evening of the month and started off with a guest storyteller from the community. Each month, a different storyteller volunteered to tell stories, read books, and motivate participants for twenty to thirty minutes. When the storyteller finished, everyone settled into a cozy place to read together as families. Each evening finished with a book drawing for the students. The Parent Teacher Organization donated some of the books, and the school purchased others through an OhioReads grant.

At the entrance of the gym doors, there was a welcome table where all guests and students signed in, signed up for the book drawing, and received bookmarks, pencils, and activity booklets—all with the theme of the month. Available for families were flyers, newsletters, and information sheets about school activities, helpful hints for reading success, and evaluation forms for the events.

Storytelling Nights required very little set up. Approximately four to six people volunteered for each event: two as greeters, two as servers at the refreshment table, one to oversee the library

book distribution, and one to take pictures and be a runner. Cost was minimal and supported by funding from the school's OhioReads program.

Storytelling Nights became a huge success. Approximately a quarter of the students and their families attended the very first event. Other Storytelling Nights that followed only increased in attendance. Evaluation forms contained wonderful comments on the event. Several people stated that they wanted the event to take place more often; students inquired about the next event during school days; and teachers, parents, and students asked that the events continue next year. One parent stated that her child insists on having Storytelling Night at home on the other Friday nights in the month. Centennial Elementary School could not have asked for a better result than that!

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