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## **PARENT CONVENTION**

### **Holy Family Catholic Regional Division No. 37**

### **Peace River, Alberta, Canada**

**T**o assist schools in demonstrating the important connection between school and home, the district sponsored a parent convention for all parents in the school district. The convention titled, 'Healthy Minds and Bodies for PARENT Success,' was a strategy of the Healthy Minds and Bodies for Student Success project funded by the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI). The convention included an array of concurrent sessions on health and well-being, parenting, and educational topics.

The goals of the Parent Convention were to demonstrate to parents that the school district values them as important educational stakeholders, and to provide them with opportunities to learn, have fun, and share ideas and experiences with other parents around the district. The convention targeted all parents within and close to Holy Family Catholic Regional Division No. 37 communities, including those whose children did not attend our schools.

Teamwork facilitated the planning and implementation. Through the AISI project funding, the district has an AISI Coordinator, and each school has an AISI Coordinator. The district AISI Coordinator organized subcommittees to look after various aspects of convention organization. The school AISI Coordinators chaired the subcommittees, and worked with teachers,

parents, and community organizations or local businesses to fulfill convention needs. A teacher from one of our schools designed a logo so that we could create an image for the parents' convention. Local community members or district personnel shared expertise as session presenters. Northwest Regional Learning Consortium, the professional development consortium in northern Alberta, sponsored the total cost of a professional speaker. A partnership with Ever Active Schools also provided a speaker for two sessions. Student and parent volunteers helped on convention day by assisting with greeting, registration, food preparation and service, set up and take down, serving as session hosts, and other tasks. Local grocers and merchants donated food and door prizes. The local 4-H Club donated time to provide childcare for the day. One of the schools donated the venue.

A lot of emphasis was placed on publicizing the event. The event was scheduled for October, and we began advertising through the school newsletters in June. In September we attended a community Parade of Programs to hand out fliers to interested parents. Convention booklets were mailed to all families within Holy Family C.R.D. No. 37. An invitation and convention booklet was mailed to each School Council Chairperson and School Trustee in our district as well as to the principals of schools that were in or near the com-

munities of our school district. Fliers were faxed to community organizations and agencies. The local radio station donated an ad for the convention. Some local papers ran an article prior to the convention to create awareness. The Peace River Record Gazette donated space for an ad.

Prior to convention, a volunteer training session was held so that all volunteers were familiar with their roles. The Parent Convention was held on a Saturday to accommodate a majority of parents. A complimentary gift bag was given to each parent containing information on healthy eating, stickers, pencils, paper pads, etc. The day started at 10:00 am with breakfast, which included a 10-minute program starting with a performance by an Aboriginal drumming group.

Parents could choose from a variety of sessions, or view displays in the gymnasium. Concurrent sessions ran from 11:00 am to 3:30 pm. Sessions included:

- Herbs and Alternatives for the Whole Family
- Dealing With Bullying
- Motivating Without Nagging and Influencing Behavior
- The 21st Century Dad
- Tai Chi for the Beginner
- Safe Passage: Teaching Kids to Be Safe and Responsible On-line
- From Couch Potato to Hot Tomato
- Nutrition: Parents Need it Too!

All sessions were 1 hour 15 minutes in length, and parents could select from three choices at each time block.

Some of the schools and communities that our district serves or neighbors are about 150 kilometers away from where the convention was held. To serve all of our parents in the district, schools offered transportation for those parents interested in coming to the convention. We also recognized that cost could have been prohibitive, so we were able to offer the Parent Convention at no cost to parents by receiving grant funding.

Approximately 120 parents attended the convention—a good turnout for this rural community. Parents completed evaluations at the end of each session. Parents benefited in two ways: being able to learn about specific issues from experts and other parents, and having an opportunity to take time for themselves and get together with other parents. Our belief was that if parents are healthy and happy, they will be better able to support their children. One parent's comment highlighted this belief, "I learned new ways to talk to my kids."

The district recognizes the success of this event, and parents have already expressed that they are looking forward to the next one. Designated time and resources from the school, the district, and the community made this event possible.

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