

# Family Learning Nights

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*Bruce Vento Elementary School  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

**B**ruce Vento Elementary pulled out all the stops for last year's Family Learning Nights, a series of three events that drew large crowds and set the stage for many more successful partnership activities.

Family Learning Nights were actually Math Night K-3, Math Night 4-6 and Literacy Night, all grades. The students became the teachers for an evening, leading activities for their parents and showing their parents how they could help their children at home.

The three nights drew about 475 students and 300 parents, a much better outcome than previous family nights. Part of the credit goes to previous editions of NNPS's *Promising Partnership Practices*, which the school's leadership team combed for similar activities that the Bruce Vento folks could modify and adapt. The team made copies of several practices and analyzed and discussed them. Nearly 80 percent of this year's design, however, came from the staff that "brought their experience as parents, knowledge of our kids and families, and ideas of what works here," said one of the leadership team members.

The school publicized the event through fliers in three languages: English, Spanish, and Hmong. After the fliers were distributed, teachers and aides called every family. The students got involved, too, inviting their parents to see what an important role they had to play.

The three nights began with dinner, but each one differed in design. At the two math nights, every teacher planned an activity for students and parents to complete together. Students led their parents through the step-by-step instructions that had been translated into Spanish and Hmong. Every family took home a packet of activities and manipulatives.

For the literacy night, the food and the books were ethnically diverse. Parents and students, working from a script, talked about their classroom work and parents could

comment on the activity. Volunteers distributed pamphlets offering parents tips on how to encourage reading at home. The staff opened the computer lab so that students could access learning web sites. Several computers were dedicated to Spanish and Hmong language resources.

More than 150 people visited the bookmobile, which opened outside school, and 25 families signed up for library cards. All students left with a book, donated by a local business sponsor. A lucky few also won door prizes from the same sponsor.

Volunteers from across the community participated, including high school ROTC students who served food, monitored hallways and cleaned up.

The result of all this collaboration: A record turnout, 100 percent participation from the staff, and many more engaged students. Teachers and participants gave the nights rave reviews. "Every time I come here it just gets better and better," one parent said.

The three nights cost \$4,000, though the actual cost to the school was much lower, due to donations from community and business partners.

Buoyed by its success, Bruce Vento will do another family night series. The leadership team also hopes to expand on the idea of the school as a partnership.

*Antwan Flowers  
(651) 293-8685  
Antwan.flowers@spps.org*