

New Family Orientation Evening

*Ranch View Elementary School
Naperville, Illinois*

Veteran students showed new students the ropes during New Family Orientation Evening at Ranch View Elementary. More than 100 incoming students and their parents toured the school, met teachers, and generally got more comfortable with their new school.

The school's social worker introduced the idea after observing orientation nights at other area schools. The practice also aligns with one of the school's improvement goals: building a more supportive social and emotional environment for students. The event was particularly important this year because the district's English Language Learners' program was returning to Ranch View after several years at another school. This move would add to the school's diversity and, perhaps, increase the number of parents who needed and wanted good information about their children's educational program.

Staff publicized the event to incoming families in fliers sent with the required school registration forms. They also advertised the orientation on the school marquee. Parent volunteers, helping to organize the evening, called teachers, administrators, and returning students asking them to volunteer.

On a summer evening a week before school opened, 100 students and 100 parents came to the school. Orientation began by taking a photo of each incoming family group. Staff gave everyone nametags and the principal greeted every guest. After the introductions, families toured the building in small groups, led by teachers, parents, and student council members. Once everyone saw the classrooms, computer center, art room and other important areas, the group reassembled.

Parents watched an informational video, produced by two Ranch View teachers, about everyday events at the school, while children went to the gymnasium for supervised activities. At the end of the night, each family

received a gift bag, a list of community resources, and a map of the school.

Both teachers and parents—new and returning—enjoyed being part of the orientation event. “The tours were very helpful. Our tour guide was knowledgeable and was able to answer all of our questions,” a parent said.

“It was helpful to get to know some of the new students in this informal way before the start of school,” a teacher added.

The event cost about \$100. The Home and School association paid for the gift bags, and the School, Family, Community Partnership team bought the cookies and punch.

Plans are underway for a bigger and better orientation next year. The families of kindergartners will be included. Refreshments will change to become more of a dinner, given the time of day the event is held. The school is preparing a “survival handbook” for parents and students—an informal guide about the school and the community.

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