A Night of Excellence

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**Introduction**

Highlighting student work can be a gratifying experience for both students and teachers. According to the National Education Association (2016), showing off students’ work is one of the most rewarding experiences for an educator. Teachers are able to share their students’ hard work with a larger audience that includes parents. This student recognition will help to motivate students to greater achievements. Learning becomes authentic and meaningful when students have the opportunity to display their work for others. In addition, students are more likely to engage in work or projects from the beginning if they know that others who are important to them will recognize their effort (Intel, 2012). Using this same philosophy, I coordinated A Night of Excellence at Amelia County Middle School (ACMS) to highlight and reward ACMS students for their extraordinary effort in completing various projects.

**Planning the Event**

The initial planning for the Night of Excellence began with the ACMS mission statement. The statement reads, “The mission of Amelia County Middle School is to provide educational opportunities for all students to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to live, learn and work productively in a global society,” (Amelia County Public Schools, 2016). When planning the event, I wanted to make sure that every aspect of the event reflected the mission of our school. Therefore, I had to ensure that the event included a wide array of projects and presentations that demonstrated a comprehensive display of students’ knowledge and skills. In addition, ACMS principal Dr. Sarah Tanner-Anderson expressed that she wanted the Night of Excellence to include numerous activities demonstrating student excellence academically, socially, and culturally. She also informed me that the Night of Excellence would coincide with the November school board meeting. Therefore, as part of the Night of Excellence we must highlight our students before and during the regular scheduled board meeting.

After my initial meeting with Dr. Tanner-Anderson I planned the event so that it included all aspects of the curriculum. After consulting with several members of the ACMS faculty and staff, I designed the event to include core curriculum subjects and arts education. For the Night of Excellence, a wide collection of projects were displayed for science, civics, and english. Stakeholders were able to view models of atoms, posters demonstrating the scientific method, lab safety brochures, and science fair projects. For civics, stakeholders learned about the Constitution, three branches of government, and features of the national government. In English, students taught stakeholders about similes, idioms, Onomatopoeia, and hyperboles. In addition, stakeholders enjoyed various performances and presentation given by our arts education students. The performances included soft must played by our band ensemble, and our Spanish students read Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss. In addition, our art students created an art gallery to display their work, while our communication classes provided stakeholders with a copy of our current school newspaper. Furthermore, two of our civics students were featured presenters at the monthly school board meeting held in our library. The students made a powerpoint presentation detailing their field trip to Longwood University during the Vice Presidential Debate.

During the planning process for the Night of Excellence, I invited all stakeholders to the event. Those stakeholders included students, parents, PTA representatives, faculty and staff of ACMS, central office staff, and school board members. Stakeholders were invited using surveys, emails and the School Messenger audio system. Gaining support and participation from all stakeholders was quite easy, with the exception of the faculty and staff of ACMS. Gaining support from staff members of ACMS proved to be challenging. Initially, I conducted a survey to determine the number of faculty and staff members attending the event. To my surprise, only one staff member responded to the original survey. This lack of response, forced me to become creative in gaining more support from the staff. I realized that faculty and staff members were more likely to respond to the survey if it came from the principal. Therefore, I used the pleasant personality of our great leader to encourage our staff members to respond to the survey. According to Groton and Alston (2012), administrators play a key role in the organizational hierarchy of a school that requires communication regarding many situations, problems, and issues. The authors go on to say that an administrator’s ability to communicate is an essential quality in the area of leadership. To my astonishment, this creative effort proved to be successful with 31 staff members responding to the survey confirming that they would attend the Night of Excellence. I learned from this experience that effective communication will be a necessary component of my leadership abilities. Therefore, I must continue to develop my communication skills as I further my career in administration.

**Coordinating the Evening**

According to Gorton and Alston (2012), effective decision making is essential to the successful performance of administrators. Coordinating the logistics for the Night of Excellence required me to make prompt decisions that affected the success of the event. Decisions were made regarding the setup for the projects and Spanish presentation, location for the band and art gallery, and refreshments. I quickly realized that administrators must sometimes make on-the-spot decisions. In this decision making situations, Gorton and Alston (2012) state that it is important for administrators to assess the circumstances of a situation, and make necessary decisions to achieve a successful outcome.

**Conclusion**

The Night of Excellence was a successful event that demonstrated the brilliance that embodies our student body. Our students were excited to showcase their skills and knowledge in various areas of our curriculum for the participating stakeholders. Those stakeholders ranged from parents to school board members. They were exposed to immaculate artwork, relaxing music, educational projects, cultural presentations, and fine dining. For the students, this event provided authentic value to their work. Students were able to demonstrate excellence academically, socially, and culturally.

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