

Family Inclusion: Holding and Making the Most of Special Events

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About Me

I have been a preschool teacher for 15 years. The last 3 years I have served as Assistant Director of the East location of the Academy of Early Childhood Learning in Columbia, MO.

During those 15 years, I have observed, helped host and helped plan several special events during the school year.

Goal For This Session

For this next hour, I would like to share with you the events that the Academy holds throughout the year, special things we do to include families and how we plan for them. You will see pictures of many of the events and I will answer any questions that you have about them.

You will also have the opportunity to share events that your school holds.

Let's get started!

Importance of Special Events

Special events are important because including families in the learning environment improves the academic and social growth of the child.

The families feel more connected and it becomes much easier to work with them and talk to them about any issues that may need to be communicated.

Families also tend to stay at your center or school longer, if they feel like part of a family. One of the biggest things the Academy hears when a family leaves is how much they are going to miss our teachers and events. Often, families will keep in contact with us and will say that they can not find another place for their child like the Academy.

What Studies Show

We can all attest to the fact that parent involvement is ideal because we have seen the benefits first hand, but in case we need some quick reminders:

In some basic research, I found these two studies at: <http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/family/engagingfamilies>

Here are two studies that offer insight into the benefits of parent-school partnerships:

“Researchers at the University of Oxford found that children whose parents participated in the Peers Early Education Partnership (a program geared towards supporting families of children ages 0-5) "made significantly greater progress in their learning than children whose parents did not participate." These strides were found in children ages 3-5, and included progress in vocabulary, language comprehension, understanding of books and print and number concepts. In addition, these children also exhibited higher self-esteem in comparison to children of non-participating parents (Evangelou & Sylva, 2003).”

“A study published in the *Journal of Instructional Psychology* reported that improving parental involvement in the classroom can also improve schools in general (Machen, Wilson & Notar, 2005). The authors describe how everyone within the school community can benefit when parents and teachers work as partners.”

Sweets With Your Sweetie

This event is held on or before Valentine's Day from 7-9 am.

Donuts, muffins and fruit is bought/ordered and prepared a few days before to the day before the event so that it will be ready to be set out when we open at 6:30 on the morning of the event. Milk, water, juice and coffee for the parents is also served.

Set up (tables, chairs and decorations) in the room happens mostly the evening before so that very little needs to be done the morning of the event. There are also photo opportunities for the families. This is also set up the evening before the event.

Directions to the room are provided by staff upon arrival so that families are ready to attend upon arrival that morning.

Any children that do not eat with their parents still get the sweets we are serving to the families that attend.

Signs are put up around the school two weeks before and then emailed to parents a day or two before as well as a note on daily sheets and in the monthly newsletter.





Join us
February 14th from 7-9am for
Sweets with your Sweetie!

*Enjoy donuts, muffins, fruit, coffee,
milk, and juice with your little
sweetie(s)*



**Come back at 3pm for class
parties!**

Classroom Valentine's Day Parties

This event takes place on the same day as Sweets with Your Sweetie, in the afternoon after nap time.

Sign ups are on the classroom door to bring foods, utensils, plates, napkins, drinks and other treats.

Teachers create a game or two for the children and parents to play.

If a child is without a family member, the teacher takes them under their wing.

Valentine's Day Party Sign up
Friday, February 12th 3:00

Fruit

Veggies

Cheese & Crackers

Plates and Napkins

Juice Boxes/ Drinks

Sweets



Egg Hunt/Bunny Visit and Spring Parties

We do a bunny visit and egg hunt on the morning of the party. Each class has their own time for the egg hunt and bunny visit.

After nap there is a class party to celebrate Spring. Parents sign up to bring items and attend the party.











Spring Party time is here!!

Classroom Spring Parties will be happening
on Friday, April 14th at 3 pm, unless
otherwise specified, in your child's classroom.
Our special visitor will be visiting between
9:30 and 10:15 am in your child's classroom
and we will be having an egg hunt during
your child's class enrichment time, which is
sometime between 9:50 and 10:50. Be sure to
ask your child's teacher for the specific
time if you would like to attend!
We hope to see you there!



