

▶ Parent-Teacher Partnership

Reorganizing a Parent-Teacher Organization

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The goal of this project is to breathe new life into Abiding Savior's Parent Teacher Organization called the Parent-Teacher Partnership, or PTP. Purposes of the partnership should match the mission: "Parents and teachers partnering to ensure our common goal of a quality Christian education for students of Abiding Savior Lutheran School, to know Christ and make Him known." The strategies by which this is to be accomplished are through redefining the purposes of the partnership, reorganizing the leadership team, and revising its By-Laws and Constitution accordingly.

The results were not as desired. Challenges in getting parents with strong leadership skills involved in the leadership team made re-launching the PTP difficult. However, despite the unanticipated setbacks, many events under the umbrella of PTP carried on and were successful. This caused me to reflect further on the needs and desires of our parents, and will attempt again to further define leadership roles of parents in PTP.

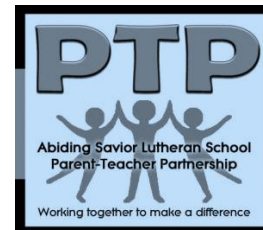
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Reorganizing a Parent-Teacher Organization

Project Focus

Abiding Savior Lutheran School enjoys a community of fellowship. One avenue the school supports in order to accomplish this is through the Parent-Teacher Partnership (PTP). This organization was established in 2007. The mission of PTP focuses on “parents and teachers partnering to ensure our common goal of a quality Christian education for the students of Abiding Savior Lutheran School, to know Christ and make Him known.” The program has grown to include several monthly functions each school year, including social gatherings, monthly planning meetings, and annual dinner meetings. Unlike similar organizations whose prime function is raising funds for the school, of the nine purposes of this organization, fund raising is last, as third source funding is a role of the school board since it helps meet budgeted needs. The main purpose of the PTP is to provide opportunities for growth and learning for parents and teachers around topics of mutual interest, especially the Christian nurture and development of children and families.

In order to be truer to the purposes of the organization, it needed restructuring, beginning with narrowing the PTP’s purposes, a new parent leadership team and a review of the constitution and by-laws. Definitions of leaders’ spiritual, organizational, and behavioral expectations were lacking. While providing time for fellowship and socialization is important and will be continued, the prime goal for restructuring the organization and its leadership personnel is to bring it back to a more academic and family-related focus, and to allow the teachers to play a more integral part and be viewed as experts through presenting educational topics to parents.



Strengths of Current Program:

- Variety of activities
- Offers social/fellowship opportunities
- Opportunities for parent involvement

Weaknesses of Current Program:

- Too many events; competes with school athletics and church activities
- Lack of common goal among leaders
- Lack of true collaboration between teachers and parents to support mission

Process for Change

Recognizing the need for change, at the close of the 2010-2011 school year, the PTP leadership team was disbanded instead of holding election for replacements. The purpose of this was to provide a time for starting fresh on the entire process. A parent expressed interest in assisting through this transition, and agreed would serve as the organization's new chair.

As part of the Van Lunen Fellows Program, Bob Rogalski of the Christian Schools Development Center was assigned as my consultant. We met in early September 2011 to devise a plan of action for the revamping of the PTP.

The first action taken was to send out an online parent survey. By October 2011, Mr. Rogalski had compiled an executive summary of the survey results and presented it to me, along with full access to the raw data. 78 of 143 families responded or 55%. Overall, the comments from parents supported the idea of having a PTP, and offered a variety of constructive criticisms.

The major issues identified were:

- Redefine the Constitution/By-Laws
- Plan fewer events
- Hold more major events
- Communicate them well
- Organize classroom liaisons
- Make a decision regarding limited fundraising

The summary was shared with parents along with an invitation to join the leadership team. There were no volunteers. I did have a few moms volunteer to help, but not for leadership roles.

In the absence of a full leadership team, in November, my next step was to research other schools' Constitutions and By-Laws to get new ideas that matched with the results gathered from the survey. I began to draft out changes based on the other schools' documents and suggestions from Mr. Rogalski. Due to a new work schedule and demands of his job, the parent who earlier expressed interest in leading this change was not readily available.

One of the questions on the survey that received a high number of interested responses was regarding a parent education night. To that end, in February, the school hosted an Internet Safety Night, sponsored by the PTP. This was to model what the future of PTP was going to be like: parents and teachers coming together to offer support for the benefit of the kids. The plan was to unveil the new Constitution and By-Laws, but yet with still no leadership team in place, it was decided to put the official re-launch on the back burner for re-evaluation. Led by our 7th Grade Homeroom Teacher--Technology Coordinator, the evening did offer parents tips on Internet safety and school updates were presented by the principal and Board of Education.

Results

Despite the lack of a formal leadership team and direction, many of the events typically sponsored/led by PTP went off without a hitch, a testament to the dedication of our parent volunteers. These were more of the major-event types such as:

- Back to School Ice Cream Social
- Grandparents' Day Breakfast hosts
- Barnes & Noble Book Fair
- Father-Daughter Dance
- Mother-Son Activity Night
- Internet Safety Night/Informational Meeting

Some of the changes made to the Constitution were to pare the PTP purposes down from nine to four more succinct statements. Added to leadership team qualifications was a statement that a leader need be in good financial standing with the school.

Considering the changes sought to be made in the structure of the running of PTP, the By-Laws were more challenging to revise, and without a full leadership team of parents to help make these decisions, I froze my progress on this project here.

Analysis/Commentary

I feel I must mention here that this past school year was also a re-accreditation year. We were blessed with parents (and teachers) who served on various committees

to complete the tasks necessary for a school self-study. My own focus on the accreditation process may have been one factor in not succeeding in getting parents to take ownership in PTP. In retrospect, I should have prayed and asked the Lord for guidance in seeking out those parents with the passion for the program and strong leadership skills, and ask those parents to lead the change.

Given some time to discuss this perceived failure to launch with respected colleagues, my plan moving forward is to move to yet another model of organization for the PTP altogether, away from the traditional leadership model and simply use a committee-based organization.

For example, based on our school's needs, committees could be formed for:

- Educational Nights (teacher-led committee)
- Special Events
- Classroom Liaisons
- New Parent Mentoring
- Fund Raising

A guidebook of sorts for committee work would be helpful that outlines processes for items such as communications, event approval, expense approval, check requests, and facilities reservations. This would eliminate the need for monthly planning meetings with the leadership team, where typically the committee with the next event would spend time discussing the event—this should be done in a small committee, not

with the leadership team and classroom liaisons who typically attended these meetings.

I would target one educational event per semester, with a mid-year (January) event also including a “PTP Meeting” status update, including time for the principal and board of education to present “State of the School” type presentations.

In conclusion, based on the comments from the parent survey in the fall and my observations, parents at Abiding Savior truly do value the opportunity to be a part of the school and want to support and learn from our teachers. However, monthly events that seem to offer more for the children serve little value in fostering the mission of the Parent-Teacher Partnership. We are competing with ourselves for our families’ time, given the array of athletic and church sponsored activities already offered. Coordinating with church events would build unity between our church and school. We need to focus on presenting high-quality information to our parents, make our families feel welcome, provide some opportunities for fun and fellowship, and be an avenue for parents to get involved with their child’s school.