

Take Your Parent to School Day / ELA Night

*Buffalo Public Schools #66/#86
Buffalo, New York*

Buffalo Public Schools #66 and #86 involved families in their efforts to raise student scores on the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) Assessment. School #66 had been identified as a first-year school in need of improvement due to its eighth graders' performance on the ELA test. In response, the school instituted instructional changes, and believed increased partnership efforts would benefit students as well. Schools #66 and #86, which share a building, implemented Take Your Parent to School Day and ELA Night to work together with parents to help students prepare for the state tests.

Take Your Parents To School Day was for students in grades four through six. Parents came to school with their children in the morning. They were welcomed by the teachers and enjoyed a continental breakfast.

Parents with students in the fourth grade learned about the following:

- Overview of the NYS ELA test at the fourth-grade level and its scoring;
- Their child's practice test score; and
- Tips on how to help their child pass the ELA test.

Parents with students in the fifth and sixth grades learned about the following:

- Overview of the NYS ELA test at the eighth-grade level and its scoring;
- Tips on how to help their child over the next four years to pass the ELA test; and
- Information about the school's Harcourt reading program and Reading 180 program.

After parents learned about the test and how they could help their children, they participated in grade-specific activities. For example,

fourth graders scored samples of student work with their parents and discussed the scores as a large group. Fifth and sixth graders took their parents to the computer lab to work on computer activities related to the school's reading programs. These same students also participated in a book swap led by the librarian.

ELA Night targeted students in grades seven and eight and focused on the ELA test and preparation. During the evening, parents and students received an overview of the eighth-grade New York State ELA test. The teachers also presented information about the schools' many efforts to improve student test scores. Then, parents worked with their child to rate samples of student work. Afterwards, the large group discussed each piece of work, the parents' scores, and the actual score each piece of work received. Teachers answered any questions or concerns. Parents received a packet of information to take home, which included tips on how to encourage reading and writing at home. Several Barnes and Noble gift certificates were raffled off.

To encourage parents to attend these events, numerous notices were sent home. Each student's practice test score was put on their progress report so that parents had an idea of their child's chances of passing the exam. Parents signed the reports, acknowledging that they had seen their child's scores. Teachers called several parents to let them know about the events, and the Buffalo Evening News Classroom Connection also provided publicity.

This practice cost approximately \$400 and was funded from Parent Partnership funds and PTA funds. The schools used the Internet

to find suggestions to compose a booklet of tips that would encourage reading and writing at home. They also provided parents with a list of helpful web sites.

Students, teachers, and parents benefited from these events. By taking the practice ELA test, students had an idea of what the test involved, their strengths and weaknesses, and what they needed to do to improve. Teachers built on their students' strengths and designed lessons to improve their academic weaknesses. Many parents were unaware of the rigorous academic requirements of the NYS ELA test. Take Your Parent to School Day and ELA Night demonstrated how the schools try to improve student achievement. Parents expressed appreciation for the events and amazement at the academic requirements that the students are expected to accomplish.

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