

## Parents, Schools and Communities as Partners: Family Literacy Nights



Tying together juicy vocabulary, storytelling, and "what?" and "why?" questioning at The Mill Museum.

### **It Takes a Literacy Village...**

Three years ago, when Literacy How launched the Turning the Curve pilot study, we sought to involve parents as literacy partners. In collaboration with the Connecticut Commission on Children (known for its award-winning Parent Leadership Training Institute), we developed a parent engagement curriculum. Since then, Family Literacy Nights have expanded to nearly 30 schools, including those in the Connecticut K-3 Literacy Initiative (CK-3LI), Norwalk and East Haven, with plans to expand in '14-'15.

### **Creating Schools as Welcoming Literacy Communities**

Smiles, handshakes and hugs from the principal and literacy staff greet K-3 students and their families at Family

Literacy Nights. These two-hour events, held three times per school year, are designed to be engaging as well as informative. Each follows a family-friendly formula: Start with a simple dinner, provide babysitting, have staff on hand, offer materials in English and Spanish, and encourage each child to choose a free (English or Spanish) book to take home.

### **Engaging Parents as Literacy Partners**

After the principal describes special literacy initiatives at the school, trained English- and Spanish-speaking facilitators present easy, meaningful activities to help parents improve their children's language and literacy skills. Topics typically include Juicy Words! (vocabulary development) and Storytelling and Questioning (encouraging Common Core Critical thinking skills by asking "what?" and "how?" and "why?" questions).

### **Connecting Parents to Community Resources—The Civic Canopy**

The final Family Literacy Night brings families out into the community to experience the wealth of free and low-cost resources that help build literacy. Families have gathered at Stepping Stones Museum for Children (Norwalk), TIMEXPO, The Timex Museum (Waterbury), The New England Carousel Museum (Bristol), the Windham Textile and History Museum (The Mill Museum), and The Naugatuck Historical Society.

Families also learned about their public library's offerings: library cards, summer and year-round programs, and free and reduced passes to Connecticut's museums and other attractions.

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