

Parents' Voice



Year of the Dad: Engaging male parents and carers survey

Parents Voice is SPTC's online survey group, comprising more than 1000 parents who receive occasional online surveys on topics relating to education and schooling.

The latest survey was part of Year of the Dad which celebrates the input a great dad or male-carer can have on a child's life. We asked you to tell us about how your school or parent group engages male parents and carers, how this could be improved and what benefits it could bring.

Key findings

- ▶ Activities taking place during standard 9am to 5pm work hours is a real preventative factor in dads and male carers being able to participate.
- ▶ Having more events and activities specifically aimed at attracting fathers and male-carers might improve levels of involvement.
- ▶ Another incentive for attendance would be if the activities were making use of the wide range of skills and abilities that parents can offer, including those typically associated with males.

"I think encouraging more fathers and male carers is about creating a diversity of role models. Simply being involved at primary school age teaches children that fathers have a role to play and not just mothers. Change is needed to achieve gender equality. Opportunity for fathers to get more involved in roles traditionally done by women is just as important as women having greater opportunity in the workplace."

Thanks to all the parents who took part and responded. You can find the link to the full survey here: <http://www.sptc.info/parents-voice-year-of-the-dad-engaging-male-parents-and-carers/>

Results

Survey details

- ▶ 215 people completed the survey.
- ▶ 52.9% of the respondents were male parents or carers themselves.
- ▶ 65.9% had a child attending primary school, 32.24% at secondary and 1.87% at pre-school.

Many respondents recognised that issues such as time constraints and work commitments are issues for both male and female parents and carers. However, it was also recognised that there is a wider cultural issue when it comes to dads and male carers, with work-places tending to be more flexible with mothers when it comes to family commitments.

Could your school do more to ensure fathers and male carers feel included?

Out of the 60 respondents that answered this question, 61.6% said yes, their school could do more to ensure fathers and male carers feel included.

The common themes from the comments were that being given more notice of activities and events and more of these being organised to take place outwith work hours would be better and enable more fathers and male carers to attend. Several comments expressed frustration that schools made the assumption that the mother was the primary caregiver and that this did not encourage participation. Respondents also said that events and activities aimed specifically at fathers and male carers might create higher levels of engagement; such as a bring your dad to school day or events centred on sport.

"I just think far too much is organised during standard work hours. Would like to see more flexibility. My employer is pretty good but even so there's quite a lot I can't get involved with."

"A father perspective. Given that my parent council is mainly women, it would provide a balance and show children that they are interested and taking an active part."

What would be contributed to the school community by male parents or carers?

A common theme throughout the comments for this question was the provision of a male role model within the education setting. More involvement by male parents and carers would create a better gender balance and allow for the sharing of duties and responsibilities between genders. This sets a good example for children and teaches them

valuable lessons about gender equality, particularly when it comes to parenting and education, which are two areas that can often be dominated by women.

85.58% of respondents said their school has not run events targeting male parents or carers in the past. Those who had gave some fantastic examples:

- ▶ A He and I day where children brought a male family member into school for group activities, games and crafts.
- ▶ A sponsored cycle/run
- ▶ School football teams
- ▶ A Father's day annual BBQ
- ▶ A soapbox derby

83.1% of respondents said their school did not have any activities that specifically targeted male parents and carers. Those which did were clubs doing physical activities such as football or touch rugby.

What do you feel you could do to support male participation within the school community?

Comments showed a recognition that male involvement in education (particularly early years and primary) and childcare is a wider societal issue with workplaces being more flexible with mothers and not taking the same level of consideration when it comes to the familial commitment of fathers. Comments

also suggested that introducing more events that specifically target or appeal more to the interests of male parents and carers may lead to increased levels of engagement.

"It is a wider societal change that needs to take place (and I believe is taking place). Opportunities to get involved are the same, society has a whole needs to acknowledge the equal parenting roles of males and females."

