

## Tips For Maximizing Attendance



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## Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

### Tips for Maximizing Attendance at Parent/Caregiver Workshops

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Successful parent workshops require careful planning and implementation. The following step-by-step process provides ideas that schools and organizations have found effective.

#### **Assess Parent Needs**

Successful, well-attended parent workshops respond to the specific needs of parents rather than what schools assume they need. Determining the interests of parents requires a broad-based needs assessment. There are several approaches:

**Surveys**--Questionnaires can be sent directly to all parents at the beginning of the school year. They can suggest topic areas to parents or can ask them to recommend areas of interest.

**Home Visits**--These visits provide an opportunity for workshop coordinators to develop programs based on personal, in-depth conversations with parents.

**Informal Methods**--There are other relatively quick and easy ways to gather ideas about the interests and needs of parents. Parents can be polled at all-school meetings, parent conferences, and advisory council meetings. Parents who use a resource room and parent aides are a good source of information.

#### **Identify Resources**

Once parent needs have been identified, schools look for resources to speak to these needs either internally or from outside agencies. Resources could come from universities, businesses, social service agencies, regional education centers, and other school systems. Depending on the topic, workshop leaders could include:

**Specialists**--physicians, lawyers, speech therapists, and social workers.

**Skilled Parents**--members of the parent group or the community who have the skills to train other parents.

**Practitioners**--staff of community agencies like the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, health clinics; members of church groups and volunteer groups; paraprofessionals.

**Educators**--university professors, teachers, school or district staff, and community educators.

#### **Recruit Participants**

Parents need to be both informed and have their interest aroused. Advance notice of upcoming workshops with note of transportation and child care services is essential for parents to plan their schedules.

**Written Materials**--A parent newsletter can include articles on upcoming workshops and can be followed up with flyers that remind parents of the date, time, place, and topic of the workshop. Recruitment announcements should be circulated in all languages spoken by parents at the school and posted in strategic locations such as neighborhood centers, churches, supermarkets, and laundromats.

**Home Visits**--Personal contacts appeal to parents, especially if the visitor is a member of the community and speaks the language of the parent. Schools also inform parents about workshops and encourage their participation during regular home visits by parent liaisons and school staff.

**Telephone Networking**--When all parents of children at the school have telephones, schools have used telephone trees to contact and recruit parents. Some parents call a few other parents, and they in turn are asked to call others from a master list.

**Announcements at Meetings**--The school's open house, PTA meetings, advisory council sessions, and parent room gatherings provide good opportunities. Neighborhood centers, adult learning centers, churches, and other community institutions may also be willing to announce parent workshops.

### **Provide Support Services**

Strategies that make it easier for all parents to attend include

- organizing on-site child care;
- reimbursing parents for child care costs;
- helping parents form carpools;
- reimbursing for bus fare;
- providing a school bus or shuttle to the workshop; and
- opening parent rooms. Some schools support parent education activities by providing permanent space for parent gatherings. In these parent rooms, parents can meet with other parents, use resource materials, and learn about other programs and services of the school.

### **Evaluate Success**

Schools with strong parent education programs assess their activities to see whether they were successful, how they might be modified, and what activities should be added. Two useful ways to evaluate programs are:

**Evaluation Forms**--After each session, parents can be asked to fill out a short evaluation form. This form can include questions such as:

- What was the most useful?
- What was the least useful?
- What other information would you like a workshop to cover?
- What kinds of workshop experiences would you like in the future?

**Group Discussion**--After some workshops, parents are asked to share their thoughts about the effectiveness of the session. They can be asked questions similar to those that would be on an evaluation form or can have a free form discussion.