

Preparing for Back-to-School and Curriculum Night

The new school year is just around the corner. As principals and vice-principals work on last minute details, welcome staff back and prepare for the arrival of students, it is also a good time to start thinking about your back-to-school or curriculum night. For most schools, this event takes place within the first few weeks of the resumption of classes.

For some parents, this will be their first official opportunity to tour the school, meet the staff and learn about your policies and protocols. It is a great opportunity to provide the information that parents will need throughout the school year, helping to minimize the repetitive questions you may receive in the coming months.

As you begin to plan, decide what it is you want to accomplish during the event. Will it be a general tour of the school, meet the teacher night or a social activity? Here are some tips that may help you to prepare for your Open House, Back-to-School or Curriculum Night:

- Select a day that works well for most parents. If possible, avoid Monday nights (events on the first day of the week are often forgotten) and Friday nights.
- Once the date has been set, communicate it in your first newsletter (repeated in subsequent newsletters if necessary), on the bulletin board outside the office, through a letter home to parents, on the school website and on message boards outside of the school.
- If your school has any social media accounts, post the information there and be prepared to answer questions concerning your event leading up to it.
- Add the date and time of the event to the message on your school's answering machine for the first few weeks of school.
- If possible, offer babysitting services to parents. Consider asking students from the higher grades to help out and ensure there is always a responsible adult present. Let parents know in advance that this service will be available if you can provide it.
- Consider offering a coffee/tea service. The School Council may be able to set this up, or approach local merchants for donations.
- Have an indoor back-up plan if you will be holding an outdoor event.
- Ensure that there is adequate signage throughout the school to find the gym, library, cafeteria, staff lounge or other room(s) where the event will be held. Parents can become

frustrated if they enter a school and do not know where to go.

- Try to have staff, students or School Council members present at each entrance to the school and in the parking lot (if necessary). In addition to answering questions, these people offer a welcoming presence to the evening.
- Prepare special nametags for all staff so they are easily recognizable.
- Ensure exits and washrooms are clearly marked and signed.
- Take a walk around the school before the event begins to ensure garbage is picked up, clothing/school supplies are removed from the floors and the hallways are in good condition.
- Ask teachers to update the bulletin boards outside of classrooms.
- Provide information about the school that parents can take home with them – the school profile, copies of last year’s newsletters, parent handbook, bus schedules, letters that have been prepared on particular issues etc. Make more copies than you think you will need so you are not scrambling to make additional copies during the evening.
- If you don’t already have them, consider preparing a short summary of key issues such as office hours, attendance, volunteering, newsletter (when and how often they can expect to receive it), safe arrival, Code of Conduct, dress code, transportation, communicable diseases, bullying and extra curricular activities. Have copies available for the evening.
- Begin the evening with a short address by the principal. Introduce staff members. Ask the Chair of the School Council to make short opening remarks, highlighting the date of the first School Council meeting.
- If you are holding a Curriculum Night, follow up the opening address with presentations by staff and then invite parents to visit their child’s classroom.
- Leave time in the program for parents to ask questions.
- Include a thank you and a short summary of the meeting in your next newsletter.
- If applicable, thank parents through your school’s social media accounts as well.