



Effectively Engaging and Involving Busy Parents



One of the greatest challenges facing Catholic school administrators, who rely heavily on volunteers, is how to engage and involve busy parents in school activities and parent organizations. These millennial parents/guardians of students in pre-K through grade 12 have less free time than parents from previous generations and as a result, they tend to volunteer less. According to a recent newsletter published by Catholic School Management, parents who do volunteer want clearly defined, specific tasks and they want to volunteer along with their peers and friends. For this reason, it is beneficial to appoint co-chairs for a committee rather than to have one person overseeing the group's activities.

The following is a list of specific ideas that may help to engage a school's busy parents:

- Ask parents to share their expertise and experience by serving as a guest speaker in a classroom or at a meeting.
- Survey parents to determine which days/times during the week work best for them to attend parent meetings. Some may prefer early mornings before work, some may prefer pick-up time in the afternoon, while some may prefer evening meetings.
- Engage the whole family in the scheduled activity so they can enjoy the event together without the need for a babysitter. For example, host a School Maintenance Day or invite families to assist the drama department in building sets or sewing costumes.
- Keep in mind that the family dynamic is changing. Instead of just using "mother" and "father" in promoting parent events, include the terms "guardian" or "grand-friend."
- Utilize technology when sending messages to parents to remind them of school events and school announcements. A service such as *SignUpGenius.com* allows parents to sign up for available volunteer time slots. There is no paperwork involved and no phone calls need to be made.
- Establish some common ground with busy parents. Some teachers and school staff have families of their own and also are asked to volunteer at their child's school. Sharing this information can help to relate to the parent community on a personal level.
- Establish a parent resource center at your school and consider ways in which the school can bring added value to parents. One example of this is a school in Atlanta that held an



informal ESL course after school in a classroom. Students worked on iPads while their parents received instruction on the Smart Board. As a result, attendance increased at parent meetings and participation in school events increased as well.

- Establish a Parent Ambassador Program. The ambassadors, working in teams, have the opportunity to reach out to parents during social events, student work and play activities, and social media networking. Make sure to train ambassadors and consider offering incentives for their involvement. An ambassador program gives busy parents the chance to assist in a way that is more possible and convenient for them.
- Respond to parents in a timely manner. Parents today appreciate fast and frequent communication. Utilize social media to post school events, breaking news, and student successes. If meetings are necessary, make sure that their time is used wisely.
- Clearly communicate volunteer opportunities for parents. During the summer, email or post online a parent volunteer opportunity sign-up form. This is a way to welcome parents and let them know what events will be offered during the year, how they can get involved, and what will be expected of them. There should also be opportunities for joining the school board and its committees. This is an excellent way to build strong relationships in support of the school.

There is a critical need for parental involvement in the educational mission of the Church in our schools. Not only does it benefit the school and the parish, but it allows parents to partner with the school and participate in the education of their child. Ultimately, this kind of involvement can support enrollment, since these invested parents often share the “good news” of the school with others while at the same time serving their Church.