

STARTING A DADS* GROUP AT SCHOOL

*The term "DADS" is meant to be inclusive of all adult male primary/significant caregivers

1. DECIDE ON LEADER(S)

- **Brainstorm a short list of potential leaders** with other parents, school administrators who support dad-engagement, and others in the school who know a wide range of dads in the school community.
- **Look for qualities** such as, trustworthiness positivity, understanding, decisiveness...someone who is imaginative, solution-focused, involved, etc.
- **Ask one or two dads** to commit to leading the first Event, from start to finish. Explain upfront that the Leader's role is task-specific, not opened ended.

2. AGREE ON A KICKOFF EVENT

- **The Leader's initial task is to decide on the best idea for a kickoff Event.** In addition to talking informally with other parents, teachers, students, PA officers, board members, etc., the Leader should arrange a small, focused brainstorming session with a few friends, interested dads.
- **New Dads Groups are advised to choose an easy, fun and community-wide kickoff Event.** Think pancake breakfast, chili cook-off, donuts with dad, parent-teacher basketball game, etc.

3. DETERMINE KEY DATES & TASKS

- **Get approval from the school administration and PA for a date on the calendar.** Keep in mind that there is no perfect date without conflicts, but a workable date can be found by doing a thorough review of the school calendars.
- **Make a master list of Event tasks and determine how many dad volunteers are needed.** Getting other dads to volunteer is much easier if you give them clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Speak with your PA about how to handle any upfront costs that may be necessary.
- **Schedule next meeting and agree on best way to communicate.** Depending on the Event, the Leader should meet with this small group monthly, leading up to the Event. A simple group email works well.

4. START BUILDING & USING YOUR DAD-A-BASE

- **Announce the newly formed Dads Group and Kickoff Event.** A letter and email from the Leader, the Head of School, and the PA President can serve both as an introduction of the Dads Group Leader as well as a 'Save the Date' for the Kickoff Event. Another option is to combine the announcement with a brief survey for dads.
- **Determine how best to communicate with dads.** A brief survey of dads is a great way to build a Dad-A-Base. The survey can be as simple as asking for contact info, interests/hobbies, and ideas for future events. It's best to do hard copy and online versions of surveys.
- **Set up a regular open, informal monthly meeting schedule.** These meetings should be mostly social, take care of any necessary planning, and take place in a restaurant, cafe, bar function room, etc. The meeting structure is an important way to build community and maintain an ongoing presence in the school community. Connect with the PA President and school administration to begin formalizing the Dad Leader role within the PA structure. Ideally, the Leader would attend PA meetings. Minimally, he should maintain regular communication with the PA on a regular basis.

* Based on material from *The Modern Dads Dilemma* (New World Library, 2010) by John Badalament and adapted by The Fatherhood Project.

To learn about The Fatherhood Project's school workshops on how to engage dads, visit
<http://www.thefatherhoodproject.org/training/agencies-organizations/>