

# Testing Kickoff Event/Math Game Night

Phalen Lake Elementary School  
St. Paul, Minnesota

*“Are YOU smarter than a fifth grader?”*

This popular quiz show on TV demonstrated to parents what children feel during standardized testing – being put on the spot for a correct answer. On the eve of two weeks of such testing, the kickoff night provided an opportunity for parents to understand the importance of the tests and the crucial role they play at home. They learned how to help their children relax, knowing that “once they have done their best, that’s all anyone can ask.” The event also provided families with tools to help their youngsters at home and added to the school’s community spirit.

Families of students in Grades 3-6 enjoyed not only the parent-student quiz show, but also a video on test-taking strategies, a chance to play a card game that teaches math skills, dinner featuring chicken wings, and a book give-away. The assistant principal and a special education teacher talked about the importance of the upcoming tests and test taking strategies. They stressed how parents can help their children do their best by ensuring that they get enough sleep, come to school on time and have a nutritious breakfast.

Interpreters translated the presentations into Spanish and Hmong. After dinner, families were encouraged to select books that a local organization contributed. These gently used books were distributed with the intent of bolstering students’ at-home libraries. Each family also received a packet of math game boards from the Everyday Math curriculum used during daily instruction.

The school’s test data from the prior year showed that math was an area that needed improvement. Feedback from parents indicated that they wanted more information about the Everyday Math curriculum and math homework. The games at Math Game Night supported the skills that were included on the tests.

The staff wanted to talk about the purposes and strengths of the math curriculum and provide good information on the standardized tests that students take.

A fifth-grade teacher used an overhead projector with transparencies of playing cards to teach the game “Top It.” Each family was given materials to play along. Students were comfortable with the game, which they also played in class. This and other games can be played at multiple levels, depending on the age and skill levels of the players. Families took the games home to have some math fun and to reinforce skills taught in school.

“After playing the games, I have a better understanding of how Everyday Math works,” commented one parent. “Before that, it was hard to help my kids with their homework.” Nearly 40 parents and 56 students attended the kickoff. A teacher reflected, “I feel better about the upcoming tests knowing that my students’ families are supportive and that they know some ways to help their students prepare.”

The district superintendent and school principal wanted to familiarize families with standardized tests. Members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) planned and helped implement the event. The ATP took great care to make the test preparation activities interesting and fun for families. Incorporating a popular game show, using math games to highlight needed skills, serving dinner and providing books all contributed to a successful and worthwhile night.

Plans are already under way to schedule a similar event earlier next school year to introduce families to the math program and to strengthen students’ math skills.

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