Bunny Visit and Egg Hunt Schedule for Friday, April 19th

Below is the schedule for the Bunny visit and egg hunt for each class. The bunny will visit you in your classroom. If weather permits the egg hunt will be on the front lawn. If it is raining that day, we will have the egg hunt in the gross motor room, but at the same time.

Bunny Visit
L&L- 9:30-9:35
K&M- 9:35-9:45
Sentries- 9:45-9:55
Jesters- 9:55-10:00
Pages- 10:00-10:05
Pixies- 10:05-10:10
Sprites- 10:10-10:15

Egg Hunt
Jesters- 9:30-9:50
L&L- 9:50-10:10
K&M- 10:10-10:30
Sentries- 10:30-10:50

I/T can have their egg hunts at their party or during their morning activity time.

Muffins With Mom

Held the Friday morning before Mother's Day.

Run the same way as Sweets With Your Sweetie. Much of the preparation is done the evening before so that the event is ready by 7 am.

Signs and emails go up and out starting at least two weeks ahead of the event.

Join us for

Muffins with Mom



Friday, May 10th from 7am-9am

Please join us in celebration of Moms and Honorary Moms by enjoying a tasty treat at drop off with your little one(s). The Academy will provide muffins, fruit, coffee, juice and milk for your enjoyment!





Graduation

This event is held at the end of May. We have a ceremony in the evening.

I make a slideshow of all of the graduates from both centers of time in the classroom and special events from their time at the Academy.

The owners take the graduates, teachers and administration to lunch either the day after or the day of graduation. This luncheon is the only event that we do not allow parents to attend as it is special for the graduates.

<https://www.facebook.com/AcademyCastle/videos/1185633111615500/>

Donuts With Dad

This event is held the Friday before Father's Day.

This event is run just like Sweets With Your Sweetie and Muffins With Mom. Much of the preparation is done the evening before so that the event is ready by 7 am.

We hold this event outside at our center if the weather is warm enough.



DONUTS WITH DAD

Join us Friday, June 14th from 7am-9am for
Donuts with Dad!

The Academy will provide donuts, fruit, coffee, juice and milk for Dads and Honorary Dads to enjoy with their child during drop-off.

We hope to see you there!

Picnic

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One of our largest events during the year. Held every August just before the start of the new school year classroom changes and held in honor of the time of year the Academy opened, August of 1999.

It is held at our East location.

We have a gift for each family in attendance. This is given when the family registers so that we know how many attend. Drawings are also done for families and staff to encourage participation.

Dinner, face painting, water play and games are just a few of the things provided throughout the evening from 6-8.

We work with local groups to rent a bounce house, tables and chairs.

Academy of Early Childhood Learning

Annual Picnic!

Celebrating 20 Years

Friday, August 9th 6-8 pm

East location: 9 Dorado Drive



Cotton Candy
Snow Cones
Bounce House
Water Play
Face Painting
Games
Dessert
Drinks
Prizes

DINNER

And More...



Grandparents Day

This event is held in September, close to Labor Day.

Gifts are made for Grandparents and there are treats and crafts for the Grandparents and children to do together.

Everything is provided. If a child does not have a grandparent or other family member come, they do the activity with a teacher and adapt it if needed.



Trunk or Treat

This event is held from 6-7 pm a couple of days before Halloween.

We close our parking lot to allow parents to decorate their trunks and then the children are able to go from car to car.

Academy of Early Childhood Learning's



Tuesday, 10/29/19
6:00pm-7:00pm
Academy East Driveway

- Family and Extended Family Welcome! Invite Grandparents to Decorate their Vehicle or Participate With You!
- Children and Adults are Welcome to Dress in costume (Nothing too scary please!)
- Get Creative and Decorate Your Car!
- Bring Candy to Pass Out After 6pm
- Bring Lawn Chairs and Enjoy a Fall Festive Atmosphere with Fellow Academy Staff and Families!





