

Math Carnival

*Maryvale Elementary School
Mobile, Alabama*

“Family fun for all ages!” announced fliers for Maryvale Elementary School’s Math Carnival, one of a series of family learning nights hosted by the school to build understanding of academic goals within the school community. Approximately 300 preschool through fifth-grade students and their families attended and enjoyed learning together at this special event.

This year’s Math Carnival, held one evening in November, featured fun-filled grade-level activities that provided opportunities for families to win prizes as they engaged in math activities with their children. Teachers at each grade level set up learning areas with activities such as weight estimation, math bingo, probability games, and a problem-solving wheel. Upon entering the multipurpose room, families received a “passport” that needed to be signed as they finished activities on each grade level. Teachers at each station explained activities to families and guided them to their next learning area. Families turned in the completed passports for the opportunity to win books. The passport system encouraged families to try activities at different grade levels so that they could see what their children had already learned and what they would learn in the future. At the end of the evening, families and staff enjoyed hot dogs and drinks.

The whole school community made the Math Carnival a success. Each grade-level team planned fun, educational activities. The curriculum committee handled publicity. They also shared door prizes and sample activities with various classes to get students excited about attending the upcoming event. Student Coun-

cil, the PTO, and administrators also took on responsibilities to organize and implement the event. The Mobile Area Education Fund provided funding through the math program.

Students relished the opportunity to help their parents with the activities—often showing new ways to learn math. Because students had practiced the activities in class, they felt comfortable explaining the activities to their parents. Everyone observed children’s learning in action and were impressed by the children’s abilities to complete difficult, thought-provoking activities. As one parent stated, “It gives me an opportunity to see what my child is doing, how they are doing it, and what is required in order for them to be successful.”

At Maryvale’s family nights, all teachers participate in some part of the activities. This allows families to see the unified learning community of the school staff. It also gives teachers a chance to interact with parents and to learn more about their students’ families. Teachers appreciate the opportunity to work together with students and their families on enjoyable learning activities.

One piece of advice Maryvale would offer other schools interested in family math nights is to remember to provide simple, affordable ways for parents to implement the activities at home. Continuing the excitement for learning math together into students’ everyday home experiences increases the chances of reaching academic results.

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