
FAMILY FUN MATH: THE 100TH DAY OF SCHOOL

Cottonwood Elementary School

Cincinnati, Ohio

A parent of a fourth grader proposed a creative idea for a family fun math activity to the Action Team for Partnerships. She saw the need for parents and the school to partner in support of children’s education, but recognized that (1) many parents did not understand the components of the state’s fourth grade math proficiency test; (2) in many cases, parents did not know how to interact with their children around important math concepts; and (3) students needed to see the fun in learning, especially in math. The Action Team for Partnerships agreed that a family fun math night would be a wonderful opportunity to develop school, family, and community partnerships in support of the school’s goal of improved student performance on the state fourth grade math proficiency test.

In consultation with teachers, this same parent, a.k.a. the “Professor Mathman,” created a series of math activities and lessons based on each strand of the fourth grade math proficiency test. The activities centered around the theme of the 100th day of school which falls a little over one month before the proficiency test is administered. The activities were designed as contests and games with student/parent teams working together to solve a problem, construct a model, or build a puzzle. As students worked, parents received background information about the concept and follow-up suggestions of other ways to encourage student practice and understanding. During the evening, students competed against other parent/child teams, as a class against another class, against the clock, or just to solve an activity for personal satisfaction. The pace was quick, the activities were lively, and the prizes and small rewards were plentiful. Professor Mathman, master of ceremonies for the evening, appeared in wig and full costume and revved up the children about math. When the evening ended, children and parents alike asked to do it again sometime soon.

Parents led the organization and implementation of this event with assistance from the Action Team for Partnerships and school staff. The Action Team arranged for volunteers to duplicate materials, prepare information packets, gather math supplies and materials, and handle registration and publicity for the event. Fourth grade teachers, as well as the principal, counselor, school psychologist, gifted teacher, and several other staff members were on hand at the event to interact with students and their parents and facilitate activities. In situations when a

parent could not attend the event, a staff person adopted the student for the evening and helped with the various projects.

The event became a special project for the fifth grade gifted classes at the school. These students participated in some of the plans and preparations and served as special helpers during the evening. They passed out information packets, helped measure and monitor results, checked answers, and distributed prizes.

Local businesses donated supplies for the activities as well as math materials and motivational rewards. In addition, a mini-grant of \$100 supported the event, and the district covered costs of duplicating, paper supplies, and publicity.

One of the challenges was finding time in the school schedule. This was a busy time in the year, and the Action Team for Partnerships questioned whether it could fit another activity into the school calendar. The event was scheduled after second quarter exams and report cards, but before the final busy days of preparation before Open House, conferences, and proficiency tests. The bottom line was that when an activity is good for kids, there is always a way to get it done.

Students learned a lot about math concepts that related to the fourth grade proficiency test in math, but even more importantly, they learned that math practice could be fun and exciting. Students and parents benefited from the opportunity to work together in an effective, positive learning situation. The school benefited by welcoming parents who take the lead to organize such a successful educational event.

The Action Team has already started making plans for the third annual Family Fun Math Night scheduled for next year's 100th day of school. Upcoming third graders are anxiously anticipating their chance to take part in the program when they are in fourth grade.

Laura D. Barrett, Cottonwood Family Involvement Program Co-Chair
(513) 728-3728