Class Halloween Parties/Boo Blast

This is held the day before Halloween from 3-430 pm.

Each class holds their own Halloween Party and then there is a rotation of games/crafts for the children to play and do while they are in their costume.

At the East location the activities and games are set up outside if the weather cooperates.









Boo Blast and Class Parties



When: Wednesday,
October 30th at 3 pm

HALLOWEEN PARTY

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30TH at 3 PM

FRUIT

SWEETS

VEGETABLES

JUICE BOXES

CHEESE AND CRACKERS

PLATES / NAPKINS

THERE ARE 16 CHILDREN AND THREE TEACHERS IN
THE CLASS.



Preschool

WEDNESDAY 10/30/18 2:45 PM - 4:30 PM

TIME	EVENT
2:45-3:30	CLASSROOM PARTIES THEN GET DRESSED IN COSTUMES!
15 min	HAYRIDE AND PICTURES! Location: Outside main entrance
15 min	GHOULISH GAMES! Location: Climber ★ Tic-Tac-Toe (with black cats, spiders, ghosts and bats) ★ Bean bag toss
15 min	GHOSTLY GAMES! Location: Racetrack ★ Jack O Lantern golf ★ Spider ring toss
15 min	CREEPY CRAFT & BURIED TREASURE! Location: Jesters/L&L Deck ★ Spider craft ★ Ghost craft

SCARY SCHEDULE

	Jesters	L&L	K&M	Sentrics
3:00-3:45	Deck	Climber	Hayride	Racetrack
3:45-4:00	Racetrack	Hayride	Deck	Climber
4:00-4:15	Climber	Deck	Racetrack	Hayride
4:15-4:30	Hayride	Racetrack	Climber	Deck

Feast

This event is held the Thursday before Thanksgiving at our South location and the Friday before Thanksgiving at our East location during lunch, with a rotation for eating times and buffets.

This is our largest event held during the day during the school year.

Signups for parents go on the classroom doors about 3 weeks ahead of the event with many reminders.

At the East location there are 3 buffets with three different times, 11, 11:20, 11:40 and a seating chart is made for each family. At East set up starts at about 9 the morning of the event and then cleanup starts as soon as the families are finished with the first buffet, usually at about 11:40.

At the South location there is one buffet with two different times and a seating chart is made for each family. South set up starts the day before the event because they use a downstairs area and do not need to use classrooms. Clean up starts when both buffets are complete, about 12:30.

Food is ordered about a week and a half before the event and started being cooked the week of the event. The Academy provides turkey, stuffing, rolls, potatoes and green beans.

Families sign up to bring other sides and desserts on the sign up at East or on Sign Up Genius at South.

Testers

- 1 8ft. table
- 2 6ft. tables

L+L

- 2 8ft. tables
 - 2 6ft. tables
 - 1 kid 8 top table
 - 36 adult chairs
 - 8 kid chairs
 - 1 bouncy seat
- 4 extra adult chairs in L+L

Sentires

- 2 8ft. tables
 - 2 kid 8 top tables
 - 20 adult chairs
 - 16 kid chairs
 - 1 bouncy seat
- 4 extra adult chairs in Sentires

K+M

- 3 8ft. tables
 - 1 6ft. table
 - 1 kid 8 top table
 - 36 adult chairs
 - 8 kid chairs
 - 2 clip chairs
- 4 extra adult chairs in K+M

GMP

- 2 8ft. tables
- 2 6ft. tables

Pages

- 4 6ft. tables
 - 1 8ft. table
 - 1 kid 4 top table
 - 8 adult chairs
 - 4 kid chairs
- 4 extra adult chairs in Pixies

Pixies

- 2 8ft. tables
- 2 little kid 8 tops (Pixies + Pages tables)
- 19 adult chairs
- 15 kid chairs
- 2 clip chairs

