

BUILDING AN EDUCATION COMMUNITY

How-to steps in conducting an education summit and implementing results

Many moons ago, the back cover of children's notebooks carried the slogan "**Knowledge is Power**". Moving community members into action starts with giving them power through information. People act based on what they know about an issue. If they think everything is going well in elementary education, they will have no reason to be concerned. If they are aware of a problem, they will do something about it.

An Education Summit—The First Step in Creating Awareness

A summit is a conference of leaders on an issue of great significance. What could be of greater significance than children's education? Should not the community be concerned if children are only learning 50 percent of what they should in schools?

Convening an education summit gives urgency to the goal of arresting the deterioration in the quality of basic education. A summit should consider parents and the community as 'doers', partners, and participants in education reform.

An education summit enables a broad range of community members to:

- Learn how children perform in school.
- Express views on important issues such as how to spend public funds.
- Develop coalitions and partnerships.
- Develop an agenda for action through meaningful participation.

Preparing for A Summit

Organize a Task Force. Create an "Education Green Berets"—a diverse group of individuals who are passionate in helping children obtain quality education. The possible candidates would be:

- Chairman of the Committee on Education of the Legislative Council
- District Supervisor
- Principal
- Heads of the Association of Parents, Barangay Captains, Teachers, Youth associations
- Representatives of private schools, civic organizations, churches, religious organizations, businesses, and, other peoples' organizations

The Task Force can:

- Set simple goals for the summit. What outputs can be expected from a one-day summit? When is the best time to conduct the summit?
- Delegate responsibilities. Who will gather information? Who will issue invitations? How will the summit be financed? Who will handle the program and workshops?

Conduct an Assessment Survey. This is the diagnostic phase that can be handled well by DEPED officials. They can organize information on:

- Size of classes.
- Ratio of textbooks to students.
- Results of achievement examinations in English and Mathematics.
- Dropout rate in grades one and two.
- Number of non-readers.
- Physical condition of school infrastructure
- Availability of school facilities such as electricity, water, and toilets
- Nutritional status of children.

The data can be presented by school and averages can be estimated for the entire municipality.

Train Facilitators for the Summit Workshops. The participants in the summit will be there to listen, discuss their concerns, and commit to help. Thus, emphasis should be placed on a **dialogue with** rather than **reporting to** community members. For this purpose, facilitators are needed. They can clarify and articulate the workshop questions. They can ensure that all participants get an opportunity to express their views. They can help conversations flow and remain on task. They can summarize agreements and disagreements.

Not everybody can be a facilitator. Facilitators should be able to:

- Encourage others to participate.
- Speak with clarity and smoothness.
- Be logical in piecing ideas together.

To provide each person with an opportunity to express their views on each workshop question, note **cards are** useful

- Each person writes his/her answer to a question on a card. Emphasize the **rule of one card for each idea.**

- Answers should be brief, in bullet points, using key words or short phrases. Answers should be written in big letters so that they are readable from afar. Use locally available materials such as crayons or markers.
- Each person pastes his/her cards on the board or on a sheet of manila paper.
- The facilitator organizes similar ideas together, i.e. puts together the cards that contain similar ideas for each workshop question.
- The facilitator or a participant summarizes the answers to the questions.

Conducting a Summit.

Organize the summit into four phases.

1. First, a mayor or governor articulates the problems in education using data from the assessment survey. These should be presented in simple language to help parents understand the crisis in education. This is also an opportunity for the mayor or governor to inform the community about the Special Education Fund tax (SEF) and the programs it finances. The presentation needs to be upbeat and should challenge the participants to help solve the education crisis. The education of children is a concern of the entire community. (30 minutes)
2. Second, participants are divided into workshops to answer the following questions: (one hour)
 - What are your dreams for your children in school? (e.g. obtain an average grade of 85%, read and write English well, complete grade six)
 - What factors hinder these dreams from coming true?
 - If government had an additional peso, how will you distribute it among different programs on education?
 - What can you do as an individual to help improve the learning performance of your children?
3. Third, a representative from each workshop summarizes the answers. The importance of a 5 to 10 minute presentation from each workshop should be emphasized. (45 minutes to one hour)

4. Fifth, the mayor or governor and the DEPED superintendent pledge their commitment to the program, identify next steps in implementation, and inspire the community to work together towards a better future for their children. (20 minutes)

Moving Ideas into Action

Two objectives of the summit are to increase community awareness and develop a concerned network of 'doers'. The local school board or the Task Force can produce and distribute a summit summary. The consensus, priorities, and work that need to be done can be summarized. It can be posted and made available to the public (e.g. through the LGUs website, through pamphlets, or in the local newspaper). The goals and strategies should continuously be communicated in forums, meetings, and assemblies.

- **Translate summit output into the SEF budget or the budget of the LGU**

The local school board can use the priorities set by the summit as a basis for allocating the SEF revenues (and if needed, the LGU budget). Linking the budget with the choices of the community is a strong sign of political will, and a commitment to reform. It is also a healthy indication that participatory governance and planning are practiced, which further encourages community involvement, ownership, and responsibility.

- **Design a work program that will implement agreements reached in the summit.**

Have the Task Force translate the summit output into bite-size, specific, and doable tasks. Set timelines and outputs for the programs. Organize committees involving participants of the summit. Have regular meetings of these committees and dedicate staff and resources from the LGU and DEPED to assist the groups in planning and implementing programs.

- **Implement activities that will foster a team spirit, communication, monitoring and a support system.**

These can include training programs, social activities, annual retreats, sharing success stories, and recognition of good work through small tokens of appreciation.

- Monitor and evaluate programs and activities regularly. Regular meetings provide opportunities for feedback on progress and difficulties in project implementation. Develop professionalism in conducting meetings:
 - Work with an agenda
 - Record minutes of meetings
 - Develop accountability by assigning a point person for each task.
 - Maintain openness and a team spirit in solving problems and developing new initiatives.