

"I'm going because it matters, come with me, we need you."

Crafting An Invitation Increasing Parent Meeting Attendance

Everything starts with the invitation. The Invitation is simply the vehicle that delivers the BIG question, purpose or theme to be addressed, riding atop the cleanest possible story of (1) what is happening, (2) how we got here, (3) what is needed (to make or do or discuss) now, (4) when and where we will gather (to make or do or discuss it). This might be as short as four sentences, or as long as... it takes. Less is usually more.

What is important is that when people on the Invitation List read it, they hear the history, happenings, and needs as their own. This is how they know that they belong in the gathering when it happens. The key to writing the invitation is to speak the truth and ask, very carefully, for what is most important at this moment in the history of the school and community.

Good invitations often mix and balance grandness and achievability, passion and practicality. The Invitation List should include everyone, yes everyone, who might have a stake or interest or contribution to make to the purpose. Anyone willing to show up, learn and contribute to the work can be welcomed. Often overlooked to invite is the support staff at the school. I believe a step in the process of inclusivity is inviting maintenance, kitchen, and landscaping support as well.

Consider the following, not as essay questions but rather like the headings of bulleted lists. What a good invitation needs is the facts, short and sweet, the most important things, that everybody already knows, all swept together in one place, for easy review and action.

- What is the “purpose” of this particular meeting/workshop/presentation?
- Survey data? Anecdotal data? Priorities? Current crisis? Upcoming changes? A vision of where we want to go?
- What are the things we know we want/need to do/have/create now or next? What activities must be created or continued regardless of any current crisis, conflicts or shifts?
- What are the people needed to get it done?
- When will we meet, and where? (day,time, location.)
- What else is going on in the world, in the community or school, and in individual situations that seems to matter now?

The good news is that it’s just that simple to craft a powerful invitation. The bad news is that it’s just that simple. I doubt that there is any such thing as a ‘generic good theme.’ But I have found that there are some general criteria:

- Short. Anything more than a half dozen words is usually too long.
- Always stated as a question.
- Stated in the language of the people.
- Cuts to the heart of the matter. There is a place for diplomatic statement, but it’s not here. Verbal obfuscation rarely arouses passion -- and you want a lot of passion.

Once the Heart is opened, the Theme clearly stated, and the Tone and Commitment resolved, the actual Invitation document is a short, a practical story that includes all of that, AND - literally asks people to do things. The first and most important action requested is showing up. Here are some other possible requests:

- Notice what is happening right now? Why this is time to act?
- Review survey data, anecdotal data, priorities put forward by leaders
- Talk to others – what are the most important issues and priorities?

Here are some examples of opening and inviting language. None of this is right – but some of it might be useful in framing and finishing your invitation to parents/faculty. Best to let it inspire, rather than replace, your own voice:

- Please join us for...Our purpose is simple and important...
- We need (and want) your deep engagement in the issues and opportunities surrounding the present and future of... toward the resolution of current issues and realization of untapped potential for...
- We have done well and we must do better... to serve ourselves, our school(s), our students, and our communities...
- Because you care about...
- Differences of opinion do exist, but it is out of this rich diversity that powerful new futures can be formed now.
- None of this can happen without open, honest conversation and caring from every one of us.