

NAEA Advisory

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Christine Davis, Editor

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"Hey, You're the Art Teacher!"

A conversation for recruiting parental involvement

Marylu Flowers-Schoen, Elementary Visual Arts Teacher, Forest View Elementary School, Durham, North Carolina

After the completion of one more carpentry project I had requested from a faithful parent, I asked, "Why do you always say yes?" He said, "Hey, you're the art teacher!" Although I don't exactly know how to take this line, I'll consider it a compliment. For some, the specialist of the arts has this mystical, inner power that can be harnessed to recruit parents and care givers to actively participate in your school.

My teaching experience ranges from rural farm communities and urban housing projects to neighboring university settings. I've been an itinerant art teacher and now am at one school and have a dedicated art room.

It is my observation that parents, generally, want to be helpful and a part of the learning environment. As we approach the year 2000, we have the goal to promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement (Goal 8, 1994 *National Art Education Association Goals Report*.) Not all teachers feel comfortable selling themselves. "It's difficult and I feel real small." (Tod Jefferson Moore, Sunday, March 16, 1997, CBS Network.) Many artists do not like asking for favors or promoting themselves. Look instead to selling your program.

Parent Volunteers Are A Vital Part Of An Effective Art Program.

They contribute special skills and talents that can strengthen the work of the on-staff art educator. We art teachers have a history of working in isolation and in solitude; get over it! A priority objective should be to make opportunities that allow parents to offer their expertise and at a level that makes them feel comfortable with their time commitment.

Be Organized. Have A Plan And Be Task Specific. Now Call Them.

Similar to the June/July 1997, *The High School* magazine article by Otto L. Graf and Betsy Henderson here are several ways to increase parental involvement:

- Show off your students and frequently invite the community.
Parents may provide hospitality.
- Let parents help with art displays.
- Fill your space and lessons with thought provoking visual stimulants that can be the spring board for art appreciation.
- Through newsletters, ask to borrow family-owned art and artifacts of other countries. So often, parents are just pleased someone asked.
- Have planned activities during School Open House.

I have had more than three hundred families creating art together. Art class is fun and even more so when parents are modeling their own enthusiasm.

- Share a materials list of "creative junk" that can be used in the art program.
Homes and work places have clean, usable discards that enhance standard art supplies... and you want parents to bring it all.
- Invite a parent to co-write a grant.
- Solicit a parent to co-chair an art committee.
- Ask a parent to be the cultural arts liaison and help with community communications and bookings.
- Use artistically talented parents as a resource.
They might letter awards posters and signs.

Parent Art Professionals Share Your High Standard For An Art Program.

"As a parent...I am much more interested in expanding the concept of art than narrowing it." (Mia Johnson, *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 1997, p. 456.)

- Invite parents/guest artists as team teachers for career sharing.
Parents may become volunteers when they seek advice regarding their child's art education. Give them time and a few pointers and you may have grateful adults eager to return a favor.
- When possible, contract the services of a parent or relative carpenter/builder.
My room and display areas are better for it.
- Sometimes there are parents that just want to make your job easier.
Utilize them as temporary secretaries, aides and maids. What a joy they are to us busy teachers!
- Remember to write thank you notes and maybe give a small gift.
After one has been blessed with volunteers show them your appreciation. There will be repeat volunteers and maybe one recruited by another.

"Whether we are specialists in the arts or not, by enlarging the field...we can teach children...(Johnson, 1997.)

If you have not begun, no longer hesitate! Hey, you're the art teacher! and through this, everyone will reap the benefits.