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National Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officials

**NASSLEO**

**NASSLEO Newsletter October 2011**

**IN MY OPINION: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IS THE KEY TO SAFE AND SECURE SCHOOLS.**

With the start of school already underway, those responsible for safe and secure schools are beginning to put their plans in place to deal with the many issues that can disrupt the school day. After sitting through many meetings this summer discussing issues such as school reform, secondary school studies, character education, adequate yearly progress, and finally, issues around school redesign, it didn't take me long to realize that one important component was missing that was the key to all of the mentioned strategies.

Although all of the above components are part of the puzzle to changing our schools and providing our students with the best education possible, I find that if one additional and very important component is not included during the school year, then what we have attempted to do over the summer may have been a waste of time, resources, and effort.

As I continue to do research on the issue around a safe and secure environment, I believe that the most important component of a successful, safe and secure school is the involvement of parents in the day-to-day operation of the schools. Now, many will wonder if I am suggesting that parents begin to interfere with the management of the school, and my answer to that is no. I am not talking about the management of the school; I am talking about the interaction of parents with their students and with the staff. Building relationships with parents, and getting them into the school building is one of the most effective ways to change the school culture.

Schools must also begin to establish partnerships not only with parents, but with the community in which they are located. Effective school-community partnerships are making a difference in the lives of young people across this nation. These differences are revealed in three unique ways. First, such partnerships encourage youngsters to achieve a higher level of performance. Second, they provide the opportunity to make it happen. And third, they motivate community activists to invest time and energy in young people to help them find success.

Business owners in our cities must realize that youngsters are the key to their business success. Youngsters, however, need more than simply a challenge; they need an opportunity. Business owners must begin to establish opportunity to train school age students. The purpose of this school-business partnership is to improve student attendance, to enhance educational quality, and to provide work opportunities for young people.

The success of our nation's schools and its school children is a direct reflection of our investment in them. Our commitment is essential so that we as a nation can compete economically in world markets, so that our national defense can be secured, and so that our quality of life can be enhanced. School community partnerships represent one of those key elements that make schools great and help young people find the success they need to become responsible and productive citizens. But, becoming a productive citizen begins at home, and it can continue with the assistance of parent volunteers in the schools.

Parents represent an invaluable security resource if they are given an opportunity to participate fully in the school's safety management programs. As one of the key stakeholders in the security and safety of schools, parents can provide information, staff assistance, and expertise; they can increase the deterrent factor by strengthening the presence of responsible adults on watch and provide auxiliary services in appropriate situations. A few examples include safe walking route patrols, hall monitoring, assistance at entrance doors, and cafeteria and playground duty. Keep in mind also, that when involving students who are minors, concurrent parent involvement may not only be useful, but prudent as well.

The secret to parent involvement in safety and security activities is three-dimensional:

1. Actively seek parent involvement and recruit effectively.
2. Find and create ways for parents to contribute, and reward their contributions.
3. Be flexible in setting meeting times and places, and provide non-meeting opportunities so that parents can otherwise participate.

If you manage your parent involvement efforts effectively along these three dimensions, you will reap benefits that far exceed your efforts.

Making the parent, students, and the general school community aware of your interest and efforts to actively engage parents in making your school safer is the best place to start your parent involvement initiative. Making increased parent involvement an objective of staff meetings will help set the school tone for parent partnerships. Effective outreach techniques include announcements to students, letters to parents, and listings in church bulletins and social organization newsletters. Remember, however, nothing beats face-to-face contact.

Accommodations should be made for language and cultural differences. The key is to target recruitment efforts around areas where parents live and gather, as well as communicating through the media they use. Parent leaders can also be developed through training and program opportunities.

If your outreach plan is effective, you will have more parents willing and available to work than you have things for them to do. The key here is to guarantee that every parent who wants to make a contribution has the opportunity to do so. Moreover, the contribution parents make should be clearly connected to improving or maintaining safety and security in the school. If you assume competence and resourcefulness among your parents at the outset, you will most often be correct. Sometimes participation will be limited to something as simple as bringing refreshments to a meeting, calling one or two parents and reminding them of an upcoming meeting, or urging other parents to come out.

