**Parent Engagement**

By Parents Engaged in Education

This Webinar is posted on Parents Engaged in Education’s (PEIE) YouTube channel if you wish to view the whole video.

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Schools a higher level of engagement prior to covid had an even higher level of engagement during the school closure in the spring, schools with a lower level of engagement saw a further drop in engagement during this same time.

Ways to increase engagement are making a commitment and taking a variety of approaches to bring in new people to councils.

* Ask parents what would help then to engage with their child’s education, this can be done through a survey or community canvas.
* Have a variety of ways to reach out to parents. Demographics matter. Dr. Pushor found that older parents and grandparents preferred phone calls, while younger parents preferred electronic communication (email, social media, apps, etc.)
* Make a conscious effort to move away from the traditional schoolcentric approach that councils have taken in the past for meetings and events and move towards a more familycentric approach.
* Find ways to approach and involve parents who cannot physically make it to meetings.
* Offer value to every meeting. Did I learn something, do something, connect to somebody?
* Create a welcome wagon package for new families with information and contacts for resources in the community.

Going virtual for outreach and meetings can decrease the barriers that would hold parents back from attending (such as childcare and transportation). Thames Valley saw a significant increase in attendance numbers when meetings were moved to online. Using captioning or having interpreters for online meetings will be helpful for ESL or hard of hearing parents. Going virtual can also help change the structure of the meetings and help make them less formal and more inviting for new members, look at doing breakout rooms, Google Docs.

When looking to increase diversity in your council do it personally and make it intentional. Shoulder tap- talk to the individual on a personal level and break the barriers and stereotype of school councils being a scary inner circle of power. Most of us have been involved in our councils for so long that we don’t often see them as intimidating as they are to those on the outside. Encourage new people to come with a friend and check in with them after the meeting to receive feedback about their experience. Look at your protocols. Are they friendly to a diverse community (eg. Food, ceremony, physically)? Are you making it comfortable for new people to come in? Slow meetings down and breakdown acronyms and educational language, make things user friendly for new people who may not be familiar with the terminology. Be an active listener; when people feel heard they tend to come back. Having a diverse council brings more experience and input into what we as councils can do.

With the current situation regarding some of the student body being in physical school while others are doing distance learning at home means that we need to communicate to parents in a variety of ways, such as email, apps, social media, outdoor signs, and paper forms (when allowed). Try creating a survey to ask parents which form of communication they prefer to use. Start with what is most popular, or even what is already being utilized by your school.

How do we make a connection with families while maintaining distance? Make parent nights a take home event, or an online one instead of the traditional in the school building event. Stay away from fundraising as a way of connection. Covid has had an impact on families in a variety of ways and some may not be able to contribute financially as they have in the past, shift the focus to mental health, wellness, and connection. Host webinars, post YouTube links for webinars too.

What can people do to engage others? Tell your story, share facts. How can we share pictures, messages, or quotes to inspire other parents? Make it personal, meaningful, and short.

Shift thinking on what engagement with our children and their education is. Engagement is about chatting with your child about their life, their hopes, and dreams for the future, not just about school and homework.

Be part of the Gentle Revolution, push for gentler and kinder ways to get messages across. Did we affirm everyone in the group? Did everyone leave the meeting feeling bigger and better about themselves?

These are ways to help engage the parent population during these times.