Module 3: A Taste of Farmington (McCay)

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**Introduction**

**When I move to New Mexico in August, I will complete my internship under Dave Gardner, the head principal at Heights Middle School. The campus has been an A or B school for the last five years, and the school is supported loyally by its parent base. Farmington has a very active community with a strong culture of “family first.” Ninety-one percent of residents attend weekly church services and highly value traditional family time with their children.**

**Unfortunately, Farmington parents have a bad habit of coming out in droves for sporting events on the middle and high school level, but not attending other events at their children’s schools, even though they espouse support and love for education. Like most parents, Famington parents need something fun and unusual from a parent night, or they simply won’t attend (Beck, 2017). To get parents out for a family learning night, I thought I’d combine a successful model I used as a coach in the past. I organized a Taste of Farmington when I coached track in New Mexico, and I asked local restaurants to donate both food and catering services, allowing them to serve their wares and drum up business, while I asked families for “entrance donations” for the team. We generally raised $5000 in one night at these annual events, and the local restaurants benefitted from increased sales for the next two months after their participation.**

**Heights Middle School can use the same model with food served by local businesses, raise funds with “entrance donations” for whichever endeavor most needs support, and ALSO provide booths with “learning vacation” opportunities for families and students at the same time. Providing the additional information at interactive booths will serve as entertainment during dinner, and it will also motivate parents to plan meaningful learning opportunities into their family vacations. “**Schools are centers for the community, and offering some level of programming for parents can help build those important school-home relationships that wind up benefitting everyone: students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community at large” (Hosting a successful parent night, 2018). **Using the fun gimmick will increase parent attendance for the event and potentially increase student scores (if parents use the information) because students’ time away from school will support their content mastery in a fun manner. Farmington residents already love food and fun; A Taste of Farmington could also motivate them to actively love learning with their kids.**

**Campus Space: Hosting the Event**

Farmington Municipal Schools received multiple warnings last year about possible shooting threats on their campuses. A neighboring district even experienced a shooting this year, and as a result of these events, Heights has instituted new security measures (a perimeter fence, entry through one door only, and no access to campus beyond the front office for visitors of any kind). Head principal Dave Gardner is a former police officer, and he uses police practices to enhance the safety of the school: “Incorporating the principles and practices of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) in the design and remodeling of schools can contribute to the safety of the campus while reducing the target hardening and fortressing effects of a bunker mentality” (Atlas, 2017). These measures make the planning of any campus event more difficult, but Heights Middle School has a unique facility, which provides a creative solution to this problem.

The cafeteria and gym are housed in a separate building from classrooms, and hosting a learning night involving food makes the separate annex the perfect location for this event. Parents could check in through the doors of the annex rather than the primary learning facility, which would ensure a more secure environment for the event as well as for the learning facility, which would still be locked down. The two large rooms in the annex provide ample space for eating and for touring learning booths without disturbing the rest of the campus, and the cleaning staff would not be inconvenienced by visitors accessing the entire campus during the evening event, requiring a second cleaning of too many campus areas.

The space is also welcoming, allowing parents to feel at ease and to get the most out of the evening; they know parent nights a good way to engage with teachers, and the perfect locale will increase attendance (Spellings, 2005, pp. 38-40). The event would not cost more than utilities for the evening in one building because the vendors would provide the food and the entertainment, leaving most volunteer teachers free to build relationships by interacting with families socially. Multiple purposes would be served by one evening on campus.

**Vendors for Food**

Restaurants in Farmington must creatively market their wares to compete with one another for patronage because our community has one restaurant for every five citizens. The flooded market demands significant “donations” of time and food to earn loyalty from the customer base. As a result, I never had difficulty obtaining volunteers for A Taste of Farmington when it only served the track team as a fund raiser. If twenty restaurants give free food for 100 guests, then we can serve 2000 attendees without issue. The restaurants bring their own equipment and staff for catering service, which frees the school from needless stress due to organizing volunteers to work the food booths.

If we adopt the Taste of Farmington model, we can ask restaurants to provide finger foods, which are easy for parents to eat while they tour the “Opportunities for Learning” booths. Providing food and fun often increases parent attendance to important campus events (Virginia Department of Education, 2010, p. 4). The food vendors can set up in one room, allow parents to fill their plates with finger food, and then direct them to the next room for their tour of learning opportunities. We have multiple restaurants, who would happily donate food and time, but my favorite three owners are also loyal Heights parents, so their buy-in has always been guaranteed. Allowing them to market their businesses while they support the school’s learning endeavors is a good return for their ongoing loyalty to the school.

