

Rooster Springs Elementary Teams Up for Success



By Jennifer Edwards

When changes come to a school, the old ways of doing things must change as well. Rooster Springs Elementary PTA in Dripping Springs, Texas, faced membership losses when the school district was redrawn and the economy took a turn for the worse. The Rooster Springs PTA found that partnering with the educators at their school helped them meet the challenge and remain strong.

For many schools, membership in PTA can become “expected,” instead of being a positive, fun opportunity to involve parents and support students and teachers. With more than 800 students each year, Rooster Springs Elementary PTA (RSE PTA) in Dripping Springs, Texas, never worried about membership recruitment. The PTA often assumed that parents understood the inherent value the group delivered and would join. The goal was simply to “do what we did the year before.” However, it became apparent that the 2011-2012 year would be different. The group was faced with some challenges that would forever change the way membership recruitment was viewed.

The school district implemented redistricting changes, which reduced enrollment by 200 students. With the redistricting, and the nation’s economic downturn, RSE PTA fully expected membership to be down for the school year. However, with some innovative ideas and creative thinking, the PTA developed and executed a plan that exceeded the past years’ membership total by almost 20 percent by September 15, 2011.

Paving the way to success

“Our first step in this process was getting an excited and organized membership chairman,” said Dawn Owens, RSE PTA President. Kim Dring took on the challenge with enthusiasm and joined the RSE PTA executive board. Kim’s first question was, “What is our membership goal?” The executive board had already set realistic membership expectations based on past years and the current situation under redistricting. Overall, the group was not very optimistic. However, our membership chair was not discouraged. Kim helped to change the board’s mindset by developing a positive, fun membership campaign.

RSE PTA also wanted to involve our administration as a part of our membership campaign. “Our ever-supportive principal agreed that each staff member who joined would receive an extra jeans day,” added Owens. This incentive encouraged almost 70 percent of the staff to join.

RSE PTA began to contemplate other membership benefits and how they might further encourage membership recruitment and retention. The PTA already offered a weekly e-mail blast with all the week’s key dates, as well as information about events on campus, as a valuable member benefit. Previously, anyone could subscribe to the weekly e-blasts, regardless of membership status. To reinforce that “membership has its benefits,” those e-mails are now only sent to RSE PTA members. The board communicated this change prior to its implementation and allowed a grace period for subscribers to join. “Initially, we were worried that parents would view this as a negative, and the change would not have the desired effect—to drive membership,” Owens said. “However, we have found that it has had the opposite effect. It was met with overwhelming success, and many of our members appreciate the added value.”



(L to R) VP of Fundraising Diana Corbin, Principal Rhonda Whitman, and Membership Chairman Kim Dring at the PTA-sponsored Kinder Picnic. (Inset) RSE PTA Brag Board

Lessons learned

The lessons we learned are many. In 2012, RSE PTA met early to create a Team Up for Success membership campaign, which we promoted to teachers before classes began. Providing information to the teachers before school started helped them act as advocates for the PTA during Meet the Teacher Night, their first interaction with the families. This effort, when added to our established membership drive, resulted in 90 percent of eligible adults becoming members by the September 30 early bird deadline. RSE PTA will continue to reinforce the Team Up for Success membership campaign throughout the year, enabling teachers and administrators to share it with incoming families.

We also learned that we cannot assume that parents understand the value and benefits of PTA. Even though it is mentioned and discussed each year, many parents were unaware of where their money went and what they received for their investment in PTA. All members need to understand that PTA is much larger than the school, that it affects education programs at both the state level and nationally. It also offers great cost-saving benefits and parent programs.

Our membership chair has been a fearless leader throughout the membership campaign, but, it could not have been accomplished without a united executive board. When asked questions by parents, teachers, or administrators, each board member can articulate the value of PTA. The board pitched in and helped with the details, both large and small, including maintaining the bulletin board and hanging up posters.

“We show a unified front whose main goal is the success of our school, and we are able to communicate our goals, objectives, and value,” said Owens.

Finally, the Rooster Springs Elementary PTA learned that membership cannot be taken for granted. Our campaign has helped to educate our new and existing members alike. We understand the importance of membership and the difference a successful membership campaign can make. We have seen it happen! RSE PTA will continue to Team Up for Success.

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Keys to Success

- Start early and involve everyone—administrators, teachers, and members.
- Make a weekly e-newsletter a member benefit. Include key dates and activities.
- Work with the administration to offer teachers an incentive to join.
- Ensure the board members and officers can articulate the value of PTA to members and prospective members.
- Stay with it, and don't give up.