Participation can be as involved and sophisticated as functioning as a regular member of the school safety committee or organizing and managing a "safe walking path" to school patrol. The opportunities you designate or create should:

1. Meet the school's needs
2. Meet the parents needs
3. Be nontrivial
4. Improve school safety in some way

Recognizing and rewarding all positive parent involvement in safety is critical in successful parent involvement. Providing the orientation, training, equipment, and supplies needed to carry out duties also will contribute to positive outcomes. Providing stipends and covering transportation costs, when budgets allow, could act as added incentives. (Be careful here, you must meet board guidelines)

One successful technique that has been used is to establish a Parent Resource Center/Room. This room functions to make parents feel welcome by providing them their own space, and it indirectly communicates their importance. This room should be comfortable and functional. A phone with local access, a refrigerator, coffee machine, copy machine, miscellaneous office supplies, and similar amenities will increase the likelihood that parents will come and remain on site. If providing such amenities is impractical, allowing priority access to such facilities will also demonstrate your commitment to parents.

Keep in mind, however, that the best method to ensure parent involvement in safety and security is to find or create interesting and innovative ways for them to actively participate in related activities. Of course, recognizing and rewarding parent contributions will reinforce their participation and encourage further involvement.

In summary, parent involvement is a two-way street. Expecting parents to give more to a school than they feel they are already giving is one-way thinking. You should also be prepared to demonstrate that you are offering them more than you feel you are currently offering. The effort you put into actively involving parents will inevitably reflect the level and quality of their participation.

It is my belief that for every one parent that we can get into the school to volunteer, it will have an effect on as many as twenty students. For, in my opinion, it is the parents that will make the real difference when it comes to changing the culture of a school. So, as teachers and administrators make plans to open schools for a new school year, remember that you need to include your parents in this process as well, as the results could be amazing.

Larry Johnson,  
Director of Public Safety, City of Grand Rapids, MI, Region III Director, NASSLEO

### **HOW TO HAVE A SAFE HALLOWEEN!**

- Be sure that costumes are not too long or too big for your child. They have to walk a long way and go up and down a lot of stairs and they could trip and fall.
- Make sure children can see well through facemasks, or if in doubt, use cosmetics for facial emphasis.
- Adults should accompany young children. Older brothers and sisters can only do so much to protect the tag-alongs. Remember, they are still children too.

- Go out in daylight, but IF you must go out at night, consider flashlights and use of reflective tape on costumes, especially dark ones.
- Stay within the neighborhood and only visit homes you know.
- Watch for traffic. Children are unusually excited during trick-or-treating and they don't pay much attention to automobile traffic or traffic signs.
- Only give and accept wrapped or packaged candy.
- Examine all candy before allowing children to eat it. Look for open or torn wrappers, or items that are obviously old or of questionable quality.
- Dogs don't understand kids dressed as monsters or other animals and may respond aggressively. Even your own pets may not recognize your children in costume so be careful with animals.
- Avoid hard plastic or wood props such as daggers or swords. The kids will "test" these items on each other so be prepared. Most costumes now come with foam weapons so take advantage of that.

One last note for adults: Lighten up! Halloween is fun! Let kids be kids. They won't be beggars or devils forever – just this one day a year. With some over watch by adults, we can all enjoy the day for what it is - a day of imagination, fun and excitement.

**THOUGHT OF THE DAY:** “Well done is always better than well said.” – Benjamin Franklin.

**Start planning now for NASSLEO's 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual School Security Conference in Miami next July.** For Conference or membership information, please contact [nassleo@nassleo.org](mailto:nassleo@nassleo.org) or visit our website at: [www.nassleo.org](http://www.nassleo.org).

Peter P. Pochowski  
Secretary and Editor

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