

“Oops—Turn Me Off!” Science Family Night

*Roosevelt Elementary School
St. Paul, Minnesota*

When families arrived at Roosevelt Elementary School’s “Oops—Turn Me Off” Science Family Night, they found the cafeteria transformed into an interactive science lab, with seven stations for learning about energy. Wearing long, white lab coats, members of the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) staffed each station. Scientist Casey, the school’s science teacher, greeted the kindergarten through third-grade students and their parents with an energy-efficiency quiz, rewarding correct answers with a free book.

After a suggestion from the science teacher, Roosevelt Elementary School’s ATP organized the family night as part of the St. Paul School District’s Schools for Energy Efficiency (SEE) Program, a comprehensive initiative to help promote and implement energy efficiency among all schools in the district. The event also helped prepare students for the third-grade state science test required by No Child Left Behind.

With the principal’s support, a committee comprised of teachers, a district representative from the SEE Program, the SEE site leader, and the ATP facilitator planned Science Family Night. The district provided a variety of materials for the event, including posters. To advertise, teachers handed out fliers in multiple languages and collected families’ RSVPs.

Stations at Science Family Night included an interactive computer project; the Lyden jar experiment, in which wool is rubbed against a Styrofoam plate to produce a spark of electricity; the game “Operation,” where stu-

dents learn about human anatomy by pretending to perform surgery; magnets; constructing fun energy crowns out of headbands, pipe cleaners, and rubber light bulbs; and an energy bike. The special bicycle, provided by the district, powered a generator. Students pedaled the bike to find out how much energy a variety of appliances and electronic devices require. At the end of the evening, some children received refurbished bicycles as door prizes.

“Oops—Turn Me Off!” Science Family Night proved to be a huge success. Through written evaluations circulated among volunteers and planning committee members, as well as phone calls to parents, the ATP received a great deal of positive feedback. Students learned about science and energy in a fun, relaxed environment, while parents had a chance to observe their children’s learning processes and informally interact with teachers. One parent said, “It was really cool to see science stressed when we have been so busy thinking about reading and math, and to see them all tied together in a fun way.”

Roosevelt Elementary will host Science Family Night again next year. Because of rave reviews, the ATP will move the event to the gym, providing space for more families and a greater number of learning stations.

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