Additional to this, respondents said they would be more likely to get involved with activities that made use of their skills and talents. In many schools, the wealth of knowledge and skills that parents have are an untapped resource that could open up many possibilities.

Conclusions

- ▶ While male and female parents should be treated equally by schools, male parents and care-givers do tend to be less involved with school activities.
- ▶ It is important to try and change this to give children good male role models and teach them about gender balance in duties and responsibilities.
- ▶ Parents are affected by wider societal beliefs that women are the main caregivers and would like schools to be more inclusive of fathers and male carers when planning parental engagement activities.

Comment Picks

Could your school do more to ensure fathers and male carers feel included?

“Organise specific father events/gatherings. Have material on school website specifically for fathers / non-resident parents.”

“Not assume the mother is the primary carer.”

“The school do try to ensure fathers/male carers are able to attend events. Given that the largest turn out of males is on sports day, it may be that this is an area to explore”

“As most fathers/males work full time, more events out of working hours would allow them to attend.”

“I would be more likely to get involved if there were a specific request, particularly something relating to my skills.”

“Maybe setting events, groups or meeting that were specific to fathers. I believe women find it easier to link in with other mothers to arrange after school playtime together for their younger kids at parks, round at each other’s homes etc.”

“Invitations to spend some time at school and to find out how a typical school day runs. Informal chats with the parent council seeking opinions and feedback might help.”

“Better publicise the benefits of having fathers participate in school activities and offer more encouragement.”

What do you feel would be contributed to the community by male parents or carers?

“It would show kids that getting involved in school activities is not just a mothers role.”

“Different role models.”

“It is important in any sector to have a broad mix.”

“Craft and DIY skills, sports skills. These are popular with children who have come to expect all parent helpers are mums.”

“A lot of kids come from broken homes and most of these stay with their mothers. Having female dominated school communities reinforces the stereotype that dads are not interested in the education of their children. Male role models are important and not just in the traditional male areas such as sport and technology.”

“Sound male role models. Ours is a rural school in an area of social deprivation. Quite a few of the kids come from difficult background and predominantly have female care.”

“I think it’s just about diversity of role models. Merely by being involved at primary school age shows fathers have a role to play and not just mothers. To achieve gender equality needs change and opportunity for fathers to get more involved in roles traditionally done by women as much as it does women to have greater opportunity in the workplace.”

“I think that there can be a particular issue with boys not engaging with the curriculum, and then being seen as trouble makers. I wonder if dads might have more insight into how to help these children find a place in the school community (or contribute to discussions about appropriate strategies to manage this sort of behaviour).”

“It provides more diversity. Historically the PTA group is predominantly women but it would be good to have more males involved so that there is more acceptance of fathers taking an active interest in the school activities and to support school events.”

What do you feel could be done to support male participation in the school community?

“A lot more. We have 3 men on the parent council and they make a big difference to the dynamic. We feel that many male carers are shy when it comes to hands on school activities, especially first time parents. It would be good to do one event a year just for them. An initial survey to find out how they feel confidence wise and away from the possible feeling of intimidation by female carers so they may be honest would be very useful.”

“Suggest that a Bring Our Parents to School day is run based on an activity that is more likely to interest the males such as outdoor learning or gym/sports.”

“More male primary school teachers. Specific asks for fathers to get involved in projects. Not easy, primary schools just generally feel like women oriented places.”

“I know it sounds clichéd but I do think music, sport and tech should be emphasised. I also think that men often like to have a clear focussed task that uses their skills (are more likely to enjoy designing the website than selling tickets for an event).”



Our last Parent’s Voice survey was about the National Improvement Framework and Standardised Assessment. You can read the report for this by visiting www.sptc.info/nifreport

If you would like to join Parents’ Voice and help inform policy discussions, services we provide and our response to media enquiries then you can do so on our website: <http://www.sptc.info/your-pc-pta/get-involved/parents-voice/>