

Appleton Citywide Parent Network Meeting
December 1, 2014, 6:30 pm
Ferber Elementary School

In Attendance: Jill Georger (Houdini), Amber Cittadino (Badger), Paul Cooney (Ferber), Lee Allinger (AASD), Tober Moderson (Jefferson), Pamela Franzke (Ferber/McKinley), Tracy Wydeva (Ferber), Sheree Garvey (AASD), Kelly Truettner (Huntley), Jenny Hintz (McKinley), Angie Borchardt (Ferber), Heidi Davies (Ferber), Cindy Munns (Ferber), John Cuff (Classical/North), Pattie Burns (Ferber), Ginger Schaden (Berry), Nancy Migliano (Ferber), Troy Blake (Edison), Carrie DeYoung (Highlands/Odyssey), Kathy Hammerton (Houdini).

*Meeting minutes from last meeting are on our website: www.appletonparents.com. Recently awarded Project SPEAK grants can also be found on our website.

*4K classes are now eligible for Project SPEAK grants because they are part of the Lifetouch contract.

*Our next meeting will be Monday, February 2nd, at Wilson Middle School, at 6:30 pm.

*Appleton Citywide Parent Network manages the photography/yearbook contracts, and feedback will soon be needed. We are in year 2 of a 4-year contract with Lifetouch, but we can opt out of years 3 and 4. We are not locked into that contract.

*The purpose of this meeting will be to share our best practices amongst each other. The following is a synopsis of our discussion. Attendees were split into two groups, and each group was assigned two questions to discuss and then share their responses with the rest of the attendees.

Question 1: What are your best practices for increasing/maintaining parent involvement and participation?

*“Peer pressure.” Parents calling parents and requesting help works better than staff calling parents.

*Letting kids know what is going on at school, so they can encourage their parents to help.

*For parents who are new to the school (or even parents who are not), communication is key. Utilize your newsletter. Others shared that they preferred to get information from various places: phone/robo calls, text messages, paper (although some shared that they try to use less paper because they felt using more high-tech methods worked better), using Facebook. Facebook can be used effectively. It was recommended to not tag people in any Facebook photos to avoid any privacy concern, and to also make it required to approve any post before it can be posted to a Facebook wall.

*It is important to get principals and staff members to buy into the mission of your parent group.

*It is a good idea to hit the kindergarten (and new) parents early, and then retain them. Have a parent group representative at the Kindergarten Welcome Night to introduce new parents to your group.

*People often have misconceptions about parent groups. Making personal connections is important to make people feel needed and included.

*Find roles for people that will both fill a need in your parent group and fit that person's personality and talents. Some people said they liked using a "Time and Talent" worksheet right at the beginning of the year, but the majority seemed to agree that they have run into problems with using this type of sheet, including: the potential to scare away new members who feel the need to be committed right away, and also parents forgetting what they signed up for or bailing when help is actually needed. Some people lead with the statement, "You don't have to do anything," because the people who are not at all involved this year (sometimes because they want to sit back and soak it all in) will be your biggest volunteers in future years.

*Have meetings at convenient times to maximize your attendance. Someone suggested possibly using teleconferencing (skyping, etc.) as an option for people who want to attend your parent group meeting but can't. It would be helpful to hand out an agenda to follow along prior to the teleconferenced meeting.

*Offer free childcare and food (i.e. pizza) to increase your meeting turnout. Make sure the child care is in a separate room so it won't be distracting.

*Having a Multicultural Night is a good way to get minority parents involved and feeling appreciated.

*Meeting turnout averages are as follows:

- Highlands—20-25 people (meetings are slightly less than monthly). Teacher grants (with a \$25 limit) are automatically given to any teacher who attends a meeting and asks for the grant.
- Houdini—20-25 people (meetings are monthly).
- Edison—25-30 (4 meetings/year)
- Berry—10-15 (4 meetings/year)
- McKinley—7-10 (monthly meetings)
- Huntley—12-15 (bimonthly meetings)
- Ferber—20-25 (4 meetings/year)
- Jefferson—12-15 (monthly meetings)
- Classical—Has a volunteer coordinator, not regular meetings
- Badger—25-30 (6 meetings/year)

*Use Sign-Up Genius or Volunteer Spot if possible...these websites make it easier to get volunteers for events.

