

Parent Informances

*Four Seasons A+ Elementary School
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Family Math and Reading Night took on the trappings of a full-scale musical performance last year at Four Seasons A+ Elementary. Parent Informances attracted 96 parents by turning a routine information session into a student-starring song-and-dance review.

Teachers and administrators created the special event after they noticed that parent turnout was much higher at their performing arts events than for Family Math and Reading Nights. With this in mind, the school's music and dance teachers got together to devise a livelier version of the latter event.

Using elements from the school's math and reading curricula, and working with student performers in Pre-K to sixth grades, they composed several song and created dance routines that would teach parents what their children were learning. The school's music teacher dubbed the routines "informances" for the way they combined information with performance.

Administrators hoped that the Parent Informances would help the staff dispel misconceptions about the school's arts-infused curriculum. Though Four Seasons followed the Minnesota state model, many parents had difficulty connecting with the nontraditional elements of their children's education. The Informances aimed to bridge that gap by helping parents know, through student-led performances, that their children had a firm grasp on the basic curriculum, even as they extended their work in the arts.

To accommodate divergent curricula from different grade levels, administrators hosted the event on four separate evenings in the fall. Two grades performed each evening, basing their program on their most recent units of work.

Pre-K and kindergarten students, for instance, modeled their Morning Meetings process and displayed artwork to show how

the visual arts linked to their writing unit on memoirs and to a science unit on bugs. Fifth- and sixth-graders used music and theater performances to enlighten parents about what they had been learning in the writing program.

Though many parents had to go to more than one event to see all of their children's presentations, almost all were happy to do so. Just about everyone gave positive feedback on evaluation forms distributed after the events.

"This is great. I hope you keep doing this kind of thing. I always wondered what [my child] meant when she said they went to 'Teaming,'" one parent said. Administrators were happy to see more parents get involved in their children's education.

"All performances are a natural outgrowth of the collaboration of the classroom teachers with the arts specialist teachers in the classrooms," said the principal. "We wanted to respond to the parents' desire to know what and how their children were learning and being taught.

"Parent Informances are about children performing and informing. They are building confidence, community, and collaboration in our school," the principal said after the series of programs.

*Naomi Adams
Home/School/Community Liaison
(651) 290-7595
howard.wilson@spps.org*