
PRESENTING OUR PORTFOLIO DAY

Discovery School #98

Buffalo, New York

The Discovery School's philosophy is hands-on, minds-on learning. To enable students to take ownership of their learning, the school instituted an English Language Arts (ELA) portfolio program. The students chose what to save for their portfolio and then presented it to their family on a special day at school.

The idea of a portfolio day seemed a little daunting at first: how could young children as small as pre-K through grade two decide what to save and then actually present their ideas? However, the Discovery School has always prided itself on innovation so the idea took flight.

The pre-K class decided to save artwork, favorite stories, journal writings and photographs. The kindergarten children saved journal writings, poems they had written and illustrated, and goals for next year. The first- and second-grade students saved research papers, journal entries, and their favorite stories. They also evaluated their strengths and weaknesses and set goals for the next year.

The children designed invitations months in advance to inform parents about the special event. Also, information was sent home via the school newsletter.

The weeks leading up to the actual portfolio presentation day were active. The students sorted through their materials and chose work to share. They also practiced read-

ing their favorite stories. Teachers modeled a presentation to help the students practice.

On the day of the presentations, the Parent Teacher Organization set up refreshments in the hallway. Children remained in the auditorium watching a movie with the support staff while parents came in at preset 15-minute intervals. During presentations, the students shared their work, read to their families, and discussed strengths, weaknesses, and student goals. Parents were provided with a list of discussion prompts to keep things moving.

The event had a great turnout of parents, grandparents, neighbors, and siblings. Of all the children in the school, only four did not have visitors to hear their presentations; these students were adopted by the Program Coordinator and other teachers. Parents completed a questionnaire following the presentations and all of their responses were favorable. They were particularly pleased with the students setting their own goals.

The Discovery School will continue this program annually. In future years, they hope to involve parents more by holding a math fair on the same day. Rather than having the children watch a movie, parents and students can work together on math activities.

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