

East Cobb County Council PTA

Diversity & Inclusion

International Celebrations Workshop

Monday, October 5, 2009

International Celebrations Ideas and Best Practices

This document is a collection of ideas and best practices shared at The East Cobb County Council (ECCC) PTA's Diversity & Inclusion International Celebrations Workshop. They are ideas offered by PTA representatives from several schools across the council with experience in producing international celebrations. Use these ideas as inspiration for planning your own international celebration. If you have any questions or want specific details, please contact ECCC PTA Diversity & Inclusion Chairperson Wendy Stewart at Diversity@ecccpa.org.

Entertainment

- Ask for volunteers from among your school community
- Many countries and cultures with a relatively large community in an area will have their own organizations for people from that country/cultural group (e.g., Korean-American Coalition of Atlanta, Swedish School of Atlanta, etc.). Contact them for ideas or connections to entertainers from their culture.
- There are consulates for many countries in Atlanta who might have information to share with you about their country and may know of local people who could help with entertainment. Use the following link to find contact information for a number of area consulates:

<http://www.georgia.org/BusinessInGeorgia/InternationalBusiness/Pages/Consulates.aspx>

Admission – most schools do not charge admission for their international celebrations, but the ones that do choose to do so for a variety of reasons. It is a decision that depends in large part on your committee's budget and the situations at your particular school.

- Admission profits can be used to reimburse families/groups who provide food for the event (e.g., \$50 per group)
- Can be necessary to pay for food provided by local restaurants, even if they give a deep discount.
- Charging admission could limit attendance at your event

- One alternative might be asking for donations of canned goods to get a discount on admission (e.g., \$5 admission reduced to \$3 with a can of food)

Food Issues – Most (if not all) school international events involve offering food from the various nations represented. Most food is prepared and served by families from that school, while others have community contacts with local restaurants that may provide food at a discount.

- How much food a family or group should prepare to represent their country is highly variable depending on the number of volunteers providing food and your anticipated crowd, but a good rule of thumb appears to be to ask participants to prepare enough bite-sized portions for everyone to have a taste. You'll have to make your best guess as to how many that might be, keeping in mind that not everyone will try everything. Remember that if everyone preparing food offers a taste, a guest's plate will fill up quickly. They don't need to make a meal from only one group's food.
- Volunteers could also be told to only make what they're comfortable providing. This is particularly true when they aren't being compensated for their contribution, and/or they are a small group or single family. It is often the case at these events that those who come early get to try everything, but when the food is gone, it's gone.
- A very important requirement of all your food providers is that they make available a list of ingredients or the recipe for their dishes so that guests have access to allergy information. While we'd like to think that parents and kids would think to ask about food ingredients, it's unsafe to assume they will. Several schools reported incidents where someone had an allergic reaction to something they ate at their festival. It was even suggested that unaccompanied children not be given samples for safety,
- Some schools allowed their volunteers to bring dishes in crock pots to keep them warm. One school even had food in chafing-style dishes with Sterno to keep it warm. You should check with your principal regarding your school's policy in this area. You'll have to take access to outlets in to consideration for warming appliances.
- Many schools provided beverages for guests. Looking for a cheap source for drinks? Check at your local dollar store to see what they have available. You might also want to check with the businesses who are your school's Partners in Education to see if they'd be interested in donating drinks for your event.
- Having volunteers provide a sign with the name and even a description of their dish is helpful. If you ask volunteers for this information ahead of time, your committee could prepare signs in advance. You could also compile this information from all your food volunteers to make "menus" for guests – or at least post one large menu at the beginning of the food line.
- If you're short on food providers, or need one from a particular country, ask around about restaurant connections at your school. Someone may know someone who could

help at least get a discount on food from a local restaurant. Be sure to offer participating restaurants the opportunity to advertise at your event, bring cards or take-out menus, etc...

