
RAISING BETTER LEARNERS WORKSHOP SERIES

Oliver Ellsworth School

Windsor, Connecticut

The School, Family, Community Partnerships (SFCP) Team at Oliver Ellsworth School introduced a series of evening workshops titled, “Raising Readers and Raising Mathematicians,” for parents and students in grades one through five. The Raising Readers workshop was offered first in order to address the school improvement goals that the school adopted as part of the Success For All school reform model. Success with Raising Readers led to many requests from parents and the Ellsworth PTO to hold a similar evening to introduce the mathematics curriculum. Thus, the school developed Raising Mathematicians and implemented it for the first time during the 2002-2003 school year. Responses were so positive that plans are underway to offer a Raising Writers Night during the 2003-2004 school year.

The workshop series promotes learning at home by introducing parents to the ways in which curriculum in core subject areas is taught in the classroom. When parents have a clear understanding of the way the subject matter is taught in the classroom, they are better equipped to help their children with assignments and reinforce learning at home.

In collaboration with the Ellsworth PTO, the SFCP team coordinated the workshops. Team members discussed plans with administrators and teachers, as well as with the reading and math specialists to enlist their

help. Teachers on the team recruited other teachers willing to give their time and help prepare the lessons. Teachers were paid by the school district. Parents volunteered to make take-home math manipulatives and provide snack items. Grocery stores and the Family Resource Center contributed donations. The administrators prepared and distributed publicity, including an article in the school newsletter and a flier/registration form for every student to take home. The total cost to implement Raising Mathematicians Night was \$650. Financial sources included Windsor Board of Education, Ellsworth Family Resource Center, and community donations.

Children and their parents registered for each evening through a pre-registration process. The principal and team members greeted people as they arrived and directed them to the appropriate rooms. In one-hour sessions, grade-level teachers taught sample math and reading lessons to adult participants. These sessions allowed for all participants to engage with the actual curriculum that their children encounter and ask questions as needed. For example, in the Raising Readers series, teachers read one of the grade-level books and followed up with curriculum-based activities. Families were given a book and math manipulatives to take home, and the evening concluded with a light snack.

All parents, teachers, and volunteers

completed evaluation forms at the end of each workshop. It was clear from the evaluations that both students and their parents benefited from the workshops. Students' academic success was enhanced by the opportunity to share what they do daily with their parents. They also took pride in their ability to demonstrate their skills before parents and peers in new ways. Parents were better equipped to reinforce classroom lessons at home when they understood the teacher's approach to material. Teachers had an opportunity to see parents' commitment to student success, and they were able to share with them specific ways to help their children. Community members had an opportunity to see the curriculum in action and see the students demonstrating their achievements.

"It cleared up all the daily questions," expressed one parent who attended the Raising Readers Night. Another parent commented on how the Raising Mathematicians workshop activity influenced their home: "My son and I enjoyed the skinnies & bits game sent home after Math Night."

Both of these workshops will continue to be offered each year. Now that everyone is familiar with the model, the workshops will be applied to writing and, possibly, other subject areas.

Shelly Bathe-Lenn,
Family Resource Center Coordinator
(860) 687-2070, ext. 146
slenn@windsorct.org