LearnBIG!

Facilitating a Neighborhood Teaching and Learning Event with Elementary School Students

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Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin
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Neighbors in the Historic Central Neighborhood of Appleton, Wisconsin are connecting with students in their local elementary school: Columbus Elementary/Appleton Bilingual School. Following research that indicates the importance of adult role models and a stable, supportive neighborhood environment for positive youth development, neighbors are offering their interests, hobbies and knowledge to create a learning community that supports children.

The initiative was launched in May 2015 with a Saturday morning teaching-learning event called LearnBIG! Facilitating a teaching and learning event requires finding topics of interest to both the volunteer teachers who will offer subjects and the learning desires of students. A great thing about working with elementary age students is that they are game to try just about anything! Key to the event was ensuring that all topics offered for learning were hands-on, so that participating students were learning by doing.

Finding teachers
Volunteers went door to door in the blocks surrounding the elementary school, asking people about their gifts of the head, hands and heart. Although initially the focus was not on recruiting neighbor/teachers to connect with children at the school, “teaching fun subjects to children” was one of several specific offers made during these conversations. Organizers then went through the surveys to identify people who expressed an interest in connecting with children and went back to them to suggest participation.
# Volunteer Interview Form

Date: ____________________  Interviewer: ____________________

Street Address: ____________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What are you good at? Know a lot about? What are your interests?</th>
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<tr>
<th>2. Would you be willing to share any of these with other people in the neighborhood who either share your interests or might like to learn from you? Which of these (if any) would you be willing to share with neighborhood children or youth?</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Is there anything you'd like to learn about or learn how to do, if there was a neighbor available to teach it? Is there anything you wish you could share or do with neighbors?</th>
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<tr>
<th>4. What do you think neighbors could do together to make the Historic Central Neighborhood an even better place to live?</th>
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Volunteer Interview Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITY IDEAS SUGGESTED BY NEIGHBORS</th>
<th>I'm interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach something fun to children at Columbus School or serve as a math or reading tutor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neighborhood group for gardeners to learn together, share materials and more</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you an artist or a crafter? Would you like to participate in a neighborhood arts &amp; crafts show?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Even if you don’t consider yourself an artist, we are working on transforming the big fence around the Columbus School playground with some art that anyone can participate in creating. Would you want to be a part of that?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you a musician? Would you like to participate in a neighborhood musical group (band, chorus, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteer with the Boys &amp; Girls Club after school program at Columbus School?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join my neighbors for good weather evening walks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join a chess or card games club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Become a mentor to a neighborhood child through Big Brothers/Big Sisters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help elderly or homebound residents shop, mow the lawn or shovel snow, make small home repairs, cook and deliver meals, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participate in a cooking club to learn new recipes and share good food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participate in a neighborhood book club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join a group of people to play some sports (flag football, soccer)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join or start a neighborhood watch group for crime prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block party</td>
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<td><strong>My idea(s):</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Who are other neighbors you think should be interviewed?

Could you help interview these people and/or other people you may not know?

Are you interested in hearing the results of this survey after we talk to other people in the neighborhood?

Would you like to participate in a discussion about things neighbors can do together to make this an even better place to live?

| Your name: |               |
| Phone: |               |
| Email: |               (for neighborhood communication only!) |
Parents of students were approached in a special way. Each student was asked in their classroom to complete a form indicating subjects they thought their parents could teach. Each parent then received a copy of their child’s ideas, with a letter requesting their participation in the event.

**What Can Your Parents Teach?**

Name: _____________ Grade: __________

Teacher’s Name: ________________

My parent knows a lot about this:

My parent knows how to do this:

My parent really cares about this:

**Draw a circle** around any of these things you think your parent could teach to kids at Columbus/ABS.
Letter to Parents

Columbus Elementary

Dear Parent:

What can you teach our students at Columbus Elementary/Appleton Bilingual School? Last week, your child made some suggestions about that you should see — check the enclosed sheet.

On May 16th, we are planning a really fun Saturday morning of teaching and learning that has just about nothing to do with reading, writing or math, followed by a free lunch picnic on the playground. Parents and neighborhood adults will teach things they know about, or know how to do, to small groups of students. Students will also be invited to teach things they know. The school will be buzzing with fun and learning, and we want you to be involved.

Through this event, we want our students to know that:

1. Learning is a wonderful thing they can do all the time in lots of ways
2. There are adults in their school and in their neighborhood who have learned (and are still learning!) lots of things. Learning doesn't only happen in school and it doesn't stop when you are a grown up.
3. There are adults in their school and in their neighborhood who care enough about them to want to teach them fun new things
4. They, too, can be teachers

The sky is the limit on what you could teach. Here are some ideas we've already heard:

- Cheerleading routines
- How to sing a round
- How to French braid
- How to use a stethoscope
- How to train a dog to sit
- How to knit with your fingers
- Simple bicycle repair
- And more...

