

2013

## Strengthening Student Achievement Through Family Learning Events

Jacquelin Ann Charlton  
*Central Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate\\_projects](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate_projects)



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Charlton, Jacquelin Ann, "Strengthening Student Achievement Through Family Learning Events" (2013). *All Graduate Projects*. 69.

[https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate\\_projects/69](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/graduate_projects/69)

This Graduate Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Student Projects at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Projects by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@cwu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@cwu.edu).

STRENGTHENING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT  
THROUGH FAMILY LEARNING EVENTS

---

A Project Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Education

Master Teacher

---

by

Jacquelin Ann Charlton

March 2013

STRENGTHENING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT  
THROUGH FAMILY LEARNING EVENTS

by

Jacquelin Ann Charlton

March 2013

Families and educators both have a great influence on a student's academic success. When the relationship between home and school is strained, students miss out on some of that success (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Parental influence is an important factor in a child's education, but parental engagement in their learning is even more important (Ho Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996). However, some parents may feel unwelcome or unneeded at school (Williams, Williams, & Ullman, 2002), so it's the educator's responsibility to understand and encourage parents to become more engaged in student learning. Hosting family learning events at school can build a bridge between home and school by blending learning, relationship-building, and fun. This project is designed to give kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) educators a handbook that they can use to host successful family learning events in their school.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I	PROJECT BACKGROUND ..... 1
	Introduction..... 1
	Statement of the Problem..... 2
	Purpose of the Project ..... 2
	Significance of the Project..... 3
	Definition of Terms..... 4
	Project Overview ..... 5
	Limitations of the Project..... 5
II	LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 6
	Parent Engagement ..... 7
	Barriers to Parent Engagement ..... 8
	Multicultural Benefits and Barriers ..... 10
	Barriers and Benefits to Teacher Engagement..... 11
	Learning Events ..... 13
	Importance of Games and Activities..... 14
	Summary ..... 16
III	PROJECT BACKGROUND ..... 17
	Project Procedure ..... 17
	Project Development..... 17
	Project Implementation..... 19
IV.	DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ..... 21
V.	SUMMARY ..... 24
	Implications..... 24
	Conclusions..... 25
	Recommendations..... 25
	REFERENCES ..... 27
	APPENDIX: Learning Event Handbook ..... 30

## CHAPTER I

### PROJECT BACKGROUND

#### Introduction

Between the ages of six and eighteen, students spend a great deal of their lives in school with teachers and classmates (Perie, Baker, & Bobbitt, 1997). They also spend a considerable amount of time with their families at home. Both of these groups are very influential on a child's learning years. Unfortunately, there are rarely strong bonds between a student's home life and school life. If the goal of education is to give students the tools they need to succeed in life, educators need to bridge the gap between home and school. According to the Washington State Legislature (2012), the goal for all Washington school districts is to provide "students with the opportunity to become responsible and respectful global citizens, to contribute to their economic well-being and that of their families and communities, to explore and understand different perspectives, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives" (Basic Education, para. 1).

To do this, teachers need to have families engaged with their material and parents understanding the importance of their involvement in their child's education. Teachers also need to be sensitive to family dynamics and understand their students, as well as any obstacles that might affect their learning. A good relationship between home and school is essential in helping students succeed, but it's not always easy to achieve (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Family learning events are a great way to blend two of the most influential groups in a child's life together in an engaging and educational way.

#### Statement of the Problem

Getting students and parents engaged in learning is of the utmost importance to educators (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Having parents involved in learning, not just school activities, makes a significant difference in student academic success (Ho Sue-Chu & Williams). Many times parents are given a bad reputation for their lack of involvement in their child's education, but it's often the fault of the school itself (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Many parents feel that their presence in school is either inconsequential or simply not wanted (Williams, Williams, & Ullman, 2002). There seems to be a gap between what parents expect from educators and what educators expect from parents. Good relationships need to be forged and nurtured to bridge this gap. Finding ways to bring educators and parents together in a non-threatening, educational, and fun environment will help develop relationships and encourage student success.

Although many educators see the importance of hosting a family learning event, the process of putting it together and making it successful can be overwhelming. The problem in many educational settings is that teachers do not have access to a handbook or instruction guide that will give them the information in an easy-to-read and easy to follow format.

#### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to give K-5 educators a resource that they can use to build more positive relationships with families and strengthen student achievement. John Dewey understood the importance of learning in a way that is active and participatory (Chamblis, 1991). Engaging students in their learning is paramount in their education. Students who are engaged learn better and remember what they learn (Dewey, 1938). Family learning events are a platform for this kind of learning. According to Petsche

(2012), “When students are engaged by games, learners feel more involved in school, and the activity of playing a game adds value that they can appreciate” (p. 44). The games and activities that make up learning events should be aligned to academic standards and with what students are learning in class. Family learning events can range from math or literacy nights to scrapbook or pet nights. Having these events will bring students, parents, and educators together in fun and non-threatening ways and will encourage positive relationships.

Hosting an event can be daunting and overwhelming, so many teachers and administrators choose not to include them in their school schedules. With an easy guidebook and simple, straightforward instructions, they can be enjoyable and painless to host. However, the idea isn’t just to bring families to school. While families need to be involved and have fun, the ultimate goal is to help students succeed in school. To that end, plans and activities need to be purposeful and organized to get optimal efficiency. There are studies that show the importance of using games in learning (Petsche, 2011; Salmina, Tihanova, & Chernaya, 2011). While not all learning events will include games, the idea is to include activities should encourage learning and be engaging to both students and their parents.

