

# **A Best Practice Case Study: The Parent Ambassador Program at The Epstein School**

**Admission Community of Practice**

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**Guests:** *Susan Berk,*

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## Goals of the Call

- To explore multiple perspectives on our topic, informed by one school's successful efforts and the input of the group.
- To collaborate with colleagues for mutual benefit.
- To discuss effective strategies for successfully involving parent volunteers in supporting your school's recruitment efforts.
- To identify priorities and goals to improve our own practice in this area.

# Agenda

- Welcome and Roll Call
- CoP News and Announcements
- Setting the Context
- The Case Study
- Discussion
- Continuing the Work

# CoP News and Announcements

- Technology:
  - Google Groups – our new web-based discussion board coming this month
- PEJE Marketing Awards
  - Deadline for submitting entries is Dec. 14
  - Download application from PEJE website
- PEJE Assembly for Jewish Day School Education
  - April 6-8 in Boston
  - Registration beginning Nov. 15, early bird prices until January. Schools encouraged to register as teams.

## Setting the Context

- Current parents and students are the best salespeople for your school – many voices sell a school best.
- Not only can inquiries, visits and applications increase with the support of a well trained ambassador team, but attrition can decrease as well.
- Ambassadors' roles are to speak positively about the school based on their own personal experiences – not to quote statistics and facts and figures.

# Best Practice in Ambassador Support

Your school effectively mobilizes students, parents, alumni and teachers to support the Recruitment effort.

<p><b>Level I</b> Common starting point</p>	<p>Has formed a group of <u>interested</u> and enthusiastic parents who (a) conduct parlor meetings and (b) support school visits by prospective students and their families.</p>
<p><b>Level II</b> Progressive performance</p>	<p>Has formed a group of <u>interested</u> and qualified parents and supplemented it with students; has <u>trained</u> them to (a) escort visiting student and parent prospects, (b) conduct parlor meetings and (c) participate in open houses.</p>
<p><b>Level III</b> Exemplary performance</p>	<p>Has carefully <u>selected</u> and <u>trained</u> a cadre of student, parents, alumni and faculty to act as ambassadors who maintain one on one phone and email contacts with prospects through to matriculation as well as support key meetings and events (school visits, parlor meetings, open houses, and feeder school presentations); lead tours and escort visiting families; and assist in establishing relationships between partner organizations (sender schools, synagogues, etc.) and the school.</p>

Source: How Does Your School Stack Up? An Admission Self-Assessment Tool. By Harry Bloom, Learning Acceleration.  
[http://www.peje.org/knowledge/admission/admission\\_assessment.php](http://www.peje.org/knowledge/admission/admission_assessment.php)

## Background



THE EPSTEIN SCHOOL  
Solomon Schechter School of Atlanta

- 2002 K-8 enrollment 536
- 2007 K-8 enrollment 551
- 72 spaces for kindergarten
  - 4 sections – all but 20 to 30 spaces typically filled by own preschool
- Average 115 inquiries yearly K-8<sup>th</sup>
- Average 75 applications yearly
- Average attrition 6.5%
- Approx. 60,000 Jewish households in Atlanta area
- 5 Jewish Day Schools
- 18 Jewish Preschools
  - Epstein has a preschool of its own

## Guiding Question

- During the call, consider what factors contributed to the success of Epstein's Parent Ambassador program. Are these factors in place in your school?
- We'll be discussing this at the end of the call.

# The Case Study

# The Need

- Enrollment was down for K at 62/72 spaces
- Needed to change the messaging image of the school
- Needed to change public opinion
- Wanted to increase the number of people involved in helping sell the school
- Wanted to work toward increasing enrollment to capacity

**So, we determined that the fastest way to learn about the school's families and identify prospective families in the community was by tapping the knowledge of current parents.**

## Start Up Process

- Contacted a Schechter School Admission Director in LA who had a successful committee in place
- Revised the LA program to meet the needs of Epstein
- 14 members initially selected by administration (admission director was too new in position to know who to choose)

# Criteria: Selecting Committee Members

- Selected two strong parent co-chairs with diverse backgrounds to organize projects under guidance of admission director
- Most ambassadors were current parents for at least 3 years
- 2-3 new parents to the school were also selected
- Needed ambassadors who demonstrated different strengths:
  - Diversity of synagogues
  - Diversity of former preschools attended by their children
  - Children across the grade levels
  - Extroverted personalities
  - Excel in one-on-one interaction
  - Represent a range of professions
  - Well-connected in the community
  - Spouse involvement

## Selection Process

- Ambassadors are selected - note emphasis on selecting.
- We did not want to ask for volunteers to serve as ambassadors. We handpicked the people we wanted to work with and invited them to participate. It is an honor to be asked to serve their school in this capacity.
- Board members were not appropriate admission ambassadors. Board members' jobs were to focus on big-picture, long-range issues for the school. Board members, however, should all be trained to be positive representatives of the school at all times.
- There were volunteers who wanted to do this but who weren't on the chosen list so we diverted their energies to other tasks (collating mailings, etc.) or to other committees in school.