**Vendors for Learning**

This new use for a Taste of Farmington only works if we provide parents with affordable opportunities for learning experiences during their vacation time. Most Farmington families take their vacation in the surrounding area, which offers hiking, hunting, fishing and camping; these activities are often the reason people choose to live in the small mountain town to begin with, and even weekend trips for short vacations are common for most residents The learning opportunities our parents are most likely to use are those provided within our neighboring communities of Durango, Colorado; Aztec, New Mexico; Bloomfield, New Mexico; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Knowing what parents are most likely to use and preparing booths or guest speakers for those opportunities increases the chances that parents will implement what they learn (Virginia Department of Education, 2010, pp. 6-9). We have multiple venders in these communities, who already provide services for students and don’t get enough business. If we invite them to market their options to our families, they will jump at the chance; most of them already have presentations and flyers developed and simply need a platform to provide this information—information, which would also benefit our students’ learning.

**Learning Vacation Opportunities in our Community**

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| **VENDOR** | **SERVICES OFFERED** | **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF TECH NEEDS AND PRESENTATION FOR PARENTS** |
| Aztec Ruins National Monument | * Week-long day camps for learning archaeological excavation skills * Two/Three-day camps for camping and survival skills * Student technology camps for developing PowerPoint presentations in the digital age * Professional group tours of the Aztec Ruins with educational Ranger Talks   \*All of these services are provided free of charge for students. | Aztec Ruins has a digital presentation about their learning opportunities for visiting students, and when they can speak to groups, they bring their own plasma television and laptop to display a silent video of previous students participating in these activities (NPS, 2018). They also provide interested parents with professional brochures and weblinks to find more information and plan their ideal visit. Generally, they also bring brochures for other national parks and monuments so parents, who are traveling farther away, can plan similar experiences at other parks near their vacation destination. |
| Salmon Ruins | * Practice archaeological digs * Interactive day camp for learning to make mud mortar for stone buildings at the ruins and to build stone walls in teams * Historical education during guided tours of the multiple types of constructions at Salmon Ruins (spanning three millennia of time and two unique cultures) | Salmon Ruins is a county-owned archaeological site in Bloomfield, New Mexico. The same Hisatsonim people, who built the Aztec Ruins, also built Salmon Ruins. Salmon Ruins has an interactive art activity they bring to schools, which allows students to learn about their site’s petroglyphs and draw their own (San Juan County Archaeological Research Center and Library, 2016). They bring their own supplies and only need a larger table for students to sit at while they learn. They provide similar brochures to parents at these events. |
| Totah Ruins | * Student camps for archaeological training (digging, cleaning, cataloging, and transporting to display museum) * Guided floating tours of entire site along San Juan River * Wildlife and Nature Museum with animal displays from every continent   \*All activities are provided free to the public. | Totah Ruins in Farmington is privately-owned, active archaeological dig of another Hisatsonim great house on the ranch of a local billionaire, who enjoys supporting education any way he can (Bolack, 2018). The family maintain the site under federal guidelines but also provide every learning opportunity they can for families, tailoring trips to the site for the needs of the group. Their wildlife museum, another attraction on their ranch, is an outstanding learning tour on the ecosystems of every continent.  Their presentation for interested groups always includes animals from their displays and brochures for their unique services. |
| San Juan College | * Multiple summer courses for students of all ages * Culinary Arts, Math in the Real World, Chemistry Camp, Physics in our Community, Fire Prevention/Future Fire Fighters Camp, Police Explorers Camp, Nursing Camp, Visual and Performing Arts Camp   \*Each class runs for two weeks, Monday-Friday, and costs $10 for students. | San Juan College, instead of closing its doors during the summer break, opens the entire campus to students from the area to expand their learning in every college of learning for affordable costs.  The university has a prepared video and bring their own equipment to show the 5-minute-video on a loop while they provide viewers with registration forms and weblinks to more information (Sean, 2018). The university allows students to attend either one or two weeks to ensure they meet the needs of all families in the community, but one-week students may only attend the first week of a camp to ensure continuity for the rest of the group. |
| San Juan Outfitting | * Professional fly-fishing and hunting tours for families with children * Tailored learning experiences about the science of the San Juan River * Tailored learning experiences about environmentally-sound hunting and fishing in the San Juan Valley * Dissection-based dressing of kills and of fishing specimens * \*Cost of family guides $125-$250 per day, depending upon package | San Juan Outfitting contracts with local hunters and fishermen to provide several specific guided experiences in the Cucharas, San Juan, Animas, and La Plata river valleys. Each experience provides safety training, education on environmentally-sound fishing and hunting, and unique learning experiences based on guide expertise as well as family interest (Hunt, 2018).  The company has never provided informative talks to groups; owners have only used their website and word-of-mouth to market their family experiences, but they are excited about the chance to provide this service, and they are willing to develop a presentation using their laptops to display their website as well as customer video footage as they discuss standards-based learning opportunities for Heights families. |
