

Seven Steps to an Effective School Council

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1. Make your school welcoming
 - Security – Do not let security overtake community
 - i. A busy , active school will see less problems
 - Have a Volunteer Room
 - i. A place where parents can come together
 - ii. A place with a photocopier , laminator, etc... Teachers can drop off “work” for parent volunteers
 - iii. Parents can help with Balanced Literacy here
 - iv. Always wear a smile!
 - Have parent council members present the first day of school to help orient new parents/students

2. Make the school part of the community
 - BBQ's are good!!
 - Hold movie nights (buy a license to show a current film) Kids bring sleeping bags and pillows to sit on the floor. Parents sit at the back. It is noisy, some watch the movie...but everyone has a great time.

3. Make connections
 - Think of every possible event held at your school that brings in parents/community partners and **be there**
 - i. First day of school
 - ii. JK Registration
 - iii. Concerts
 - iv. Bake sales
 - v. Field Trips
 - vi. Be a Parent Ambassador- Usually the first person that a new family meets is the Principal. He/she can be your best school council advocate...make sure they give names and numbers.
 - Instead of “Staff meetings” hold “School meetings” invite parents, student reps, teachers, board reps. Let the community know what is going on in their school

4. Invite, invite, invite, and then invite again!!
 - Saying in a letter “Next school council meeting will be held on” “All parents welcome” does not give people the motivation to make the effort to come out. Consider phone trees (autodial), mass emails, website.
 - Never assume that everyone knows you are on the school council
 - Never assume that everyone knows what a council is and what you do

5. The meeting

- Lose the formality
- Introduce yourselves, give a little history to new comers
- Go over what it is you do as a council to new comers
- Let them know the rules (everyone can vote)
- The principal does not run the meetings or make up agendas...It is a parent majority council. Leave that to the chair.
- If you use education jargon stop and explain what they mean

6. Lower Expectations

- No formal elections (no speeches) otherwise you will never get new members. This is very intimidating
- Not every parent wants or is able to be involved in their child's education. This is ok...but make sure you have other ways that their voices can be heard.
 - If there is an issue....list them, have the parent put a sticker or check mark their choice...quick, and easily done while waiting for parent/teacher interviews.

7. Be Patient!

- It takes time to invigorate a council and engage parents.

How do you Engage a Busy Parent?

Give the parents different options to be involved in your meetings

- Teleconferencing
- Be flexible....offer different timeslot choices for volunteering
- Vary meeting times/days
- Offer something for the kids (ex. Basketball game, movie in the gym, etc....)
- They need to know that are an important part of the school's success and tell them why?
 - Studies show that when parents are involved in the school community, student's success rates go up.

Elementary v.s. Secondary

Elementary Focus:

- Fundraising
- Field Trips
- Spirit Days
- Hot Dog Days
- Special guests (authors, scientists)
- Playground
- Health Fairs

Secondary Focus:

- Curriculum based advice to principals
- EQAO testing
- Parents as Partners
- Board policies
- Little or no fundraising...students are good at that...they can handle it!

Other

Grade 8 Orientation – Be there...take a few moments to tell parents what it is that you do

Green Theme – Environmentally friendly bags as a give away

One week before school starts...have a parent/student orientation at the school....show them around, tell about the semester system, show them where their kids classes are, meet the teachers, have a BBQ. Student ambassadors can help

Form a network of School councils....work together! This is coming in May in Timmins

Parent Support Line 1-888-534-3944 (Jackie runs this...anything and everything a parent might want to know but does not know how to ask)

www.peopleforeducation.com Great information and resources

KEEP IT ABOUT THE KIDS!!