



GEETA PAREKH EXPLORES WAYS IN WHICH SCHOOLS CAN GET THE WHOLE COMMUNITY INVOLVED IN FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE CURRICULUM...

Q I teach at a medium-sized academy school in the South East – it serves a catchment of relatively low deprivation, and we are lucky in that the vast majority of our parents are closely engaged with their children's education. However, when it comes to fundraising events, whether organised by the PTA to raise money for the school, or by staff and students in order to support various charities as part of our 'whole learner' approach to the curriculum, the level of engagement is considerably less impressive. It's always the same few families that donate cakes/sign up for sponsorship/volunteer to help at events/buy tickets. Do you have any advice on ways that we could reach out to a wider audience and inspire more parents to get involved with these kinds of activities?

A Communication is key, so first and foremost the most important thing to consider is how effective your current communications strategy is. This is crucial to successful event planning, so think carefully about which channels you use to engage with parents and whether these are generating a good response.

The internet offers many great opportunities for schools to keep parents informed of events and activities. They can, for example, set up a Facebook page for parents, or create a space on their own website specifically detailing upcoming fundraising opportunities. A word of warning, though – while I would highly recommend expanding your online presence, there is no use in passively existing on the web. It's essential to make sure your page is regularly updated in order to attract repeat



ABOUT THE EXPERT



Geeta Parekh is Regional Adviser for PTA-UK East Midlands. PTA-UK is the leading PTA membership organisation, representing 14,000 PTAs, the biggest network of PTA fundraisers in the UK. Its vision is for every school to have the benefit of a successful and supportive PTA, to enhance the education futures of all our children and young people. To find out more, visit pta.org.uk or call 0300 123 5460.

visitors and get a strong following. I would suggest nominating at least one member of staff to update your page with regular news, event information and activity updates, including information on how the funds raised have been spent.

Once you have strengthened your communication strategy, you will be in a better position to reach out to a wider audience and to encourage more parents to attend fundraising events.

Even with a solid communications strategy in place, it is still vital to ensure that you are thinking outside the box when it comes to planning – although 'traditional' activities such as cake sales and school discos can be very successful, parents may lose interest if they are the only events you run regularly. Your ideas do not have to be ground-breaking, but try to offer something a bit different from the norm, anything from a second hand uniform sale to a grand ball. Social events for parents and staff can also have the added benefit of harnessing stronger home-school links, which can help to encourage greater participation in future fundraising events.

Another really effective way of capturing parents' attention is to get the children involved. Sponsoring students to take part in an enriching activity is a great opportunity to make parents sit up and pay attention to your cause. Why not arrange a sponsored walk to coincide with World Heart Day (28 September 2014), to highlight the importance of a healthy and active lifestyle? Or you could set children a number of thematic challenges on National Motivation Day (1 July 2014) – for example, one task could include learning how to say a basic phrase in five completely new languages. Tying activities in with national awareness days, and perhaps donating part of the funds to an associated charity, is an excellent way to make the event more meaningful, and is likely to get a greater response from parents.

While the focus for teachers is often on parents, it is important not to underestimate the power of fundraising activities in bringing together the wider community, too. Opening events up to the general public, which can easily be done through advertising in local community magazines, radios and leafleting, can help to generate more interest and boost the overall amount of funds raised. I recently had a school in my region that hosted a car boot sale and this received a very positive reaction from parents, as well as the local community in general. Musical events are also a sure way to attract a big crowd, so why not organise a jazz band to play after a school fete, or host a music festival during the warmer months, featuring bands from both within and outside the school? When hosting these types of events, an excellent way to maximise engagement is to donate a good share of the funds to an outside charity that's close to the heart of the community.