



Cross Street Christian School teachers plan for Family School.

FAMILIES Go Back to School

I just can't deal with him anymore." "I don't know what else to try." "He just doesn't seem to care about anything." "We argue all the time." Do these comments sound familiar? As teachers, we hear these, and similar concerns, from parents. They reek of frustration . . . exhaustion . . . burn-out.

As teachers, we empathize with the parents when they sit before us, tears streaming down their faces. What they need is help and suggestions that work. They need a support system to answer their questions and convince them that they are not alone.

At Cross Street Christian School (CSCS), a Seventh-day Adventist junior academy in Anderson, Indiana, the teachers and school board recognized that parents today desire suggestions on how to guide their students' study habits and how to deal with difficult or rebellious teenagers. Being a parent in the 21st century involves awesome responsibilities, as Ellen White pointed out: "No work

entrusted to human beings involves greater or more far-reaching results than does the work of fathers and mothers."¹ Moms and dads feel this pressure and want the best for their children; they are seeking positive Christian ideas and support.

Piloting Family School

Family School was created to fill this void. It was piloted for the 2004-2005 school year at Cross Street Christian School. Moms, dads, and students all attended two-hour programs on four Sunday evenings during the school year. Each program featured guest speakers whose topics were pertinent to parents and students alike. The meetings were planned to be intense, interactive learning times for attendees. Because of the level of learning during the programs, the Indiana Conference approved the programs to be counted as school days.

Each year that CSCS implemented the program, the school board voted a

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committee that was to plan the Family School during the summer. This committee met two or three times to choose topics, presenters, and dates. The group then reported back to the school board with a list of possible speakers, topics, volunteers, and any suggested changes. Each committee member was given a list of responsibilities, including finding specific volunteers and seeing that his or her assigned presenter had housing and any necessary supplies for the meeting.

Supporting Parents

Seventh-day Adventist teachers are concerned with the whole child. They recognize that influences from outside the classroom determine their learning as much as the instruction provided within it. Anything that they can do to support the parents in controlling these influences will enhance their efforts in the classroom. For example, students who spend hours each day playing video games or watching TV during school vacations usually have a harder time getting back into the school routine once they return. Teachers realize this, but (surprisingly) some parents do not. Teachers battle these, and other, influences every day. Winston Ferris, one of our presenters during the 2004-2005 school year, talked about the effects of television and video games on youth. Some of the parents strictly limited their children's video-game time due to the information they learned at Family School.

Students from my classroom listened carefully to the presenter who explained how sugar decreases their brains' ability to learn and retain information, and afterward talked openly about changing their diet.

Topics for Family School presentations have included: hazards of TV viewing, study skills, anger management, health, family time, understanding adolescents, children's coping skills, children's spirituality, and many others. In order to offer these important topics, CSCS has brought guest speakers from as far as three hours' drive away. Doctors, educators, authors, family counselors, and other professionals have presented positive, research-based in-

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Volunteers Help With the Programs

In an attempt to provide for every member of our school families, the Family School Committee enlisted volunteers from the nearby Anderson Adventist church to help with various children's programs. During each two-hour Family School program, two children's programs were run; ages 4 through 1st grade watched Bible videos, created color sheets and a craft, and had play time. Grades 4 through 6, however, had presenters who talked to them about health, family time, and their relationship with Christ. Each age group attending Family School had a presentation that was tailored to their specific needs. Grades 7 and higher sat with the adults in the main meeting.

Positive Response

What were the results of this trial program? Through a survey given at the final Family School of the year, the parents provided reassurance that the information was helpful, practical, and effective. The response was so positive that the school board voted to continue the Family School program the next school year. Speakers for the second year (2005-2006) included Larry Burton, an education professor



During the second year of Family School, each class provided special music for one Family School program.

from Andrews University; Donna Habenicht, a retired psychologist and author; Diana Stankewicz, the head of the remedial learning department at Anderson University; and Joanna Smith, a licensed family counselor from Indianapolis. The primary changes in the program the second year were: (1) a third children's program and childcare for infants through age 3, (2) a light dinner just before the program, and (3) special music presented by one of the classrooms at the beginning of each program. (This was a real hit!)

Attendance was good. For the first program in October, we had 85 total attendees, including students and adults; plus 15 volunteers who helped make Family School a reality. The programs couldn't have happened without the efforts of Archie Moore, education superintendent for the Indiana Conference, CSCS teachers, the school board chairman, a number of volunteers from the Anderson church, and local guest speakers. In October, JoAnna Smith, a li-



The younger children had crafts, coloring, Bible videos, and other activities while their parents attended the program.



One of the presenters for Family School was Chris Richards, a family physician.

censed family counselor, taught parents and teens how to recognize anger and use appropriate coping techniques. In November, Larry Burton introduced us to a variety of ways to enhance family worship and increase our students' faith level. Several of our presenters came for the whole weekend and preached on Sabbath, as well.

We assessed the Family School's effectiveness on an ongoing basis throughout the year. There were problems to solve, and obstacles to overcome. We occasionally had to reschedule our meetings (although it took something very serious to make this necessary!). We had a few parents who didn't want to include a two-hour program in their schedule, and several who refused to come.

Planning the Future

One improvement that we're considering for the future is having parents and students complete activities together during part or all of the program. Instead of separating the children from the parents during the presentation on "Family Time," we will prepare cooperative activities with which the families can experiment, such as worship or family togetherness ideas.

Another element that we have considered for the future is that of small-group, parent-support meetings. The teachers have discussed the concept of providing more quality time for the parents to join together and brainstorm solutions—discussion-style. I haven't met a parent yet who didn't have several concerns he or she would like to discuss with supportive peers. This element could include prayer groups or study groups.

The CSCS school board voted in April of 2006 to take a break from Family School for one year. Although the board felt strongly that it had been an effective and useful tool, the program was time-consuming, and it was difficult to solicit volunteers. The school board also voted to discuss later whether to offer Family School every other year.

It is our prayer that our students and families grow closer together and stronger. The Adventist family is an ever-present mission field for our schools. "If the child is not instructed aright here, Satan will educate him through agencies of his choosing. How important, then, is the school in the home!"²²



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REFERENCES

1. Ellen G. White *The Adventist Home* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1980), p. 182.
2. Ibid.