

# White Elephant Bingo

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*Elmwood Elementary School  
Naperville, Illinois*

Imagine a bingo night where no less than 10 kinds of bingo are played, the town Mayor calls the big game, and everyone goes home with a prize. White Elephant Bingo at Elmwood Elementary was all that and more.

Wanting to break up the long winter with some excitement, Elmwood's School/Family/Community Partnership (SFCP) Team planned the event for students and parents. The price of admission was a "gently used" age-appropriate item such as a DVD, CD, board game or book -- the White Elephant -- that someone else would win.

Students then selected the game they wanted to begin with and started playing bingo. All tables were marked with the kind of bingo game and the ages it was best suited for. The SFCP Team created some of the games, drawing on topics that applied specifically to the school. Elmwood Bingo was popular among students, who loved playing a game named after their school. Other games included: Sports Bingo, Harry Potter Bingo and Outer Space Bingo. Many of the games could be played two ways -- for a table of older or younger children.

When a student won a game, he or she went to the prize table and selected a "new to them" prize to take home. The high point of the evening was a series of traditional bingo games for all students. To everyone's delight, the Mayor called these games. Students winning these games received school spirit wear and other new prizes provided by the SFCP. At the end of the evening, students who had not won anything could select a prize to take home.

White Elephant Bingo wasn't only fun. It supported the school's reading improvement goal by incorporating kindergarten and first-grade sight words into a bingo game. Other games involved elements of math and geography. Students benefited from the opportunity

to work together, to help each other and to listen well, while having fun. They also loved coming to this evening with their parent and getting to see many of their school friends.

Parents liked having a planned activity that they and their children enjoyed, as well as the opportunity to meet new parents. They also had a chance to meet and talk to their mayor.

"How nice it was to come to a free and fun event at school," several parents said. The children commented on how great it was to be able to pick a new "treasure" to take home.

About 100 students and their parents attended, which the SFCP team considered a strong response for a new event. The team plans to repeat the activity next year, perhaps at different times of the year and for a longer time. Home and School Funds paid the bills, which totaled only about \$70. Some adults contributed extra White Elephant items, so that every child would get a prize. White Elephant Bingo was definitely a winner for Elmwood.

*Theresa Tinker  
Co-Chair, SFCP Team  
(630) 420-6341  
tltinker55@hotmail.com.*