

Turn Off the TV Family Game Night/Ice Cream Social

*Naper Elementary School
Naperville, Illinois*

Research shows that many children spend more hours in front of the TV than in the classroom. To help families reduce children's TV time, Naper Elementary offered an educational and social alternative during National TV-Turnoff Week. The Game Night and Ice Cream Social featured board games and ice cream sundaes. Naper invited families of students in grades K-5 to turn off the TV and come to school for some fun.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) visited the "National TV-Turnoff" web site for ideas. A games coordinator contacted parents and staff members to ask what games they would be willing to lend to game night. The coordinator researched various skills that different board games help to develop, put together an information packet and made it available for families to take home. They learned that board games help to build skills in math, reading, memory, organization and strategy.

This year the school decided to make the event more enjoyable by adding an Ice Cream Social. Who can resist ice cream sundaes? A parent worked with a vendor to arrange for the ice cream, toppings, plastic bowls, spoons and napkins. The school principal, teachers and volunteers scooped ice cream and toppings. School staff also made rounds in the gym to assist families who had questions about the games. Some families challenged other families, and students realized that this was a great way to get to know people. Of approximately 295 students and 180 families in the school, about 145 students and 90 families attended, making the evening a great success.

Publicity included a notice in the monthly school newsletter and fliers posted in the school. The teachers helped create some excitement. Children were also asked to make a "pledge" that they would turn off the TV and do _____ instead.

The event supports a school improvement goal by promoting reading practices, as students used game cards, information on the board games, and game directions. The students and families also improved math fluency with games that required counting, sequencing, and play money. Yet because the games were so much fun, students learned without realizing it. "I can't wait to play a game I don't have at home," said one student. "Why do we have to leave so early?" asked another.

Students also realized that it can be entertaining to do something besides watching TV. The school's hope was that families would try to organize their own "Family Game Night" at least once a month. "This is a great evening, I had no idea how beneficial this would be," commented a parent.

The night will be repeated because it offers family members a valuable opportunity to "reconnect" with each other, learn new skills and strengthen existing skills. It is also a way to socialize with other school families and to exchange ideas that will lead to turning off the TV more often.

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