

Arts Extravaganza Family Night

*Highwood Hills Elementary School
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Highwood Hills Elementary School has a diverse student body, with members of Somali, Hmong, Cambodian, Hispanic, Japanese, African American, and other heritages. Nearly two-thirds of these students are ELL. To celebrate its students' diverse backgrounds, the school created an Arts Extravaganza Family Night that featured fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students and their families showcasing their familial and cultural traditions. The night combined performances with hands-on interaction so that students could both observe and participate in the traditional activities.

The gym was set up with stations for making Hmong story cloths, Hmong New Year balls, Japanese origami, Hispanic tissue flowers, piñatas, Guatemalan kites, and henna painting. There were also several ethnic food stations. A Cambodian musician, the father of one of the students, performed traditional music. The evening culminated with a participatory performance by a local African American storyteller.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) publicized the Arts Extravaganza with fliers each student brought home. These fliers, which were written in four languages, included a tear-off RSVP slip. The ATP also posted fliers in area apartment buildings and made phone calls home to remind parents about the event.

The idea for the arts night was spearheaded by the schoolwide enrichment model teacher, who worked with the ATP, an arts-related school grant, and community members to create the event. The planners solicited the

teaching staff to come up with ideas and prepare material for the gym stations. Community organizations also contributed ideas and materials to the project, including cultural foods. The school asked parents to help run the gym stations, and some parents even provided cultural entertainment. The Arts Extravaganza cost approximately \$1,400 and was funded by part of a three-year US Department of Education grant, Title I funds, and donations from community members and parents.

Next year, the school plans to open the event to all grade levels. The Arts Extravaganza will have fewer stations, with larger work areas and more time for students to spend at each station. Also, to save on costs, the school will solicit more teacher and parent volunteers.

This practice brought the community into the school. The Arts Extravaganza promoted arts and artistic expression and encouraged families to share their experiences at home and in their communities. Thanks to activities like this, Highwood Hills has a positive climate, where its students' cultures are not only respected, but celebrated.

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