A professional educator can help you figure out the best way to teach your subject to a small group in 30-40 minutes, and we will provide materials you need to teach with.

Please contact Julie Filapek at 920-217-8744 or julief@sustainfv.org if you have questions or are interested in getting involved. The more people who are teaching and learning together on May 16th, the more fun we're going to have!

RJ Chesterton, Principal
Columbus/ABS

Julie Filapek, Coordinator
Neighborhood Partners
Matching teacher and student interests
The initiative started with the list of subjects neighbors said they would like to teach to students, and distributed that to students to indicate which ones sounded like fun to learn about. Every subject suggested received enough votes to warrant going forward. Each class was offered for a 30-minute period in multiple classrooms, gymnasium, and playground during a 2-1/2-hour period, such that each child was able to participate in four classes, with 10-minute breaks in between. Students were offered an opportunity to pre-register for classes by filling out a form indicating all of the classes they liked the sound of, and specifying up to four subjects in which they were especially interested. Every effort was made to ensure that each student was scheduled for at least two of their most desired classes. Those who came on the event day without pre-registering were included in classes with remaining spaces.

Learn BIG Registration Form

REGISTRATION FORM
Return to the Columbus School office by Tuesday, May 12th for the best chance of being enrolled in the classes you want. Enrollment in each is limited to 10.

Student First Name: ____________________________
Student Last Name: ____________________________

☑ Check **ALL** the classes you would enjoy

★ Draw a star by **up to 4** of your favorites

____ Finger Knitting
____ Use a stethoscope to hear your heart
____ Jiu-jitsu wrestling
____ Walk tall like a model/Press-on nails for fun
____ Make music with a dulcimer
____ Singing
____ Learn an African dance
____ French braiding and corn rows
____ Geology — fun with rocks
____ Create your own diary
____ Build a bird house
____ Language and sports in Afghanistan
____ Make a Zentangle artist trading card
____ Double-dutch jump rope & hop scotch
____ Record your own hip-hop lyrics
____ Make a friendship bracelet
____ How did children dress and play 200 years ago?

PARENTAL CONSENT:
____ My child is permitted to participate in any of the classes listed on this sheet.

____ I will attend with my child

____ I will drop off my child at 8:45am and pick up by 12:15pm

______________________________
Parent Signature
Teaching materials and support
Grant funding supported the purchase of teaching materials as needed, and the event organizer did much of the legwork to ensure that teachers had the materials they felt they needed. All teachers were provided with a list of teaching tips offered by a local elementary school teacher, and were offered an opportunity to discuss with her their ideas and teaching approach.

Tips for Neighborhood Teachers

**Tips for Teachers**

Having a successful experience with students relies on good preparation. Children have little tolerance for fumbling around trying to find words or supplies. Good teachers realize pretty early on that teaching is 75% preparation and 25% presentation.

Just a few points to consider when presenting to elementary age students:

**Being prepared:** Have an outline of how your program will proceed. Do not assume you can wing it. Those are always the most disastrous times with children. Consider what you are going to say and what activity you are going to do ahead of time and then be flexible. It never goes as planned but having that initial plan is essential.

**Interacting:** Consider doing more than simply lecturing to students. Playing an instrument? Have students keep a rhythm or stomp a beat. Talking about gardening? Bring samples of seeds for them to get their hands on, plant seedlings, or dissect flowers. The more you can get the students actively involved in the learning, the more it will add to their experience.

**Setting Up:** Have everything set up before any child enters the room. You’ll want to have more supplies than you think you’ll need. Often, groups can be overwhelming for younger children (and the adults!), so the smaller the groups the better at this age. If you can split into two adult guided “stations” for a hands-on activity after an introduction, then the task will seem more manageable.

**Speaking Up:** There are usually two big challenges when speaking with children and attempting to get them involved in the conversation: getting them to speak up and getting them to stop talking. If you are having trouble getting students involved, try asking a question in which they can relate or share something from their lives. For example, if you are sharing about building, ask students to share how they have built something in their own homes. Also, don’t be afraid to stop students who are rambling. Some children can really elaborate! The kindest way I have found to stop a rambler is to say, “You know, I would love to hear more about that. Can we talk more after the presentation?”

Last, just have fun and be yourself. Children are drawn to authentic people who don’t make them feel as though they are being talked down to.
Event roles and logistics
The LearnBIG! launch event involved 35 students, grades 1-6, participating in 11 classes, with 7-10 students, along with some accompanying parents (that was optional), in each class.

The event utilized, in addition to teachers, two additional categories of adult participants: observer/aides and event managers. Each teacher was assigned an observer/aide.

Observer/aides had three responsibilities before, during and after the class:
- Help greet students and get them settled.
- Assist students one-on-one as they do the hands-on work of the class (e.g., making friendship bracelets, pounding nails in wood, finger knitting).
- Observing and making notes about teacher-student interactions.
- Conducting a short evaluation questionnaire with students immediately upon the completion of the class.

