

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, 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 section, 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? It is important to be welcoming, organized, communicate well, and follow up.

An informal social event can be 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.

Offer name tags at every event or meeting.

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

For communication ideas, see **Tab 16, Communication in your PAC, DPAC, and SPC.**

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

Have greeters at the door at every event or meeting. Their job is welcome everyone, make introductions, and make sure new people aren’t isolated.

- feeling they were welcomed
- feeling comfortable – the higher the comfort level, the more likely that they will return
- feeling that participation by all parents is welcome, not just by a chosen few
- encouraged to speak up
- knowing more about your council, the school, and district
- encouraged to return and get involved
- feeling they have something to contribute

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.

If your first meeting gets little accomplished and lasts forever, attendance will be low in the future. Show everyone that your council is organized and respects people’s time.

Wear name tags and make sure to introduce everybody – there’s no better way to turn off a new parent than by ignoring them.

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

A good way to solidify new contacts is to phone or email them after the meeting. Thank them for coming and ask how they enjoyed it. Provide them with contact information for people who can answer their questions.

Gathering Contact Information

There are a number of different ways of reaching parents, such as face to face communication, phone calls, newsletters, websites, emails, meetings, posters, and social media. Important considerations for the method include how much time it takes your volunteers, how effective the method is for getting information out, the cost of the method, how much control you have over the communication, and what results you want from the method. It is best to look at communicating in as many methods as possible, in order to communicate with as many parents as possible.

The information your council will wish to communicate is for different purposes:

- Actions required – volunteers, wanted, events, meeting attendance
- Council information – minutes, reports, agendas
- Discussions and announcements, for parents to feel informed about what is going on
- How to get more information – resources for further information or concerns

For PACs

- Electronic methods, such as email or websites, are typically the easiest and cheapest methods for communication. Some websites have the capacity to automatically send out daily or weekly email updates when website content is updated, which can be a very simple method of communicating.
- Some schools have a listserv for e-mail addresses which you may be able to use. If they do not have this list, then they may be able to provide you with email addresses so that you can create your own email list. Ask your principal. Often your DPAC will have listserv capabilities.
- 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. Warning: if you ask people to put down their contact information for an event or a committee, it's an important courtesy to contact them, even if it's just to explain that there aren't any meetings or enough work to go around at the moment.

For DPACs

- On the PAC member registration form, request name, phone number, and e-mail address of the PAC representative and alternate representative, if any, as well as the PAC Chair. *A sample form is included for your reference- see page 8.*
- 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.

- Your school district may collect information on PACs for their own database. Ask the school district to make sure that they can share this information with DPAC.
- 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 12.

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 or event. Ask your principal to include the invitation with registration information.
- Invite parents of students registering in the Spring 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 and where they can find the PAC bulletin board.
- Create a one page letter of introduction to be provided to all new registrations and also deliver enough copies of the letter to neighbourhood preschools and daycares and your feeder schools for distribution to students who will be coming to your school for the new school year.

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 free babysitting by students with babysitting certificates. Thank the students with a free lunch on hot lunch day, or pay them.
- 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 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.
- It's important to partner with your principal – you want to work together towards the betterment of the school. Just as the principal shouldn't take over the PAC, the PAC shouldn't take over the school – involvement should be a respected partnership.
- Respect teacher's time – if your council communicates by sending newsletters or flyers home, remember that this typically involves a lot of teacher time. Try and minimize teacher efforts, and make sure to give back.
- Make it easy for people to participate. For some people, the smallest obstacle to involvement can become a major barrier.
- Consider what excuses or reasons people have for not getting involved in your council, and then look at those areas for improvement. This may mean a hard look at how your

group currently works. However, if you are serious about increasing involvement, it needs to be easy for parents to say yes to your council.

- The single best method to increase involvement is to personally ask people to participate. Personal contact can be the best way for people to take that first step and become involved.
- Don't assume that people know what it is that your council does – communicate this important message in a variety of ways.
- Make fundraising second, and building parent community first.
- Offer multiple ways to become involved. Some parents can't make evening meetings, or volunteer during the work day, but they can contribute and participate in many other ways. Attending meetings is not the only way of being involved, but it's often one that councils focus on.
- Say thank you. Some people may not feel it is important to be thanked, but many people respond well to a personal thank you note, or a volunteer appreciation event.
- Make it fun, and celebrate successes!
- 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.

DPAC REPRESENTATIVE FORM

School Year:	
School Name:	
PAC Website:	
School Website:	
DPAC Representative Name:	
Phone:	Email:
Alternate DPAC Representative Name:	
Phone:	Email:
PAC Chair Name:	
Signature authorizing above representatives to represent your PAC:	
Phone:	Email:
Any additional email addresses for DPAC notices:	

DPAC will use the information provided above to communicate information to representative, PAC chairs, and other PAC members. Contact information may be made available to the DPAC Executive, PAC representatives to DPAC, PAC Chairs and the School District.

Your DPAC representative(s) should be elected from your PAC, and are responsible for attending DPAC meetings, voting and reporting back to your PAC.