

# The Together Program

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P.S. 280

New York, New York

Located in a high-poverty area, within walking distance of several shelters, P.S. 280 decided to close the achievement gap by inviting the parents of all kindergarteners and first graders into the classroom. Through the Together Program, students and their families learned math and literacy using music, dance, art, cooking, and storytelling.

The assistant principal and teachers chose a theme to match the academic content for each of the monthly sessions. Parents worked with their own child and any other children at the table whose family members could not attend.

All activities proceeded in a step-by-step manner, and each session included a read-aloud, a roundtable discussion, a writing activity, vocabulary development, and a culminating project that reflected the day's objectives. The projects were displayed for the whole school to see. At the end of each session, parents received a folder of activities similar to those completed during the session that they could do with their child at home, along with a word list and a reading list for the students. Parents often shared these folders with friends; parents who could not attend the sessions frequently requested the folders.

The assistant principal obtained \$1,500 to fund the Together Program, through a United Federation of Teachers grant. The money paid for project supplies, including the food prepared in the classroom. Parents received invitations, and the assistant principal and teachers told students about the sessions a few days beforehand so that they too would encourage their parents to attend.

While the Together Program took time both to organize and implement, everyone involved benefited greatly. Initially run just in kindergarten classes, the program expanded into first grade the next school year to continue the family involvement. Many of the same parents participated, and others joined in. Students involved developed good study habits, more extensive vocabularies, better listening and oral communication skills, and improved behavior from sharing with and helping their classmates. More parents became classroom volunteers once they realized how much the school did and continues to do for their children.

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