

Preface

Why write a book on Family Nights? Currently, schools face new federal and local mandates to involve families in the education of their children. In order to respond, teachers are scrambling for ideas that would be attractive to them and to their students' families. Perhaps you are one of those teachers looking for some new ideas to try out with students and families in your classroom and school. At the same time you know that you already have many expectations in your life as a teacher and little available time. With testing demands, curriculum alignment, professional development, meetings, and more meetings, in addition to all of the day-to-day responsibilities of teaching, you may find yourself concerned about the problem but lacking the resources to address it. We have written this book to help resolve just such a dilemma.

As we begin, we want to introduce ourselves and let you know how we came to write this book. Two of us are university professors (Ellen McIntyre and Diane Kyle), and two of us are classroom teachers (Gayle Moore and Karen Miller). We have worked together as part of a research team for several years as we studied an educational reform initiative in our state and effective instructional strategies for improving students' academic achievement. Especially interested in how to support those students often not successful in schools, we devoted considerable effort to finding ways of reaching out to families and involving them more meaningfully and extensively in their child's education.

Our research took us into the homes of families to learn from them about their children. We organized Family Nights, redesigned homework, focused on new ways of communicating, and changed some instructional practices. After several years of this work, we decided we were ready to share some of what we had tried and learned. Corwin Press, Inc., published our book, *Reaching Out: A K-8 Resource for Connecting Families and Schools* in 2002. One chapter in the book offered examples of Family Night activities.

We have shared the ideas in the book as we have worked with teachers and principals in our university classes, statewide literacy projects, and

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professional development sessions. They have responded very positively to all of the strategies. However, they have gravitated most often to Family Nights when choosing a family involvement initiative to try in their own settings. We decided that a book solely devoted to Family Nights would fill an expressed need for teachers. Further, we realized that, by developing Family Nights on topics across the curriculum, we could help teachers meet their academic goals as well.

In writing this book we hoped to offer as much assistance as possible for planning and implementing the events, while also providing the flexibility to make modifications to meet teachers' needs in a particular context. Although the standards of professional organizations and the mandates of federal legislation provide common influences on schools across the country, teachers in those schools still make decisions in light of their own experiences, resources, and goals and with particular students and families in mind. We have a deep respect for teachers as professionals (after all, we're teachers, too) and reject attempts to "teacher-proof" curriculum materials. We have provided a wealth of ideas and resources, knowing that teachers will modify and supplement as needed, adding their own creativity to enrich the Family Nights and make them as meaningful as possible for their students' families.

The book includes an introduction, 13 chapters of Family Nights, and a follow-up chapter about expanding on these ideas. The introduction elaborates on the key reason for Family Nights—to improve student achievement through involving families in schools and as partners in students' education. It also includes information on how to use the book most effectively, adaptations for special populations, issues about providing food and incentives, and cost-saving ideas. Each of the 13 chapters is a self-contained unit, including all information, suggestions, and materials needed for implementing a particular Family Night. Each provides a purpose statement, connections with national professional standards, and an overview of the content and grade level appropriateness. Teachers can find detailed help on how to organize the evening, including procedures, an agenda, needed materials, tips, and how to follow up with families unable to attend. Reproducibles for each Family Night include an invitation, a blank agenda, a blank sign-in sheet, and an evaluation form, as well as materials specific to the topic for use with overheads or as handouts. Any resources listed at the end of a chapter offer additional sources of information teachers would find helpful.

These Family Night experiences offer an enjoyable and academically meaningful way for schools to reach out to families and get them involved. Although the ultimate goal may be more far-reaching, Family Nights provide an important first step. It is up to us to make that first step worth taking.

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another and, in partnership, help students achieve. We also thank the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) for funding our research that resulted, in part, in the development of this book.

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Principal
Montalvo Elementary School
Ventura Unified School District
Ventura, CA

Ellen Lunts
Assistant Professor/Mentor
Master of Arts in Teaching Program
Empire State College
Rochester, NY