

Parent and Child Project Planner

*Windsor Oaks Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

An extra help session on diorama-building was the key to getting parents and students more involved in their science curriculum at Windsor Oaks Elementary School. The Parent and Child Project Planner initiative brought 40 parents and students together to make bigger and more sophisticated science projects than they ever thought possible.

The school's parent involvement coordinator initiated the project to help some frustrated science teachers. In the past, when teachers assigned major projects for students to complete at home with their parents, students frequently came back to school reporting: "we didn't have any poster board," or "we don't have a computer," or "my mom didn't understand what I was supposed to do."

The parent involvement coordinator approached teachers and inquired about whether or not they would like to participate. Third grade teachers elected to be the project's guinea pigs. They had recently assigned their students a project to recreate an animal habitat in diorama form. Students were assigned a variety of different animals to research. The final portion of the project required that the third graders build their diorama at home with the help of their parents. Teachers figured that an extra help workshop on diorama building would offer students and parents a boost in moving forward with their projects.

School administrators advertised the workshop with fliers sent home with students, as well as announcements delivered over the school's intercom system.

On the night of the event, about 40 students and parents arrived at the school to take advantage of the time and resources. A handful of teachers volunteered to stock a table at the front of the room full of diorama supplies. Around the back, they placed dioramas from past years on display along with the grading rubric so families would understand how the students would be graded.

"I liked being able to see what animals the other kids were making habitats for. I got lots of different colors of clay that I can use in my desert," a student said.

Parents and students drew inspiration from the displays and from the teachers, who offered words of encouragement to all of the diorama engineers. Those who appeared stuck on the research aspect of the project were invited to use the school's computer center, where they discovered many sources and pages of animal facts. By evening's end, many happy students shared their final projects with parents and teachers.

"This was a great idea. It helped give my son different ideas, as well as give me some clarification on the assignment," a parent said. "The event was simple to set up. All parents were extremely grateful and had nothing but wonderful things to say about the workshop. As teachers, we saw improvement with the quality of the projects," a teacher said.

The event cost \$30 to implement, mostly for diorama supplies. The school used funds from a Title I grant to cover the expenses. Windsor Oaks hopes to offer the event again next year. They plan to open up the workshop experience to more grade levels and perhaps host several different sessions throughout the 2008-09 school year.

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