Lesson 18: Let's have a manatee science night!

Objective: To coordinate a family science night at the school, around the theme of manatees. Students will share their podcasts, etc. with other students and families.

Strategy:

Early in the school year:

1. Set a date for the science night and reserve the cafeteria or auditorium. Ideally, you will want to set the date several months in advance. Some schools like to do this on a PTA meeting night, to attract parents to that meeting.
2. Check with your PTA to find out if they might be able to provide food for the event (schools may be able to use Title 1 money to provide food, or the PTA may wish to sell slices of pizza, hotdogs, etc.)
3. Decide on a format for the event. The format that seems to work well is to start at either 5:30 or 6:00 pm and have several "booths" that the families can roam around. Each booth should ideally have interactive activities that people can participate in. You might be able to use some of the activities from this curriculum (e.g. create a matching game with sketches and photographs of manatees from Lesson 18, or have the manatee migration game set up from Lesson 14). You might show podcasts that students created (possibly do this in an adjacent classroom where it will be quieter). After about 90 minutes, try to arrange for a "grand finale" to draw everyone together—this might be a musical performance, or a live animal presentation. Wrap up the evening at about 7:30 or 8:00 pm.
4. Start rounding up partners for the event. Your local extension office, local aquarium or zoo, water management district are all good places to start. Once you find someone who is interested, they probably have contacts with others who will help out. These folks will help by providing booths*, and will sometimes come into the classrooms on the days preceding the event to teach the kids and get them excited about bringing their families to the event. Partners might also be able to provide door prize items!
*water cycle bracelets, pollution/trash activities, touch tanks, fish printing, exhibits with manatee or dolphin artifacts, safe boating displays, water safety, sun safety are all great topics for booths.
5. Assign responsibilities for the event. Someone from the school will need to coordinate the logistics (reserve the room, work with PTA, distribute fliers to classes etc.) Someone will need to take overall charge of the event (this might be someone from the school, or might be one of the partners). This person will coordinate with exhibitors, arrange the grand finale, design the layout of the event, create fliers and signs etc.

About two weeks before the event:

1. School and overall coordinator should touch base to make sure all of the logistics are in place.
2. Teachers should work with students to select videos, posters, activities etc. to showcase at the event.

This activity is available online at http://stjohns.ifas.ufl.edu/sea/manatees.html
A few days before the event:
1. Fliers should be sent home with all students to promote the event. If fish printing is going to be an activity, fliers might ask parents to bring along blank shirts to print on.
2. In-class visits may be made by some of the presenters.

Night of the event:
1. Exhibitors will probably begin setting up about 2 hours ahead of time.
2. Once the families arrive, it is great if there is some way for them to sign in (perhaps they get a free tote bag to carry all their goodies in when they sign in, perhaps they get free food tickets when they sign in…) This will allow for a head count of participants.
3. Once the event is underway, someone should give a “heads-up” about 10 minutes before the grand finale (over the PA system) to encourage folks to wrap up whatever they are doing and make their way to the stage area (or wherever).
4. Before the grand finale, make announcements and do door prize drawings as appropriate.