

PRAIRIE DOGS, PARENTS, PIZZA, AND POETRY

Prairie Elementary School Naperville, Illinois

Prairie's Action Team for Partnerships supported the school's literacy goal by creating a family learning night focused on poetry. The evening began with pizza, drinks, and cookies. Next, a guest poet read poetry and discussed different types of poetry and her interest in writing. The children shared original poetry either by reading it aloud or posting it on a poetry wall.

The concept of a poetry family learning night was developed with the help of the Home & School president. The Learning Resource Center (LRC) coordinator provided guest speaker recommendations with the help of Anderson Bookstore and a web site with information describing local poets. The coordinator also offered to work with the students on poetry writing during their LRC time for the weeks preceding the family learning night.

The Action Team contacted five poets by email to describe the event and to request bids from those who were interested and available. In order to compensate the poet, the Action Team determined the amount of money available from the school and applied for two grants. The total cost for the evening was approximately \$900, half of which was provided by Prairie's Home & School. Part of the funds for the evening came from the Jeanine Nicarico Memorial Literacy Grant.

To publicize the poetry family learn-

ing night, the Action Team prepared and distributed informational fliers to all students—twice. Team members wrote articles about the event for the school newspaper that ran for two months prior to the poetry night. Along with publicity, the Action Team developed an evaluation form and recruited volunteers to help with the event and serve food.

Shortly before the poetry night, the Action Team determined the final count of attendees from the flier RSVPs and phone responses. Based on this count, they shopped for the necessary amount of food and drinks the day before the event. Two hours prior to the start of the poetry night, the team arrived at school to check on the room, audiovisual setup, food arrangements, and preparation of the poetry wall, and to meet the poet.

Based on feedback from the evaluation forms, families enjoyed spending quality time together while being entertained by the guest speaker and student poets. Some parents commented later that the family learning night sparked an interest in writing poetry for some of the students. All in all, this event was a great way for families to learn about and share poetry and help support the school's literacy goal.

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