

# International Night “Around the World in 90 Minutes”

*Prairie Elementary School  
Naperville, Illinois*

Some of the international families with children at Prairie Elementary were feeling isolated from others at the school. They talked with the teacher of English Language Learners (ELL) about wanting to be more involved with the school and with their children’s education. So the school decided to conduct an International Night to welcome these families and help them connect with others at this celebration of cultures.

Building on last year’s successful international “Games Around the World,” the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) decided to expand the event this year to include food, music, art and dance. With the theme, “Around the World in 90 Minutes” and a hot air balloon to carry the idea, International Night took off, with adventures galore.

Each family was invited to share its heritage with a display of interesting facts, photos and artifacts, and to bring a food or prepared dish from its cuisine. Students, teachers and parents traveled around the school to:

- View cultural displays that highlighted fun facts about many families’ native countries
- Sample ethnic foods prepared by families
- Get creative with international crafts, including Chinese character writing, origami, and German paper cutting
- Learn traditional Hebrew songs or participate in an African stone-passing game
- Learn to salsa dance.

The ATP designed a passport that included each activity and its country of origin. The passports included interesting facts about each country and space for a stamp on each page as families visited the various activities.

Throughout the evening, the organizers gave away international board games as raffle prizes. Winners were announced every 10 to 15 minutes throughout the evening. During each announcement, families were reminded to explore the various activities.

Members of the ATP oversaw the entire event, which required considerable planning and coordination. Many team members volunteered to teach games, crafts or music. Other volunteers coordinated the food tables. Community partners contributed, too. A local dance instructor taught salsa to families, and a neighborhood business donated the Italian ice cream, Gelato, for sampling.

One of the challenges was communicating with some of the ELL families who do not speak English. To overcome this, the ATP met with the families about six weeks before the event and stayed in close contact with the ELL instructor, who communicated instructions to the families, making sure everyone understood what they needed to do.

In addition to encouraging parent involvement, the International Night enriched children’s knowledge of social studies and enhanced their cultural awareness. All Prairie families were able to appreciate and enjoy the cultural diversity within the school. As a result, ELL families seem to feel more welcome.

The event was well-attended, with 140 students and 80 parents present. When the ATP solicited informal feedback from attendees and volunteers, many commented on how much fun the evening was. The ELL instructor said she had never seen her students look so happy and confident.

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