

## Family Days at Barnum School

*Barnum School  
Taunton, Massachusetts*

As the preschool program for the Taunton Public Schools, the Barnum School is strongly aware of the tremendous impact that families have on school readiness. To be responsive to its diverse families and to involve and support families as they begin to work with their young children toward academic success, the school sponsored Monthly Family Days.

Each month, the school invites families to school for a parent workshop followed by visits to the classrooms. The adults take part in regular classroom activities, such as enjoying a snack, playing in the block area or pushing their child on a swing. Realizing that many parents are working, the school always invites other important adults in the child's life to come in place of parents who cannot make the meetings.

Each Family Day begins with coffee and a welcome from the principal or chair of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP). After news of upcoming events, there is a half-hour presentation by various staff members. For example, the school's occupational therapist presented a successful workshop, *How to Develop Your Child's Fine Motor Skills*. Participants learned how the hand develops and worked in groups exploring wikki stiks, theraputty, pencil grips and other activities to do at home.

Another month's presentation was a *Make It and Take It Literacy Workshop*. A special education teacher instructed parents, working in four rotating groups, how to create literacy games to use at home. At one station, parents put together fishing games using dowels, string, magnets and alphabet cards. At another, parents made bean bags out of plastic bags and rice to use for an alphabet or shape toss game. Other groups designed game boards with markers, stickers and lots of imagination. At the final station, parents created letter and rhyming matching games.

Throughout the morning, there was a special camaraderie among parents. All of them left with four games they could play with their children that night!

Additional popular topics include how to prevent colds and other diseases, how to increase their preschoolers' physical activity, and a round-table discussion with the principal on how to improve parent-teacher communications. One of the most popular programs was a special event for the whole family featuring a performance by a children's singer and storyteller.

The ideas for the workshops came from a parent survey conducted at the beginning of the year and from staff suggestions. With the principal's input, Family Days are scheduled in advance and put on the calendar for the whole year.

Attendance has been consistently excellent. The children benefit from the active involvement of their families. Families connect with one another and gain valuable insights into strategies for helping their preschoolers develop readiness skills.

The staff believes that more parents are reached in these morning get-togethers than at evening workshops. Barnum School plans to continue its Family Days as it explores new ways to ensure that parents see the school as a welcoming, engaging place.

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