

Math Off the Shelf

*Langley Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

To some, it's just a can of soup. But last year when staff at Langley Elementary looked at that can of soup, they saw a math lesson waiting to happen. During their Math Off the Shelf workshop in March, teachers used soup cans and other common pantry items to show parents that math is something families can do at home together.

The parent involvement facilitator at Langley developed the workshop to help give parents useful strategies to support math at home. One of the school improvement goals last year was to raise math scores on state achievement tests. By introducing parents to selected, testable concepts, the staff hoped that parents would discover their own "teachable math moments" shopping in the grocery store or preparing dinner together with their child.

Staff publicized the event first through a series of fliers sent home in both Spanish and English. Signs posted around the hallways of the building also reminded parents and students about the upcoming event.

On the night of the event, 23 students and 17 parents came to the school to participate in the workshop. Volunteers distributed canned food, boxed cereal, and other packaged items. They asked parents and children to look closely at the nutritional labels. The school's Parent Involvement Facilitator, also a former teacher, led the group through a series of calculations based on those labels. Students and parents discussed comparing products' weights and percentages. They also received a bag of Fruit Loops and explored topics of sorting, patterning, counting, and graphing.

"This was a lot of fun! I can't wait to do math with my cereal at home," one student said.

The biggest challenge the group faced was to include its large ESL population. The staff brought in a translator for the evening. As the parent involvement facilitator led the workshop in English, the translator enabled parents to follow along in Spanish.

A lucky few participants received door prizes donated by community members. By the end of the evening parents were as pleased with the exercise as their students.

"I learned ideas that I can do very easily with my kids every day, while doing what I normally do anyway," a parent said.

The workshop cost about \$75 to plan and implement. The school used Title I funds and material donations to cover the project's expenses.

Langley Elementary plans to host the workshop again during the 2008-09 school year. Next year, planners will recruit more teachers so that they can divide the workshop into age-group sections.

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