

Science – It’s All Family Fun!

*Leaphart Elementary School
Columbia, South Carolina*

Robots, foam gliders and a Mad Scientist were all part of the fun at Science Spectacular at Leaphart Elementary. Building on the success of an earlier literacy night, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to try a science night to make science more interesting and attractive to Leaphart students. The team identified this need because test data suggested that students needed more and different instructional strategies to actively engage in learning science and to improve their achievement in the subject.

So, with an ATP member as the overall coordinator, the school put together a night of demonstrations and presentations showing how science can be fun. To increase interest, it tied the event to the school’s science fair, where students displayed their projects and competed for prizes.

“Science Spectacular was a huge hit and just an awesome event. My children raved about the presentations,” said one parent.

Staff members, community volunteers and parents made presentations, stressing inquiry and hands-on experiences. In addition, the young students had opportunities to interact with middle school students who were invited to give robotics demonstrations.

Science Night began with a pizza supper, but the meat of the evening was a variety of sessions and stations for adults and students to visit. These included Science through Literature, Animals at the Zoo, Robotics, Biofacts (information about animals and their habitats, plant growth and vegetation at a nearby park on the Saluda River), and “Phun” with Foam, where students built gliders from styrofoam, and learned about aerodynamics. In Engineering Dynamic Duo, students learned about different states of matter through observation and hands-on investigations, while the session How Big Can You Blow a Bubble? explored the effects of air and force on matter.

Second-grade habitat projects and fourth- and fifth-grade science projects were displayed throughout the school. First- second- and third-place ribbons were awarded to the science fair winners at the end of the evening.

In addition, students and their families enjoyed a show at dinner performed by a staff member of “MAD Scientist,” an educational organization that operates after-school science camps. The organization volunteered to entertain and students assisted the “mad scientist” in his demonstration of “solids, liquids and gases” involving dry ice.

The science night cost less than \$70, as the school received donations of food and funds. The school’s PTO paid for what was not donated.

The practice supported the school’s improvement goal of encouraging the use of inquiry in problem-solving. It also contributed significantly to shaping students’ perception of science as “fun” and encouraged them to see themselves as “scientists.” Overall, 150 students and 200 parents were involved, as were 20 teachers and seven community members.

Responses and informal evaluations were positive. “Parents, students, teachers and community members were able to come together and get excited about learning science. It’s the type of home-school relationship that is a win-win situation,” said the principal.

Next year, the school hopes to offer more and different activities to extend students’ excitement about science.

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