

OHS World's Fair Week

*Orchard Hills School
Milford, Connecticut*

“**T**his event opens students up to different horizons and cultures,” said a fifth-grade student from Orchard Hills School (OHS). “The United States has many cultures in it. It’s nice to know something about the cultures around you.”

OHS created a multicultural, educational week-long event called “Around the World in Five Days.” During this week-long event, each classroom or grade level selected a country to study and worked together to develop a project that showcased what they had learned. The event culminated with an evening fair on the fifth day, in which students displayed all of their projects for their families and the community. Orchard Hills School hoped the fair would strengthen school, family, community partnerships while educating students about diversity.

Throughout World’s Fair Week, the committee tried to immerse students in the various cultures as much as possible. Very talented and creative parents worked with the classrooms to choose ideas and assist with their implementation. Every hallway, classroom, and bulletin board displayed some type of cultural activity for the entire school to view. Working with district administration, the school lunch program featured special ethnic meals. Students announced different cultural facts over the PA system daily.

At the fair, students and parents entered the school as tourists and received a passport for international travel throughout the building. While children at all grade levels were performing on the “World Stage,” the kindergarten classes formed a Chinese dragon parade

through the hallways. Fourth graders performed a multicultural play entitled “The Rainbow People.” Some students performed dances from Ireland and India, then taught their parents the steps and danced with them. At the “Tastes of the World Café,” ethnic food samples from around the world were prepared and served.

Many classrooms hosted countries. One classroom had Chinese lanterns and mock firecrackers to decorate the room; and another did traditional Indian mehendi painting on people’s hands. Music by Elton John and the Beatles blared from the English classroom, where they served scones, tea biscuits, and jam. A Buckingham palace guard with a face cut-out was painted, which allowed the children to poke their faces through for pictures. Norway, the Land of the Midnight Sun, was represented, as well as Australia and other countries.

A committee composed of the principal, two teachers, a representative from the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), a parent chairperson, as well as eight additional parent volunteers met monthly, and then bi-weekly, to organize the event. The group divided into subcommittees to focus on specific assignments and tasks such as production, coordinating day and evening events, obtaining entertainment, and fundraising. The school administrators served as mentors and decision makers, facilitated scheduling changes, and provided access to teachers that was crucial to bring this project to fruition.

The \$3,000 cost of World’s Fair Week was funded by the ATP budget, the school budget, and PTA funds. Many area shops, res-

restaurants, and companies donated goods, services, and foods, and received acknowledgement in the printed passports that served as programs.

One important challenge to implementing the week-long event was lack of time. How would teachers have the time to add yet another project to their already overflowing plates? The parents assigned to help each classroom with their research and project took a lot of pressure off the teachers. Additionally, the two teacher members of the World's Fair Committee talked about the event at staff meetings and posted sign-up sheets and posters in the teacher room. As the sign-up sheets began to fill up, enthusiasm spread among the teachers.

The success of the OHS World's Fair Week was measured by the overwhelming attendance of almost a thousand people. Because of the nature of the programming, many families brought extended family members—grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and others. “My grandchildren showed me their school with pride. Their excitement was contagious,” said one grandparent. “I’ve heard nothing but rave reviews from parents, and did you notice how many new faces were there Friday night?” commented one parent. Students, teachers, parents, and community members are already looking forward to the next event.

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