

Redefining parent engagement: Addressing the unique needs of DSBN Academy

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Literature Review

Parent engagement has been identified in many studies as an important component of a child's education. Studies attribute student achievement to parent engagement (Izzo et al., 1999), citing incidences such as increased test scores (Redding et al., 2004) and better adjustment and engagement of students (Simons-Morton and Crump, 2003). Recognizing parent engagement as an important factor in student achievement, DSBN Academy has implemented a yearly 15 hour parent engagement requirement into their policies.



Method

The current study used small focus groups and online surveys to gather feedback from parents. Parents present both in person and online in these meetings discussed the planning of a parent engagement event that they had received a grant for. Notes were taken at the meetings and later analyzed for common themes. A survey was developed on Google Forms and was available to all parents to complete at their convenience. The survey contained eight multiple choice questions with the option for open ended responses if parents chose to provide additional information. The focus of the survey was to uncover **parent's wants and needs for engagement events** and **barriers to participation**, to aid in the planning of a parent engagement event by the school council. The results of the survey were analyzed by sorting the results among the child's grade level, followed by identifying which items had a high or low level of parent response. The results of the survey were compared with the information gathered from the focus groups to create a more comprehensive source of parent feedback.

Discussion

From the findings of both the focus groups and the survey, some key recommendations for future planning of parent engagement events emerged:

- increased and early communication about events
- flexible event schedules
- family friendly events
- children as motivators

As seen in Figure 1, many parents are still in need of parent engagement hours to fulfill their annual 15 hour requirement. The implementation of more accommodating events with advance notice could increase the amount of parents reaching their annual requirement.

Purpose

Similar to many schools, DSBN Academy faces challenges engaging parents as they incur additional unique barriers such as the geography of the school catchment, and the philosophy of the school program.

Despite the required parent engagement hours and various available opportunities for parent engagement, DSBN Academy still identifies that many parents are not meeting the 15 hours. In the present study, we will seek to answer the question: **How can we redefine parent engagement to meet the unique needs of DSBN Academy?** And through this, **How can we increase parent engagement?**



Findings

Overall there was 51 responses to the parent survey out of approximately 300 families.

One of the main goals of the survey was to determine what types of events interested parents. **Parents responded positively to events that directly involved parent-teacher interaction.** (Table 1.1)

In contrast to the input of the focus group, there was an incongruence in the perceived interest in events. In the focus groups respondents suggested and indicated interest in a social event as well as a desire to attend parent-only social events. However, in the survey responses **45% of parents indicated they would only like to attend events with their child**, compared to parents who would like to attend parent-only social events (24%), or both (12%), and a large number of parents who did not respond to this question (14%).

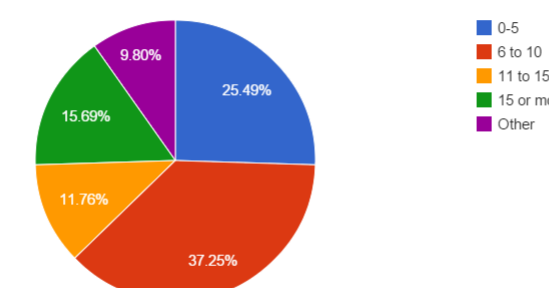
When asked to identify barriers that may prevent them from attending parent engagement events, **the most commonly identified barrier was a conflicting work schedule with the events (54%)**, followed by having other children or family members to take care of (30%) and a busy family schedule (30%). Of the 51 survey respondents, only two parents identified transportation as a barrier. This is in contrast to the respondents in the focus group, who suggested transportation would be a major limiting factor to parents attending events.

In the open response sections, some common themes were identified. Parents indicated a desire for an **easier method of logging their hours** as well as **increased communication regarding events**. Many parents admitted that although they had a busy and varying work schedule, they would be able to rearrange their schedule if they are informed of events well in advance.

Table 1
Frequency of Parent Interest in School Events, Grades 6-10

Activity	% (N)
Social	
School Barbecue	76 (39)
Student Performances	75 (38)
Pasta Dinner	53 (27)
Sports Events	53 (27)
Movie Night	35 (18)
Parent Social	29 (15)
Trivia/Board Game Night	27 (14)
Academic	
Parent Teacher Interview	84 (43)
Meet the Teacher	80 (41)
Information Sessions About Attending College and University	71 (36)
Information Sessions About Financing Post-Secondary Education	59 (30)
Open House	47 (24)
School Council Meetings	47 (24)
Guest Speakers	29 (15)
Information Sessions About Child Development	22 (11)
Total	100 (51)

Number of Annual Parent Engagement Hours Completed as Self Reported by Parents



Conclusion

Overall, parents have been responsive to inquiries on how to improve the parent engagement experience. Uncovering the views of the parents involved is extremely valuable to improving both the frequency and quality of parent engagement events. These findings will contribute to a better understanding of the parent engagement requirement at DSBN Academy, as well as redefining the specific details of parent engagement that meets the unique needs of the school.

The current study will continue to redefine parent engagement in the unique context of DSBN Academy in an effort to engage all parents in their children's education



References

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