

The Parent Inclusion Manual



Including hot tips, cool ideas and practical suggestions for supporting all parents to be effectively involved in their children's education

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The Parent Inclusion Manual

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P.O. Box 64, Station P
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 2S6

phone: 416-534-0100
fax: 416-536-0100
e-mail: info@peopleforeducation.com
website: www.peopleforeducation.com

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A LETTER FROM JACQUI

Over the past several years, there has been a growing recognition of the valuable contribution that parents make to their children’s education. Whether it is called ‘inclusion’, ‘involvement’, or ‘engagement’, we need to ensure that parents have access to the information and support they need to be effective partners in their children’s education.

There is a lot of discussion among researchers about the difference between *involvement* and *engagement*. In this manual, the terms *involvement*, *engagement*, and *inclusion* are used interchangeably, and the term *parent* includes anyone involved in the raising of a child (parents, grandparents, guardians, and childcare providers).

Instead of talking about engagement vs. inclusion, I sometimes talk about the difference between “engagement in school” vs. “engagement in education”. The most important thing that parents can do to help their children succeed in school is to provide an education-oriented environment at home. Talk to students about what they are doing in school, go over their report cards with them, and take them with you to parent-teacher interviews. Show them that you think school is the most important thing on earth! It is this kind of “involvement” that makes the biggest difference for student success; it crosses socio-economic, cultural and racial barriers; and it is something that virtually all parents can do. Parents should not feel like failures if they can’t be ‘involved’ at the school, whether as a volunteer or school council member – it is their involvement at home that will have the greatest impact on their children’s academic success.

For those parents who want to and are able to participate in school programs and activities, their involvement can foster a sense of community within the school and support the efforts of school staff. It can also build stronger relationships between teachers and parents, and provide an opportunity for parents to get to know their neighbours and members of the broader community.

When reaching out to parents, whether as a staff member or a volunteer, face-to-face contact is the most effective way of building relationships. Paper notices get lost, emails can be ignored, and phone calls can be missed. They don’t provide the same level of personal connection that a friendly smile and warm chat can. It takes time, effort and patience to build parent engagement, but it is worth the investment!

The information, tips, and ideas contained in this manual have come from parents, community agencies and educators across the province. Most of them can be replicated anywhere, and can be adjusted to fit the needs of your school or community. They are just a small sample of the tremendous inclusion work that is being done, and we welcome any other ideas that you would like to share. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact me at info@peopleforeducation.com.

Jacqui Strachan

Parent Inclusion Coordinator, People for Education

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT PARENT INVOLVEMENT

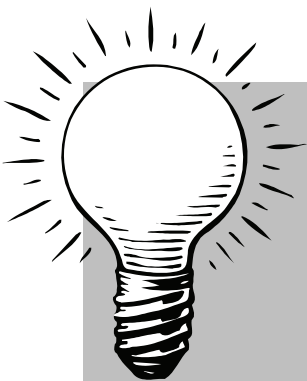
In Ontario, as in many other jurisdictions around the world, parent engagement in education has become an important focus over the past few years. There have been numerous academic studies examining parent involvement and its impact on children, schools, families and communities.

There is no uniform agreement on what counts as parent involvement (Flessa, 2008), and some researchers make a distinction between the terms *involvement* and *engagement*, but what is consistent in the available research is agreement that parental involvement/engagement does have an impact on student academic achievement, across culture, background and socio-economic status.

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

In studies that examined specific parent behaviours, it was found that having high expectations of children is the most significant contributor to their academic achievement (Jeynes, 2005). Parents reading with their children and talking with them about school were the next most important parental involvement activities. In fact, parents' involvement with their children at home has more of an impact on student achievement than in-school participation. Jeynes (2005) concludes that a general atmosphere of involvement may be most beneficial to children's success. What this means is that improving children's chances for success may be as simple as helping parents create an education-oriented atmosphere at home.

The research also shows that the school-based programs that are the most beneficial are the ones that include programming for parents *and* children, programs that target the home as well as the school, and programs that focus on involvement that is specifically linked to achievement (Pelletier & Corter, 2005). Programs work best when they respect the needs of families and address barriers to involvement such as childcare, transportation, and scheduling conflicts. For culturally diverse families, programs that recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences are more effective, and invite more parental participation (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- Surprisingly, checking homework had no impact on children's academic achievement. Some researchers explain this result stating that parents of children who are not performing well to begin with are those parents who tend to get more involved in their children's homework.
- Community schools in Saskatchewan are one example of a model that supports staff, family and community connections/partnerships with a goal of creating welcoming communities and encouraging parental involvement.

A key finding from the research is that parental involvement can transcend differences in socio-economic status, race, and other factors. This means that any group can experience the advantages of parent involvement (Jeynes, 2005), and that effective engagement has the capacity to reduce the achievement gap between marginalized students.

BENEFITS FOR PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

While the research demonstrates direct benefits for students when their parents are involved in their education, there are also side benefits for parents themselves - they learn more about public education, they feel a sense of belonging to a larger community (both within and beyond the school), they are engaged as citizens, and they develop more effective parenting skills. When parents can effectively engage with schools and advocate for their families, it helps set the stage for other types of community engagement as well (Colorado Department of Education, 2007). It can help build better relationships between parents and teachers and lead to higher satisfaction with the school for all. The benefits to parents can, in turn, reinforce the benefits back to children (Pelletier & Corter, 2004).

COSTS

Intuitively, parent involvement makes sense and we can see the benefits, but it does not come without costs (Cortier & Pelletier, 2004). It can be resource intensive and time-consuming, and may increase the workload on educators and put pressure on families. However, the additional cost of parental involvement is a worthwhile investment, as it can help reduce the “achievement gap” between the students who tend to struggle at school and the students who are more successful.

FACTORS INFLUENCING INVOLVEMENT

The research shows that parent involvement is influenced by many factors. These include minority language status, parent cliques, parent educational level, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, and family stressors - including socioeconomic status, single-parenthood, and childcare arrangements which make demands on time and energy (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 46). Parents’ own educational experiences in school and their parents’ involvement are also major influences. Parents get involved in schools when they feel it is important, necessary, and permissible to be involved on behalf of their children. “Different cultural and class contexts also shape how parents define their role about how to engage in their children’s education” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 44).

The environment in the school and parents' perception as to whether the child and the school want their involvement is also a major influence on parent involvement. "When school staff engage in caring and trusting relationships with parents that recognize parents as partners in the educational development of children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 46). Trust and communication seem to be the foundation upon which school, family, and community relationships can be built.

BARRIERS FOR MARGINALIZED FAMILIES

Parents' socioeconomic status has an impact on parent involvement. Single parents, parents with low incomes, minority groups, newcomers, and those with little formal education face many barriers to full involvement in their children's schooling. Some parents may also be self-conscious about their levels of schooling, feel uncomfortable in institutional settings, and fear that they are not educated enough to help in the classroom or even come into the school or speak to teachers (Lareau, 1987; Moles, 1993; Parker et al., 1996; as cited in Lahaie, 2008). When these barriers are addressed, parents are more likely to participate.

Research shows there are four main barriers that prevent marginalized parents from being involved in their children's education:

- Lack of information about the school system and teaching practices
- Systemic barriers e.g. institutional racism, non-inclusive structure
- Linguistic, cultural, financial, and educational barriers that deter marginalized parents from connecting to and participating in school activities
- Lack of social capital – a sense that any contribution will not be wanted or valued as highly as the contributions of others

WHAT IS NEEDED?

The research shows the benefits of engaging parents in their children's education. It also shows it is not easy. However, there are some activities that can facilitate parent involvement. Effective engagement is more likely in schools that are welcoming places with respectful and trusting relationships between staff, families and communities.

Communication is the key to effective family and community connections. Schools can build positive relationships through outreach efforts such as newsletters, fliers, telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, family events, participation in neighborhood/community events, and by providing parents with information on ways to help their child at home. The key component of the communication, however, is that it must be continuous and ongoing (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 46). Schools need to make a conscious effort to actively invite and welcome parent involvement. And they need to develop programs that encourage, support and enhance parents' involvement in their children's schooling (Henderson & Mapp, 2002: 45).

Schools need to build a foundation of trust and respect, connect parent engagement strategies to learning objectives, and reach out to parents beyond the school (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004). Leadership is an essential factor in fostering this environment, as is training in teachers' colleges, professional development courses, and educational administration training programs.

Schools that embrace a philosophy of partnership and have a comprehensive approach to ongoing communication can maximize parent engagement and its contribution to improved student achievement. However, this cannot happen in absence of policy support and resources (Kugler & Flessa, 2007). Only then can sufficient time, energy and resources be devoted to parent engagement. The more welcome parents feel in schools, the more likely they will be to engage in their children's education and ensure their success.

Please visit www.peopleforeducation.com for the full literature review of parent involvement research.

“Comprehensive consistent communication at many points, in many venues over the course of the schooling years” is essential.

Redding, Langdon, Meyer, & Sheley, 2004

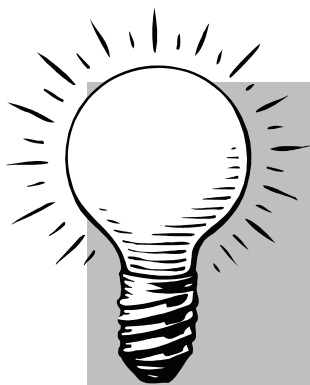
PROVINCIAL INCLUSION INITIATIVES

ONTARIO'S PARENT INVOLVEMENT POLICY

In 2005, the Ministry of Education developed a Parent Involvement Policy, on the recommendation of the Parent Voice in Education Project. The policy acknowledges the important role that parents play in ensuring success both for their own children and for Ontario's public education system as a whole.

The policy is intended to ensure that parents are included at all levels of the education system, and includes a range of initiatives:

- Annual regional forums where the Minister of Education can address parent concerns;
- New tools to ensure better communication with parents at the provincial, board and local levels;
- A provincial Parent Engagement Office and regional offices to support parent inclusion; and
- Parent Involvement Committees in every school board, who have a direct link to the Director and Trustees, and who provide advice about, and support for, parent engagement in the school board.



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- Remember, **every** school council gets \$500 each year to support their engagement work. School councils **DO NOT** have to apply for this funding – it is a part of the school budget. Use the funding for things like newsletters, translations, electronic mail services, or other technology that can improve communication with parents.
- If you are applying for a PRO (Parents Reaching Out) grant, check out our “Tips for Writing PRO Grant Proposals” in the appendix. Also, the ministry has provided some examples of successful projects at the following link, in case you are looking for some ideas: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/success.html>
- If you have a question or concern about provincial issues or parent engagement at the provincial level, try calling your regional office first, before contacting the ministry's central office. The regional offices may be more accessible and can help you get the information you need.

