

Reading Can Be A “No Brainer”

Lynnhaven Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia

The staff at Lynnhaven wanted to promote literacy and introduce parents to new information from the latest brain research in education. The goal was to discuss how new information could be applied to improve parent/child relationships and to promote student learning. The school decided to dedicate the annual Family Literacy Night to these dual goals, and expand the activity that had been limited to families of students in the primary grades to include the whole school.

Offering to support the project, one of the school’s Partners in Excellence, GEICO, arranged for a United Way speaker from the Raising a Reader program to talk with the parents. The school planned parallel literacy activities for the students and the Partners in Education Committee contacted other partners about providing dinner. School staff pitched in to monitor the children’s activities and provide childcare for younger siblings.

“We invited the whole Lynnhaven family – all students and their parents – for dinner and a speaker to have a less stressful school event,” said one of the organizers. “The families could all come, be fed, informed and entertained.”

Thanks to hard work and generosity, that’s what happened. The partners really came through. GEICO paid for pizzas; Chick-fil-A sent chicken sandwiches; Zero’s Subs discounted sandwiches and donated potato chips; McDonald’s provided juice, cookies and paper products. Not only did the families enjoy a feast, but they were also treated to visits from GEICO’s Gecko and the Chick-fil-A Cow, who posed for photos with the families.

The coordinators from the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) designed invitations and fliers and distributed them twice. Teachers wrote letters home inviting parents to the activity, stressing the importance of the

program. ATP members decorated the cafeteria with balloons and brightly colored tablecloths.

After dinner, a storyteller entertained the children in the library so parents could concentrate on their program. A staff member read to the children when the storyteller finished. Children also selected a book to take home.

The parents found the speaker fascinating. She talked about brain development, reading development and how parents can better help their children reach their potential. She had color handouts of brain scans that clearly illustrated how a child’s brain can be stimulated. She also spoke about how to interact effectively with children.

“This really changed how I will speak to my children from now on,” said one parent.

A teacher said “I thought we might lose the parents in the theory, but the speaker explained things beautifully. You could hear a pin drop while she spoke.”

The PTA president called it “the most effective presentation ever at the school.” She added, “Many parents have never heard that what they say to a child can help or hinder brain development. It really makes you stop and think. It was fascinating. When can we have Part II?”

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