

# Hosting a Family Literacy Night

**Michelle McGahey**

**O**ur school, Holy Cross School in Kemptville hosted a Family Literacy Night on Jan. 27, 2005 that happened to coincide with the National Family Literacy Day as named by the ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation in 1999. It turned out to be a very successful and well-attended evening with parents learning and children having fun celebrating their literacy. In one's role as a teacher-librarian, one is looked upon as a leader in the school for promoting and encouraging literacy within the school community. You may have thought about hosting a family literacy night or teachers or administration may have made the suggestion. Here are some thoughts, suggestions and guidelines.

## **Needs**

The idea for a Family Literacy event at our school came from two recognized needs:

- Teachers wanting more time to share reading strategies with parent working with children at home on their reading;
- Parents wanting more information from the teachers with regards to how best they could support and encourage their child with reading while at home.

The school did hold a Curriculum Night every year in the fall, but there was never enough time to properly inform parents about reading strategies or demonstrate how they could best assist their children in reading and writing.

Within your own school, you need to take a look at your needs with regards to literacy and your parent population. Is there a need for more

information sharing time between teachers and parents? Is there more of a need to bring local parent resources to your school for support and information? How does the staff at your school define literacy?

## **Purpose of the Literacy Event**

The teacher-librarian with the support of the administration of the school took on the coordination of the Family Literacy event. After determining the interest and support of teachers, through an invitational request, the next thing to be realized was the purpose and format of the evening. At our first meeting, teachers decided that the Family Literacy Night would be one of information sharing with parents. Some schools have made their Family Literacy Night one of celebration, with shared parent and child activities, author visits and book fairs. As a planning group or school staff, you need to determine the purpose of your Family Literacy Night and what you hope to obtain as an outcome of the event.

## **Format**

At a first meeting, dates and times were decided on. Teachers felt that they did want to have parents gather in the gym for a main guest speaker; perhaps a leader from the school board who could speak on the results of studies done and changes in the province that have occurred with regards to literacy and the teaching of reading.

Teachers felt that to be able to receive a good turnout of parents for an informational type of format, students would have to be invited to