A Winter Holiday Party that Involves Families

by Jacqueline Osborne

Communicating the goals and values of a preschool program to parents is one of the most important jobs of teachers and administrators. Doing this job well can enhance the program of the school and also its reputation in the community.

When parents feel they understand what a program is trying to achieve, they feel more comfortable and confident about their choice of school. If they can communicate that understanding to others, the reputation of the school is enhanced, and the staff who run it take more pride in their work and feel more motivation to provide the best program they can to the children they work with.

The involvement of parents in the program of the school also has positive effects on child development. Children’s self-image and achievement increase when their parents are involved with their schools (Morrison, 1988). This outcome can lead in turn to greater parent satisfaction with the program of the school.

Bulletin boards with notices of current school events, newsletters that alert parents to upcoming activities, and parent meetings are some of the important ways we have to reach families with information about our programs. Holiday parties can provide another mode of effective communication and can be a lot of fun for everyone involved as well. Horowitz and Paggella (1986) note that when parents participate in their child’s life at school, they begin to see their child

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Dear parents,

Welcome to our party! We are delighted to have you here, and have planned many activities for you and your child to enjoy. Please make your way around the room any way you would like, and enjoy these activities with your child.

1. Our book corner has some favorite books your child may want to read with you. It also has several books we have made as a class, and a story on the flannelboard your child may want to tell to you. Activities like these help children learn many things about books and written language.

2. Our puzzle corner has some homemade puzzles for you to enjoy together. These help children learn the relationships between wholes and parts. Our flannelboard house encourages children to sort and classify.

3. The bulletin board in the block corner has shape riddles for you to enjoy. Shapes are an important beginning step for learning about math and reading.

4. Please have some cookies and punch in our housekeeping corner. Your children helped to make them. The children learn many social skills in this area, of which hospitality is only one.

5. Our pendulum in the back hallway lets your child experiment with space and gravity. Activities like these help children learn about the physical world.

6. Add a few links to our chain! Transforming paper and sticking it together with glue, staples, or tape helps children experiment with space and learn about transformations in the physical world.

7. Our lotto game, like other group games, helps children practice cooperation and group activity, as well as matching skills. Please stop by and have a game.

8. Your children can tell you the story that is on our computer. Our computer activities help the children learn about reading and math, as well as build knowledge about ways to use this machine.

in a new way with new abilities and skills. They also feel more comfortable with the learning environment they have chosen for their child and get new ideas for games and projects to do at home. Today's busy parents are not always able to volunteer time at school, so a party to which parents are invited can be another opportunity for them to participate in their child's life.

Our school uses the annual winter vacation party for this purpose. The ideas presented here, however, can just as well be used at any other time of year with appropriate games and activities for all to enjoy. We like to hold our parties at noon, since our community is a small one. Most parents are able to attend on their lunch hour, and our participation is very high at that time. In larger communities, a nighttime event might have much better attendance. It is important to invite parents in several different ways, to make sure that they get the invitation. Our party is announced in our monthly calendar, as well as in our weekly schedule of events that goes home with each child. In addition, the children make invitations to take home with them. Their own involvement in getting things ready for the party makes it more likely that they will talk about this upcoming event at home. Their own enthusiasm helps make it more likely that their parents will take the time out of their own busy schedules to attend. December is a time for hospitality and parties, so there is a cultural expectation that can assist our efforts to bring our parents out to visit us.

We begin planning for our party by thinking of the theme, in this case the winter holiday, that we will use as a center around which we can build activities that will involve parents and children together. We then consider all of the interest centers in the room, and how they can contribute to that theme. Activities that can be presented in each center that will suit the theme and also will demonstrate some aspect of our child development program are selected. Some of the activities include things made by the children and others things made by the adults, using common materials. These demonstrate ideas that parents can use at home, extending the skills and concepts that their children have learned at school.

For our party this year, we will fill our book corner with familiar books that the children have heard read at storytime, and also books that we have made as a class during the fall. The children love to produce books and ask for them to be read over and over. Each child makes a page for one of these books, such as our Red Wagon book, produced when we repainted.