Funding for Parent Inclusion

A key part of the Parent Involvement Policy is the provision of funding to support parent inclusion initiatives, including:

School Council Funding: \$500 annually for each elementary school council and to support local communication and engagement work. *Please note that this funding is part of the school's budget, and is available **each** year to school councils. You do not have to apply for it. Your principal can help you access it. (See Appendix 3 for suggestions on using this funding)*

Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants: school councils can apply for up to \$1000 in funding for school-based projects to reach parents who may experience barriers to involvement due to language, poverty, immigration status, or other factors.

Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) Funding: base funding for each school board to support the work of the Parent Involvement Committee, with additional funding based on student population in the board

Regional Project Grants: organizations can apply for funding to support larger regional or provincial parent engagement projects.

Provincial Parent Organizations: the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Parents Partenaires en éducation, and People for Education receive annual funding to enhance parent involvement.

Parent Engagement Office: the office an annual budget to support its ongoing parent involvement work.

PROVINCIAL PARENT ENGAGEMENT OFFICE AND REGIONAL OFFICES

The Provincial Parent Engagement Office oversees and supports parent inclusion efforts across the province. You can contact the Parent Engagement Office at:

Manager, Parent Engagement Office
12th Floor, Mowat Block, 900 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2
Phone: 1-800-387-5514

The regional offices act as liaisons between the ministry and local school boards. They support school boards in implementing education programs, clarify ministry policies and programs to parents and the community, and ensure local input in the development of ministry policies.

The are six regional offices:

Barrie Regional Office

(Central Ontario)
2nd Floor, 20 Rose Street
Barrie, ON L4M 2T2
Phone: 705-725-7627
or toll-free: 1-800-471-0713

Ottawa Regional Office

(Eastern Ontario)
Suite 504, 1580 Merivale Road
Nepean, ON K2G 4B5
Phone: 613-225-9210
or toll-free: 1-800-267-1067

London Regional Office

(Southwestern Ontario)
Suite 207, 217 York Street
London, ON N6A 5P9
Phone: 519-667-1440
or toll-free: 1-800-265-4221

Toronto and Area Regional Office

(Greater Toronto Area)
Suite 1610, 3300 Bloor Street West
Clarica Centre – Centre Tower
Etobicoke, ON M8X 2X3
Phone: 416-325-6870
or toll-free: 1-800-268-5755

North Bay / Sudbury Regional Office

(Northeastern Ontario)
Suite 211, 447 McKeown Avenue
North Bay, ON P1B 9S9
Phone: 705-474-7210
or toll-free: 1-800-461-9570

Thunder Bay Regional Office

(Northwestern Ontario)
1st Floor, 615 James Street South
Thunder Bay, ON P7E 6P6
Phone: 807-474-2980
or toll-free: 1-800-465-5020

For a complete list of the school boards each regional office is responsible for, go to:
http://esip.edu.gov.on.ca/english/DistrictOffice/directory_ListAll.asp.

SCHOOL BOARDS AND INCLUSION

Each of the 72 different boards must respond to the unique challenges that they face – rural boards may have to cope with vast geographical areas, while urban boards may be dealing with a greater diversity of families. In some boards, population growth has become a huge factor, while others face declining enrolment.

In recognition of the need for parent involvement strategies that meet local needs, the province's Parent Involvement Policy recommended the establishment of board level Parent Involvement Committees (PICs).

PARENT INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In 2005, the Ministry of Education announced a new initiative, the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy.

As part of the Parent Involvement Policy, "School boards [are] required to establish Parent Involvement Committees with a direct link to the Director and Trustees, to provide parent advice and to support parent engagement. Base provincial funding to support the work of the committee [is] provided, with additional funding scaled to the size of the board" (*Developing Partners in Education December 1, 2005*).

Parent Involvement Committees across the province have established a range of objectives, including things like:

- **supporting** parent engagement in their Boards.
- **maintaining** a reporting procedure on best practices for the use of Parent Involvement Funds.
- **using** the base funding provided to support the work of the Parent Involvement Committee both effectively and responsibly.
- **enhancing** communication to parents throughout the Board.
- **building** strong connections between School Councils, the PIC, and the Board.

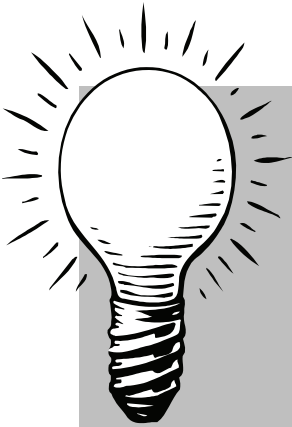
"Parents play a vital role in the development and education of their children and in the success of schools. The Ministry of Education appreciates that the needs and contributions of parents have been undervalued and the education system needs to create several new points of reinforcement in order for the "parent factor" to realize its potential."

*Ministry of Education
Developing Partners in Education December 1, 2005.*

PICS AND REGIONAL SCHOOL COUNCILS

Prior to the creation of Parent Involvement Committees, many boards had regional school councils, with membership from school councils across the board. When the PICs were mandated by the province, different boards responded in different ways. In some boards, the existing regional council became the PIC, while in others, the two parent organizations remained separate, often with representatives from the regional council sitting on the PIC.

At present, there is no official guide for Parent Involvement Committees, so policies and practices vary from board to board. The Parent Engagement Office is in the process of developing a Parent Involvement Committee Guide, similar to its provincial School Council Guide. The guide should be available in the spring of 2009.



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- The Toronto Catholic School Board has done an outstanding job of making their Parent Involvement Committee accessible. On the board website, PIC members' names and photos are posted, along with their contact information and the schools they are responsible for. This makes it easy for parents to connect with the right person, and is great example of openness and accessibility. Check out their website at: <http://www.tcdsb.org/parents/cpic.htm>
- At least two school boards (Hastings Prince Edward and Ontario North East) have invested in video-conferencing technology to overcome the challenges of geographically large boards. Parents and community members can participate in board-wide meetings and forums by gathering in local schools and connecting in to the event by video link.
- The Lakehead Board has an annual "School Council Kick-Off", supported by its Parent Involvement Committee and the Council of School Council Chairs. The event brings together school council members from every school in the board (only one school was not represented this year). Participants have dinner, followed by brief presentations and lots of networking time. They even build in time so that individual school councils can hold their own meeting that night, in recognition that parent volunteer time is at a premium.
- The Kawartha Pine Ridge Board has a great bi-monthly newsletter for school councils, *Keeping in Touch*, with greetings from the director and chair, upcoming events, and other useful information.

SCHOOL STAFF AND PARENT INCLUSION

HOW PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS CAN HELP

When parents and staff work together to support learning, students have a better chance of being successful in school. It is important not only that school staff and parents work in partnership, but that students witness that relationship and understand that both the home and the school have the same goal – ensuring every student’s success.

Teachers and principals play a key role in helping parents feel welcome in the school. It is often the classroom teacher who is the parent’s first adult contact at the school, so teachers must be given the time, tools and information they need to effectively engage parents.

Teachers should ensure that every parent in their classroom knows:

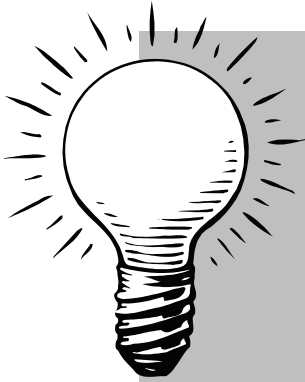
- how and when to contact the teacher if they have a question or concern (providing a range of options is even better – an email address, a phone number, a mail box in the office);
- the role of the school council and contact information for the school council chair;
- volunteer opportunities within the classroom and the school at large; and
- other supports and resources available in the school (eg. Guidance counsellors, social workers, settlement workers).

Effective communication is essential. One of the biggest concerns for parents is poor communication between home and school. Parents sometimes feel that when they ask questions or need information, it is interpreted by staff as a challenge or lack of support for the school. By keeping the lines of communication open and building relationships with parents, schools can create a stronger sense of inclusion and welcome.

Principals can help teachers by ensuring they are provided with the information they need and by encouraging staff to see parents as partners who can help their students be successful. A high school principal in Toronto told the story of a parent who came to him with concerns about her child. When she became upset and said “You must think I’m crazy”, he said “Not at all – you are your child’s only advocate, and I know that you must do everything you can for him”. He encouraged her to speak freely and showed understanding and support for her at a difficult time. It is gestures like this that can make a huge difference for parents.

“How do we get parents to come out to school events? Each teacher personally invites their students’ families! We ask in person, we phone and we follow up with emails.”

Pam Duty, Teacher, Madison Park Middle School



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- Invite the school council chair to come to a staff meeting early in the school year to talk about the council and its role. Teachers who are familiar with the school council will be more likely to share the information with parents in their classroom and are better equipped to encourage greater parent involvement.
- The Ottawa Catholic School Board has an outstanding program called *Parents as Partners in Education*. It is a series of 15 workshops aimed at helping parents with literacy and language barriers support their children in elementary and intermediate school. The plain language workshops are designed for parents with limited reading or English skills, but they are useful for all parents. Teaching staff, community agencies, or adult literacy/ESL instructors can facilitate the workshops, and facilitator training is available. The *Parents as Partners* package includes an Implementation Guide, Facilitator's Guide, and *Parents as Partners* CD of 15 plain language workshops and related resources. For more information about the program, contact Joanne MacEwan, jmacewan@sympatico.ca
- At Madison Park Middle School in Arizona, teachers participate in a 'community walk' as part of their orientation week (the week before school starts in the fall). Teachers visit the homes of students in the area, let them know about school start times, make sure they have everything they need, and answer any questions that families have. They also leave a door hanger with all of the essential contact information for the school. This personal contact even before school starts has led to improved attendance, a sharp reduction in lateness, and a greater comfort level and feeling of welcome for parents.
- Each teacher should have the name and contact information for the school council, so that they can easily provide this information to parents who ask
- Encourage volunteering in your school and recognize the contribution volunteers make. This can be done through a "volunteer of the month" program or acknowledgement in the school newsletter, at staff meetings, and to senior administration and even the media.
- Host a "Bring your parent to school day", where parents and guardians are welcomed into the classroom to find out more about what happens there and participate in typical classroom activities.
- The local newspaper in Parry Sound includes the monthly student newspaper from Parry Sound High School as an insert to their regular paper. This helps to keep the whole community informed and involved in what is happening at the school, and to showcase the skills of the young journalists at the school.