### Significance of the Project

When parents and educators spend time together in a way that encourages positive relationships, strengthens bonds, and creates an environment of learning, students win (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Having family learning events in a school will bring together parents, educators and students, as well as foster positive interaction to help drive student success. A handbook for educators will explain the importance of parental

influence and participation. It will also address communication issues between home and school. Finally, there should be clear instructions and recommendations on how to host an event. There should also be instruments included to use before and after the event to gauge success and make recommendations for future events. Having a handbook with these essentials will help educators facilitate a successful learning event by bringing students, their families and school staff together for a fun and educational event.

### Definition of Terms

The terms used in this project are to clarify the author's meaning.

1. Parental engagement - parental engagement in learning, as opposed to parental involvement, which is the level of participation that a parent has in their child's education and school life (Harris & Goodall, 2007).
2. Parents - include those adults caring for children, i.e. those who have the direct responsibility for safety and well-being of young people (Harris & Goodall, 2007).
3. Family Learning Events - school activities that include the school, students and their families with the goal of blending the three in engaging and education activities (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller & Moore, 2006).

### Project Overview

Chapter I examines the disconnect between a student's school life and home life. To bridge this disconnect, educators need to provide opportunities for parents and teachers to build positive and effective relationships that will ultimately benefit their

students. Family Learning Events can help bridge the gap between home and school while fostering positive relationships between school and home. Chapter II is a literature review that covers the importance of parent involvement, parent engagement and the use of games and activities for student learning. Chapter III explains handbook procedure, development and implementation. Chapter IV contains a description of the handbook for educators. Chapter V contains the summary, conclusions, and implications for the project along with recommendations for educators hosting a learning event.

#### Limitations of the Project

This handbook is best used by educators or administrators that are interested in hosting a learning event for their elementary school. Activities and games are provided for grades K-5. The activities and games may not be suitable for students in higher grade levels. Some of the activities may need additional school/class funding. All activities require student and parent participation, along with an educator/facilitator.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, parents have always played a large role in their child's education. Due to the ideas and teachings of education pioneers Locke, Rousseau, and others, the late 16th and early 17th century saw a shift from a strictly parental education to a more public one in Europe (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). As European education developed, the idea became popular in the colonies. Many schools in early America were organized along social class, with the upper and middle classes paying fees to run the school and have it cater to their social demands. Charity schools were then organized to provide a rudimentary education to those who could not afford other schools. It wasn't until the Revolutionary War era that America saw tax-supported universal education. Many American leaders, including Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Rush and George Washington, called for elementary education supported by state or federal taxes (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

Early American schools were generally large, single-room schoolhouses with one teacher teaching children of various ages and capabilities. Eventually, the factory model of schooling became the norm. Parents began to lose their voice in their children's education, and as education became more public, teachers usurped the role of educator as parents, somewhat reluctantly, stepped aside. Students were classified by grades and teachers taught what was assigned to that grade. As the population grew, the school system became more organized and the daily decision-making responsibilities were taken over by administrators (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

In 1897 the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) was established in order to quell the increasing separation between parental control and the public school. These mothers

met with teachers, expressed concerns with the principal, and encouraged other mothers to become involved. The NCM paved the way for today's Parent/Teachers Association (PTA). National reports emerged in the late 20th century calling for the need to connect a child's home life with their school experiences (Hiatt-Michael, 1994).

There are, of course, many factors that affect parent involvement. Sacker, Schoon & Bartley (2002) showed that Supplemental Education Services (SES) is just one of many factors. Working also seems to be a stumbling block for parent volunteers. But as much as educators would like to put the blame on families, sometimes it is the schools themselves that makes parents feel unwelcome. Building strong relationships and connections between family and school can help to combat this disconnect.

#### Parent Engagement

Parents are one of the most important influences in their child's learning and play an essential role in the achievement and success of a child throughout their educational years (Ferlazzo, 2011). Involvement is one of the key factors (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006), but there are many other ways parents influence their children academically. Many students have working or single parents who are unable to physically be there for them. Even so, most parents want what is best for their child (Epstein, 1987, 1995) and just need to know what to do and what resources are available for them. Schools are a great resource, but many parents feel threatened or unwanted at their child's school (Williams, Williams & Ullman, 2002).

A study conducted by Sylva et al. (2004) reinforced the link between cognitive achievement and parent engagement, particularly in the early years. However, it also showed that parental engagement in general school activities bear little or no benefit on

the individual child. Mere presence at school, or at school activities, does not increase learning unless there is a direct connection to learning.

In research by Harris & Goodall (2008), they found that although parental engagement was viewed as good by teachers, parents, and pupils alike, the interpretation of “good” was varied. Teachers viewed parental engagement as a means to “improve behavior and support for the school” while parents viewed it as “support to students.” The students themselves viewed it as “moral support” and as showing interest in their academic progress. This study points out that although all interested parties view parental engagement as important in student success, there are different views of what that means. Students sometimes give the impression of not wanting their parents involved in their school life, especially in secondary school. Interestingly enough, in this study students saw parental engagement as being about valuing education. They also thought that those of their peers who lacked this form of support were less likely to do well academically. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school but throughout life (Grace, Jethro & Aina, 2012).

#### Barriers to Parent Engagement

There are many barriers that affect parental involvement. One of the most cited reasons for lack of involvement is work commitments (Peña, 2000). There are many demands for a parent’s time and many parents, especially single working ones, are not able to spend extra time in their child’s school.

While work is one of the biggest preventers of parental involvement in school, it is not the only one. Williams, Williams & Ullman (2002) reported that 16% of parents were wary of overstepping some unwritten rule. Educators need to be sensitive to family

dynamics, get to know students and communicate clearly the importance of parental involvement in education. Increasing parent involvement requires the time and energy to gain the trust of parents and give tangible ways in which they can become more involved (Peña, 2000). Educators need to find ways to build relationships that empower students and families to achieve academic success.

