

Parent Information Nights

*Ochoa Middle School
Pasco, Washington*

How do you get more parents to attend informational sessions at your school? If you are an Action Team for Partnership (ATP) member at Ochoa Middle School hosting nine Parent Information Nights over a school year, you ask parents what they want to hear about and what they want to learn!

The ATP at Ochoa has been hosting monthly informational meetings for parents for the past two years. When turnout and enthusiasm appeared lower than desired, the team used their first meeting of the year to solicit the opinion of the parents. The ATP and school teachers asked parents to share their ideas about the kinds of academic information that would most interest them. They also asked if there were particular guest speakers in the community that parents wanted to hear.

After carefully considering the feedback, the ATP decided to begin a new Parent Information Night meeting structure in the 07-08 school year. Each hour-long meeting, held on the first Wednesday of every month, consisted of three segments: an academic segment, a community segment, and a general information segment.

The ATP advertised the newly redesigned meetings in monthly newsletter announcements and on refrigerator magnets that listed the meeting dates. As the dates of each meeting approached, designated staff called parents to remind them to attend. The friendly reminders helped boost attendance at the sessions. Participation varied, based on the topic of discussion. The highest turnout was 100 parents!

Over the course of the school year, teachers and staff gave 27 presentations at the nine monthly meetings. Academic topics covered math games that families could play at home together, studying tips for the state achievement tests, and a talk from a high school counselor about how to support a successful transition into high school. During the commu-

nity segments, parents received information about immigration laws, community resources for parents who wanted to learn English, and tools for job seeking. Local businesses, such as Washington Mutual Bank and Costco, volunteered their time to present on these topics. Most community organizations supplied free brochures and gifts to distribute to parents. At the last meeting of the year, parents had an opportunity to win door prizes, including hockey tickets.

All nine information sessions cost approximately \$1,300. This amount included snacks and beverages for each meeting, child-care, and an end-of-year parent participation celebration. The price tag was well worth it! Evaluations distributed to parents at the end of the year measured a substantial improvement in parent satisfaction over prior years' meetings. Many of the "regulars" at the information nights offered their services to help plan other activities in the school.

Ochoa Middle School intends to continue the sessions. The ATP plans to send a letter of appreciation to every family who attends and participates in each session. They also will include a save-the-date card in each letter, reminding parents of the next information night. Finally, the ATP hopes to have a parent serve as a team co-chair to answer other parents' questions about Ochoa's comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships.

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