
FAMILY READING NIGHT

Winneconne Community School District

Winneconne, Wisconsin

The front-page story of the March 6th *Winneconne News* hailed the Family Reading Night as “an enjoyable event for readers of all ages.” Winneconne Community School District’s Family Resource Center organized the reading night for all families in the school community as a kick-off event for its weeklong Read Across America program. The Family Resource Center wanted to share the importance and fun of reading with students, school staff, families, volunteers, and community members while promoting a stronger school and community relationship.

On February 28th in honor of Dr. Seuss, families gathered at Winneconne Elementary School where they made paper Dr. Seuss hats, cooked Green Eggs & Ham sweet treats (melted white chocolate, pretzel sticks, and green M & M’s), and participated in a Dr. Seuss trivia contest to win gift certificates for the next PTA Book Fair. At ten-minute intervals, Featured Readers began to read favorite children’s books to everyone seated on beanbags, blankets, quilts, and chairs. Featured Readers included preschool and elementary school teachers, a middle school administrator, parents, business partners, a doctor, a newspaper reporter, and several more community representatives. Families, students, community members, and school staff enjoyed Dr. Seuss’ birthday cake, coffee and juice, and green eggs (Jell-O jigglers) throughout the evening. In all, ninety families, or about 450 people, attended the event from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.—a wonderful turnout for a village of about 2,200 people.

The successful family reading night entailed much pre-planning and preparations. A series of six meetings covered discussing with the Teachers’ Union their involvement in the event, obtaining information on Read Across America (<http://www.nea.org/readacross/>), coordinating volunteers and support staff, and disseminating letters to promote the event. District leaders, school faculty and staff, families, and community and business partners collaborated at every stage of event planning. Families with children of all ages were encouraged to participate. Along with an anonymous donation of \$300 (of which only \$175 was spent), Banta Publishing Company donated books for every child attending the event.

The school sent letters home about a week and a half before the Family Reading Night informing families and children about the evening’s activities. The local *Winneconne News* featured the upcoming activity in its February 27th newspaper. On the night of the event,

families checked in at the school lobby and received an information folder about family reading and children's top 100 book lists. They then proceeded to the school's cafeteria which displayed posters that classes had made showing people reading, pictures of books, and names of Dr. Seuss books. The Book Swap (bring a book, take a book) was the first activity of the Reading Night. Because the Book Swap was such a success, there is now a Book Swap every Friday during the first recess.

Follow-up surveys completed by participants confirmed that the Family Reading Night was a positive educational experience for families and students. From the surveys, the Family Resource Center collected ideas for future improvements including getting a better PA system for the featured readings, holding the PTA Book Fair concurrently, and using classrooms for craft-making so that listeners could hear the readers better.

The First Annual Family Reading Night brought awareness to the school and community about the Family Resource Center. The event sparked an increase in community volunteers who want to be involved in the next Family Reading Night. In fact, the Family Resource Center is planning four theme-based Family Reading Nights for the 2002-2003 school year, one per grading quarter. The Family Resource Center of Winneconne is working hard to bring together families, schools, students, and the community to support success through education.

*Mary Koeck, Family Resource Center Board Member and
Dawn Schafer, Family Resource Center Secretary
(920) 582-5803*