SCHOOL COUNCILS AND ENGAGING PARENTS

School councils, Home and School Associations, and other school-based parent organizations play a key role in parent inclusion. They are uniquely situated to support parents with information and the opportunity to have input on school activities.

For many parents, the most important thing that the school can do to help them feel included is to communicate effectively with them. Parents want to know about changes that are taking place before they happen. For example, if the school is planning on changing the daily schedule or lunchroom procedures, these changes should be explained to parents before they are implemented, and there should be an opportunity for parents to have input. Parents need lots of time and opportunities to ask questions before decisions are made. They want to know how to help their children succeed in school. The school council or parent association at the school can play a lead role in making sure that parents have access to the information they need in a timely manner.

FUNDING FOR SCHOOL COUNCILS

In recognition of the important role that school councils play in engaging parents, the province has provided funding for school councils to help them in their inclusion work. Every school council receives \$500 in annual funding, to be used for communication and engagement work. School councils do not have to apply for the funding. It is a part of the school budget, and can be accessed through the principal. Councils can also apply for a further \$1000 through the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant funding. This money is for specific engagement projects that the council would like to initiate, eg. A welcome program for newcomer parents. See Appendix 3 for more examples.

ENSURING A VOICE FOR ALL PARENTS

School councils frequently spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to get more parents involved in the council, often with limited success. Most school councils have only five to ten active parents, and can work very effectively with that number of members. But it is extremely important that the council makes every effort to represent the voices of *all* parents at the school. They must ensure that parents who may not be able to attend meetings are given many opportunities to have input and provide feedback on school and council activities.

Parent engagement takes time to build, and it has to be actively encouraged to make it work. It won't happen without some effort from both parents (school council members, volunteers, and community leaders) and staff. The pay-off is that when everyone has a sense of belonging, you are well on the way to building a true community within the school.

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

1) Make the School a Welcoming Place

- Make sure that parents feel welcome when they come into the school. Display art, cultural information, or family photos, so that everyone feels a personal connection to the school.
- Don't let security outweigh community. Students need to be kept safe, but schools are a community asset, and should be welcoming to all community members.
- All staff, parents, and volunteers in the school should make extra efforts to welcome people coming in - big smiles, help finding what they are looking for, and a friendly chat, all go a long way to make people feel welcome.

2) Community Building Activities

- To truly engage parents, they need to feel like they are part of a community. You can build that feeling through social events, such as barbecues, family movie nights, and cultural celebrations. People need opportunities to get to know each other in a social setting before they will feel comfortable coming to a meeting.
- Sometimes, we worry too much about 'educating parents to be better parents'. For the parent who struggles to get their child to read, hearing that 'children should read 15 minutes a day' every time they walk in the school will only make them feel like a failure. Events that provide parenting advice are useful, but may further exacerbate the disengagement that some parents feel, and should be balanced with low-pressure, fun social events that make everyone feel welcome.

3) Make Connections Early and Often

- School staff, school council members, and volunteers should introduce themselves to parents early in the school year. This can be done both formally (at Curriculum Night) and informally (chatting in the school yard before classes begin).
- Set up parent information tables at every event (kindergarten registration, concerts, parent-teacher interviews, public meetings), with a member of school council available to greet parents and answer questions.
- Since they are often the first adults parents meet, school staff should have the school council contact information and share it with the parents of their students. Staff should also be able to explain what the school council is and encourage parents to contact the school council if they have questions or need information.

- Have a "school council information" page as part of the kindergarten registration or "welcome to school" package. Include contact information, the role of council, helpful tips for starting school, etc. If your school has set times for parents to register for kindergarten, have council members or other parents available to greet them and answer questions.
- Organize a "parent ambassador" program, where new parents are connected with volunteer "parent ambassadors", someone they can turn to for help and information.

4) Invite, Invite, and Invite Again

- It is not enough to put a note in the newsletter about a meeting and say "all parents welcome", and backpacks are notoriously unreliable methods of communication :-)
- Try using a website, email, phone tree, electronic phone messaging systems, and posters both inside AND outside the school (many parents don't come into the school)
- The most effective way of inviting parents is face-to-face contact. It takes a very brave parent to show up at a meeting where they don't know anyone, so council members should engage parents at every opportunity by introducing themselves, chatting, and making them feel welcome. If a parent knows that there will be a familiar face at the meeting, it will help them feel more comfortable.

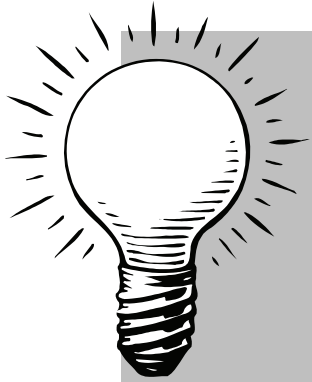
5) Make Meetings Friendly and Inviting

- It is important to keep meetings friendly. Most councils work on consensus, so keep the use of "Roberts Rules" to a minimum. Even if you are using the concepts behind the rules, try to make the language friendlier. For example, instead of saying "Can we have a motion regarding the new anti-bullying program?" try "Let's talk about the new anti-bullying program." You will get the same results, but in a more accessible language and tone.
- Let parents know that they don't have to be council members to come to the meeting. This is a very common misconception. Tell them that they can just listen if they don't want to participate, so that the more reserved parents are not discouraged from coming.
- Bring in interesting speakers to increase attendance. There are many possibilities: a community agency to talk about the services they provide, an Aboriginal elder to share traditional stories, or a local sports hero/ war hero/ etc. It doesn't always have to be school-focussed topics.

- Provide meaningful programs for kids, as opposed to 'childcare'. If students want to participate, they will beg their parents to go, which will get the parents in the door.
- Make meetings accessible. If time or distance is an issue, try teleconferencing, email discussions, a web forum, varying times and locations.
- Introduce everyone at every meeting. For parents coming to their first meeting, the council can sometimes feel like a clique of old friends who all know each other. That can make the newcomer feel like an outsider. Make sure new parents feel really welcome by assigning a person to talk to them throughout the meeting and explain how the meeting works in a really friendly way.
- Stop frequently and ask if anyone has questions or needs clarification
- Follow up with new parents after the meeting. Thank them for coming, and ask if they have any questions, as they may be too shy to ask them at the meeting.

6) Lower Expectations and Be Patient!

- Even the most active school councils may only have five to ten core parents supporting their activities. This is not necessarily a problem, as long as those parents on the council are acting as the voice of **all** parents in the school.
- To make sure that the council is truly representing the broader parent voice, provide lots of opportunities for parents to give feedback and input - surveys, dotmocracy, phone interviews, website and email. Also, make sure there is enough time before a decision is made for parents to ask questions and provide input.
- Provide other opportunities for involvement beyond school councils, whether it is committee work, volunteer opportunities on weekends or evenings, or things that can be done from home, etc.
- It takes time and effort to build relationships and increase parents' comfort level when it comes to involvement, but it is worth it! An active engaged parent body, ready to support their school and help create a rich learning environment for students, is a tremendous asset.



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- Wilkinson P.S., in Toronto, ran a feature in the school council newsletter, where members shared their reasons for joining the council, what they get out of being a member, and how they feel council membership makes a difference. This helped to introduce members to the wider school community, and gave parents some great reasons to join the council.
- If there is available space in the school, try setting up a simple volunteer room. Make it a drop-in for parents and caregivers. Have a coffee maker, some toys for parents with younger kids, and encourage people to come in and help out. Teachers can send work down to the volunteer room, or ask a volunteer to come to the classroom to help.
- At Princess Alexandra Community School in Saskatchewan, a school with a large Métis population, the principal introduced 'Family Picture Day'. Families were encouraged to come to the school and get a free portrait, instead of the typical student pictures. Each family got a copy of the portrait, and another copy was hung in the main hall, so that all families could see themselves reflected in the school.
- The school council at Merrickville P.S. developed a survey for parents to help them assess the parents' knowledge and interest in the school council and its activities, and to help them meet parents' needs (see appendix).
- The school council at Preston High School in Cambridge developed a *Parent "Go-To" Guide* with links to both school and community resources. It is set up in a fun and approachable way, with an alphabetical list of topics and where to find information. Check out the guide, which has been posted online at: <http://phs.wrdsb.on.ca/uploads/PHSGOTOGuide.pdf>
- A school in Thunder Bay has a new initiative to engage more fathers in their children's education, as well as parents who may find literacy and math nights intimidating. Called "Connecting Parents", the school council will host an interactive event with parents and students to show how science supports literacy and math at the same time. There will also be a school council table, community displays, a speaker from the university, and food.

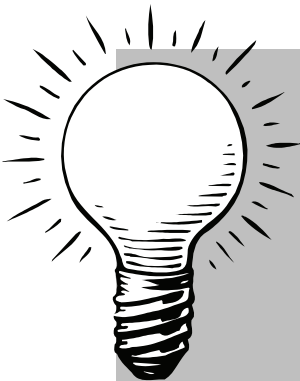
INCLUDING NEWCOMER, ABORIGINAL, AND LOW-INCOME PARENTS

NEWCOMER PARENTS

Many immigrants come to Canada with the hope for a better life for their children. This determination for their success can help them to be strong advocates for their children. When provided with the right tools and information, they can become very active participants in their children's education.

The two main barriers for newcomer parents are language and a lack of understanding as to how the school system works in Canada. In some countries, parents are not expected to take such an active role in their children's schooling, so they may be surprised to discover that they are welcome and valued partners here. There are also vast differences between countries in matters of discipline, assessment, and parent/teacher relationships. In order to be effectively involved in their children's education, parents need to be provided with accessible information about how the school system works in Canada, and how they are expected to support their children's learning.

If English is not the home language, parents may not have the confidence to ask questions or seek help, and may have to rely on their children to be interpreters. Providing information in parents' first language can help them feel that their culture is recognized and valued, as opposed to being a problem to overcome. Even something as simple as multi-lingual signs and posters in the school can provide families with the comfort and familiarity of their own language and help them feel more welcome.



