
MOTHER GOOSE ON THE LOOSE FAMILY NIGHT

St. Charles Parish Public Schools

Luling, Louisiana

St. Charles Parish Schools has strong support for public education, but has a significant portion of its community in poverty. Many preschool children are at day-care centers or in school-based programs, but demonstrate a lack of reading readiness. The St. Charles Parish Public Schools Literacy Team developed a family literacy night to assist parents of preschool and kindergarten students in understanding the importance of oral language and phonemic awareness in learning to read. The Mother Goose on the Loose Night is held at most primary schools and one district-wide night to target all families with preschool and kindergarten children throughout the district

The Mother Goose on the Loose Night pursues several goals:

- Provide families the opportunity to understand the importance of pre-reading strategies and activities to better prepare children for formal reading instruction.
- Show parents the importance of oral language in the developing child.
- Provide an opportunity for parents and children to interact with school and district staff members in an informal setting.
- Provide an opportunity for parents and children to see that learning can be fun.

At Mother Goose on the Loose Night, families come together with the teach-

ers for a welcome and explanation of the evening activities. Families then move about the cafeteria visiting interactive centers of their choice. Usually, there are approximately 20 - 30 centers set up around the cafeteria. All centers are based on Mother Goose rhymes and include reading the rhymes or stories together as a family then participating in a related activity. For example, at the “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” station, parents and children read the poem together then decorate star-shaped cookies. At the “Rhyming to the Beat” center, parents and children listen to an updated CD of nursery rhymes and perform motions while singing. At the end of the evening, all parents and children come together for a closing activity which is usually focused on a story by Mother Goose and a music and movement activity.

A Reading Recovery teacher in the district responded to a principal’s request to develop a literacy night focused on the importance of phonemic awareness and oral language. After much discussion with the principal, her own team, and district level supervisors, she created the Mother Goose on the Loose Night. The Mother Goose Night spread like wildfire throughout the district as a result of the first night’s success and overwhelmingly positive support from parents. The district’s Reading Recovery teachers, who meet on a monthly basis, discussed the event’s success,

and from there all schools wanted to get into the action. From that lead, the director of literacy decided to encourage the district family literacy team to sponsor a preschool literacy night.

The planning, preparation, and delivery of this activity are a joint effort of classroom teachers, literacy teachers, and the school administration. Teachers plan various interactive centers throughout the school cafeteria, purchase materials to support the activities, create easy-to-follow directions for parents on each center, and set up centers the afternoon of the activity. District-level administrators support the activity by joining the parents and teachers for the event and setting aside money to assist with the development of the centers. Some team members even dress up as storybook characters.

Mother Goose on the Loose Nights are publicized in school newsletters, on the local Cable Access Channel, and in fliers sent home to parents. Some schools contact local private daycare providers to invite future families to participate in the activities.

Developing simple yet engaging, interactive centers for families to visit poses the greatest challenge. This is overcome through the collaborative work between literacy teachers and district staff members. Teams have created a binder of activities that focus on phonemic awareness levels and oral language.

The Mother Goose on the Loose Nights have benefited students by sparking enthusiastic involvement from their parents around reading. The activities help students learn through play at specifically designed cen-

ters. Activities are directly related to grade level expectations, curriculum, and report cards. The planned activities also have benefited parents and the community by demonstrating how to gain the most of oral language and phonemic awareness. School and district staff members have found that the activities focus parents and children on key components of learning to better prepare children for formal reading instruction. The nights provide valuable family time focused on reading.

The Mother Goose on the Loose Nights will continue to be implemented in many of the schools in the district as well as a district-sponsored event during the school year. Plans are to expand the centers to keep the activities new and exciting. Continuous improvement is necessary for events like this to remain current and effective. Through the input of teachers, administrators, and parents, teams work to improve the variety of activities planned to keep parents coming. The best advice to have cameras ready! The engaging family learning activities are great to capture on film.

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