

## Parent Community Communication/Cultivation Plan

The parent community may be the most important component of a marketing plan. Parents need to be cultivated and brought to understand the critical role they play in the school's reputation. Part of that cultivation must be including them in appropriate decision-making, involving them in the life of the school (worship, assemblies, chaperoning) and honoring them in front of the students. There should be distinct strategies for parents in the following areas:

**Communications:** Parents should be able to articulate the school mission/message. Through school newsletters, emails, and your website, keep parents aware of the good things going on at your school so that they can share the information with others. Also, inform them of crisis procedures so that they have confidence in your ability to keep children safe.

**Recruitment:** Parents can act as liaisons with parishes, schools and communities to spread the word about your school. As members of those communities, they can tell you who may be interested in your school. Parents may be willing to host events to help recruit from their community.

**Social events:** School social events provide an opportunity for parents to bond with the school and to network with each other. These events help parents feel connected to the school and part of a family.

**Special interest opportunities:** Parents have an opportunity to deepen their connection to your school through behind-the-scenes involvement in athletics, fine arts, fundraising and service. Encourage parent participation in these activities.

**School administration:** Involve parents in ad hoc committees, school boards, and as consultants. Parents like to share their talents and this strengthens their connection to the school.

## Employee Communication Plan

Too often, it is assumed that employees have accurate information and will make appropriate comments to others. Employees are probably the second most influential group (behind parents) in determining a school's reputation. There should be a clear strategy to keep employees informed about both the daily workings of the school and about those extraordinary events that are prone to misinformation and exaggeration. Elements of this component include:

- Regularly scheduled employee meetings to discuss the state of the school. At least once a semester employees should be updated on the overall financial situation, recruitment initiatives, program changes and capital improvements planned. Allow time for questions.
- Any crisis in the school community should trigger a same-day meeting with all employees. Facts should be presented and a written statement regarding the situation should be distributed.
- Copies of all communications that are distributed to other constituencies should be placed in each employee's mailbox.
- An annual, all-staff meeting should be dedicated to that year's recruitment program. A primary focus of this meeting is a discussion of the role employees have with recruitment.
- The staff should be encouraged to engage in community activities where they serve as a representative of the school. This might mean time out of class to judge a science fair at a nearby school, run a journalism workshop or host a one-day retreat for a feeder school.



## Student Communication Plan

Students are often effective ambassadors for a school. As active members of their community and parish, students play a large role in the reputation of the school. They represent the mission of a school in the most significant way – they are an example of the difference your school can make in the life of a child. Without appropriate training and oversight, however, they could convey an inappropriate message.

- **Communications:** Prospective parents and students often ask current students about their school and what they like about the school. Students should know about the highlights of their school and what makes their school appealing. This topic should be addressed regularly and consistently during school assemblies and during announcements over the public address system. In order for students to accurately articulate the school mission/message, they must be instructed in appropriate language and length.
- **Recruitment:** A select group of students should be trained to formally articulate the mission of the school and the good things that go on at your school. These ambassadors should be utilized as:
  - Tour guides at open house
  - Hosts for students who want to spend a day at your school
  - Presenters at public events
  - Recruiters who can help identify students who may be interested in your school
  - Mentors for younger students to help with retention
- **Community Relations:** Encourage your students to be involved in their community and parish. Students can help build the relationship between your school and the community/parish. During Catholic schools week, students can be effective communicators in the parish and community about what Catholic education has meant to them.
  - Prepare students to speak to parishioners at Sunday mass about the value of Catholic education
  - Solicit students to write letters of thanks to supporters of the school
  - Train students to be lectors or cantors in their local parish
  - Develop a service program that encourages participation in community activities



## Co-curricular (coaches/advisors) Communication Plan

All co-curricular activities, whether athletic, performing or special interest groups, should be able to express their purpose in terms that relate to the mission of the school. We don't play football to simply win a game and cheer. It must be an integral part of each student-athlete's education or we are wasting time and money. Similarly, we don't collect stamps or perform on stage only because students are interested. There must be lessons learned and ideals maintained. The activity must be conducted in the context of the graduation guidelines of your school. Using your co-curricular program as a marketing tool works best when parents see it as a part of the unique education of your school.

High schools have more opportunities to use co-curricular activities for recruiting and marketing purposes than elementary schools. However, since many people in the general populace only know a school through its co-curricular program, both levels of schools should pay attention to this popular area. High school athletics are a regular feature of local news agencies. Activities such as debate, academic competitions and service projects are also featured on the news. Elementary school students can be featured doing service projects. Specific guidelines should be established in the following areas:

- Coaches and advisors of competitive groups should be trained in specific responsibilities related to the promotion of their programs and, consequently, the school.
  - Understanding, believing in and promoting the connection of the program to the mission of the school.
  - Reporting scores, awards and activities to news media and school office
  - Making appropriate responses to media inquiries, including interviews
  - Providing updated information for the school website
  - Providing updated information to the Admissions Office
- Summer camp activities should be encouraged. A coordinated summer program for students with athletic camps, musical theater camp, art workshops, technology classes, etc., provide opportunities to expose students and their parents to the school culture and expand the database for the Admissions Office. Here, again, the relationship between the activity and the school's mission should be expressed.
- High schools should invite feeder schools to activities throughout the school year. Elementary school athletic teams could be invited to attend a game at the high school (announce their presence), schools could be invited to appropriate concerts or plays, or elementary school teachers could be invited to staff development activities.
- Parish elementary schools should regularly post photos of student activities in the lobby of the church and insert as many items as allowed into the weekly parish bulletin.