| Farmington Museum | * Rotating educational exhibits from state-wide museums * Specific, standards-based day camps for science, technology, and history with a rotating schedule of events for students of all ages * Discounted state museum membership for families   \*All services for students are free. | Farmington Museum partners with all other state museums to bring meaningful exhibits to Farmington on a rotating schedule to ensure students from all communities may interact with significant exhibits each year. The museum also hires teachers in the summer to provide day camps, which incorporate current exhibits and state standards to provide meaningful educational opportunities to school-aged visitors (Powell, 2018). The museum has a digital presentation for school visits, and they provide parents with professional brochures with weblinks to more information about their current exhibits. Furthermore, the museum offers a discounted, state-wide membership to all museums in New Mexico. |
| Cottonwood State Park | * Camping at primitive and electric sites * Guided tours for groups based on state-standards for history and science * Fishing, hunting, and hiking throughout the state park * Discounted family membership for all state parks for $185/year | Cottonwood State Park, adjacent to the San Juan River, provides families with a variety of camp sites so they can access the river and valley. The park also provides rotating educational programs, which are seasonally based, and which are prepared by educators to ensure alignment with state standards (New Mexico State Parks, 2018). Families may day daily camping fees, which include all of the learning experiences the park has to offer, or they may purchase an annual pass, which grants them full-access to all state parks for the entire year (camping and parking fees are free to families with an annual pass). The state parks from the area have a promotional video, student information, and weblinks for their booth. They would prefer to have one booth for both parks to safe on manpower costs. |
| Navajo Lake State Park | * Camping at primitive and electric sites * Nature museum with guided tours by Park Rangers * Fishing, hunting, and hiking throughout the state park   Discounted family membership for all state parks for $185/year | Navajo Lake State Park endeavors to maintain a standards-based nature museum on site, which also displays cultural artifacts from the ancient cultures of the region. Most of the artifacts on display were found within the boundaries of the park. Rangers provide seasonal talks at the museum and have an interactive program for students, who visit, with an educational workbook students can complete during their visit (New Mexico State Parks, 2018). The state parks from the area have a promotional video, student information, and weblinks for their booth. They would prefer to have one booth for both parks to safe on manpower costs. |
| Cliff’s Amusement Park | * Seasonal amusement park with water park and rollercoaster/adventure rides * Located in the center of Albuquerque, NM, near multiple other attractions * All-day passes, single-attraction passes, and all-access season passes available | Cliff’s Amusement Park does not offer educational programs for visiting families, but parents can preview the rides on the website and prepare their own meaningful discussions about the laws of motion and other standards-based physics applications. Pinterest has worksheets available on these topics. A display for Cliff’s would have to be prepared by one of the volunteer teachers; the park does not have a marketing video but would send discount coupons and a poster for the table (Cliff’s Amusement Park, 2018). |
| National Museum of Nuclear Science & History | * Exhibits on the nuclear history of New Mexico, the United States, and the world * Educational tours with retired teachers working as docents * Discounted state museum membership for families   \*All services for students are free. | The National Museum of Nuclear Science & History (2018) provides multiple educational programs for students, and the speakers for these tours are retired teachers. The museum also offers educational opportunities similar to school field trip opportunities for families, who are vacationing in the area. Furthermore, the museum is centrally located near three other museums, an aquarium, and a botanical garden. The museum provides a video advertising their exhibits and programs, brochures, and display items to interested schools. This booth would require a volunteer teacher to answer questions and maintain the A/V equipment. |

**Conclusion**

Parents in Farmington care deeply about their children’s education, but they rarely attend campus nights, which don’t involve sports. To ensure they attend the opportunity, it has to be marketed with food so they don’t have to plan dinner, to provide a meaningful service—planning a learning adventure along with a vacation—which saves the family time, and to be entertaining (booths full of innovative information can actually be very fun for one night when you live in such a small, isolated community. Knowing the market helps savvy administrators plan and deliver a successful event, which will directly benefit their students’ learning during the summer break while it also provides leisure and bonding time for families. Sometimes, we only need a little creativity, and we will develop positive ties with our most important stakeholders: our students’ parents.

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