

PARENTS' DAY

SALEM MIDDLE SCHOOL VIRGINIA BEACH, VIRGINIA

Come spend a day in middle school. Some adults might run from this invitation, but not the parents of students at Salem Middle School. Hundreds of parents came to see what their children's school days were like and enjoyed the experience.

Although common in elementary schools, parents' days are not traditional middle school activities. Salem developed the practice to give parents and guardians a snapshot of their children's day-to-day experiences and to strengthen the bonds between school and home. Now, Parents' Day is an annual event.

A committee of parents, teachers, students, and administrators planned the day. They sent invitations to parents and guardians in mid-September. Because of space limitations, only one adult per student could attend. Subcommittees worked on registration, publicity, attendance, cafeteria, name tags, and evaluation forms, among other details. Volunteers even assisted with parking.

On the "shadow day" (when parents shadowed their children), members of the school staff and Student Council Association greeted the adults and served them refreshments. The principal welcomed the parents at an assembly and gave them a brief overview of what their day would be like. After that, the adults accompanied their students to class, following a regular schedule that included lunch. One diversion was the closing reception, with refreshments, and time for adults to complete a questionnaire to evaluate the day.

"I was utterly exhausted at the end of the day," one parent commented. "I had no idea just how hard middle school was and what my daughter does all day."

One sixth-grade science class actually extended Parents' Day into Parents' Night. The teacher assigned parents the same homework as the students. The sixth grade scientists had the

option to either turn in their own homework or their parents' homework. Surprisingly—or maybe not so surprisingly—most children decided to turn in their *own* assignments, leaving their parents' work at home.

The PTA provided \$800 to cover morning and afternoon refreshments and the lunch vouchers for visiting family members. It was money well spent, as the parents expressed their appreciation for the hospitality and the opportunity to share a day with their children.

The school plans to continue this long-standing annual event, strengthening its organizational strategies to make the day even more engaging. They will find ways to help more families RSVP in a timely fashion so that all who want to attend can be accommodated.

In addition to building school-home-community partnerships, Parents' Day has other benefits, according to school officials. The students are on their best behavior and focused on their classes, so it is a good day academically with few discipline issues. Parents understand better what their students do all day, see the teachers in action, and are better acquainted with the content of the courses. The event also creates good public relations for the school in the community.

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