

Heart Healthy Lunch

Buffalo Public School #53

Buffalo, New York

Buffalo Public School #53 gave a gift from the heart to the heart last Valentine's Day with its Heart Healthy Lunch, an annual event that stresses the importance of good health and encourages parent involvement at school. This year's event drew 50 parents, who joined 70 students for a nutritious meal and an opportunity to participate in health screenings.

Heart Healthy Lunch began two years ago when the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) realized that other schools were holding health screenings to assist the families they served. The school site facilitator for its Closing the Gap initiative said that teachers and parents had commented on the need to inform and educate one another on "the importance of maintaining good health not only for ourselves, but as role models for our students."

The health clinic that works as a community partner in the school had conducted screenings in other schools, so that part was easy. By adding a healthy lunch to the event, the ATP turned a somewhat clinical practice into an enjoyable afternoon.

ATP staff advertised the event through "save the date" cards mailed home so parents could RSVP and arrange their work schedules around a longer lunch. The school published announcements in the school newsletter, sent home fliers, and set up an easel in the main hallway to promote the event.

On Valentine's Day, 120 parents and students gathered during the regular lunch period for a healthy meal together. Once parents had signed in, they were escorted to the VIP (Very Important Parent) lunch line. Lunch included salad, wrap sandwiches, and fresh fruit. After the meal, an ATP member took a picture of each family group before the health screening. Some parents stopped by teachers' offices to discuss their children's progress; others visited the school's Parent Room to check on upcoming events.

Health screenings, set up in the clinic, checked participants' blood pressure and body mass index. Health professionals answered questions and referred parents and students for other services, if needed.

All in all, teachers and staff were happy with the event. The school nurse was especially pleased by the turnout, which was up 65 percent from the year before. "Parents are able to enjoy quality time with their child and see their child engage during lunch with classmates and school staff," said one staff member. "Teachers and parents are able to connect on a social level in a small, casual setting."

And the students? "They are always excited and feel special when their parents come to school," she added.

The event cost \$100, most of it for food. Funds came from the school's Closing the Gap initiative. Administrators at Community School #53 plan to continue this heart-healthy event on future Valentine Days.

Pamela Brown
Site Facilitator, Closing the Gap
 (716) 864-9023
pam.mcgarvey@ccwny.org