Tips to launch a parent series in your community

Getting Started

- Start small and stay with it!
- In the beginning, plan one event each year (fall) or one each semester Sept/March to start.
- We suggest no registration necessary. The fewer stumbling blocks to attendance, the better.
- "Parents, Teens, Parties and the Law" is a great first program with little to no cost and a title that is nonjudgmental. This event works well as a panel: judge, police, dean/counselor/school representative a substance abuse prevention professional or parent with a personal story.
- We cannot stress enough that the title of your event is key. Words that work: success, achievement, thrive. Example of a title that doesn’t work: "Drugs and Your Child". Titles that work: "Yes, Your Teen is Crazy" (Dr. Michael Bradley) and "Parents, Teens, Parties and the Law".
- Usually, you may screen a film at little cost. For example, "Miss Representation" (on the underrepresentation of women) or "The Mask You Live In" with a focus on males. Plan on a short discussion to follow. Once you establish yourself as a group that brings out a crowd, bookstores will want you to host authors on a book tour, which is free.
- Understand these things take time to build. Don’t get discouraged. Allow your parent/guardian/family series the time to grow.

Choosing a Guest Speaker

- Free guest speakers are available from hospitals, treatment centers, school personnel, law enforcement and the judicial system.
- Seek speakers with the ability to communicate well. You want participants to have a positive experience and return. Visit glenbardgps.org to see our current and past speakers.
- Negotiate with your guest speakers for more than one presentation, and then network inside your school to maximize the funds you receive and share speakers (e.g. teacher workshops, Institute Day). If you host presentations for students, have the speaker address parents as well. Partner with your athletic department and organize a speaker for their athletic code presentations to parents and student athletes. For example, "Peak Performance" can address alcohol and the athlete.
• Also network outside of your school. Connect with neighboring school districts (who may want to host the speaker at their venue), treatment hospitals, health departments, organizations, etc. The speaker can present to more than one organization per day. Also, parent programs at night can be followed by a workshop the next morning. For shared programs, take advantage of shared transportation costs and reduced fees, which can be negotiated!

**Leveraging Partnerships**

• Access funding by reaching out to local businesses, banks, insurance companies, real estate agencies, organizations, foundations, or your local health department. Ask them to help fund a program or co-sponsor a program. Offer the opportunity to showcase their organization at a display table prior to the program, place their logo on your event flier and offer recognition in any media and your website.

• Remember in-kind donations. For example, a local Holiday Inn hosts our guest speakers.

• Your chamber of commerce can organize reduced restaurant prices/coupons on the night of a program.

• Connect with your public library for book discussions prior to the speaker’s appearance. Ask the library to create a display of your speakers’ books. This is a great source of free publicity.

• Connect with your local university/community college. This is a great source for a venue ("We are bringing families to your campus"), assistance from their marketing department with design of a brochure/flier and financial support.

• Partner with your local newspaper and offer the opportunity for a reporter to interview your speaker prior to the event to assist with advance publicity.

• Inside the educational world, reach out to your special education cooperatives, local colleges, PTA/Boosters, wellness committee, Title I and title III funds and academic departments in your school (host a family read). Organize an event with a focus on your shared goals.

**Communicating About Your Program**

• Reach out and invite other schools' families to events you host. Your sponsors will be pleased with a larger audience. Add the invited schools’ logos to your flier. Your series can be a source of pride for your school community "bragging rights". It's also a great way to build community within your school district (our programs rotate among several venues). Additionally, it can strengthen connections with your feeder school districts.

• Leverage social media. Share information on Facebook & Twitter. Live tweet during events and post a takeaway message from an attendee (with photo) in your e-newsletter & on social media the day after a program. Have your principals tweet about the event. Make use of automated calls to your parents as reminders. Give prominence to your series on your website and ask neighboring school districts to do the same.

• Mail your series flier or brochure in conjunction with your registration packet and insert fliers with any outgoing correspondence from the dean’s office, principals or PTA newsletters.

• Connect with local government to get the information on your village marquee and in their e-newsletters.

• Promote the guest speakers’ books so those unable to attend an event may obtain the information. Publish a summer reading list for parents.
● Videotape your speaker if given permission and post the video on YouTube and link to it on your website.

Expanding Your Program Offerings

● To engage minority parents, schedule a speaker and honor their children (for leadership, character or scholarship) at the event. We held a leadership conference for our minority students and later recognized those students (certificates were awarded) and asked their families to join us for a weekend lunch and a program that followed. Make use of targeted automated calls, but if possible, make positive, personal phone calls home that can transform relationships. Offer free dinner (seek donations from your food service provider or local restaurants), prize drawings and free babysitting provided by students in National Honor Society, Key Club, etc. Actively recruit minority parent leadership for your parent series. The relevancy of a family speaker series makes it a safe place for parents to connect with the school and a great source for volunteers and committee members. Volunteers can assist with outreach, social media (blog, retweet,) flyer design, planning, transportation for speakers, distributing flyers for upcoming events at each program, etc. Offer programs in families’ native language or invest in headsets for translation. Offer a parent academy with a graduation certificate ceremony and dinner for extended family. Parent involvement specialist Dr. Lourdes Ferrer offers great workshops in Spanish. We initiated a Saturday morning series (in English and Spanish) called "How to Get to College" and were amazed at the appeal of this time slot for all parents.

● Host networking/outreach luncheon or breakfast prior to a program to build awareness. Invite organizations in your area: religious youth leaders, social service agencies or therapists in private practice. We all work with the same young people and their parents. We hosted a luncheon event for all the PTA leaders in our county. Ask for their support in spreading the word.

● Invest the time for personal outreach to attend administration meetings, pupil personnel services staff meetings and PTA/Booster meetings to build awareness and seek support in spreading the word.

● Offer school staff continuing education credit for attending a program.

Final thought:  Be assured that synergy, outreach and partnerships will ensure success. Good luck!

For further information, visit glenbardgps.org or contact Gilda Ross, Glenbard District 87 student and community projects coordinator, at gilda_ross@glenbard.org or 630-942-7668.