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- When providing translated material, make sure to include the English version too. This provides an opportunity for parents to hone their English skills.
- At www.settlement.org/edguide/ there is everything from an orientation video for newcomer high school students to a checklist of "14 Things to do in your first weeks in Canada" and a guide to dressing for Canadian winters!
- People for Education has translated parent tip sheets, both included in this manual and available for download from our website at www.peopleforeducation.com.
- Settlement workers are the unsung heroes of parent inclusion. The Settlement Workers in School (SWIS) program, provides direct support to newcomer families. Settlement workers are assigned to schools, and can help families access the information and services they need. Most settlement workers speak at least two languages, and are a great resource for school councils and staff. They can help contact newcomer families to tell them about upcoming events or meetings, and answer questions about the school system and parents' role in it. For more information about the SWIS program, contact the provincial coordinator, Darcy MacCallum, at dmacallum@cicswis.ca.
- Cultural barriers can sometimes be more difficult to overcome than language barriers. Schools can help newcomer families feel included by becoming familiar with their cultural traditions and by showing an understanding of the challenges that these traditions may bring. To ensure a sense of belonging for everyone, schools may have to make accommodations for religious or cultural practices.

Now that's inclusive! How one school supports newcomer families

Winston Churchill School, in Waterloo, is a magnet for new Canadians, with over half of the student population in ESL. Tom Schell, chair of the school council, is justifiably proud of the efforts they have made to help parents become more involved:

- **Dual Language Book Program** This program brings parents from different cultural backgrounds into the school to help their children create fully illustrated, professionally bound, hard cover books. The books, written in English and the family's first language, depict things like stories from their home country. The process of creating the Dual-Language books helps parents begin to make connections with school staff and understand how the school system works. Language barriers begin to disappear along with apprehension. All students are encouraged to read the books to gain a better appreciation for other cultures.
- **Cultural Liaison Program** Working with the Settlement Worker and ESL teacher, parents who speak both English and a second language are asked to act as liaisons between the school/school council and the parents from their cultural group. At the beginning of the year a note, translated in multiple languages, goes home along with a list of parents who are willing to act as cultural liaisons and with their contact information.
- **Multi-cultural Evening** Each year, the school hosts a multi-cultural event that is attended by parents, community members, teachers, trustees and Board staff. The event provides a casual environment for everyone to meet, share cultural information and build relationships. The gym is decorated with flags from over 40 countries. During the program, ethnic food and refreshments are served and presentations are made "from around the world". Translators are present to bridge the language gap.
- **School Council** The settlement worker and ESL teacher help identify prospective school council members. The Chairperson personally invites multi-cultural parents, face-to-face, to school council meeting. The night of the meeting, parents are welcomed at the front door. A school council member or settlement worker sits with the parents. Everyone speaks slowly. Pauses are built into the conversation for understanding and reflection. Parents are asked for input.

One more really important note...there is a culture at the school, which has been developed over the last two decades, where teachers and staff have mastered the dimensions and dynamics of cultural diversity. You can feel it the minute you walk in the door!

ABORIGINAL PARENTS

While most newcomers have a positive attitude toward education, and look forward to their children becoming active participants in school life, for many Aboriginal parents, education is associated with their history at residential schools.

The residential school experience - forced separation from family, loss of language and culture, and frequent abuse - has profoundly affected their attitude to education, resulting in a distrust and fear of the education system that did so much harm to generations of families.

Many Aboriginal parents do not trust the 'establishment' to make decisions that are in the best interests of their children. Their past experience has had a negative impact on their view of government and social organizations - parents don't trust them, and may view them as a genuine threat, with the power to remove their children.

Although parents have become marginally more involved in the provincial school system, they continue to feel alienated from a school environment that appears not to respect or reflect their values.

Assembly of First Nations Report on Tradition and Education

Aboriginal families living in urban areas or entering urban schools from reserves may have unique challenges:

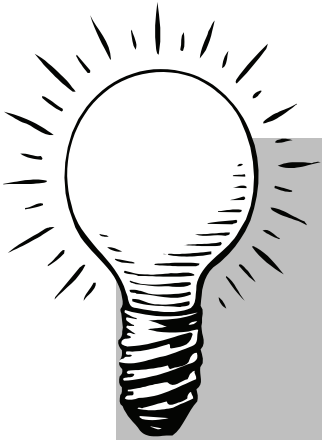
- Aboriginal students in urban centres may not be concentrated in one neighbourhood, and may not choose to self-identify as Aboriginal, which may make it difficult to provide appropriate programs.
- On reserves, the whole community shares responsibility for raising children. Many families in urban centres do not have the same community support, and parents may experience isolation and loneliness.
- Urban schools often educate hundreds of children in one building. Without a sense of intimacy or shared experience, it is hard for families to maintain connections to their cultural roots.

Building trust and strong relationships with Aboriginal parents can be influenced by their own experiences in the education system. Parents should not be penalized for feeling the way that they do. It is up to the institutions to be sensitive to their situation and consult meaningfully to ensure that these families feel welcome and included in their children's education.

First Nations have persistently emphasized the need for education systems that reflect and reinforce First Nations cultures and traditions ... To achieve that goal, family and community involvement in the education process is crucial.

Barbara Kavanagh,

The Role of Parental and Community Involvement in the Success of First Nations Learners



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- The Rainy River District School Board hosts an Aboriginal elders' session for senior administration, principals, vice-principals, and program support personnel. The intent is to draw on the experiences and knowledge of the local First Nations elders, and to provide the board's leadership with an opportunity to learn more about their culture and traditions. It is hoped that a better understanding of the richness of First Nations culture will help support the success of Aboriginal students.
- At the First Nations School in Toronto, Aboriginal learning and culture are interwoven through the curriculum and programming. Every Friday, the whole school, including the school secretary and caretaking staff, comes together to participate in "Big Circle", which includes drumming, smudging, and sharing of stories, songs and successes.
- The Parent Involvement Committee at the Lakehead District School Board includes a parent member of the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee as a voting member of the PIC.
- The Bluewater School Board has initiated several programs to include Aboriginal parents. Mothers from the Saugeen First Nation are involved as Program Mothers for the *Roots of Empathy* program (a program where mothers bring their babies to visit a class regularly throughout the year. Students bond with the mother and child and observe the baby's development. The program has proven extremely effective at reducing levels of aggression among students by raising their social/emotional competence and increasing empathy.)
- Ensure that the environment of the school is welcoming (e.g., mural painted by an Aboriginal artist, Aboriginal artwork, welcome message at the entrance to the school in various languages including Aboriginal languages)
- Depending on geography and local demographics, parent-teacher interviews or other after school activities can take place at an Aboriginal centre or reserve. At Indian Head High School in Saskatchewan, staff members go to the Carry the Kettle First Nation for parent teacher interviews, rather than holding them in the school.
- The Lakehead Adult Education Centre, in partnership with the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, Ontario Works, and the Aboriginal Interagency Council, has developed a Parent Guide Book, with lots of information, activities and tips for parents, including recipes, crafts and stories that reflect Aboriginal culture.
- Beyond the school and board, Aboriginal community members can become important role models for students and provide vital information for teachers. Aboriginal organizations such as Friendship Centres can offer resources and support.
- Remember that the process of building a welcoming school environment for Aboriginal parents is a learning journey. Mistakes can be made with the best intentions at heart. In these situations, apologize, learn, and move forward together. When we can do this as adults and as a community, we teach our children, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, many life lessons.

LOW INCOME PARENTS AND PARENTS WITH LIMITED EDUCATION

Parents who have to deal with the daily stress of poverty, who have to work shifts, or who have to work more than one job, may not be able to commit to school-based activities. They also face the stigma that can be attached to poverty and the judgemental attitudes of others - a perception that they may not be 'qualified' to be involved. Many of our institutional structures are built around the way middle-class people do things. Parents who have never been to a meeting before may be intimidated by formalities, and may not understand how they are supposed to participate. As a result, they don't feel that they 'belong' there.

Parents who were not successful at school, or who didn't have a positive school experience, may carry those feelings over when it comes to getting involved in their children's education. They may feel that they are not 'smart' enough, and will avoid contact with the school.

In focus groups organized by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa and the Renfrew County Child Poverty Action Network, parents identified the following as some barriers to involvement:

- school fees: field trips, agendas, student activity fees, and school supplies may be difficult for parents to afford
- fundraising activities and lunch programs: parents may feel pressured to support the school and may go without other things to ensure their kids can participate in pizza lunches and other activities
- lack of access to information about services for families and children
- transportation costs and challenges, especially for large families
- respect for families' reality: many programs are structured as if there is only one child in the family, many families need programs for multiple children at the same time

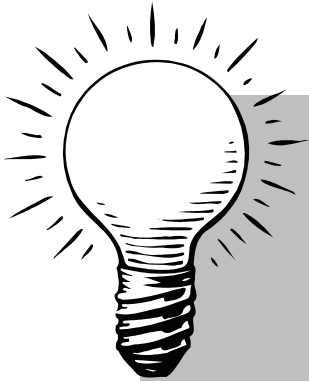
"If I don't have bus fare, we don't go anywhere. Every time I go out with the kids it costs me \$9 - a whole sheet of bus tickets for one outing."

"I don't think they should be doing pizza days and fundraisers in the school. It's not fair. All the parents get the sheet home. Then you are either going to have to pay it and do without, or swallow your pride and ask for help, or tell the kids you can't afford it and leave them out."

"Every time I turn around the school is asking for money. If you don't have it where are you going to get it from - a tree?"

"It's embarrassing to go to the principal. I wouldn't have the guts to tell him I couldn't afford the fees."

Social Planning Council of Ottawa focus group



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- Provide subsidies for all programs, and make sure that *all* parents are aware of the subsidies and how to access them.
- Clearly note on all forms that fees are voluntary. Those who can pay, will, and those who cannot will not have to go through the sometimes humiliating process of requesting a subsidy.
- Ensure that any process to access subsidies is inclusive, respectful, and confidential
- Reduce the number of school fees wherever possible
- Sometimes parents think that if they cannot pay, their children cannot participate. Separate permission forms from requests for money, so that parents know that whether they pay or not, their children can take part.
- Fundraising activities should be low-pressure and inclusive. Limit the number of fundraising programs, so as not to overwhelm families with requests for support
- The Renfrew Child Poverty Action Network (CPAN) has several school-oriented programs to assist low-income families:
 - * Backpack Plus: Parents are issued vouchers for local stores who agree to participate in the program. The program is respectful, because children can choose the items they like without necessarily knowing how the items are being paid for.
 - * Operation Snowsuit: CPAN collects donated winter clothing and distributes it to needy families. Schools play a large role in the program, both by collecting donations and letting parents know how to get help if needed.
 - * School Inclusion Fund: this pilot program (running in 3 schools this year) provides a fund that can be accessed through an anonymous, simple and respectful process, and is designed to remove financial barriers to full school participation by covering any school fees that may be charged.

