

## Parent Involvement and Awareness:

# How to Get Parents and Families to Turn Out for School Mathematics Events

by Paul Giganti, Jr., CMC Math Festival Program  
pgiganti@berkeley.edu



Involving parents and families in school mathematics events is critical to student success, but far from easy. Federal and state programs often require parent participation as a condition of funding, but provide very little guidance about how to achieve this goal. The successful experiences of other schools and teachers can assist you in making your event a popular success. Here are some suggestions that have worked well in garnering parent and family participation in mathematics events:

- First and foremost, design an event that parents or families want to attend. Ask yourself: does this event seem interesting, exciting, vital, fun, delicious (food), or, in any other way, appeal to parents? If any one of these adjectives applies to your event, that is good; if several do, that is much better. And if none of the adjectives seem to apply, then seriously think about revising your event!
- The mere mention of “mathematics” can often scare parents away. Assure parents that your event will be a pleasant, even enjoyable, experience (see adjectives above). In simple, straightforward language, describe your event and clearly explain to parents what you are asking them to attend, and why.
- Will your event fit nicely into the busy lives of parents and families? Think about the time of year (fall is often better than spring) and the timing of the event. Generally speaking, avoid dinner and bed times for family events. This often leaves a narrow window between 6:00 and 8:00 p.m. If your event can be successful within this time, more families will attend.
- Advertise your upcoming event well in advance. While the “flyer sent home in the backpack” is the classic means, this alone is far from ideal. If you really want a good turnout, make a big deal of the event with your students right before you send them home at the end of the day. If possible, flyers should be in multiple languages to appeal to the entire school population, but if your students themselves have a good understanding of

your event, they are often great translators. If you get the kids excited about an event, they become willing, enthusiastic messengers.

- Post flyers around the school a week in advance with the time and date of the event. School newsletters are also a great way to spread the word, and yet are a different means for a parent to hear about your event. Newsletters allow you to explain an event more thoroughly than a flyer. Don’t forget to use parent and school e-trees too. If you have time, use all of these to get the word out!
- Get the teachers directly involved in procuring parent participation. While some schools have a resource person who can focus on this task, many do not. A very effective strategy is to have each class be responsible for signing up a quota of parents in advance. Phone calls are often more effective than flyers, but teachers need not make a lot of phone calls if they ask key supportive parents to call families. Often a call from one parent to another parent can be the most effective.
- Offer the students an incentive for bringing their families to an event. Offer a pizza party to the class with the highest participation, or serve pizza that night (many schools have funds set aside to encourage parent participation in school events)! Offer students a “get out of one homework assignment” coupon if they bring their families. Be creative!
- And finally, after a successful (or not so successful) parent or family event, take time to debrief with other teachers. Take notes about what seemed to work best (or least) in getting parent participation. If you do this, you are much more likely to remember how to do it right for your next mathematics event!



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