Total

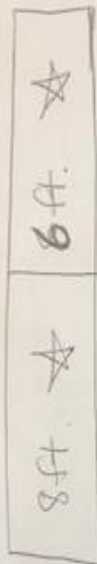
- 13 8ft. tables
- 11 6ft. tables
- Pixies + Pages tables
- 1 kid 4 top table
- 4 kid 8 top tables
- ~135 adult chairs
- 15 little kid chairs
- 36 big kid chairs
- 4 clip chairs (Arles, Dylan, Lauren, Sophie, Kate, Laila, Sentires, Zane)
- 2 bouncy seats (Brittley, Zane)

Pages

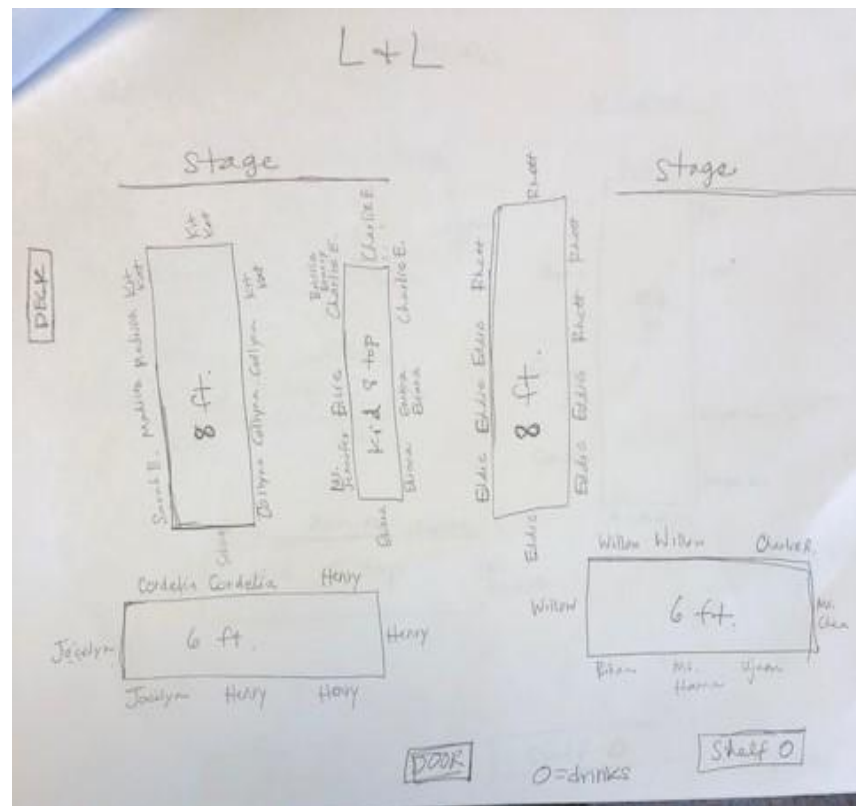
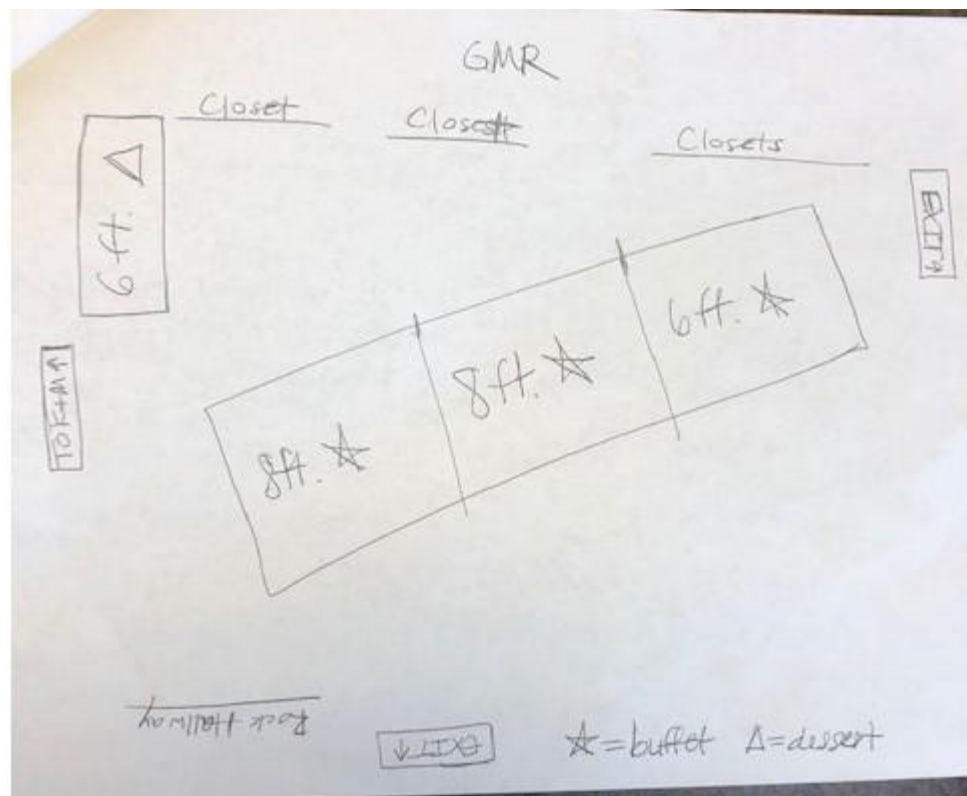
6 ft. Δ