STARTING SCHOOL: PARENT INCLUSION IN THE EARLY YEARS

Many families find the transition from home to school a challenging time. The change can be stressful, but parents are also very excited about this big step in their child's growth.

It is an ideal time to begin the process of engaging them in their children's education. By providing parents with the information and support they need to help their children adjust to life in their new school, and letting them know how the school system works and their role in it, a whole new generation of engaged parents can be created.

The following programs and resources are just a few examples of available supports for young families starting school for the first time:

Ready for School Connects

This two-week program is designed for newcomer families with children entering kindergarten. While their children participate in a daily program designed to prepare them for kindergarten, parents attend workshops on topics including effective discipline, the kindergarten curriculum, the education system in Ontario, and services available in the community. The program even builds in a much-appreciated "parent relief" day – parents get a morning off while their children participate in the program. A *Ready for School Connects* guide is available online at www.rfsc.ca, and provides community agencies and schools with a framework for creating local programs. For more information, contact the Program Manager, at r.mcgarry@dpnc.ca.

Better Beginnings, Better futures (Partir d'un bon pas)

Better Beginnings Better Futures is an initiative to prevent young children in low income, high-risk neighbourhoods from experiencing poor developmental outcomes, which may then require expensive health, education and social services. It emphasizes quality early child development programs, community and parental involvement, and program integration. The program provides parent education and support. Programs are available in many communities across Ontario. For more information, contact Josée Dostie at jo22gab@live.ca.

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

There are 123 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in schools across Ontario, with a promised expansion in 2009. These drop-in centres are open to the community, and no fees or pre-registration is required. The centres help children get used to school routines. Programs include stories, music, and multi-lingual books that families can borrow to read at home. They help parents get involved in their children's learning, provide an opportunity to meet and spend time with other neighbourhood families, and provide information about community resources for special needs, health and other services. You can find the centre closest to you at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/findACentre.html>

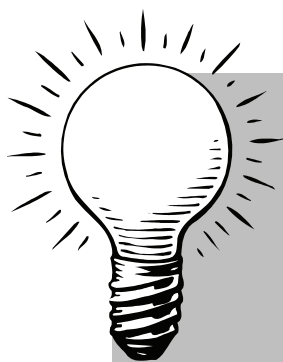
MIDDLE SCHOOLS AND HIGH SCHOOLS

As students get older and gain more independence, it is natural that parent involvement in the school will decline – that’s why there are no parent councils in universities!

It is sometimes hard for parents to accept this newfound independence, but it can also lead to opportunities for a new kind of relationship between parents, students and schools.

Some barriers to parent involvement in the middle and high school years include:

- Students don’t want their parents participating in school activities. Parents aren’t cool anymore! J
- Many stay-at-home parents return to work as their children get older, reducing the amount of time that they are available.
- Parents may find it difficult to commit to a school that their children will only be at for a few years (this is especially true of middle schools, where students may only be there for two years).
- In high school, many of the school council-led activities become the responsibility of the *student* council. For example, students usually lead fundraising initiatives, both for school-based activities and for charitable projects.



Hot Tips and Cool Ideas

- During the middle and high school years, it becomes even more important to attend parent-teacher interviews. Students may try to convince parents that it is not important, and/or that the students do not need to attend. But it is important that students see their parents and the teacher(s) working as a team, and that students take responsibility for their own academic progress.
- At Earl Grey Sr. P.S. in Toronto, student-led conferences have been introduced in place of the traditional Parent-teacher interviews. The term “conference” is very important because it implies a sharing of information among equals. Students play an active role planning, conducting and evaluating the conference. They present samples of their work and tests from the term, and answer their parents’ questions. Teachers consult with and support the students and help them develop their growth plan.
- At Monarch Park Collegiate in Toronto, incoming grade 9 students are invited to come to the school for a day in the week before school starts. They participate in an introductory program to help them make the transition to high school. At the beginning of the day, parents are welcomed into the school for coffee and a chat with the principal, staff members, and the school council chair.
- Settlement Workers in Schools have two programs to assist newcomer students and their parents. WIN (Welcome and Information for Newcomers) orients students in grades 7 and 8 to the people and activities that can help them settle in their new school, while NOW (Newcomer Orientation Week) provides a similar program for high school students. Students learn about the layout of the building, some of the challenges of school in a new country, and sources of support in their school. Trained Peer Leaders, students who were themselves newcomers in previous years, play a key role in delivering the program, with support from teachers and settlement workers. Both programs offer a parent component, with information about community services, school supplies, extra-curricular activities, and other valuable resources to help them support their children.

Appendices

Appendix 1:

TIPS FOR WRITING PRO GRANT FUNDING PROPOSALS

1. Keep the application fairly short - the ministry will be reviewing a huge number of proposals and will appreciate brief, concise proposals.
2. Make sure that the idea focuses on parent engagement - it has to be aimed at parents, not children (for example, homework clubs are unlikely to be funded, but a parent workshop on homework issues may be) - they want to see that there will be a direct, positive increase in parent involvement as a result of the project, so the more you talk about "engagement, inclusion, involvement", the more likely they will be to fund your project.
3. Make sure your goal is clear and simple (eg. "This project will increase the number of parents who participate in parent teacher interviews at our school" or "This project will let the newcomer parents at our school know about opportunities for volunteering"). Make sure you've figured out a way of measuring how well you've done. (eg. "the principal will survey teachers to find out if more parents came to parent teacher interviews" or "we will document the number of translated materials we produce and how we do the outreach to newcomer parents. At the end of the school year, we will interview the principal and at least X teachers to find out if more parents volunteered in the school")
4. The goal of the grants is to increase the participation of parents who in the past have faced challenges in getting involved in their children's education, so it's important to talk about how you are going to reach parents who may be less likely to be involved (eg. newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal parents, parents with disabilities or socio-economic challenges, parents who have difficulty getting to school because of transportation issues etc.)
5. Your project might be more interesting to the Ministry if you have someone in your community that you're going to work with - is there a neighbourhood organization, or a community organization working with newcomers? For rural or northern school councils, is there something like a community health network or other outreach program that you could partner with on a project?
6. Some of the things that might be appropriate would include things like - translating materials, running workshops, getting training for your school council, arranging video-conferencing, newsletters, parent resource rooms, holding meetings outside the school.
7. Don't be disappointed or discouraged if you don't get funding this time. The amount of money available for the PRO grants is limited, and many worthy projects may not get a grant. But don't give up - there will be more opportunities to refine your proposal and reapply in the future.

Appendix 2:

SAMPLE PARENT SURVEY

(courtesy of Merrickville P.S. School Council)

Parent Survey

In order to represent the needs of the entire parent body, we would like your input.

Please fill out form and return it to school by _____

Circle the appropriate answer

1. I am aware that there is a School Council. **Yes/No**
2. I am aware of the role of School Council. **Yes/No**
3. Has the School Council done a good job of communicating their activities to you? **Yes/No**
4. Has the School Council done a good job of soliciting input from you?
5. I read the school newsletter regularly. **Yes/No**
6. Would you access the school web site for School Council news if it were posted there? **Yes/ No**
7. I know whom to contact on the School Council. **Yes/No**
8. I feel that parents' concerns are well represented by the School Council. **Yes/No**
9. I would like to become more involved in the School Council. **Yes/No**
10. Are there any issues or concerns you would like your School Council to deal with? **Yes/No** Please Specify:

12. What do you feel are the strengths of the school?

13. What programs would you like to see added to our school?

14. What should our school's priorities be for the next two years?

15. Further comments or suggestions:

Appendix 4:

POSSIBLE USES FOR ANNUAL SCHOOL COUNCIL FUNDING

Every school council in Ontario receives \$500 for parent engagement each year.

The following are just a few examples of how school councils across the province have been using their funding:

- printing costs for newsletters and notices home
- setting up bulletin boards to post parent information
- developing a school directory, including contact information for staff, school council, and information on school events and activities
- providing child care and food for meetings to encourage more parents to participate
- bringing in guest speakers for meetings
- getting outdoor signs and message boards to provide information to parents who may not come into the school
- establishing, upgrading and maintaining a school council website
- setting up an electronic mailing list service for sharing information
- purchasing video-conferencing equipment or tele-conferencing capability to allow parents to participate in meetings from home
- hosting an event for new parents to the school
- establishing a parent resource library
- creating a family/volunteer room in the school
- translation of information and materials
- supporting family programs
- Setting up a room for parents and volunteers

Appendix 5:

USEFUL WEBSITES

People for Education:

www.peopleforeducation.com

Including multi-lingual parent tip sheets:

<http://www.peopleforeducation.com/resources/tips.html>

Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education:

www.oapce.on.ca

Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations:

www.ofhsa.on.ca

Parents Partenaires en éducation:

www.reseauppe.on.ca

TVO Parents

www.tvoparents.org

Ministry of Education

www.edu.gov.on.ca

Settlement Information

www.settlement.org

Appendix 6:

Parent Inclusion Research Resources

For more in-depth research on parent inclusion, check out the following papers:

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Who Does What in Education



In Canada, public education is a provincial responsibility. This tip sheet will help you understand the structure of Ontario's public education system and the roles played by schools, school boards, and the Ministry of Education.

The Provincial Ministry of Education

The **Ministry of Education** is responsible for overseeing all aspects of Ontario's public education system. *Ontario's Education Act* sets out the duties and responsibilities of the Minister of Education, school boards, supervisory officers (superintendents), principals, teachers, parents and students.

The Ministry is responsible for:

- Setting policies and guidelines for school boards
- Allocating funding to school boards using the Funding Formula
- Establishing the provincial curriculum (what students will learn in each grade)
- Setting requirements for graduation (diplomas and certificates)
- Creating lists of approved text books and other learning resources

The **Minister of Education** is appointed by the Premier, and is an elected Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP).

You can contact the Ministry of Education at www.edu.gov.on.ca or by calling 1-800-387-5514.

Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

The EQAO is an independent government body that oversees the province-wide standardized testing in grades 3, 6, and 9 and 10. It is responsible for:

- developing and administering tests in reading, writing and mathematics
- reporting standardized test results to the Ministry and the public
- providing recommendations to improve test results

You can contact the EQAO at www.eqao.com or by calling 1-888-327-7377

Ontario College of Teachers

The Ontario College of Teachers regulates the teaching profession. Its responsibilities include:

- establishing the requirements for a teaching certificate and setting standards for teacher training programs
- maintaining a provincial register of qualified teachers
- investigating complaints against teachers

You can contact the Ontario College of Teachers at www.oct.ca or by calling 1-888-534-2222.

