

Family Literacy Nights: Creating Lifelong Readers

*Leaphart Elementary School
Columbia, South Carolina*

It might have been a weeknight, but with the students sitting around in their pajamas, books open for reading, and the smell of freshly cooked bacon and eggs in the air, it looked just like a Sunday morning. At least it looked like the Sunday morning Leaphart Elementary School envisioned when it created Family Literacy Nights. Parents, teachers, and students gathered in the school for a night of reading aloud, parent workshops, and breakfast for dinner in order to instill a love of reading in the children.

To begin Family Literacy Night, families met with teachers, the principal, the assistant principal, and PTO members in the cafeteria for a dinner of pancakes, eggs, bacon, grits, toast, and juice. Afterwards, students, dressed in their pajamas, went to the gym where teachers also dressed in pajamas read aloud to them. The physical education teacher kicked things off by reading *Ferdinand the Bull*. Meanwhile, the school's literacy coach ran a workshop for parents. In addition to giving parents suggestions on how to promote reading with their children, the literacy coach presented reading strategies other than sounding out words, and showed parents how to work with their children to improve reading comprehension.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) worked with the PTO, the literacy coach, teachers, and the principal to organize Family Literacy Night. To publicize the event, they sent fliers home, placed notes in the school's weekly newsletter, advertised on the school's marquee, and mentioned the Literacy

Night on the school's news program and in the principal's daily announcements. The PTO paid for the food, which a business partner of the school significantly discounted. All of the school staff got involved. The school's night supervisor especially appreciated the opportunity to read to the children and show that he, too, cares about literacy.

At the close of Family Literacy Night, the assistant principal videotaped the parents as they commented on what they thought of the event. The faculty viewed the tape to hear parents' positive comments. As a result of Family Literacy Night, parents knew more about how to support their children's reading, and they developed a deeper understanding of the reading process. Parents indicated they would like to see the event held again in the future, and some even indicated that they would like for it to run several times during the school year.

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