Harris & Goodall (2008) argued that socio-economic status is a major factor in parental engagement, especially parental (especially maternal) level of education. Their research also showed that “the impact of parental engagement arises from parental values and educational aspirations continuously exhibited through parental enthusiasm for and their own experiences of education” (p.279).

Parents also have to see that they can make a difference. Parents will be more involved if they see that their help is supporting and enhancing their child’s education (Peña, 2000). This suggests that educators need to view students more holistically. Educators can’t afford to make assumptions about a student’s home life and perceived lack of support. In a study by Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore (2006), teachers and researchers worked together to understand children’s development in and out of school. In order to get to know their students and families more deeply, they went into their homes and communities and actively looked for ways to build strong relationships with the families or guardians. They discovered that to have effective relationships, communication must be built on trust. “Parents and school personnel must trust that each has the best interests of the children at heart and a desire to work together for those children” (p. 3) .

Although most parents want their children to do well in school and life, many are uncertain as to how to become involved or to help. In many schools, teachers can use learning events to share learning strategies with parents and give them information on how they could encourage and support their students at home.

#### Multicultural Benefits and Barriers

As populations become increasingly diverse, many educators find themselves working with students who are not like them in race, religion, culture and language. Teachers may feel that these families are unreachable because of cultural and language differences. Educators have to be creative in finding ways to help these families support their child's academic success. In addition, the families may feel out of touch with the school and unsure how to approach teachers, who can appear unfriendly or unresponsive to their needs. When a teacher uses "educational jargon" that a parent is unfamiliar with, parents can be intimidated and communication can stall (Peña, 2000).

Crozier and Davies (2007) showed that many parents from ethnic groupings know little about the educational system. Schools see these parents as 'hard to reach.' The perceived role of responsibility plays a key factor in shaping parents' views about what they feel is necessary, important or even permissible for them to do in regards to their child's school. According to Harris and Goodall (2008), "Role definitions are complexly shaped by family and cultural experiences and are subject to potential internal conflict (parent as housekeeper/breadwinner/nurse/teacher)"(p. 280). However, Lopez & Donovan (2009), state that all parents need to be seen as "resources and strengths that can positively and effectively influence any partnership" (p. 222).

Peña (2000) states that many Mexican American parents believe that the best thing they can do is to maintain a “respectful distance from the educational system. They are respectful of a teacher’s position and afraid to intervene” (p.44). Peña also points out that Hispanic parents are more trusting and less comfortable in school settings than African Americans and Caucasians.

There are many positive outcomes to getting all parents, including Mexican American parents, involved in family learning events. According to the report by Peña, researchers found that increased parent involvement helps to build up the overall school-community relationship. Also, when low-income parents are trained to work with students they “develop better attitudes, become more active, and help support school activities” (p. 43). Being involved also increases the interest and support concerning their children’s educational progress and their aspirations for their children’s futures. As an added benefit, many of these parents also begin to seek additional education opportunities for themselves (Peña, 2000).

#### Barriers and Benefits to Teacher Engagement

Building bridges and making connections with parents has been shown to help students, but many teachers are still reluctant to add parent help to their “toolbox” (Hiatt, 1994). The extra time and work is difficult when teachers already have numerous demands for their time. According to Epstein (1985), some teachers do not believe that parents will fully understand or follow through with activities given to them. This gives them reason to hold off on asking and receiving help from willing parents. In Eugenia Berger’s book *Parents as Partners in Education*, Berger points out that some teachers believe that parent involvement jeopardizes their professional status. Additionally,

tensions exist between parents who want to be more involved and have a voice in their children's education and the educators who want to do their job (Hiatt, 1994).

According to Peña's study (2000), parents recognized that teachers sometimes felt threatened by increased parent involvement. Nevertheless, teachers must change their attitudes regarding parent involvement and recognize the advantages of parent-teacher collaboration. Peña found that parents were not in the schools to judge teachers or their teaching, but "merely to provide assistance where possible" (p. 52).

To build these bridges and collaborate, teachers need time to plan and organize parent activities. Teachers are so heavily burdened with teaching duties as it is, many feel unable to find the time to work with parents (Peña, 2000). Looking to administrators, who also understand the importance of parent involvement, teachers are unable to find an ally who will give them proper training and extra time to incorporate parents in their planning. Pena's findings reveal that administrators need to find ways to provide the time for teachers to plan and work with parents in order to increase parent involvement and participation. Most importantly, schools need to provide a welcoming atmosphere and an open door policy so that all parents will feel welcome and encouraged when they come to their child's school for any reason (Peña, 2000).

### Learning Events

One way to build connections and to help students succeed academically is to hold learning events at school. These events are educational, engaging and a great way to get families and educators together. These connections, "built on relationships, listening, welcoming, and shared decision-making can produce multiple benefits for students" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p.10 ).

Learning events can include Math Nights, Literacy Nights, “Bring Your Pet to School” Night, etc. The possibilities are endless, though one thing they must have in common is family engagement. Getting students and their parents engaged is of utmost importance (Ferrara, 2009). John Dewey believed that imagination “is common to us all as a vehicle of learning” (Chambliss, 1991, p. 43). Educators need to let students and their parents get away from traditional homework and passivity and encourage them to be involved and excited about learning.

Knowing the cultures of not only the school, but also the students and their families, is also important. Activities and games which are engaging and relevant to a wide variety of families will make the most impact. Learning events build trust between families and schools, and that trust needs to have its roots in mutual respect (Kyle et. al, 2006). Paying attention to details and adaptations that might be needed for students and parents is central in planning a successful event.

