

Community Schools Program on a Shoestring

Any school system can offer adult education if it uses volunteers.

Adult education programs appear to be a coming trend. In *Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Educational Excellence (1983) sees a need for a learning society, with experiences from preschool to adulthood. Naisbitt (1982), in *Megatrends*, observes, "In education we are moving from the short-term considerations of completing our training at the end of high school or college to lifelong education and re-training. The whole idea of what education is will be reconceptualized during the next decade." But how can schools with already tight budgets provide adult education programs?

The Perkins Local Schools in northern Ohio have provided a community schools program for adults in the community for 11 years. And it costs the district very little: only the price of evening building use and a part-time community schools director. This past year, the program provided over 100 classes with enrollment of about 2,000.

The key to the program is volunteers. A volunteer community schools committee representing schools, businesses, and homemakers, meets three times during the year to plan a six-week term. Chaired by the community



schools director the group brainstorms ideas for classes to offer and persons to teach. Classes are generally planned for one to two hours one night a week, with the majority of classes offered Tuesday night—or "family night"—when free babysitting and children's programs are provided. All classes are taught by volunteers and the only cost to attendees is the fee for materials.

Courses range from needlecraft to legal issues, some past topics including "Beginning German," Effective Parenting," "Running," "Landscaping," "CPR," and "Knitting." Subjects are based on suggestions from previous students, past successful classes, community trends, and available community programs. Future growth will include more daytime classes and more classes offered at community sites.

Why volunteer?

Volunteers teach classes for a variety of reasons. Businesses have found that providing free classes can have a positive advertising effect. For example, in a class called "Specialty of the House," students taste dishes served by various local restaurants and learn how they are prepared. A class on "Landscaping," offers helpful hints on planting shrubs but also gives the nursery an opportunity to show its wares. Legal classes such as "Wills," "Estates," and "Divorces" provide opportunities for

lawyers to show their expertise. Community agencies may offer classes to increase awareness of their programs. And through teaching classes, the electric company and police department can benefit from improved community relations.

Not all volunteers receive such direct rewards; many just enjoy sharing their knowledge. Sometimes those who began as students become teachers themselves when they realize they have something to offer. Whatever the reason, the Perkins Community Schools program never lacks a variety of class offerings; each year the number of classes and persons served increases. Our experience is proof that a vital and growing community schools program can develop on a shoestring. □

References

- Naisbitt, John. *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives*. New York: Warner Books, 1982.
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983.

Jacalyn K. Wood is an elementary consultant for the Erie County Board of Education in Sandusky. She also serves on the executive committee for the Perkins Community Schools, Sandusky OH 44870.



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