# Structure of Ambassador Committee

- New members selected and personally invited
- Three committee meetings held during year
- Phone logs by committee members to track their activities
- Parent co-chairs helped coordinate and take care of many details
- Matched member to assignment and availability
  - Some like tours, some phone calls, etc.
  - Some available during daytime for tours, others only for evenings
- Gathered feedback regularly from group - yearly evaluations of members
- Burnout prevention – regular rotation of members, varied assignment of tasks

## Educating the Committee

- Held 2.5 hour training meeting
- Provided binder with all materials
- Familiarized them with school website
- Shared information on specialized programs school offers
- Provided detailed tour of building
- Practiced role playing scenarios
- Provided quick facts about school
- Provided answers to commonly asked questions
- Created a bond among committee members

# Roles

## **Ambassador Roles:**

- Greet and chat with visitors to campus or at events
- Tour guides
- Host parlor meetings or recruitment events
- Make connections for school with feeder organizations (their synagogue, preschool their children attended, etc.)
- Make introductions with rabbis, cantors, educators, community leaders, etc.
- Distribute promotional materials (pass out brochures, collate mailings, post flyers/signs)
- Phone call/e-mail follow up with prospective families throughout the admission process to answer questions (homework, carpool, uniforms, etc.) and make them feel welcome in the school community
- Provide input to admission director in planning events and trying new strategies

## **Other Roles:**

- Serve as a buddy to a new family planning to enter the school, shepherding them from enrollment to matriculation (this is a separate committee in some schools)
- Identify students/families for Admission Director to contact – help generate new inquiries
- Speakers for events (panel presentations at open houses, speak at PTO meetings at preschools or in synagogue religious schools, etc.)

## Discussion

- Clarifying Questions
- Your Ideas
- Lessons Learned
- More Ideas

## Clarifying Questions

Please ask your clarifying questions – do you need more information about anything in the case study, or is there anything you don't understand?

## Your Ideas

- What factors contributed to the success of Epstein's Parent Ambassador program?
  - Are these factors in place in your school?
- In what other ways can parents support recruitment?

# Lessons Learned

- Listen to your committee...they know the community
- From year 1 to year 2, inquiries went up, but enrollment did not
  - Decision was made to add new committee members, fitting a broad range of characteristics, chosen by co-chairs and admission director
  - Increased the number of members of ambassador team
  - Key messages changed to emphasize academics
- From year 2 to year 3, inquiries, applications, and enrollment increased!
  - Began adding parents new to the school to ambassador team
  - Changes based on committee feedback regarding open houses, tours, messages were implemented
- From year 3 going forward, school is at capacity! Success!

# Lessons Learned

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Inquiries	107	115	117	99
Applications	48	83	71	78
# New Students Enrolled	31	48	50	43
Attrition (not counting graduates)	32	44	35	22
K-8 School enrollment	537	549	552	552

## More Ideas

- Other kinds of ambassadors – ways to use students
  - Little children as room ambassadors
  - Older elementary and middle school children as tour guides and speakers
  - High school students as day hosts for “shadow” experiences
  - All students can be taken on visits to their previous school to talk about how great their new school is!
- Other kinds of ambassadors – using alumni
  - Keeping alumni connected to the school puts positive emphasis on successful outcomes of your graduates (current high school or college students), which is of interest both to prospective and current students (attrition prevention technique as well).
  - Put them on panels at parlor meetings and open houses or get them involved in a letter writing campaign to prospective students
  - Helps establish future base of donors

## Next Steps for Your School

- What factors do you need to consider to start/improve your own program?
- How can you develop training materials?
- How would you select and invite potential ambassadors? How many do you need for success?

## Continuing the Work Online

- Today's case study focused on one type of ambassadors – parents. This does not mean that involving current students and alumni (former students) in your outreach efforts is not important, it simply is not the focus of our discussion today. We can use the CoP discussion board to share ideas and strategies for other functions and activities for ambassadors.

**Thanks for participating!**  
**Thanks to our special guest,**  
**Susan Berk!**

*Contact our presenter:*

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