The primary purpose of holding family nights is to improve student learning. Getting parents involved in their child’s education will help improve the child’s success academically (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Bringing families on board and involving them in their child’s education is essential to success (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). Additionally, the more teachers get to know their students and their families on a deeper level, the better they can teach to those student’s individual needs. Again, the goal for education is to give student the tools that they need to succeed in life (Washington State Legislature, 2012).

When learning events take place, it’s not only the students, families and educators that can get involved. Many events also encourage the community to get involved. There

is much evidence that shows linking family or community involvement with learning has a great effect on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Dewey was convinced that “the ordinary contacts of day to day community life, be they social, economic, cultural or political, provided real and significant learning situations” (Flanagan, 1994, p. 2).

#### Importance of Games and Activities

Dewey, as the father of progressivism, understood the importance of learning in a way that is active and participatory (Chamblis, 1991).

The old education was predominantly static in subject matter, authoritarian in methods, and mainly passive and receptive from the side of the young...the imagination of educators did not go beyond provision of a fixed and rigid environment of subject matter, on drawn moreover from sources altogether too remote from the experience of the pupil. (Flanagan, 1994, p. 1)

Engaging students in their own learning is paramount to their education. Herbert Spencer and John Dewey have been celebrated for diagnosing a central problem with modern formal education: “Students can learn a great deal about the world and yet remain bored and unable to use the knowledge to enrich their experience” (Egan, 2002, p.147). Students who are engaged learn better. Their learning “sticks” and they are later able to build upon that learning and succeed academically (Dewey, 1938).

Doing an activity just for the sake of doing an activity does not necessarily promote learning. The games and activities used during family learning events should be aligned to academic standards. With purposeful activities and games, students and

parents will be engaged with learning. “When students are engaged by games, learners feel more involved in school, and the activity of playing a game adds value that they can appreciate” (Petsche, 2011, p. 44). According to Petsche (2011), one of the chief ways that playing games can help students is by providing a different venue for learning when traditional ways do not work. Not all children learn by listening and watching a teacher teach a lesson, some students need to be active and participating in something when learning. Playing games also give students a chance to practice other social and problem solving skills in a non-threatening environment (Petsche, 2011).

Children enjoy playing games, but according to research by Salmina, Tihanova, & Chernaya (2011), “Games occupy the leading position in the developmental process of preschool children, (and) still remain important for the further cognitive and personal development of primary school children and even later. Both children and grown-up people enjoy playing games in their spare time” (p. 56).

### Summary

As the evolution of education has occurred, many parents have taken a back seat to their child’s education. Both educators and parents are realizing the importance to working together and fostering a positive learning environment for children. Parents are getting more involved and educators are working on ways to bring families together and give parents the tools that they need to help their child succeed academically. Having students play games and do hands-on activities with parents and friends at family learning events is a great way to engage students in their learning. The objective of learning events is to build bridges, develop relationships and help students succeed

academically. Through these events bridges are built, relationships fostered and children are one step closer to success.

## CHAPTER III

### BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Parent engagement, as well as parent involvement, is important to the academic success of students. While getting parents involved in their child's lives may be easy, getting them engaged in their learning is more difficult. Many parents feel that they are not needed in school, and many educators feel that families can sometimes be more trouble than help in a classroom (Harris & Goodall, 2008). The evidence of the importance of parental engagement however is overwhelmingly positive (Peña, 2000; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Ferlazzo, 2011; Henderson, 2003). Finding fun, educational activities that will interest parents as well as students is a good place to start.

While most educators understand the importance of getting families involved (Peña, 2000; Ferrara, 2009), they sometimes feel overwhelmed with the task of doing it (Peña, 2000). Since both games and family learning events have been shown to be a great way to get families involved and help students learn (Petsche, 2011; Kyle, et. al, 2006), there is a need to get easy to understand and practical instruction handbook to educators that wish to hold learning events. The handbook should be designed for K-5 educators that will give background information about the importance of learning events and practical information on how to facilitate them.

#### Project Procedure

Procedures for gathering information included conducting research to find information and activities using various websites, books, educational journals and information from other school districts that would give the handbook validity and

substance. Research was done to include information for educators that explains the importance of parental influence and participation in student learning and that addresses relationship and communication issues between home and school.

In addition, samples of brochures, invitations and parent letters were studied and some used in the handbook. The handbook also has clear instructions and recommendations on how to host an event, including types of learning events, lists of games and activities, and samples of activities for students in grades kindergarten through fifth.

Because follow-up is important in knowing how to make an event even better the next time, instruments were included to use before and after the event to gauge success and make recommendations for future events.

### Project Development

Educators have many demands placed upon them throughout the school year and even in the summer months. Many teachers spend a lot of their own time exploring ways to teach, finding new avenues to teach creatively and either brushing up on skills or learning new ones all the time. There is no shortage of places to look when a teacher wants to find new ideas to incorporate into his/her classroom. The internet is bursting with sites such as Pinterest ([www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)), TeacherspayTeacher ([www.Teacherspayteacher.com](http://www.Teacherspayteacher.com)) and other creative and educator-friendly websites. It's easy to get overwhelmed with ideas and end up doing nothing. When looking into ways to incorporate more parent involvement into the classroom, the author found information about family learning events. Learning events sounded like a fun and creative way to get parents more involved in student learning. A lot of information was found on how to host

an event, but not very much information telling why the events are important to teachers, parents and students. The idea to research the value of learning events came about when the author suggested an event at school and was asked by the administrator to give reasons and proof that they were a legitimate academic activity, and not just for fun.

Although there was a lot of information about hosting an event, most books on the subject were overwhelming and daunting. The idea of creating a compact handbook designed for small elementary school educators was hatched.

When spending time thinking and brainstorming with co-workers, a word web was developed with ideas on why family learning events were important. Some of the ideas included parent involvement, parent engagement, game ideas, school/ home communication, and increased learning for students. Initial research showed that there was ample information available, and the project began.

