

Parent Education Workshops

*Sherman Elementary School
Eau Claire, Wisconsin*

Families are invited to a night out at Sherman Elementary School three times a year. The evening starts with dinner in the cafeteria, and then comes the serious part—for parents, at least. They go to the library for workshops. The children go to the gym for fun and games.

Last year, Sherman hosted three such evenings with the help of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). With a diverse membership of parents and staff, the team helped choose the workshop topics and invited guest speakers. The team also looked at parent surveys for topics families would like to know more about and worked to ensure that parent education opportunities were tied to student achievement.

At the first workshop, the executive director of the local Family Resource Center shared homework tips and strategies with parents. During the second workshop, Sherman's former counselor spoke about discipline. He used examples from his own experiences as a parent, a counselor, and now a part-time university professor. The final workshop featured an expert on women's studies who addressed developmental issues for girls in third through fifth grades. After the presentations, parents could ask questions, share concerns, and get to know one another during an open discussion period.

For these workshops, the school partners with the community by tapping into the services of local businesses. For example, a nearby restaurant supplies the dinner, and the childcare volunteers are local college students.

An area newspaper published an article about the workshops before the first event in November. The school sent out registration fliers and mass e-mails to families to remind them of the event. As a result of these publicity efforts, spearheaded by the partnership coordinator, about 240 parents and students participated in the workshops.

The workshops at Sherman have been well received. The team has found that families appreciate the expert advice and students have benefited, too, particularly from the homework workshop, which stressed ways for parents to help their children help themselves. Parents and teachers spoke highly of the discipline workshop.

Sherman plans to take the feedback from this year's sessions into account when planning next year's topics for the family nights out.

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