Middle School Panel

Palms-Rancho Park Branch, Los Angeles Public Library

Children

|

Teens

|

Young Adult

|

Adults

Middle School Panel

Jan 20, 2018

Free

Byline

Michele Robinson, Children's Librarian II, Palms-Rancho Park Branch, Los Angeles (Calif.) Public Library

The Fifth Annual Middle School Panel was a great opportunity for parents/guardians to hear about the local middle schools and their programs. This program was geared

for parents/guardians of fourth- and fifth-graders.

The event was hosted by the Palms-Rancho Park Branch Library in partnership with 17 area schools and organizations. Program representatives from the area schools addressed parents, legal guardians and students about their respective middle schools in terms of academic programs, resources and performance.

Panelists included magnet, charter, SAS (Schools for Advanced Studies) / High Ability / AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), independent and private schools, as well as the program and policy specialist from LAUSD’s choices program. Participants were provided informational material and handouts with opportunities to speak with school representatives.

The goal of the program is to support the readiness of families in the successful transition of their children from primary school to secondary school — a significant life event and major decision in education.

Advanced Planning

This program takes lots of advanced planning. The date is booked several months in advance because I work with the Palms Parks and Recreation Center (we share an adjacent parking lot) to provide a larger space for the program, since our library cannot hold as many people. As soon as school starts in mid-August, I send out emails to the local principals/teachers/educators to invite them to attend the program, which is set for early October. (In the Attachments at the right).

One hurdle we had to overcome was technical difficulties. Many of the presenters used PowerPoint for their presentations and needed WiFi and speakers, which the park auditorium does not have. Also neither the park nor the library have a hot spot. Luckily, this turned out to be a non-issue, because one of the presenters was able to bring a hot spot and shared it as necessary.

Another challenge I faced was managing to organize several schools to attend the panel on the set date. This year, representatives from 17 organizations/schools attended, which was the largest turnout ever. Since the date was planned very far in advance, they had to arrange their schedules to be available to attend and some presenters faced a scheduling conflict. They actually had to leave this event early to

attend another event.

Goals for the Middle School Panel include presenting information about middle school choices and options to parents. This program allows parents/guardians to talk with and meet representatives from many different kinds of schools in a neutral environment. The other goal was to bring schools to the library so that parents could make informed decisions about their child(ren)’s academic future. Both goals were accomplished almost immediately and with great success.

An unexpected success of this program is that every year more schools and organizations want to be a part of the panel. Some schools are new and some are just new to the panel but every year the panel seems to grow, which is wonderful for our patrons. They are able to get more information to make informed choices.

Marketing

I advertised the event using in-house marketing, e-blasts and posted fliers throughout the library. I also promoted it on the Los Angeles Public Library website.

About a month before the program, I sent emails to parents/guardians of school-aged children who are on my e-blast list to save the date. As the date got closer, I sent out subsequent emails to remind patrons of the program. I also worked with the local elementary schools to promote the program to their fourth- and fifth-grade parents. The marketing was very successful and we got many parents to attend the panel.

Budgeting

This program is free. All the panelists came on their own time.

Day-of-event Activity

The set-up can be done quite efficiently with only one staff member.

The chairs are arranged audience-style, facing the front. The tables are in the back of the room so the panelists can put their materials on it. I encouraged the panelist to bring fliers about upcoming tours, tuition (if applicable), the admission process and whatever information they wanted to bring about their school.

All materials were laid out so the parents/guardians could easily see the information. I asked the panelists to bring nametags so we would know their names and which school they represented.

Program Execution

All of the seats in the auditorium were filled. An estimated number of people attending the program was about 85, plus the presenters from the 17 different schools/organizations.

Our panel program is set up in three parts. First, the formal presentation, then we open the floor for questions, and finally a "meet and greet" at the end where people can meet the panelists and get information from them up close. The program usually lasts about two hours, and I do it in the evening, so parents/guardians can come after work.

Since this is the fifth year that I have been doing this program, I think this was the smoothest program that we have done. Reasons for this include: no technical glitches and all of the participants showing up (except for one school who contacted me at the last minute to tell me that they could not make it). Also, because many of the presenters have done this before, they knew what to expect and their presentations were well prepared.

We got amazing positive feedback from both the people attending the program and the presenters. Our LAPL Public Relations Department recommended this program to be featured by our city librarian, John Szabo, in a meeting.

Advice

Librarians should be open to new programming ideas. For this program in particular, you have to know your patrons' needs and your community. This program will not work for every community library or library system. In some cities/towns, there are no or few choices and people just go to their local schools.

The reason it is popular on the Westside of Los Angeles is because our parents/guardians are faced with the daunting task of having to choose between so many middle school options (public, private, charter, magnet, SAS, dual language immersion, etc). Many of the parents/guardians in our community are well educated and involved with their child(ren)'s academic success, so they take these choices very seriously. While it is nice to have choices, as in this case, sometimes the choices are overwhelming, and it is good to have a library program where they can go to have the answers to their questions addressed.

Be prepared for things not to go as planned the first time around. It is very difficult to get school administrators to commit to coming at a specified date/time. Some might have scheduling conflicts and/or might be leery of attending a new program. Inevitably, there will be a school that cancels at the last minute, or one that wants to come that you didn't anticipate. Other things to watch out for include technical glitches, like no internet connections. Or you might get a small turnout for your audience. But don't fret, these things will all work out in the end.

Also, cushion enough time in the program so that the audience can ask questions and meet the presenters one-on-one.

I believe the best way to evaluate the success of a program is by how many people attend and the positive feedback you get from it. The most amazing thing about this program is that I am able to retain almost all of the original presenters and add more panelists every year. In the beginning, I had to solicit all of the schools. Now, some schools/organizations are actually contacting me and asking to be included in this program.

Another mark of success is: originally, five years ago, I planned to do this as a one-time program, but now it has become an annual tradition. Every year it grows and gets better in terms of participation, attendance and positive outcomes.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
flyer.pdf
Document
school_choices.pdf
Document
flier.pdf
Document
sample_letter.doc
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

More Programs

Sep 28, 2015
Children (9 and under)+ | $
Image



Coffee and Conversation

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Adults (21 and up)
Dec 28, 2016
Children (9 and under)+ | $
Image



Welcome to Kindergarten

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Tweens (10-12)
Sep 21, 2017
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | □□
Image



Café LOUIE

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational