

# Five Steps to Getting Parents to Your Meetings

Recruiting and engaging parents is a common concern among parent leaders who are looking for new strategies to increase parent participation.

Getting parents involved is challenging in every community. Cultural differences and different understandings of involvement makes parent engagement even more challenging in many schools.

This step-by-step guide is the result of a series of conversations with diverse parent leaders from various organizations. It offers some reflective questions, suggestions for your consideration, and examples of how one local elementary school PTA answered the questions for that particular step.

## Step 1

Before inviting parents to one more meeting, think about why you want them to

come. What is the goal of the meeting? Knowing your goal will make recruitment a lot easier.

Examples:

- ⇒ To provide important information about the school.
- ⇒ To give parents ideas on how to support their children's learning.
- ⇒ To get volunteers.
- ⇒ To build community.
- ⇒ To educate parents on the importance of being involved.

### Specific Goals

- To engage parents who reflect the diversity of the school community.
- To build a foundation for long-term involvement.
- To provide useful information to parents.
- To provide an opportunity to build relationships among parents and staff.

## Why Don't Parents Come?

- They don't see themselves in the leadership?
- They don't think the meetings are useful or do not know what the agenda is.
- Busy with work and kids.
- Come from cultures in which parents were not supposed to be involved.
- Uncomfortable that other parents seem to know everything.
- Meetings sometimes feel like an

## Step 3

Now, create an agenda that addresses the barriers you listed in Step 2.

- ⇒ Don't start the agenda like a business meeting. Welcome people and do something to make people feel welcome who may be new or intimidated. Consider doing an icebreaker.
- ⇒ Make the bulk of the agenda about something parents can use to help their children.
- ⇒ Make the topic relevant to the time of the school year.
- ⇒ Have the business at the end of the agenda and limit the use of "Roberts Rules" and other protocols.
- ⇒ Have a set agenda and stick to it.
- ⇒ End on time.
- ⇒ Have a raffle as the final item so people stay until the end.

## Step 2

Now that you know why you want parents to come, think about all the reasons why parents often do not attend.

Here are some things to consider:

- ⇒ What did parent involvement look like in the communities in which many of the parents grew up?
- ⇒ Does your parent leadership reflect the diversity of families in your school community?
- ⇒ What do most parents think about your organization? Do they know what it does?
- ⇒ Do your outreach strategies (e.g. listserve, flyers, phone calls) reach the majority of your parents?
- ⇒ Does the format of your meeting make it feel welcoming to parents who may be nervous about attending or do not understand MCPS culture?
- ⇒ Is the topic relevant to most families in your community?
- ⇒ Are the meetings too long or run too late?

## Possible Agenda

- 6:30 Dinner
- 7:00 Welcome. Have everyone introduce themselves to someone they don't know.
- 7:10 Cultural Bingo—fun activity to talk with each other, feel valued, and learn about different cultures in the school.
- 7:30 Principal and teachers give an interactive presentation on Curriculum 2.0.
- 8:00 Announcements
- 8:15 Raffle

## Step 4

The agenda is only part of what needs to be considered to make a meeting successful. Here are some things to think about for the setup .

- ⇒ Childcare. Many schools have aftercare programs that will do the childcare for you. Others use high school students with adult/staff supervision.
- ⇒ Interpretation. Do some of your families need an interpreter? Have bilingual parents greet and welcome non-English speakers when they walk in. Consider having additional meetings that are just in the other languages.
- ⇒ Food. Parents are coming from a busy day. Also, food makes a meeting seem more comfortable and welcoming.
- ⇒ Time. Have the food available 30 minutes before the meeting starts. That way, parents won't feel so rushed and most people will be in place before the actual meeting gets started. It also offers an opportunity for community building.
- ⇒ Chairs. Consider putting chairs in small circles of 6 to 8. That will make the meeting less intimidating and give people a chance to talk with a small group of parents.
- ⇒ Greeters. Have some parents at the door welcoming people. Give everyone a nametag. Make sure the leaders are easily identified.

### Set Up

- Pick up pupusas and order pizza.
- Parent Ambassadors welcome parents as they arrive.
- Set up chairs in small circles of 6 to 8.
- Call the interpreter and reserve the translation equipment.
- Bring nametags, markers, and pens.
- Create evaluation in English and Spanish.

## Step 5

Finally, create an outreach "campaign" that considers

the barriers from Step 2. Here are some ideas:

- ⇒ Flyer that addresses the barriers.
- ⇒ "Robo Call" that is written in a way that people will understand why they should come.
- ⇒ Enlist parents to help make personal calls.
- ⇒ Motivate students to push their parents to attend.
  - \* Some schools provide ice cream to the grade with the most parents in attendance.
- ⇒ Remind parents on the day of the meeting.
  - \* Some elementary schools put a sticker on their students to remind parents about the meeting.
- ⇒ Organize car pools.
- ⇒ Translate your outreach materials to the languages most often used in your school.

## Parent Meeting

Do you have questions about school? Want to meet other parents and get information about activities?

How do I sign my child up to get lunch? How much time should be spent on homework? How can we be sure our children are safe walking to school? Can you tell me about the programs for students with special needs? How much time for recess? Who do I contact when I have a question or problem? Is there before and aftercare?

**Thursday, August 30th**

At Flora M. Singer **ES**

**Free Pizza and Pupusa's at 6:30 pm**

(while supplies last)

**Meeting from 7 to 8:30 pm**

Free Child care

Groups in Spanish, Amharic, and French

#### Agenda

- Dinner
- Learn about different activities and programs
- Get to know each other
- Questions and answers
- Announcements
- Budget vote
- Raffle
- Conclude

Mr. Heitvoile and some teachers will be at the meeting to answer questions.

A representative from Safe Routes to Schools will be present to provide information to help students get to school safely.

#### Questions

**English**  
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**Special Education**  
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# Pulling It All Together

Getting parents out to meetings requires you to be as intentional in your efforts as you are with other programs. Try to think out of the box and remember that you want to grow as the year goes on.

1. Develop your goals. Why is this meeting important?
2. Think about what gets in the way of parents coming.
3. Create an agenda that considers the reasons why people don't attend meetings.
4. Think about the other variables that will make it easier for parents to attend and participate.
5. Create an outreach campaign that addresses the barriers from Step 2.
6. Evaluate. What worked well and what could you do differently the next time.


## Additionally...

Consider other opportunities for parents to meet.

For example, many PTAs have formed Latino Parent Coffees where parents can build community, get information, and provide support to each other.

### Latino Parents Coffee

Every Friday Morning at  
Flora M. Singer Elementary School  
Coffee and Snacks start at 9:00 am



- ☕ Have a cup of coffee
- ☕ Meet other Singer Parents
- ☕ Get information about school

We will have games and a movie for younger children while parents talk and meet together.

Organized by the Singer Latino Parent Committee  
Please call Vicmarie Arocho with any questions  
301-681-2758 or varocho@yahoo.com

Flora M. Singer Parent and Teacher Association  
2007/2008-2013/2014, Spring 2015

### Created by

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