Event managers undertook the following tasks:
- Registration/sign-in desk for students. Each student receives a “Class Schedule” that tells them where they need to go for each of the four sessions.
- Help students move from class to class between sessions.
- Welcome teachers, give them their teaching materials, orient them to their post-session evaluation sheets, and direct them to their classrooms.
- Collect evaluation sheets from teachers after their sessions.

Evaluation
Post session evaluations from students and teachers were used to decide whether teachers are good candidates to continue working with children in the future. An event like this can be used as a friendly introduction so that all involved can decide whether the teachers will offer future classes with elementary school children. In Appleton, all of the teachers wanted to continue teaching in the future. The after-school program located at the school is the site for future LearnBIG! Sessions.

Post-session evaluations from students also asked them to think about subjects they could themselves teach, so that a future event will involve students in the role of teachers and adults in the role of students.
Student Post-Session Evaluation

Questions for students

Observers: Please interview the students for five minutes in another corner of the classroom before they leave to go to their next session. Fill out one of these forms for each session, writing down as much information as you can from the group as a whole. Please return these evaluation forms to the registration desk near the front entrance of the school before you leave. THANK YOU!

Class: ______________________  Teacher: ______________________

Number of students interviewed: ______

What did you learn in this session?

How many of you want to learn more about this subject? (Show of hands)

If the school had another event like this where you could come and learn fun things from people in the neighborhood would you want to come again? (Show of hands)

What if YOU were the teachers at an event like this... what could each of YOU teach?

How many friendly grownups do you know in your neighborhood?
In most every case, all or nearly all of the participating students said they would like to learn more about the subject at hand, and that they would want to come to another event like this. We asked about subjects they thought they themselves could teach at an event like this (a future plan).

These were some of their suggestions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cars</th>
<th>Origami</th>
<th>How to do a round off</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birds</td>
<td>Singing</td>
<td>Different language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to care for a pet</td>
<td>How to draw</td>
<td>Animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>pre-historic animals</td>
<td>Hard rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make bracelets</td>
<td>Ju-jitsu</td>
<td>Make an instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minecraft</td>
<td>Cool art</td>
<td>How to eat lots of candy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students learn and practice French hair braiding and corn row techniques.
Teacher Evaluation Form

Teacher Evaluation Questions

Please return to the registration table at the front entrance before you leave! THANK YOU!

Name: __________________________________________

What do you think worked well in your session?

Is there more you could have taught about this subject if you had more time? Would you have liked to have more time?

Would you like to teach again at an event like this in the future? Same subject or something else?

What do you think the relationship should be between an elementary school and its neighborhood?

Please share any suggestions about how the organizers of this event could make it a better experience the next time we try it.
Each class was meant to have a monitor in place to (1) help out as needed, (2) take notes on how the class seemed to be going, and (3) conduct a short interview with the students right afterward. We had an unexpected dearth of monitors, but a fair number of classes did have one. Each teacher was given a written evaluation form to complete. The 30-minute time limit worked well for most, if not all, subjects. The following are quotes from the question “What do you think the relationship should be between an elementary school and its neighborhood?”:

- *I think the neighbors, especially those of us without children in the school and/or retired, can offer a lot to the school and its students.*
- *We could use more events like this.*
- *Lots of opportunities to volunteer and get connected. Making use of local live sources is great.*
- *Ideally, neighbors should be able to share skills, time, attention with local school. At very least, make children feel welcome in the neighborhood as they walk to and from school.*
- *I’ve never seen a school involved like this in its neighborhood and it’s beautiful!*  

**Coordination**

Elementary schools are busy places, and school staff members are stretched thin. *LearnBIG!* was coordinated by a staff member from a nonprofit organization supporting neighbor activities in the Historic Central Neighborhood. That staff member kept the ball rolling on all preliminary work – creating materials, ensuring their distribution through classroom teachers, managing the teacher recruitment process -- and handled all event logistics. This role could also be managed by a neighbor.

That said, school representatives did help significantly and the event could not have happened without their involvement. The parent-teacher organization served a lunch for all students and teachers at the end of the morning event. The school principal championed the program by advocating for it with staff and parents through various forums (school events, school newsletter, video announcements). The principal also attended the event, helping with logistical details and even offering an impromptu magic show when one teacher failed to arrive. A small group of teachers provided direction in two planning meetings, recommending the best approaches for parent and student recruitment, appropriate class session length, and other substantive issues. They also reviewed printed materials developed for student and parent audiences to ensure their suitability.
Future of LearnBIG!

The LearnBIG! Saturday morning event will be repeated in May 2016, incorporating opportunities for students to teach subjects as well. In the interim, adults will offer after-school sessions throughout the school year. Some of these will be one-off events. Other adults are planning to offer a series of learning experiences, through which we hope that students and adult neighbors will get to know one another in a more sustained way.

Neighborhood teacher instructs a class on how to make a birdhouse.