School Boards

There are 72 school boards in Ontario, including 31 English public boards, 29 English Catholic boards, 4 French public boards, and 8 French Catholic boards. There are also several 'school authorities' that oversee schools in hospitals, treatment centres, and in remote regions of the province.

School boards are responsible for:

- deciding how to spend the funds they receive from the province for things like hiring teachers and other staff, building and maintaining schools and purchasing school supplies
- deciding where new schools should be built and when and if schools should close
- providing programs in schools such as special education, programs for newcomers and French Immersion
- developing local education policy (eg. safe schools, homework)
- setting an annual balanced budget for the school board
- ensuring schools follow the rules set out in the Education Act
- establishing a school council at each school and a Parent Involvement Committee for the board

Trustees are elected to the school board during municipal elections. They represent the interests of parents and students in their area. Trustees sit on committees regarding expelling students, and make decisions about the school board's budget. You can find out who



Who Does What in Education

your trustee is by asking at the school office or checking your board's website.

School superintendents or “supervisory officers” are board staff responsible for groups of schools in each school board. Superintendents may be involved in suspension appeals, special education meetings, and requests to attend a school other than the home school. Superintendents may also be assigned by the board to oversee board-wide programs (e.g. Superintendent for special education). You can contact your school superintendent if you can't get the help you need from the school principal.

You can find a complete list of the province's school boards at: <http://esip.edu.gov.on.ca/english/core/Board-Directory.asp>

Schools

Principals are responsible for the management of individual schools. They may have one or more **vice-principals** assigned to help them. Principals are responsible for:

- overseeing the teaching and curriculum in the school and making decisions about the School Improvement Plan
- supervising teachers and other staff
- admitting students and making decisions about special education placements
- administering the school's budget and ensuring the building is maintained
- making decisions about the allocation of specialized staff such as department heads, arts specialists or library staff
- maintaining student records and ensuring report cards are sent to parents
- overseeing student discipline and making decisions about suspensions and possible expulsions
- working with the school council to encourage parent involvement, assist in decisions about fundraising and develop new policy about things like homework and the school's Code of Conduct

Teachers in Ontario must have a recognized teaching certificate in order to teach students in the public edu-

cation system. Teachers are responsible for:

- preparing lesson plans, teaching classes, and evaluating student progress
- maintaining discipline in the classroom
- running extra-curricular sports, clubs and activities (voluntary)
- communicating with parents about students' progress

School Councils provide advice to the principal and school board. Every school must have a school council, and members include parents, the principal, a teacher, a student (in high schools), a non-teaching staff member, and a community representative. The majority of members must be parents and the chair must be a parent. Principals do not vote on school council decisions. School councils are responsible for:

- sharing information with parents and the community and seeking their input on matters the council is discussing
- providing advice to the principal and school board on issues such as school year calendars, strategies to improve school performance, codes of conduct and dress, selection criteria for principals, and board policies that will affect the school

Many school councils are also actively involved in organizing social events for the school community and fundraising.

For more information on school councils go to: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html>

For More Information

To find out more about Ontario's education system and how you can be involved in it, you can contact:

People for Education at: www.peopleforeducation.com

The Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education at: www.oapce.on.ca

The Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations at: www.ofhsa.on.ca/

Starting School



Starting school is an exciting time for students and their parents, but some students have first-day jitters. The following information will help make starting school easier.

What will my child learn in Junior and Senior Kindergarten?

- Kindergarten is an introduction to the more formal learning that begins in Grade 1. It might seem as if kindergarten students just spend their time playing, but they are actually learning about letters, numbers, reading, the arts, physical education and science through many different kinds of activities.
- Teachers set up educational toys and games in 'activity centres' around the classroom which children visit during the class.
- The Kindergarten program is set out by the provincial Ministry of Education and includes six main areas: Personal and Social Development, Language, Math, Science and Technology, Health and Physical Activity, and the Arts. Kindergarten students do not usually get homework, but they often bring books home to read with their parents. Reading with your child – in any language – is one of the best ways to help them succeed in school.

What's the difference between Kindergarten and Grade 1?

- Students go to school all day every day in Grade 1, and the teaching and learning is more formal. Children still play and spend time learning social skills, but they are also taught in a more structured way about reading, writing, math, science, social studies and the arts.
- By the end of Grade 1, children should be able to read simple words and books and understand basic math skills like addition and subtraction and measurement.

- For some students the transition to Grade 1 is just as big as the transition to Kindergarten. It may take them a few weeks to get used to the new structure and the new rules.

How can I help my child settle in?

- Some children cry on their first day of school, but they often calm down shortly after their parents leave. The teacher will let you know if your child is having problems adjusting so that you and the teacher can work together to help your child.
- When parents show an interest in their children's school, students are more likely to be successful. Talk about school with enthusiasm, and ask your child specific questions about their day, like "What songs did you sing today? What book did the teacher read?" or "Did you visit the library?"
- Participate in school activities as much as you can. Attending school concerts, sports and community events will help you feel comfortable in the school and give you a chance to get to know the other members of the school community.

Can I spend time in the classroom with my child?

- It's important to ask the teacher about visiting the classroom. Most teachers welcome visitors, but they may ask parents to visit at specific times so that they don't disrupt the learning activities.

How can I find out how my child is doing in school?

- Teachers use different ways to report on your child's progress. They may talk to you informally or send a note home.
- Students receive report cards at least twice a year with information on their progress in all





Starting School

the subject areas, and there are scheduled parent teacher interviews at least once a year (you can ask for an interpreter if you need one).

What if I want to speak to the teacher?

- If you have questions or concerns, you can ask the teacher for an appointment or phone the school. By making an appointment, you will ensure that the teacher can set aside enough time to talk and prepare for the meeting. That way, the meeting will be much more helpful for you, your child, and the teacher.

Can I volunteer in my child's class?

- Ask the teacher about volunteer opportunities in the classroom. Most teachers appreciate the help, but may need to schedule volunteer visits to coordinate them with planned classroom activities.
- If you are not available during the day, find out if there are things you can do from home, or if there are evening or weekend activities that you can help with. Many schools have events like movie nights, fun fairs, or other community events, and they always need volunteers.

What is Curriculum Night and why should I go?

- This is an evening, usually held in September, for parents to meet the teachers and find out more about the programs offered at the school. It is sometimes called an "Open House" or "Meet the Teacher Night".
- At Curriculum Night you will meet the teacher and find out about the class schedule, homework expectations, and plans for the year. You will also have the chance to meet other parents and staff members.

When will my child learn French?

- In some school boards, students start to learn French in grade 1, while in others, students start in grade 4.
- French Immersion is a program where students study in French for most of the school day. French Immersion programs can start either in Senior Kindergarten or in grade four. You can ask your principal for more details.

What is a School Council?

- The school council is the parent organization at the school. Contact the school council if you have questions about how to get involved at the school, or if you are looking for information from a parent perspective.
- Council meetings are open to everyone in the community, so you do not have to be a member to attend. It is a great way to keep up with what is happening in the school.

Where can I go if I need help?

- You should feel free to ask for help or information whenever you need it. School secretaries know almost everything that goes on in the school, so the school office is a good place to start. There you can find out about things like interpreters, special education, daycare and lunchroom programs, or make an appointment to talk to the principal or your child's teacher.
- Some schools have settlement workers to help families new to the country, and most schools have access to specialists who can help if your child is having difficulty.
- Community centres, libraries and Ontario Early Years Centres have many helpful programs and resources for parents and children.
- The People for Education website has information available in several languages. Visit us at www.peopleforeducation.com.

Homework



One way that parents and caregivers can help students succeed in school is to support them as they do homework.

What is homework?

Types of work that students may bring home:

- finishing assignments that were started in class
- working on a research project
- studying for tests and exams
- practicing new skills learned in the classroom
- organizing binders or workbooks
- reading assigned parts of a novel or text book

Where and when should homework be done?

- Not all students study in the same way. Some like to work in a quiet place, some like to work with music in the background and other students find it is helpful to study with friends. You know your child best. Help him or her choose the best place to do their homework.
- It may help to have a regular time for homework. Students may try to put off homework while parents push to get it done, often ending in arguments. By having a regular homework time, it becomes part of the routine.
- Try to get the homework done earlier in the evening, when students have more energy. Allow time for them to relax before bed.

How much time should students spend on homework?

- There is no established “right” amount of homework. Researchers and educators agree that there should only be limited homework in the early grades, with the amount gradually increasing as students move into high school.
- Students work at different speeds, so the amount of time spent on homework will vary.

- Students should be able to do their homework and have time to participate in other activities, including sports, music lessons, religious activities, language classes, volunteer work, and free play.
- If you are concerned that your child is getting too much or too little homework, you should speak to the classroom teacher.

How can parents help with homework?

- Encourage older children to use their school agenda to keep track of assignments and tests. Help set up a work schedule or even a big calendar for larger projects.
- Unless it is a project, homework should be a review of what students are learning in class, so students should be able to do their homework on their own.
- While your children are doing their homework, you might do your ‘homework’, like paying bills, reading a book or writing a letter. It gives them company and keeps you close at hand. But only offer help if asked.
- Read together (in any language) with younger children, and encourage older students to spend some time each day reading by themselves.
- Talk to your children about school every day. Even if you don’t understand the topic, and even if English or French is not your first language, you can be a good listener. Research shows that just by talking about school, parents can improve students’ chances for success.
- Make sure students have all the homework supplies they need – pencils, rulers, markers, paper.



Homework

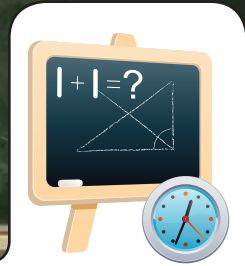
What if a student is having difficulty with homework?

- Encourage students to speak to the teacher if they need help. Let your child know that it is okay to ask for assistance if they don't understand something.
- If your child doesn't understand the homework, ask how the teacher taught the lesson. This may help the child to remember what was learned earlier and how to get to the answer.
- If your child is getting frustrated or upset, have them take a break, and try again a bit later.
- If the student cannot complete the homework after trying their best, it is okay to send the work back to school incomplete. You can write a note on the homework or in the agenda, explaining why it isn't finished. This helps the teacher understand what the problems are, and the teacher will be pleased to know that you are involved in your child's education.
- If your child is consistently unable to do his/her homework, make an appointment to speak to the teacher.

