

DIVERSITY CELEBRATION Early Childhood Center #17 Buffalo, New York

The Diversity Celebration at Early Childhood Center #17 brought together students, families, and community and school members to celebrate the many cultures that make up our community. This was a direct link to one of the school goals, which is to cultivate a higher level of involvement among our students' families as well as our community. Our school has found that our most successful endeavors in reaching that goal have been ones that highlight our students. Additionally, the celebration intended to help our students to develop and appreciate a sense of pride in their particular heritages, while at the same time celebrate being Americans.

Our entire school, pre-k through third grade, participated. The administrators invited all classes and departments to use their collective imaginations to find a way to celebrate their uniqueness, either as a class or on an individual basis. Students' families participated by sending in something reflective of their heritage. Items such as articles of clothing, flags, pictures, and objects of art were sent in from home. Parents helped design and make costumes. They also assisted with the stage performances. Student teachers, as well as regular teachers, donated their time in order to make this event special. The teachers helped arrange performances, and the aides assisted teachers and students with the practic-

ing of performances. Volunteers from the community provided music and dance programs reflective of various cultures.

The day of the celebration was an exciting one. Many students and teachers dressed to reflect a particular ethnicity. The auditorium was filled with family members with cameras, some of them also dressed up. To open the program, we enjoyed a moving rendition of *God Bless America* sung by a local musician and the *Pledge of Allegiance*. Our principal made opening statements and the program began. The classes climbed on stage to present their skits, poems, and songs. Many students presented individually, showing off an artifact from home. We learned much about Native American, Polish, Puerto Rican, African, Irish, English, and other cultures. The program ended with the entire audience singing and dancing together with a volunteer calypso singer.

To add to the experience next year, we may include a reception with various ethnic foods to be enjoyed by the parents and grandparents.

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