After completing research on each of the subcategories that would explain the “why” of hosting learning events, the handbook itself was created. Using many ideas from books, websites and journal articles, the handbook pulled together why schools should host learning events, ideas on how to host an event and evaluations and follow-ups to use after the event is held.

### Project Implementation

This handbook was designed for educators and/or administrators in kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. The handbook will be used at a private elementary school to develop and hold learning events for families each winter quarter. The school is a small, rural school with approximately 95 students in kindergarten through eighth grades. There is one teacher for each grade level and all elementary teachers teach multiple

subjects. The handbook will be available to all teachers that wish to participate or facilitate a learning event.

This handbook will also be presented at the Northwest Christian Schools International conference workshop next fall in Canada. NWCSI is a collaboration of large and small Christian schools in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, Canada. The handbook will be available to those teachers or administrators that are interested in hosting an event at their school.

## CHAPTER IV

### DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The project is a compact handbook to be used by educators and administrators in small kindergarten through fifth grade schools that wish to hold family learning events at their school.

The first section of the handbook contains research information about the importance of parent involvement in children's education. Parents are one of the most important influences in their child's learning and play an essential role in the achievement and success of a child throughout their educational years (Ferlazzo, 2011). Involvement is one of the key factors (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006) that influence their children academically. The handbook also discusses some of the issues that some parents may have with school involvement. While work is one of the biggest preventers of parental involvement in school, it is not the only one. Williams, Williams & Ullman (2002) reported that 16% of parents were wary of overstepping some unwritten rule at schools. Parents also have to see that they can make a difference. Parents will be more involved if they see that their help is supporting and enhancing their child's education (Peña, 2000).

Next, the handbook focuses on the "why" educators would want to host learning events in their school. It explains what a learning event is and how it can impact student achievement and parent/school relationships. These events are educational, engaging and a great way to get families and educators together. The primary purpose of holding family nights is to improve student learning. Getting parents involved in their child's education will help improve the child's success academically (Desforges and Abouchar,

2003). Bringing families on board and involving them in their child's education is essential to success (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006).

Additionally, the more teachers get to know their students and their families on a deeper level, the better they can teach to those student's individual needs.

The next section is the "how" to host such events. The handbook gives a detailed checklist of what needs to be done to host a successful event according to authors well versed in hosting learning events. Each bullet point explains what to do and why it is important in the planning. Deciding what type of event and the games and activities that are planned are important tasks. Doing an activity just for the sake of doing an activity does not necessarily promote learning. The games and activities used during family learning events should be aligned to academic standards. With purposeful activities and games, students and parents will be engaged with learning. "When students are engaged by games, learners feel more involved in school, and the activity of playing a game adds value that they can appreciate" (Petsche, 2011, p. 44).

Follow up is important to learning events. The handbook explains that educators will want to get feedback from the parents, students and other helpers at the event. This information is valuable in planning an even better and more successful event next time.

The appendix is a gathering of information about different types of learning events, games and activities to play, communication ideas, and follow up assessments that can be used. Games and activities are divided up between math night and literature night ideas and further divided between grades kindergarten through second and third through fifth. Samples of flyers to send home are included as well as samples of follow up assessments to hand out to parents as they leave the event.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY

Parents have always been an important part of a child's education. As society and education have changed, so has the gap between home and school. Studies have shown the importance of parental involvement and engagement in regard to student success. As educators realize the value of working together with families, they become more aware of the need of activities that bring school and home together. Planning learning events that focus on curricular and school goals in a fun and family friendly way will bridge the gap that sometimes exists between home and school. While educators understand the need for such activities and events, the time to plan them can be hard to find. A handbook that explains the importance of family involvement in education and gives kindergarten through fifth grade educators concrete examples and ideas on how and why to host events is essential. Hosting learning events at school can build bridges, develop relationships and help students succeed academically. Through these events children can be one step closer to success.

#### Implications

When educators use this handbook and host family learning events the expectation is that combining family and school together will increase student achievement. Family participation has a great impact on student learning. Many families are hesitant to get involved in their child's education for a number of reasons. Teachers also have reasons that they are tentative to have parents in their classroom. Bringing these two important groups of people together in a non-threatening and fun way will help to bridge the gap that sometimes exists. Most learning events are based on curriculum skills

and activities that educators want to focus on with their students. As students play and practice skills in a fun and engaging manner, their learning will increase. Students who are engaged learn better. Their learning “sticks” and they are later able to build upon that learning and succeed academically (Dewey, 1938).

### Conclusion

At the conclusion of this project, teachers and administrators will have an easy to use handbook that will walk them through the process of hosting a learning event at their school. They will have the background information that explains why they should host such events, and the hands-on materials that will be needed to plan and facilitate a successful event.

### Recommendations

This handbook will be used by kindergarten through fifth grade educators and administrators at a small, rural, private elementary school in Central Washington each winter quarter. This handbook will also be presented at a Christian School conference in the fall of 2013. The handbook will be given to other educators who wish to host events at their school.

In using the handbook the author realized that the handbook did not give information about using activities for children of many different ages. Their event needed to include activities for a wide variety of ages and skill levels as families that came were made up of children ages 2-14. The activities that were planned were grade specific and not geared toward such a wide age range. In making a handbook that would benefit educators *and* families, there needs to be mention of extra planning for various skills and ages.

Another recommendation would be to include a wider variety of event ideas. This handbook focused on math and literacy events because they are the most common, and the events that the school was interested in hosting. Other events that could be included might be, “Family Pet Night”, “Family History Night”, “Sharing Hobbies and Interests Night” or even “Poetry and Pajamas Night”.

