

Start with Success at the Science Museum

*Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center #99
Buffalo, New York*

The Buffalo Museum of Science approached Stanley M. Makowski Early Childhood Center to form a partnership. Makowski ECC is located less than four blocks from the museum, and children frequently walk there to visit its special exhibits. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) welcomed a partner that could support the school's improvement goal to teach science using a hands-on approach. The partnership also provided opportunities for school events that included educational activities for students' families. Start with Success, an annual school event, benefited from the school-museum partnership.

Two weeks prior to the event, Makowski teachers went to the museum and received training in the hands-on exhibits by the museum's educational department and scientists. Staff members picked themes and exhibits that interested them. In addition, a group of staff members contacted community agencies to set up informational displays about services they provide to both students and families.

The ATP sent home several notices to parents about the museum's exclusive three-hour evening event planned just for Makowski families. The museum agreed to provide free one-year memberships to each family and staff member that attended Start with Success.

When the big night arrived, staff members left school at the end of the day and went straight to the museum. The parent organization provided dinner for both the school and the museum staff prior to the families arriving. Teachers manned their stations and exhibits. Community agencies set up their display tables on the second floor veranda, and the school

administrative staff greeted families at the door.

As families entered the museum, they received a "Passport to the Stars," designed by a Makowski teacher and listing all of the interactive exhibits the families could visit. After visiting each exhibit, the passports were punched with a star. The exhibits included: mammals, artifacts, Ancient Egypt, the Solar System, and a dinosaur dig. Families also visited the community agency displays and learned about available resources. After visiting the exhibits and displays, families snacked on refreshments and filled out museum membership applications. Within the month, each family received their one-year membership in the mail.

The response to Start with Success at the Buffalo Museum of Science was overwhelming. Not counting the staff, there were 898 people who attended and over 400 families who applied for memberships. Children and their parents thoroughly enjoyed learning together. Parents had an opportunity to meet their child's teacher in a positive educational setting. Many parents commented that even though they had lived in the surrounding neighborhood for many years, they had never been to the Buffalo Museum of Science and were impressed by all that it had to offer. Other parents said that this was the best thing they had ever attended. Both the school and museum staff were thanked repeatedly. Most important, the museum's generous offer of free memberships allowed students and their families to visit the ever-changing exhibits frequently and continue their learning.

The partnership between Makowski ECC and the Buffalo Museum of Science im-

pacted other school events. For example, the museum hosted Math Outreach and in-house programs such as sending penguin artifacts to the penguin-themed Family Reading Night. Museum staff set up a Paleontology Dig on Math and Science Night at the school. They trained staff in the use of the school's STAR-LAB and provided follow-up programs about the stars and the solar system. Museum staff worked with individual and groups of teachers to design hands-on programming around a particular science topic. Each time Makowski children visit the museum, parents are invited. The museum staff also sponsored overnight sleep-ins at the science museum and has awarded free scholarships to Makowski students for museum summer programs.

Thanks to this school-museum partnership, students, parents, and staff are reaching their goal of learning science using a hands-on approach.

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