Country Representatives/Committees

- Survey your school community to find out who would like to represent their country at your event. Online survey tool (e.g., <http://www.esurveyspro.com>, surveymonkey.com) allow you to create a custom volunteer survey to recruit participants and collect information about how they'd like to help. Links to the survey can be sent out through the school's electronic communications and posted on the school website. However, don't assume everyone has internet access. At least one round of paper-based surveys is advisable too.
- After collecting your volunteer information, you might want to put families interested in the same country/culture in touch with one another. Working together, they can divide the work (some do food, some present culture, some do a performance) and best represent their country to its fullest.
- When you're recruiting countries for your event, don't forget the USA! One school suggested highlighting great American inventors as one way to share American culture.
- Also, don't overlook our Native American cultures. While Native Americans might make up only a fraction of our school community, our area was once heavily populated with Native American cultures and our children study units on the local native tribes. Native Americans are just as important and relevant as any of the other countries you'll include.

Communications – Everyone was in agreement that a big part of the success of your event depends on how well it is communicated.

- Some schools begin communicating about their international celebration as early as Meet & Greet and the first day of school. Your committee might want to set up an information table at Meet & Greet or your Open House and provide a sign-up sheet and information about the event.
- Use every method of communication available to you at your school to get the word out about your international celebration (e.g., bulletin boards at school, emails, website, etc...).
- A couple schools used the students to help advertise the event at their schools. The students produced skits or reports for their school news broadcasts.

Event Set-Up – How you decide to set up your event will depend a lot on your school's layout as well as what events you have planned, but here are a few ideas to consider.

- If you hold a meeting with your volunteers before your event, set up some sample cultural displays to give them an appreciation of how much space they'll have and show them ideas about how they might organize it.
- Using separate areas in the school as venues (e.g., cafeteria, halls, gym, library) will help with noise and crowd control.
- Cobb County high school students are required to complete a certain number of service hours each year. Consider using high school students from your cluster as volunteers for a variety of tasks at your festival. Coordinate student volunteers by contacting faculty sponsors of clubs at the school.
- Once you've set your schedule of events for the evening, it's helpful for guests if you create a program for them with descriptions of performances, participants, their country, etc...

PTA Responsibilities – Certain aspects of your event are likely to fall to your committee's or your PTA's responsibility, some of which may depend on your budget.

- A common PTA contribution was plates, napkins, and forks. One school bought trays from their cafeteria.
- Every PTA event is an opportunity to increase membership! Don't forget that one of the basic tenets of our D&I community's mission is increasing our PTA membership to better reflect the community we serve. Be sure to have a PTA membership table at your festival to encourage people to join – particularly international families who might not otherwise participate in PTA functions.

Involving Students – Finding ways to engage students at your international celebration encourages them to learn about different countries and cultures, helps bring in more people, and makes the event that much more fun!

- Hold a Parade of Nations. Invite families who are participating to gather in groups by country at the beginning of the night to parade into the main venue. Encourage native attire and flags, make signs for each country, and have them parade in to some patriotic fanfare, just like the Olympic opening ceremonies!
- Develop a trivia quiz for the kids with a question for every country represented. Have one per grade level, or for elementary schools, one for K-2 and one for 3-5. Kids have to visit each country's display to learn the answer to each question. Prizes could be awarded individually for each quiz correctly completed, or, as an added incentive for

more attendance, have awards for the class at each grade level that turns in the most correct quizzes.

- For a fun twist on the trivia quiz, come up with a “fun facts” quiz with a fun fact trivia question for each participating country (e.g., What country eats the most chocolate? Switzerland 22.36 lbs per person)
- Passports are very popular items at international celebrations. Create a one-page passport with pictures of each participating country’s flag, or a multi-page passport booklet. Kids can take their passports to each country’s display to have it stamped or signed. A cool twist – have kids learn to say hello, goodbye, and thank you in each country’s native language before they get a stamp!
- Have volunteers at each country’s display who can write children’s names in their native language (e.g., Russian, Chinese, Korean, etc.)
- Coordinate with your school’s music teachers to arrange to have the school chorus or even individual classes to learn some international songs to perform at the festival.
- Recruit volunteers to lead crafts/activities that reflect their native culture (e.g., making Chinese lanterns, folding origami figures, henna tattoos, providing native costumes for pictures, etc.)
- Invite volunteers to read stories, legends, or folk-tales from their native culture to children at the festival.
- Set up a station for children to sign-up for an international pen pal.
- Work with your curriculum planning committee to find some ways to connect your festival to what’s going on in their classrooms.