## REFERENCES

- Berger, E. (2004). *Parents as partners in education: Families and schools working together*. 6th Ed. United States of America: Merrill.
- Chamblis, J.J. (1991) Dewey's idea of imagination in philosophy and education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 25:42-49.
- Crozier, G. & J. Davies (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. *British Educational Research Journal*. 33. No. 3: 295-313.
- Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Annesley, NG: DfES Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience & Education*. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Egan, K. (2002). *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning*. Yale University Press: New Haven & London.
- Epstein, J. (1985). *Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teachers practices and parent involvement*. Report No. 3: 121-136. New York: DeGruyter.
- Epstein, J. (1995) School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76: 701-712.
- Ferlazzo, L. (2011). Involvement or engagement? *Educational Leadership*, 68 (8), 10-14.
- Ferrara (2009). Broadening the myopic vision of parent involvement. *Community Journal*, 1059308x: Fall 2009, Vol. 19, Issue 2. Academic Development Institute
- Flanagan, F (1994). Programme 7. *The Great Educators*. Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick.

- Frabotta, S. (2009). Fun-filled family literacy nights. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 75(4), 19-22.
- Grace, A., Jethro, O., & Aina, F. (2012). Roles of parent on the academic performance of pupils in elementary schools. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences*, 2(1), 196-201.
- Harris, A., & Chrispeels, J.H. (2006). *Improving Schools and Educational Systems: International Perspectives*. London: Routledge.
- Harris, A., & Goodall, J. (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. *Educational Research*. 50(3), 277-289.
- Henderson, A.T., & Mapp, K.L., (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hiatt-Michael, D. (1994). Parent involvement in American public schools: A historical perspective 1642-2000. *School Community Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 2,(Fall/Winter 1994). 247-258.
- Ho Sui-Chu, El, & Williams, J.D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on 8th grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*. 69, no. 2: 126-141.
- Kyle, D., McIntyre, E., Miller, K. B., & Moore, G. H. (2006). *Bridging School & Home Through Family Nights*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.
- Lopez, C., & Donovan, L. (2009). Involving Latino parents with mathematics through family math nights: A review of the literature. *Journal Of Latinos & Education*, 8(3), 219-230. doi:10.1080/15348430902888666

- McGahey, M. (2005). Tips & Tactics: Hosting a family literacy night at your school. *Teacher Librarian*, 32(5), 28-30.
- Perie, M., Baker, D., & Bobbitt, S. A. (1997). *Time Spent Teaching Core Academic Subjects in Elementary Schools: Comparisons Across Community, School, Teacher, and Student Characteristics*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.
- Petsche, J. (2011). Engage and excite students with educational games. *Knowledge Quest*, 40(1), 42-44.
- Peña, D. C. (2000). Parent involvement: Influencing factors and implications. *Journal Of Educational Research*, 94 (1): 42.
- Sacker, A., Schoon, I. & Bartley, M. (2002). Social inequality in educational achievement and psychological adjustment throughout childhood: Magnitude and mechanisms. *Social Science and Medicine*. 55: 863-880.
- Salmina, N. G., Tihanova, I. G., & Chernaya, O. V. (2011). Creation of developing curricula using the board games. *Psychological Science & Education*, 2, 55-61.
- Williams, B., Williams, J., & Ullman, A. (2002). *Parental Involvement in Education*. London: Department for Education and Skills
- Washington State Legislature. (2012). Goals of school districts. In *Revised Code of Washington* (RCW 28A.150.210). Retrieved from <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.150.210>

# Strengthening Student Achievement through Learning Events: A Kindergarten Through Fifth Grade Educator's Handbook

Jackie Charlton  
2013

Note to educators: This handbook is best used by educators or administrators that are interested in hosting a learning event for their elementary school. Activities and games are provided for grades K-5. The activities and games may not be suitable for students in higher

grade levels. Some of the activities may need additional school/class funding. All activities require student and parent participation, along with an educator/facilitator and additional helpers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

The “Why” of Family Learning Events .....	33
The “How” of Family Learning Events .....	36
Learning Event Checklist.....	39
Math Night Activity Ideas.....	42
Math Activities for Grades K-2 .....	43
Math Activities for Grades 3-5 .....	47
Literacy Night Activity Ideas.....	56
Literacy Activities for Grades K-2 .....	57
Literacy Activities for Grades 3-5 .....	61
Communication .....	65
Follow Up/Assessment Ideas .....	69
Resources .....	72

## The “Why” of Family Learning Events

Families and educators both have a great influence on a student’s academic success. When the relationship between home and school is strained, students miss out on some of that success (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Parental influence is an important factor in a child’s education, but parental engagement in their learning is even more important (Ho Sui-Chu & Williams, 1996). However, some parents may feel unwelcome or unneeded at school (Williams, Williams, & Ullman, 2002), so it’s the educator’s responsibility to understand and encourage parents to become more engaged in student learning. Hosting family learning events at school can build a bridge between home and school by blending learning, relationship-building, and fun. This handbook is designed to give kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) educators a handbook that they can use to host successful family learning events in their school.

Between the ages of six and eighteen, students spend a great deal of their lives in school with teachers and classmates (Perie, Baker, & Bobbitt, 1997). They also spend a considerable amount of time with their families at home. Both of these groups are very influential on a child’s learning years. Unfortunately, there are rarely strong bonds

between a student's home life and school life. If the goal of education is to give students the tools they need to succeed in life, educators need to bridge the gap between home and school.

In addition, as populations become increasingly diverse, many educators find themselves working with students who are not like them in race, religion, culture and language. Teachers may feel that the families are unreachable because of cultural and language differences. They have to be creative in finding ways to help these families support their child's academic success. The families may feel out of touch with the school and unsure how to approach teachers, who can appear unfriendly or unresponsive to their needs.

