

Family Literacy Night

*Pembroke Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Rainbow-colored brain scans of children wowed parents during a PowerPoint presentation on literacy at Pembroke Elementary last year. As part of the school's new Family Literacy Night program, 70 parents learned about the neurological basis of children's reading abilities—a compelling argument for increased reading activities at home.

Pembroke Elementary inaugurated their NNPS membership during the 2007-08 school year. The school had a history of very little parent involvement, but with encouragement and support from NNPS, administrators decided it was time to take new directions. They formed their first Action Team for Partnership (ATP) and decided to target science in their action plan. One ATP member planned a successful literacy event at another school the previous year, which had featured a discussion on child literacy and brain research. Given that the school had never hosted a big educational family event, they decided to go with the tested activity.

ATP members began planning the event by contacting the United Way's *Raising a Reader* program, which provided the speaker about brain-research. They also hired a professional story teller to entertain students while parents were in the information session.

School administrators promoted the event through a series of e-mails, fliers, and personal letters from teachers to parents. Students also performed skits during the morning announcements to advertise the event.

On the night of the event, 70 parents and 90 children entered the school's cafeteria to learn more about reading and science. The night began with some light refreshments of juice and cookies. Staff displayed a series of literacy booths at tables around the room. While parents and children enjoyed the food and the informational brochures, staff projected literacy-based photographs from every classroom on

a large screen in front of the room.

Once everyone arrived, staff separated parents from students. Adults stayed in the cafeteria to listen to the talk, while children went to the library to hear the local storyteller. The guest speaker showed parents slides of children whose families read aloud to them at home versus children who did not receive this reading exposure. The bright colors on the screen showed a clear discrepancy in the brain activity of the two groups.

The talk drew rapt attention from all parents in the room. "You could hear a pin drop!" the principal later exclaimed.

But the silence didn't last forever, as the parents applauded the presentation. They were thrilled to learn so much about their children's brains and reading development.

"This was fascinating! We should have more events like this—just for parents. I liked having my children creatively occupied so I could really listen to the speaker," a parent said.

The event cost \$385 to implement. The school used Title I funds to pay for food, books, and speakers. The United Way donated handouts for the event. The PTA donated the funds to cover the storyteller's fee.

School officials plan to host another Family Literacy Night in the near future. They hope to have more school staff involved and provide evaluations for parents to fill out at the end of the event.

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