TO PIXIES

6ft. O



* = buffet Δ = desserts O = drinks













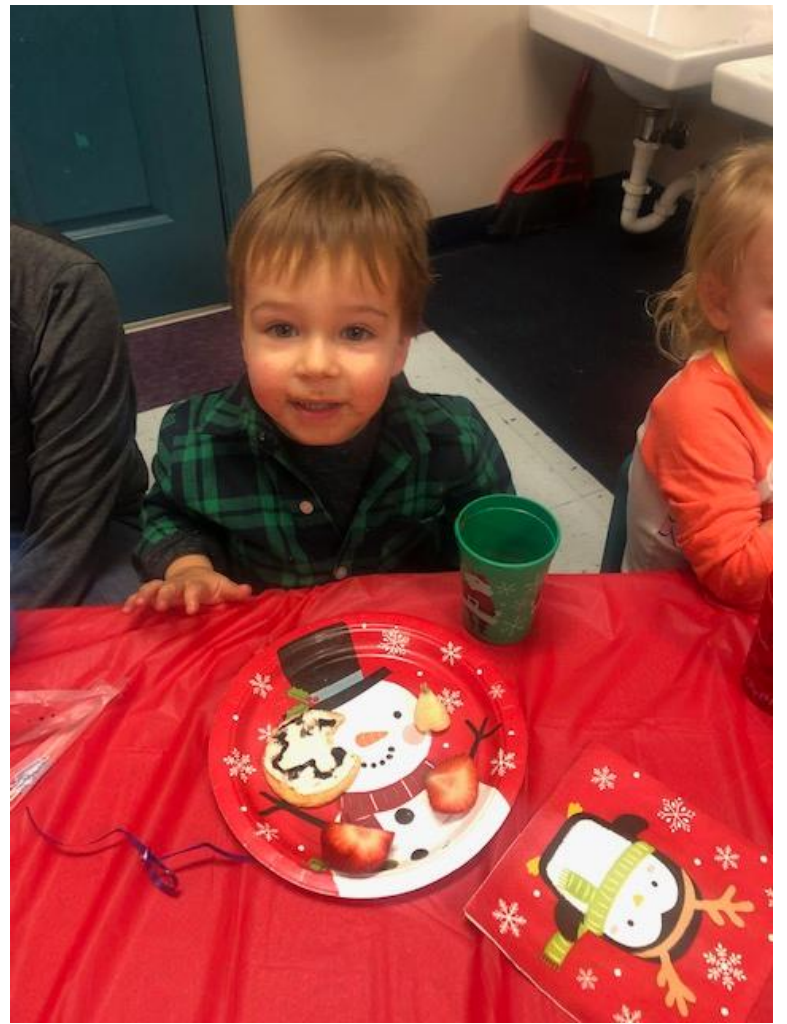


Classroom Holiday Parties

These parties all happen on the same day throughout both centers. Usually on about the second Friday of December at 3 pm, after nap time.