One way to build connections and to help students succeed academically is to hold learning events at school. These events are educational, engaging and a great way to get families and educators together. These connections, "built on relationships, listening, welcoming, and shared decision-making can produce multiple benefits for students" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p.10 ).

Learning events can be many things: Math Nights, Literacy Nights, "Bring Your Pet to School" Night, etc. The one thing they must have in common is family engagement. Getting students and their parents engaged is of utmost importance (Ferrara, 2009). John Dewey believed that imagination "is common to us all as a vehicle of learning" (Chambliss, 1991, p. 43). Educators need to let students and their parents get away from traditional homework and passivity and encourage them to be involved and excited about learning.

The primary purpose of holding family nights is to improve student learning. Getting parents involved in their child's education will help improve the child's success academically (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). Bringing families on board and involving them in their child's

education is essential to success (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006). Additionally, the more teachers get to know their students and their families on a deeper level, the better they can teach to those student's individual needs. Again, the goal for education is to give student the tools that they need to succeed in life (Washington State Legislature, 2012).

When learning events take place, it's not only the students, families and educators that can get involved. Many events also encourage the community to get involved. Much evidence shows that linking family or community involvement with learning has a great effect on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Dewey was convinced that "the ordinary contacts of day to day community life, be they social, economic, cultural or political, provided real and significant learning situations" (Flanagan, 1994, p.2)

## The "How" of Learning Events

There are many different types of learning events that can take place. This handbook will address primarily literacy and math nights as these are two of the most popular events to take place. For many other event ideas please refer to the reference section of the handbook for books, websites and other resources available to help you plan and implement a learning event at your school.

- **First things first:** Talk to everyone. Find excited and eager staff that are willing and able to put a little time and energy into

doing the event. Then you need to decide with your administration and staff what type of learning event you are interested in doing. You will need to look at your school's curricular goals, your school's emphasis and needs, the population and culture of your school and the strengths and weaknesses of those that are planning the event.

- **Assemble a team.** You will need a lot of support to host a successful event. One person alone cannot do it! Find enthusiastic volunteers that are willing to put the time and energy into the event. You will need a coordinator, activity and game leaders, set up and clean up volunteers, advertising person and people to take care of refreshments among others. Get lots of volunteers- the more the merrier.
- **Next start planning!** See the attached planning guide and get planning! Keep in mind what your goal is for the event. An activity just for the sake of activities doesn't work. Focus on what you want to accomplish with the event. Don't try to do more than you are capable of doing and get people involved!
- **Send those invitations!** Publicize the event to everyone in your school in as many ways as possible. Parents may not see a blurb

in the school newsletter, or the note home, but might just hear in on the radio on the way to work!

- **Prepare, prepare, prepare!** Don't worry about over preparing! Be ready for anything. Trouble shoot before the event with your team and don't leave anything to chance. Have extra materials, extra food, extra everything just in case.
- **The night of the event.** Have a great time engaging and building relationships with your students and their families. If everything is in place, and everyone is doing their job, you should be able to enjoy the event and focus on your students and families. If the unexpected happens, try to "roll" with it and make the best of the situation.

Have evaluations ready to go and give them to each family to fill out. This is a great time to use an incentive! The more feedback you get the better the next event will be.

- **After the event.** You'll want to follow up on the evaluations and check in with parents who didn't make it. Find out why they weren't able to come. Maybe that can factor into the planning for the next event. Follow up with students also. Talk to them about the activities that they did at the family event.

Were they fun? Did they enjoy the time with their parents in school? Talk about why you did each activity. Get the students involved in planning the next event.

## Learning Event Checklist

### 8 weeks before the event:

- Determine interest and discuss purpose, format, date, and time of the event.
- Develop a team and divide up tasks. For example, you may need someone to choose games and activities, someone to lead activities, do the advertising and a person to coordinate the event.

### 6 weeks before the event:

- Hold a planning meeting to finalize the theme and schedule for the event.
- Also firm up roles of teachers and notify parents and others that may be interested in volunteering that night.

### 4 weeks before the event:

- Meet with team and parent volunteers and identify helpers that will assist with refreshments, furniture arrangement, door prizes and decorations.
- Give everyone that is helping written instructions concerning their job and a schedule for the evening.

**2 weeks before the event:**

- Send out invitations to parents and if wanted, the community.
- Have a system in place for RSVP's and a contact person if parents have any questions.
- Make sure each presenter or activity coordinator has everything he/she needs to be successful. If appropriate, each activity or game should have a handout to go home with students and parents so they can take the learning home with them and do the activity again with their family.

**1 week before the event:**

- Continue to promote the learning event to students and get them excited! This could include prizes or incentives for attendance at the event.
- Tally up RSVP's and inform presenters and coordinators so they have enough supplies.
- Meet with team and firm up details of the evening and finalize the schedule.

- Design a PowerPoint presentation to welcome students and parents that gives them the schedule, locations and time of activities for the evening.
- Plan refreshments and make sure arrangements are made for equipment if needed.
- Identify a person who will hand out evaluations at the end of the evening. This is another time when incentives come in handy!

**Day of the event:**

- Pick up any required equipment, make sure it's working and that the person using it understands how it works.
- Pick up refreshments
- Insure that set up is complete and make sure there is a crew to "tear down" and clean up after the event.
- Assign someone to take pictures during the event- you'll want those later!

**After the event:**

- Meet with team to prepare and send thank you notes to those volunteers and helpers who assisted in making the night a success.

- Review evaluations that were handed out at the end of the evening. Prepare a report of information to be shared with those involved and file it with information for the next event.

## **Math Night Activity Ideas**

The concepts in these activities will help students learn essential new skills and/or reinforce skills already learned in class. Organizers will need to identify the concepts that educators wish to focus on during the math learning event and choose accordingly. This is only a small sample of activities and games that are available. Please see the resources section at the end of the handbook for a list of other places to look for more ideas.