*Having Room Reps was suggested as an idea to get more people involved.

*Handwritten thank you notes are more personal and help people feel appreciated, even better than an email thank you note.

Question 2: What are your best practices for grooming future parent group executive members or officers (i.e. President, VP, Secretary, Treasurer, Chairperson positions)?

*Limiting what people on your board can take on, for the sake of preventing burnout. Set limits, for example: “If no one takes over _____ event, it will go away,” and stick to those limits.

*Have your officers make a multi-year commitment to prevent yearly turnover. Officers are just getting comfortable in their positions after the first year, so switching to someone new every year makes it difficult.

*Avoid rotating all officer positions in one year - alternate 2 one year for a 2 year term then 2 the following year for a 2 year term as an example.

*Have the Immediate Past President be a member of your Executive Board, so your new board doesn't try to “reinvent the wheel.” Utilize the knowledge of past members. Have past Presidents plan to be available to answer questions.

Question 3: What are your best practices for publicizing your parent group activities/sharing information with the broad school community? Volunteering needs? Successes?

Discussion about how to best publicize things:

*Edison (PTA) uses Facebook and robo-calls. They are not using flyers as much.

*Houdini (PTO) is using Facebook and robo-calls. They tend to use more of a variety of ways.

*Classical is using more paperwork.

*McKinley—Facebook, robo-calls, flyers.

*Robo-call— parents said they don't mind if they get the call to multiple phones

*Janet Berry (PTO)—PTO talks to the students about the bigger events to increase excitement (their Fun Run, for example).

*Ferber—Room Parents go into rooms and create hype for upcoming events.

*Student councils can give messages back to homerooms or service club.

*Facebook is useful. One way of managing content is to allow only the administrator to post.

*Use of a school marquee is helpful.

*Paper and electronic communications both seem to be helpful to different schools.

*Try a survey: “How did you hear about us?”

Discussion regarding how to best fill volunteer needs:

*McKinley emails their entire PTA distribution list.

*Edison has a volunteer sign-up at their PTA registration table.

*Houdini uses Bring It, Sign Up Genius, and Volunteerspot. Also, the Vice President controls the PTO membership distribution list and shares it on an as-needed basis. They also put their Volunteerspot link in their newsletter.

*Classical has a para-pro coordinator for their school.

*Ferber has a teacher representative on their PTO that shares volunteer needs and other information with the staff.

*Question was raised: Do you get staff support? Most responded minimal to some. The question was asked if teachers/staff can get “commitment to building” points by participating in parent group activities. The answer was “yes” if the person organizes something or volunteers - up to 10 points.

Discussion about publicizing successes:

*Classical—school newsletter (both digital and paper) publicizes their successes. They also specifically thank volunteers for their help.

*Appleton North—the things they buy for the school are “branded” with a slogan: “Powered by the Appleton North Boosters” so people will be aware of what they are doing for the school.

*It was mentioned to not be afraid to “toot your own horn,” (i.e. “we did this for you,” or “we bought this for you.”).

*Ferber—Shares successes on the school marquee.

Question 4: What are your fundraising best practices?

*Janet Berry—Parents were asking about how the money was being spent, so they posted it in the newsletter, shared it at the Welcome Back Coffee Chat, and shared it at their Fun Run (their biggest event).

*Houdini’s largest fundraiser is the Knowledge-a-thon

*McKinley—Their holiday craft sale generates more than \$2000. The kids shop, and the parents make and donate the crafts. They also have a school dance and basket raffle that generates more than \$2000. The basket raffle is made possible through donations.

*Ferber uses an “un-fundraiser” and a coin drop/penny war.

*Edison does a knowledge-a-thon. They tried a walk-a-thon, and that didn’t do well. They also have a sock hop, where selling glow-sticks is huge. They get popcorn and water donated.

*It was suggested to always have a donation bucket at every event.

*Classical has a knowledge-a-thon.

*Janet Berry has a fun run which raises between \$6000 and \$9000 in the fall, and a BINGO night with raffle baskets in the spring.

*People seem to like creative fundraisers, but it is important to know your school demographic to know what would work best in your school.

*Using company matches or acquiring donations from people with business connections is also a good idea.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:00 pm.

Submitted by:

Amber Cittadino

Appleton Citywide Parent Network Secretary