Other Sources for Homework Support

- Find out what kinds of homework support are available through the school or in your local library or community centre. Some schools and many public libraries have homework clubs after school.
- Students may be able to get help from friends or older siblings.
- Many high schools have peer tutors – students who have completed the course and can help with things like math and science.
- There is a free online tutoring service for high school students at www.ilc.org. Certified teachers are available on the site Sunday through Thursday, and they also offer an essay feedback service.
- Some school boards offer on-line lessons and learning activities for different grade levels. Check your school board's website for more information.

Special Education



All students will have times when they struggle with schoolwork or with school life. But some students may need extra support from a special education program.

Parents may be the first to notice that their son or daughter is having problems in school, or a teacher may suggest to a parent that their son or daughter might need extra and ongoing support.

Some things to remember

- Some issues can be solved by the teacher in the classroom, so speak to the teacher first if you are worried about your child's progress.
- Needing Special Education support is not a bad thing—all students learn differently, some just need different kinds of support to succeed.
- Just because your child does not speak English, it does not mean that he/she needs Special Education help. Some problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. It may help to provide the principal with information about the student's academic skills in his or her first language.
- Some parts of the process for getting Special Education support can feel confusing and it may have many unfamiliar names. Always ask questions if there are things you don't understand, or, if you are not comfortable in English, ask for an interpreter.
- Parents play an important role in Special Education. Don't give up. It is alright to ask for support for your child.

What is Special Education?

Special Education is used to describe a wide range of supports, programs and placements for students who need different teaching methods or special equipment to allow them to be successful in school.

Special Education can involve anything from a different way of teaching, to special equipment to help students with their school work, to simply providing students with extra time for writing tests. Students may be in specialized class for all or part of the day, or stay in their regular class with support from an educational assistant.

The most important thing to remember is that Special

Education is intended to help your child succeed in school.

What should you do if you think your child needs Special Education support?

Ask questions

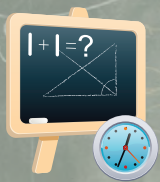
- Ask your child if there are particular things that are consistently difficult at school.
- Ask the teacher if he or she thinks your son or daughter needs extra support and if the teacher can provide the extra help
- Some medical conditions may affect learning (e.g. hearing, vision etc.), so it might help to talk to your child's doctor.

Meet with the school staff

- If you think your son or daughter needs more help, ask the principal or vice-principal to hold meeting with other school staff (called a *School Team Meeting*) to talk about your child.
- Prepare for the meeting. Sometimes it helps to write down questions, such as:
 - What kinds of supports or programs would help my child succeed?
 - What is available in the school?
 - Would my son or daughter have to wait a long time to get into the right program?
- At the *School Team Meeting* the school staff may recommend one or more of the following options:
 - that the teacher continue to provide support in the classroom;
 - that the teacher/team develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student;
 - that a student be formally “assessed” to find out if he or she has special needs and what those needs are; **and/or**
 - that the school hold a more formal Special Education meeting, called an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

What is a Special Education assessment?

A Special Education “assessment” is an evaluation of a student by a specialist to determine if a student has special needs and what those needs are. Your princi-



Special Education

pal or vice principal can explain what you need to do to have your child assessed.

The board has specialists on staff who will assess students at no cost to parents, but there may be a waiting list.

What is an IEP?

The Individual Education Plan (IEP), describes what the school will do to help your child. The Plan must be developed in consultation with parents. **A student does not have to be formally assessed to have an IEP.**

The IEP should include:

- A list of the student's strengths and needs;
- An outline of the special education services the student will receive, where and when the service will be provided, and who will provide it.
- A description of how the student's progress will be measured and reviewed;
- A set of goals for the student and teacher to work toward over the year; and
- A list of any special equipment to be provided.

An IEP must be completed within 30 school days after your child has been placed in a special placement and the principal must ensure that you receive a copy of it. The IEP must be reviewed each reporting period.

What is an IPRC?

Sometimes the School Team will recommend the school hold an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) – which is a meeting to officially identify a student's special needs (often called “exceptionalities”).

An IPRC may be requested by the parents or the school. Once parents have made a request in writing, an IPRC must be held. The school must inform the parents about an IPRC, and **it is very important for parents to attend.** The IPRC will officially decide:

- if a student has special learning needs,
- what kind of learning needs the student has, and
- the best placement and program for the student.

What happens at an IPRC, and do parents have a role?

The IPRC meeting usually includes the student's teacher and/or guidance counsellor, the principal, a psych-

ologist, a school board representative and the parents.

Using information from the staff and parents, the committee will recommend a placement for the student, and the parents will be asked to sign a document agreeing to the committee's recommendations. You may take the document home and think it over before deciding whether to sign it.

Some tips for your IPRC:

- You can bring a family member, a friend or someone from a support association to the meeting.
- Bring any doctor's notes or assessments about the student's medical condition or about his or her learning skills.
- Take a photograph of your child to help the committee remember who they're talking about.
- If a particular placement is recommended, you may ask to visit it.
- If you disagree with the decision of the IPRC, you may appeal it, but there is a time limit for the appeal. Your principal can explain the process.
- The IPRC process may seem very formal, but it means that you and your child will have a legal right to request ongoing support, which will help him or her succeed in school.

Will my child's support change over time?

- Your child's placement will be reviewed at least once in every school year – you can always ask for changes or for more information at the review.

Where can parents go for help?

- Ask your teacher, principal or guidance counselor for information.
- People for Education has more information and links to special education organizations at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/links/specialed>
- If you have a school settlement worker, they can help explain the Special Education process.
- Other parents can be a wonderful resource—talk to the parents in your school about how Special Education works or contact your school board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).
- At www.edu.gov.on.ca, you can find an IEP Resource Guide, an Educator's Guide to Special Education and the document, Education for All.

Solving Problems at School



Parents sometimes need to talk to the teacher about schoolwork, their child's relationship with another student or their child's special needs. Most teachers are used to getting these kinds of calls from parents and want to help your child succeed in school.

Parents as partners in education

In Ontario, parents are encouraged to be key partners in their children's education. In fact, there is now a part of the Education Ministry that is dedicated to helping parents become involved in their children's education and school community.

But the system can sometimes be confusing or intimidating. Who should you talk to if you have a question or problem?

If you want to talk to the teacher on the phone, call the school office, leave a message and the teacher will call you back.

If you want to meet with the teacher, call the school office and leave a message that you want to make an appointment to meet with the teacher. If you think your child needs extra support or a special program, you can ask for a meeting with the teacher and other staff at the school. Some schools can provide interpreters.

Here are some tips for talking with the school staff:

Talk to your child

- Ask your child questions to help you gather information.
- Try using "open-ended questions" like, "What do you find difficult about ...?" "Tell me what happened..."
- Listen to what he or she says and ask more questions.

Talk to your child's teacher or the school's guidance counsellor

- Talk to the teacher about your concerns and how your child feels.
- Try using comments like "My child told me that..".
- Ask questions to help you understand school policies and procedures.
- Listen to the teacher's point of view and suggestions.

Talk about what you and the teacher will do so your child gets the same message from both of you.

- If your school has a guidance counselor, he or she can give you information about the rest of your child's courses and advice about how to solve social or educational problems.
- You can take time to think about what the teacher has said; you don't have to decide anything right away. Agree to talk again to see if the solution is working.

Talk to the principal or vice-principal

If the teacher is not able to help, speak with the principal or vice-principal. They may be able to help directly or involve other teachers or other staff at your school.

Talk to the school superintendent or your trustee

If the problem still isn't solved, you can contact the school superintendent or your school trustee for assistance. The school secretary or principal can tell you how to contact the superintendent or trustee or you can go to your school board's website to find the information.

Remember to:

- Be informed: Find out about your school's policies.



Solving Problems at School

- Attend all regular parent-teacher interviews and events. It is easier to solve problems if you and the teacher have already met.
- Attend any meetings about your child that the school invites you to. (e.g. special education, IEP, school discipline)
- If your problem can't be easily solved, keep written notes about important meetings and conversations.
- Ask for an interpreter if you are not comfortable expressing yourself in English.
- Concerns about our children can be upsetting. Try to stay calm. People are more likely to listen to your concerns if you express them calmly.

For more information:

- Call People for Education at 416-534-0100 or obtain copies of this tip sheet in other languages at: www.peopleforeducation.com
- Visit the Ministry of Education website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca
- Visit www.settlement.org/edguide for videos and information in many languages

EQAO Testing



What is the EQAO and why are students tested?

The EQAO is the provincial Education Equality and Accountability Office. It is an independent government body that develops and oversees reading, writing and mathematics tests that Ontario students must take in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10.

The tests give parents, teachers, principals and school boards information about how well students have learned what the province expects them to learn in reading, writing and mathematics.

What do the results mean?

The report tells you if your child's skills are at:

- Level 1 - approximately 50% to 59% or "D"
- Level 2 - 60% to 69% or "C"
- Level 3 - 70% to 79% or "B"
- Level 4 - 80% to 100% or "A"

Students writing the grade 10 literacy test will receive a pass/fail grade.

Do the results count on students' report cards?

The grades 3 and 6 tests do not count as part of a student's mark and do not affect their progress or future opportunities in school. The grade 9 math test can count for up to 10% of the student's math mark. However, students must pass the Grade 10 Literacy Test or Literacy course in order to graduate with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

How can I help my child prepare?

There is no special preparation for the tests. Some teachers provide sample questions to help students understand what the tests will be like. The best way to help your child is to make sure he or she is rested and at school on time.

Do ESL students write the tests?

Yes, although some ESL students may be exempt if they have recently arrived in Canada. Others may have "accommodations" such as more time to write the test, a quiet setting or having someone read instructions and questions. The principal must consult with parents about making accommodations or exempting a student from the test.

Do students with special needs write the tests?

All students are encouraged to write the test but some students with special needs may be exempt. These students usually have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that outline "accommodations" or "supports" that help them succeed in school. The "accommodations" also help students write the EQAO tests. They may include more time to write, a quiet setting or having someone read instructions or questions to them.

The principal must consult with parents about making accommodations or exempting a student from the test.

Do French Immersion students write the test?

In grade 3, schools may choose to have French Immersion students write only the French version of the mathematics test and receive results only for mathematics, or they may ask that French Immersion students write both the French math test and the English reading and writing tests.

In Grade 6, French Immersion students are expected to write all the tests in English, though they may use a bilingual glossary of mathematical terms.

How are test results used?

