

Get Smart with the Arts—After School Language Arts Program

*Northwoods Elementary School
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

Northwoods Elementary teamed up with the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire (UWEC) to help students Get Smart with the Arts. A senior education class from UWEC offered 16 hours of supplementary language arts instruction to Northwoods students of all ability levels in grades one through five.

The semester-long program consisted of ten after-school sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The university students worked with small groups of children to improve their reading and language arts skills using fun, educational activities like language arts games and reader's theater. The university students met with their UWEC professor in the school after each Get Smart session as part of their course requirements.

Families learned about the opportunity to enroll their child in Get Smart with the Arts through a brochure sent home in students' school folders. Over time, past participants' enthusiasm for the program provided great publicity, too. Interested families completed a sign-up sheet and parent compact. In the compacts, parents agreed to ensure that their children would attend each session, and that a parent would come into the building to pick up their children after every session. This dismissal format helped parents and university student teachers interact regularly and discuss what the children were learning. Students' classroom teachers completed referral forms for each of the students who had signed up for the program, indicating the student's reading level. This helped the Get Smart organizers place students in groups according to their abilities.

Get Smart with the Arts noticeably helped students improve their reading and language arts skills. "I have seen great improvements in attitude and ability in their reading in my class," said one satisfied teacher. "I encourage my students to be part of the 'Get Smart' program."

Parents also observed their children's academic progress. One parent commented, "When my children were in this program, they were so fired up about reading." On top of the academic outcome, students formed positive relationships with the University student teachers. A student involved in the program said it best: "We read different books and it was always fun. The teachers from the university were awesome!"

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