

FACT Nights

*Grant School
Wausau, Wisconsin*

On a cold February evening at Grant School, children and their parents celebrated Valentine’s Day with fun, math-related activities. After a free dinner and prize drawing, the school principal greeted families and outlined the night’s events, which included games that reinforced counting, pattern recognition, and money arithmetic, along with a craft table where students could construct animals out of paper hearts. Participants had a chance to guess how many pieces of candy a jar held, and whoever came closest to the real number won the candy.

This math event was only one in a series of four Families And Children Together (FACT) Nights at Grant School. Other themes included reading, writing, and spelling. From 5:00 until 6:30, families gathered in the gymnasium to share a meal prepared by school staff and participate in activities together.

The Site Council implemented FACT Nights to involve parents in the school’s action plan goal of improving students’ math and language arts skills. The events also encouraged parents to help their children with homework. Through interacting with teachers and learning some of the methods used at school, the events helped parents feel more comfortable working with their children at home.

A subcommittee of Grant School’s Site Council, made up of the principal, the parent partnership coordinator, and the 21st Century coordinator, organized FACT Nights. Their responsibilities included planning activities, preparing dinner, and recruiting volunteers

from the faculty to help with the events. The subcommittee asked each teacher to attend one FACT Night per year and assist with supervising activities and cleaning up. At least five staff members attended each evening. The organizers did not ask parents to help, because they wanted all parents to participate in the educational activities with their children. The Site Council secured funding for the events, which cost \$150 to \$200 each, through Title I, the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program, and 21st Century grants earmarked for family involvement activities.

Parents learned about each FACT Night through invitations informing them of the evening’s theme and asking them to respond with the number of family members that would attend. As the event drew near, students brought home a reminder, giving families a final chance to sign up. The Site Council found these second invitations critical in obtaining an accurate count of attendees and determining how much food to prepare.

Satisfied families spread the word about FACT Nights and, after a few months, the events averaged 110 participants. Parents and students spent time together in a social setting with open lines of communication between families and teachers. Because they did not have to worry about making dinner, parents could concentrate on engaging their children in meaningful conversations and helping them learn. In the words of one parent, “What I like most about FACT Nights is the school information, the crafts, and the time my kids get to

spend with friends. The fact that I don't have to cook is great!"

Next year, the Site Council hopes to improve FACT Nights by recruiting guest speakers to provide families with useful information in addition to the fun activities. They will also try to involve teachers more in determining the activities to offer at each FACT Night, because "their input is invaluable in helping reach parents."

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