Teachers and principals get a report that shows how students performed in reading, writing and mathematics. If many students did poorly on a particular



EQAO Testing

skill, then teachers try to find better teaching strategies or resources to help students be more successful. If students in many schools have similar difficulties, then school boards know that all schools need to improve their teaching strategies or find better resources. Parents receive test results in the fall. Results are sent to the school where the students wrote the test, and the school forwards them to any students who have left the school.

How can I get more information?

The EQAO website at www.eqao.com has answers to frequently asked questions, sample tests, and test results.

High School Courses and Choices



Entering high school is an important time in your child's education. The courses that students choose in grade 9 will have an impact on what they can study in later grades and after high school. This Tip Sheet is only a first step to understanding those choices.

How can parents help?

Between October and January your grade 8 student will receive information about high school programs and courses. Some schools hold high school information nights or open houses. It is important to read the information and attend the information meetings so that you can help your child make choices that suit their interests, abilities and future goals. In some communities, grade 8 students will choose between secondary schools that offer different kinds of courses and programs.

Your child will bring home a form for you to sign. The form lists the choice of courses. It is important to go over the options with your child and make sure that they are taking courses that suit their interests and abilities. It is your responsibility to approve the choices your child makes.

If you need help, talk to your school guidance counsellor. Schools and school boards also publish information about school choices and lists of courses. School settlement workers can provide support to newcomers to Canada.

It is very important to remember that the courses students choose in grade 9 will affect their options in the future. There are many different types of courses. Some lead to community college, some to university and some to apprenticeship or directly to work. Not all high schools offer each type of course.

Students who succeed in grade 9 courses are more likely to graduate from high school. Parents should help their children choose appropriate courses each year.

What can parents do to help their children make good choices?

- Talk to your child about what he or she would like to do after high school.
- Pick up or download the course lists from schools in your area or read the school profile on the school website. Not all schools offer the same courses and courses types.
- Go to high school information nights and Open Houses. Some schools provide interpreters.
- Make an appointment with the school guidance counsellor, vice-principal or principal for help making choices that best suit your child's interests and strengths.

What are the requirements for graduating from high school in Ontario?

- Students must pass 30 credit courses between grades 9 and 12. Of the 30 credit courses, 18 are compulsory credits and 12 can be chosen from optional credit courses.
- Students must complete 40 hours of community service.
- Students must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test or Literacy Course.
- Most students complete high school in four or five years but they may stay until they are 21 years old.

What choices do students have in grades 9 and 10?

In grades 9 and 10, there are four types of courses:

- **Applied** – focus on practical applications and concrete examples;
- **Academic** – focus on theory and abstract problems;
- **Locally Developed** compulsory credit courses (also called Essentials) for students who need more flexibility and support; and
- **Open** – to prepare students for further study and enrich their education.



High School Courses and Choices

Students must take English, mathematics, science, geography, history, physical education, and French. Students may choose to mix different types courses. For example, a student can take Applied English and Academic math. They can also choose from optional or open courses in subjects that interest them.

How do course choices in Grades 9 and 10 affect students?

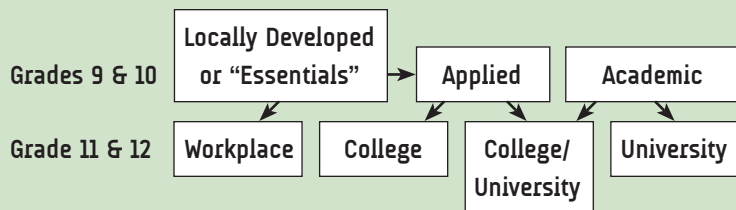
The courses students choose in grades 9 and 10 prepare them for specific courses in grades 11 and 12 and will affect their choices after they graduate.

What choices do students have in grades 11 and 12?

Students choose from four types of courses that prepare them for their goals after high school: Workplace, College, University/ College and University.

- Is there a chance any courses will be cancelled because of low enrolment? Which ones?

Where do the courses lead?



Can students transfer from one type of course to another?

In some circumstances, students may change from one type of course to another. To do so, they may have to repeat a subject (e.g. a student who completed grade 9 Applied math may have to take grade 9 Academic math). Or it may be possible for the student to take an on-line or summer school transfer course. The guidance counsellor can help you.

What should parents ask when choosing a high school?

- What subjects do you offer in grade 9 and 10 Academic, Applied and Locally Developed Courses?
- What subjects do you offer in grades 11 and 12 Workplace, College, College/University, University courses?
- What optional courses or programs do you offer? (e.g. computer networking, languages)

What should parents ask about Special Education Support?

- What kinds of special needs can your school support?
- What resources does your school have? (e.g. staff, programs, computer lab, special courses)
- What kinds of courses do you have for special needs students? Are they separate courses or combined within an existing course?

What should parents ask about ESL programs?

- Do you have ESL credit courses (e.g. ESL Science)? In which subjects?

For more information:

Visit your school board's website or phone your child's school

Ministry of Education <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/oss/oss.pdf>

Newcomers' Guide to Education: <http://www.settlement.org/site/ED/secondary.asp>

For copies of this tip sheet in other languages, go to the People for Education website at www.peopleforeducation.com

Parent-Teacher Interviews



Parent teacher-interviews are held two or three times a year at the end of each term when report cards are sent home. They are opportunities for parents and teachers to talk together about how to help each child succeed in school. They are very short – usually 10 or 15 minutes. It's important to prepare before the interview to make the best use of that short time. If you need more time, schedule another appointment.

1. Prepare

- Read your child's report card.
- Make notes about your questions and concerns.
- Talk to your child about the report.
- What do you want to ask the teacher? Make a list.

2. Ask Questions

Arrive on time. Bring your list of questions. The teacher will review your child's report card or show you samples of his or her work.

Tell the teacher what your child likes and dislikes about school. Let the teacher know if you think there is too much or too little homework.

Parent-teacher interviews are strictly confidential. Share personal information that might be affecting your child's progress or behaviour at school (e.g., family illness, job search). This information will help the teacher understand your child better.

- What does my child do well?
- What skills does she or he still need to develop?
- Is my child getting extra help? In what subjects?
- What is your homework policy?
- How much time should my child be spending on homework?
- How does my child get along with the other students?
- How can I help my child at home?
- What is the best way to contact you if I have more questions?
- Take notes so that you can share the comments with your child.

3. Follow Up

Talk to your child. Stress the positive things the teacher said. Talk about how you and the teacher are going to help with the things that need to be improved.

Health and Physical Education and Daily Physical Activity



Did you know?

- By the time the average student graduates from high school, he or she will have spent 15,000 hours watching TV, and just 500 hours in Physical and Health Education programs.
- Over half of Canadian children and youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development.
- Physical, emotional, and mental health are key predictors of future quality of life for our kids.
- With 95% of Ontario's children attending public schools, our local schools are the ideal place to promote mental health, healthy eating, and increased physical activity for students.
- Only 40% of Ontario's elementary schools have specialist teachers in physical and health education; most are part-time; and only half of them teach all students in the school!
- Most students stop taking Physical and Health Education after grade 9.

What do students learn in Health and Physical Education (H&PE)?

- Students are required to take Health and Physical Education (H&PE) from Kindergarten through grade 8.
- High school students must earn one credit in Health and Physical Education in order to graduate.
- A new H&PE curriculum is being introduced, which will focus more on developing and supporting life-long healthy habits.
- The curriculum for elementary students teaches fundamental movement skills, healthy living, and active participation. *Healthy living* includes healthy eating, growth and development, sexual health, personal safety and injury prevention, and substance use and abuse. *Fundamental movement skills* include locomotion/traveling, manipulation, and stability.

Active participation includes physical activity, physical fitness, living skills, and safety.

- In high school, the program continues to build these skills, with a greater emphasis on the living skills component, to help address the unique physical and emotional challenges that adolescents face. The Health and Physical Education courses in Grades 9 and 10 are made up of four strands: physical activity, active living, healthy living, and living skills.

What Difference Do Specialist Teachers Make?

- Specialist physical education teachers receive extra training to acquire the specialized knowledge needed to teach health and physical education.
- Specialist teachers deliver more effective and consistent physical and health education programs than regular classroom teachers.
- Specialist teachers can provide the necessary leadership to build a health-promoting environment throughout the entire school community.

What is DPA (Daily Physical Activity)?

- In 2007, the provincial government introduced "Daily Physical Activity" (DPA) for all elementary schools, requiring schools to provide 20 minutes of sustained physical activity every day.

Why are DPA and Health & Physical Education so important?

- Regular physical activity is essential for the healthy growth of children and youth.
- Students spend a large part of their time in school, making it the perfect place to provide programs that promote health and well-being.
- Research has shown that physical activity



Health and Physical Education and Daily Physical Activity

increases students' ability to focus and pay attention in class, and may result in better performance on academic achievement tests.

- Teenagers who engage in regular physical activity have lower levels of anxiety and depression.
- Physical activity helps students to maintain a healthy body weight.
- Schools can provide health promotion programs and activities that do not depend on a student's wealth or background.

What can parents do to ensure students have access to an effective, comprehensive Health and Physical Education program?

- Talk to your principal and school council. Let them know that quality physical education programs are important to you. Ask how your school can support physical activity opportunities for students.
- Spread the word! Use your school newsletter, website, or bulletin boards to feature articles and information about the importance of a good quality health and physical education program and its benefits for students.
- Write to your local newspaper or make a deputation to your school board or city council.
- Ask your school council to plan community events that focus on increasing physical activity, e.g. Family Sports Night.
- At home, encourage all family members to participate in some kind of activity every day – walk, bike, dance, or play catch! Find things that the whole family can do – it is a great way to spend time together.

For More Information:

- The Heart and Stroke Foundation has a wealth of information for parents, kids and teachers. You'll find tips about healthy eating, lots of fun programs, and strategies to increase physical activity both at home and school. Go to www.heartandstroke.on.ca.
- The Ministry of Education has information for both educators and families, including how to create a healthier school, healthy foods and beverages and the Healthy Schools Recognition Program. Go to www.edu.gov.on.ca and look for the link to "Healthy Schools".
- People for Education's website has research on Physical and Health Education Programs in Ontario's schools, and links to international research and programs in other provinces. Go to www.peopleforeducation.com/healthyschools.
- The Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea) has many programs, activities and services for schools and communities to enable children and youth to lead healthy active lives. The majority of Ophea's programs and services are available for free. For more information visit www.ophea.net.
- Many municipalities offer free, subsidized, and low-cost fitness programs and activities. Contact your local Parks and Recreation department to find out what's available in your area.
- The Federal government has a Children's Fitness Tax Credit of up to \$500 for expenses paid to register a child in a program of physical activity. For more information, visit: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/fitness/>

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