The class makes keepsakes for their parents and prepare a song or two or poem to present for the parents.

For families with children in multiple classes, the teachers work together to stagger the presentation times so that families can attend all presentations.





Other Ways to Include Families

At the Academy we do two other things to include families throughout the year.

During the first week of March we hold Dr. Seuss week. During this time we invite families to write down any books they read during the week and we make a hat for Cat in the Hat with red and white striped paper.

During November, we put up a Thankful Turkey and provide a feather for all of our families to fill out and return.

We have an open door policy for parents and encourage teachers to invite parents at anytime that their lesson plans might allow for visits, like special readers.

The Academy has also just started using the app, Homeroom. This app allows teachers to take pictures and video from the classroom iPad and upload to the app to the child's "account". Parents then receive a text stating that a picture or video has been uploaded for them to view. This does take some time to set up and stipulations need to be in place to ensure that teachers are sending positive information about the child's day to the parents.



Organizational Tips

Putting together these events can be very time consuming. I am going to let you in on the organizational tips we have found along the way to help with the time consuming parts of planning and holding events.

If it is the first time you are deciding to hold an event, start planning at least a couple of months ahead so that you will think of everything that you will need and have time to get the needed items.

Organizational Tips

For smaller events, like class parties and Sweets With Your Sweetie, there is not a lot that is needed. This will mean that you will likely have to guess about how much you will need as far as donuts, muffins and fruit because you will not likely know how many will be attending. To help with your guess for the first time you hold the event, you can send an email or start talking to parents about a week a head so that you can get the food ordered. Tables and chairs can be the tables and chairs you already have since it is a staggered event with families coming and going.

For larger events, like the Feast, you should get the best estimate you can because you may have to rent tables and chairs and you will have more food to order.

The Academy uses Google Drive to organize our notes for the events. We keep the notes for the previous year to review as time gets closer to the event so that we can make guesses for the current year. In the notes we include things like, number of attendees, how many people we had working the event, when we started preparing things for the event and what needs to be changed for next year; for example, locations of parts of the buffets. We also keep contact information of places we rent items from and what and how much we rented.

Organizational Tips

Google Drive is a free service provided to anyone with a Google email account. The Academy pays for our staff emails since we have many staff members between both centers, but your school does not necessarily have to.

You could have your staff create their own work email, for example, firstname.lastname@center@gmail.com. You can use last initials if you have more than one staff member with the same name. You can also do this with only staff members who will be involved with planning. If you do this, you will have less control as far as what is being sent out in the centers name and when, which could potentially lead to some issues. To prevent these issues, if you are not ready for your entire staff to have email, you can limit it to the staff doing the planning.

From there you can get into Drive and start creating Folders for events and then documents within the folders, like signs and signups. If you are interested in learning more about Google Drive, you can see me at the end of this session and I will gladly show you how to create it and how I have my Drive set up.

Organizational Tips

Finally, and probably one of the most important things, is to communicate your vision to your staff and explain how events help foster great relationships with families and keep families around longer because they feel like they are part of the school family.

Explain that it will take work from all staff, but that it will be worth it. If at all possible, keep any help that you have during their normal hours. For our Feast, that is not possible because our teachers are with their students. In that case, we ask our part timers who usually come in the afternoon if they are available to help during any part of the event. This usually gets us the help we need.

Thank you for letting me share these events and tips with you! If you would like to contact me with any questions, you can email me at:
kellyl@academycastle.com.

I always like to end with a laugh, so, may we all have troubles like having to switch room parents.....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xycCf-06Z8>

