

Pizza Open House

*John F. Kennedy School
Windsor, Connecticut*

How did John F. Kennedy School boost attendance at its annual open house to 500 adults and students? Pizza – is the short answer. Providing dinner for busy families added to the response.

Attempting to attract more families than in previous years, the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and the Family Resource Center decided to begin the annual open house night with a free pizza dinner. Many of Kennedy's families have both parents working outside the home. The extra convenience of sitting down to a prepared meal was the perfect incentive for them.

Before the Pizza Open House, the school sent fliers home to the parents with an RSVP in order to get a head count. The event also was publicized on the school's morning announcements and posted on the district-wide calendar.

On the evening of the open house, families of students in grades 1-2 ate and toured the school first. Families of children in grades 3-5 started a bit later.

Parents and PTO members helped set up and clean up, while teachers and administrators greeted families and served the meal. To the students' delight, teachers had dinner with the families, which included parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Eating together was a wonderful way for teachers to get to know the students' caregivers.

Discounts and donations from community members helped the school plan and pay for Pizza Open House. The local pizza parlor gave the school a discount on the 30 party-size pizzas it delivered, making the total cost of the event approximately \$750.

The benefits of providing a meal to families far outweighed the price of pizza. Costs were covered by the Family Resource Center. Offering a meal proved to be a good solution to

fitting a school event into parents' busy schedules. The casual atmosphere ensured that families felt at ease and encouraged them to be part of the school community. Pizza Open House provided many parents an opportunity to visit their child's classroom and meet their teacher, perhaps for the first time.

For other schools hoping the boost attendance at any evening event, the organizers of Pizza Open House suggest getting a head count of the number of parents and students who will attend as early as possible. This information ensures that there will be enough food, and that there will be the right number of volunteers and ample space to accommodate a large crowd.

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