

## Family and Exhibit Nights

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*Museum Magnet School*  
*St. Paul, Minnesota*

**D**edicated to the museum process of explore, experiment, explain, and exhibit, the Museum Magnet School hosts four Family and Exhibit Nights each year for different grade levels to show what they have learned and to help parents support their children's learning at home. Following a light supper, Family and Exhibit Nights feature presentations by two grades that incorporate demonstrations, props, storytelling, and interactive learning stations. Two nearby high schools share their students to help run the learning stations and serve food.

Much of what the Museum Magnet School achieves stems from its relationship with the Minnesota Science Museum, a relationship established as part of the school's founding. The current agreement provides a Museum staff member who helps organize Family and Exhibit Nights, teaches the children at the school, sets up exhibits within the school building, and sits on the Site Council. The Museum also loans the school materials such as powerful magnets and microscopes. Once a year, the Museum hosts a Family Night for the school, and twice each year, students take field trips to the Museum, where they learn how the museum staff creates exhibits.

On Family and Exhibit Nights, students present their prepared exhibits, with both written and oral components, and answer "key knowledge" questions asked by parents. The students' presentations help parents learn more about the curriculum standards used at the school and the processes by which their

children learn. Many exhibits focus on scientific concepts like magnetism; however, a recent exhibit featured sixth-grade students presenting poetry—teaching about the different types and providing an opportunity for families to write poems and make books of their work. Learning stations include hands-on areas, where participants explore activities such as origami. Regardless of the learning station's focus, each must include activities that parents can work on at home with their children.

Parents on the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) determine the number of learning stations and the activities each will include. Some parents who do not have children presenting volunteer to man a station or help serve food. Teachers help the students prepare their presentations and write the "key knowledge" questions that parents ask when the students show their exhibits. The administration oversees the event and the sign-in table, while support staff publicizes the event, orders food and other supplies, and recruits volunteers.

High school student volunteers contribute to the success of Family and Exhibit Nights. The volunteers receive service-learning hours for supervising learning stations, serving the meal, and cleaning up afterwards. By volunteering, they learn people skills and networking. The teenagers' participation also eases the anxieties of the parents of the elementary and middle school students about the high school years. Parents are impressed with the high schoolers' knowledge, kindness, and maturity. One parent commented, "These high school kids are great;

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they are so polite. I am feeling much better about my kid going on to high school.” The high school volunteers also help the teachers by freeing them up to interact more with the families of their students.

The school, family, and community partnerships fostered at the Museum Magnet School clearly benefit everyone involved, especially the children—young and old. As a result, the school and Museum will continue to collaborate, especially on the Family and Exhibit Nights. The ATP may have to rethink offering dinner, because of the cost, and will explore ways to involve the high school students in the event planning and the exhibit process in the classrooms.

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