

Lunch and Learn

*Sherman Elementary School
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

Kindergarten parents at Sherman Elementary School are invited out to lunch three times each school year. It is not all leisure, however. They are expected to learn while they lunch and then practice what they learned.

The very successful Lunch and Learn project brings parents, children, and teachers together to foster understanding and build camaraderie. The staff at Sherman wants these parents, many of them new to the school, to feel welcome and understand what their children are learning and how families can reinforce those skills at home.

The lunch lessons focus on reading, writing, and math skills—with one subject served up each time, starting with reading skills in the fall. “Many parents have not been exposed to the ‘how’ of teaching their child to read and write, and what is developmentally appropriate for a 5-year-old,” said one kindergarten staff member. “This is a fun way to teach parents what they can do at home to help their child be successful.”

Parents eat lunch with their children—they can choose a hot meal from the cafeteria or bring their own—and then, while the children go to recess, the parents go to school. They meet with the kindergarten teachers and the school’s reading specialist to learn how they can encourage their budding readers, writers, and mathematicians. After recess, parents and children get together again so the parents can practice the skills they just acquired.

The teachers and reading specialist designed the materials, and the teachers prepared the activities for the parents and students. The lunch schedule was adjusted slightly, giving the kindergarteners and their guests more time to get through the cafeteria line.

About 60 parents attended the Lunch and Learn sessions. Students whose parents could not attend were “buddied up” with other families or with instructional aides so that they had someone to eat and practice with. During lunch, teachers visited with the adults and children. “It is good whenever we can invite parents into the school building, as it promotes cooperation and communication,” Sherman’s principal commented. The project also helped the school meet its goals of promoting parent involvement and helping all students succeed in their academics. Parents said they liked learning what is expected of their children in the three core subjects and getting new ideas of how to help their students at home, especially with writing skills.

Teachers at Sherman hope to expand the program next year to include more grades. Said one Sherman teacher, “It was easy to implement and the rewards were great.”

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