

Tab 19 ~

Contagious Enthusiasm ~ How to Get Parents Involved

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Contagious Enthusiasm ~ How to Get Parents Involved

Enthusiasm is contagious. It takes only a little to generate a lot among the people around you.

Parents are constantly coming up with new ideas on how to involve more parents in their PACs, DPACs, and SPCs. As you read this manual, you will find dozens of suggestions for getting the word out and attracting more parents to the work of your council—and keeping them!

All of these ideas come from parents—our best source of information. In this **Tab 19**, you will find suggestions collected from parents during networking sessions at BCCPAC conferences.

Starting Off the Year

For many councils, the September meeting is the best attended of the year. How can you capture that September energy and enthusiasm and make it last all year?

An informal social event is one of the best ways to start the year. It helps renew friendships and welcomes new parents to your council. Some ideas to consider...

Food is always an attraction—it makes people feel more comfortable and inclined to mingle. Include it whenever possible.

For PACs

- a hospitality event at morning drop-off, afternoon pick-up, or in the evening
- a PAC display and hospitality table at the school's first Open House or Meet the Teacher Night
- a regular drop-in for coffee at the same time every week, especially through September

For DPACs

- a hospitality event during the first half hour of your September meeting. Invite trustees, the superintendent, and senior district staff.
- Include a display of DPAC information, with your mission statement prominently displayed.

- Encourage your executive (both current and last year's) to mingle and talk to as many people as possible about your DPAC.

Be sure to advertise the event, using all the communication tools available to your council.

Offer name tags at every event or meeting.

For communication ideas, see **Tab 16, Communication in Your PAC, DPAC, and School Planning Council**.

Making the most of your first meeting

Use your September meeting to tell parents what your council is, what it does, how parents can become involved—and how much fun you have. Describe your council's purposes as they are set out in your constitution. Explain how these purposes relate to every parent and child in the school.

Parents who are new to your council want to go away from the first meeting

- feeling they were welcomed
- knowing more about your council, the school, and district
- encouraged to return and get involved.

Have a greeter at the door at every event or meeting.

Your first meeting is a time to celebrate parent involvement in public education, to welcome *everyone*—parents, staff, students—and to gather speed for the year ahead.

Many councils hold their elections at the first meeting of the year. Consider holding elections at a later meeting so as to keep the first meeting more of a social event.

A good way to solidify new contacts is to phone them after the meeting. Thank them for coming and ask how they enjoyed it. Offer to put them in touch with people who can answer their questions.

Gathering Contact Information

To reach parents, you will need contact information.

For PACs

- With parents' permission, some schools will give phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Ask your principal.
- Circulate a sign-in sheet at every event or meeting, with a place for name, phone number, and e-mail address. Use this information to create a data base for regular communication.

For DPACs

- On the PAC member registration form, request name, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address of the PAC representative and alternate representative, if any.
- Also request contact information for the PAC member's school and president.
- At DPAC meetings, ask everyone to sign in. Invite anyone who is not a designated representative to give their phone number and e-mail address if they wish to receive information directly.
- Use all of this information to create a data base for regular communication.

Before collecting personal information on parents, see *Personal Information Protection Act* in **Tab 1, Parent Involvement ~ Basic Principles**, page 14.

Reaching New Parents

New parents to your school want to learn about the school, staff, other parents, and your council.

- Invite new parents to a PAC-sponsored barbeque. Ask your principal to include the invitation with registration information.
- Invite parents of students registering in May or June to your last PAC meeting of the school year.
- Hold a special PAC meeting for parents of incoming middle or secondary school students while the students are visiting the school.

- Ask your principal for time to welcome parents at school-sponsored events for new parents. Encourage your executive to attend and mingle.
- Display your PAC mission statement at the school entrance, with information on how to learn more about the PAC.

Boosting Attendance at Meetings and Events

- Welcome parents to the school with regular coffee get-togethers. (If you have a parent room, keep the coffee on.) Use the opportunity to talk about parent involvement in your school. Offer to take parents' comments, questions, and concerns to the next PAC meeting. Encourage parents to come themselves to discuss their points.
- Advertise your meetings through flyers, newsletters, calendars, signs, sandwich boards, phone-outs, e-mail, and website. See **Tab 16, Communication in Your PAC, DPAC, and School Planning Council**.
- Hold your meetings in different locations. For example, alternate meetings between the school and local Band Council centre or community centre. Hold each meeting in a different classroom in the school so that parents can see the various classrooms.
- Make minutes of PAC, DPAC, and SPC meetings easily available to parents. Post them on the parent bulletin board, in the parent centre, or school office. Include them in the PAC or school newsletter or website, or send them by e-mail.
- Offer babysitting by students with babysitting certificates. Thank the students with a free lunch on hot lunch day, or pay them with money received from parents.
- Offer to pick up anyone without transportation.
- Offer donated door prizes, or a draw for dinner-for-two or front row seats at the Christmas concert or spring play. Hold the draw at the beginning of the meeting to encourage people to come on time.
- Schedule meetings so as to accommodate as many members as possible. Follow the principles of good meetings. See **Tab 14, Effective Meetings**.
- Use an ice-breaker at each meeting. For example, invite everyone to introduce themselves to two other people.

- Arrange guest speakers. Ask members for suggestions.
- Invite a student representative. Let the student speak early on and then leave.
- Invite a teacher representative and students to share a classroom project.
- Facilitate a discussion on a specific issue, with leading questions to encourage comment.
- Include an open question or information period at each meeting. (Limit 15 minutes.)
- Include an up-to-date list of volunteer opportunities at each meeting.
- Ask everyone to bring a friend to the next meeting.
- Invite members who do crafts to bring an item to the next meeting.
- Place a PAC suggestion box in the school entrance.
- Assure members that any information they give the PAC will not be used to solicit support for fundraising.
- Hold a pot luck celebration dinner at the close of the annual general meeting.
- For DPACs, hold a special breakfast meeting in the fall and spring for DPACs reps and PAC presidents. Keep the agenda short (or have no agenda at all) and encourage networking and open discussion.
- For DPACs, hold a breakfast, lunch, or dinner meeting for DPAC reps, PAC presidents, interested parents, principals, senior district administrators, and trustees with a guest speaker. Leave time for networking and encourage everyone to mingle.