While not all learning events have stations, setting up your event into various stations is a great way to organize it.

Students and their parents move about the evening experiencing the different activities in a controlled and sequential manner.

**Grades K-2**

**Math Activities and Games**

## Frog Hop Addition

Please note: Text and images on pages 44-65 have been redacted due to copyright concerns.

\*adapted from Family Math Night: Standards in Action.

Is It More or Less?

\*adapted from Family Math Night: Standards in Action.

## Subtract-a-graph

\*adapted from *Family Math Games* (Educational Solutions Northwest).

**Grades 3-5**

**Math Activities and Games**



Which Place is Best?

\*adapted from Family Math Night: Standards in Action.

Which Place is Best?

## Money Toss

\*adapted from Family Math Night: Standards in Action.



# Fruit Salad

\*adapted from Family Math Night: Standards in Action.

## Fruit Salad Cards

## Multiplication Scramble

\*adapted from Family Math Games (Educational Solutions Northwest).

## Multiplication Scramble

## Literacy Night Activity Ideas

Most teachers of elementary students say that learning to read and improving reading skills is one of the most important tasks that students will do in school. If students struggle with reading many other aspects of school will suffer also. Many parents are eager to help their students read better, but many lack the knowledge of strategies that will improve their child's reading skills. Literacy nights can not only showcase reading in a fun and exciting light, but can give parents insight on ways to encourage and help their child become a better reader.

### Read Aloud

One station during literacy night should always be a read aloud station. You can either have parents read to students or have a guest reader (fireman, policeman or elected official).

### Take-home For Parents

Have flyers or pamphlets for parents to take home with reading strategies and tips on helping their child improve their reading skills.

## **Grades K-2**

# **Literature Activities and Games**

\*adapted from Family Reading Nights by elucas at  
teacherspayteachers

\*adapted from Family Reading Nights by elucas at  
teacherspayteachers

# Winter Vocabulary

\*adapted from a lesson by Y. Denerson-Horne

**Grades 3-5**  
**Literature Activities**  
**and Games**



\*adapted from Family Reading Nights by elucas at  
teacherspayteachers

Parents and students work together to create  
Mad Libs...they will have to remember what an  
adjective, adverb, present tense verb and  
plural nouns are! Good luck and have fun!

## Reader's Theater

Reader's theater are plays that readers read and don't have to worry about memorizing!

At this station choose a reader's theater play, assign parts (kids get to choose for their parents!), and then start reading! Here are some of our choices...

A Little Excitement by Marc Hashman

Angelina Ice Skates by Katherine Holabird

The Ant and the Grasshopper (Aesop's Fable)

## Communication

Communicating about your learning event is very important.

Invitations need to be sent out to all parents, making sure to send invitations in the parent's first language if that is a concern. All parents need to feel welcome and wanted for the learning event to be a success. Included with the invitation should be the 'whys' of hosting the event. The goal may be to boost learning skills, build relationships, or to celebrate skills learned in class, but the 'why' should be stated so parents will buy in to

**You are invited to:**

**Family Math Night!**

On \_\_\_\_\_ (date and time)

\_\_\_\_\_ (school name) will be holding an exciting event called Family Math Night! Students, parents, siblings, and other relatives are invited to attend a fun-filled evening of mathematical pleasure. The intent of Family Math Night is to participate in math standards in action as we strengthen the mathematical application, problem solving, and communication skills of students through the power of family interaction.

**Come and join us for  
Family Literacy Night!**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Place:**

We will be celebrating literacy by listening to guest readers, learning about new books, and learning skills to help students become better readers.

We'll have a light meal so you don't need to bring a thing- except your family and a ready spirit of reading and fun!

Please return the form below and let us know if you will be attending.

-----  
YES! My family will be attending Family Literacy Night on

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Number of People



## **Follow Up/Assessment**

### **Ideas**

## How was Family Math Night?

We want to make our next event even better- so please give us your feedback!

What games did your family like?

For children: Which games will you most want to play again?

What suggestions would you make for Family Events in the future?

Other comments:

## How was Family Reading Night?

We want to make our next event even better- so please give us your feedback!

What games and activities did your family like best?

For children: Which games or activities will you most want to play again?

What suggestions would you make for Family Events in the future?

Other comments:

## Resources

McGahey, M. (2005). Tips & tactics: Hosting a family literacy night at your school.

*Teacher Librarian*, 32(5), 28-30.

Kyle, D., McIntyre, E., Miller, K. B., & Moore, G. H. (2006). *Bridging School & Home*

*Through Family Nights*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Frabotta, S. (2009). Fun-filled family literacy nights. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*,

75(4), 19-22.

Lopez, C., & Donovan, L. (2009). Involving Latino parents with mathematics through

family math nights: A review of the literature. *Journal Of Latinos & Education*,

8(3), 219-230. doi:10.1080/15348430902888666

Petsche, J. (2011). Engage and excite students with educational games. *Knowledge*

*Quest*, 40(1), 42-44.

Taylor-Cox, J. (2005). *Family Math Night: Math Standards in Action*. Larchmont, NY:

Eye on Education.

### Other Online Resources:

[www.familymathandscience.org](http://www.familymathandscience.org) (Family Math and Science Fun)

[www.paralin.com](http://www.paralin.com) (Free online translations)

[www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org) (International Reading Association)

[www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com) (Education and other classroom ideas)

[www.standards.nctm.org](http://www.standards.nctm.org) (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics)

[www.teacherspayteachers.com](http://www.teacherspayteachers.com) (Teacher sharing website)

[www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html](http://www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html) (Reader's Theater)