



Involving Parents in the School - Ministry of Education Tips

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/gettingstarted.html>

We believe that good schools are even better when parents are involved and engaged. By engaging more parents in their children's education, their children will achieve more and we will boost confidence and pride in public education in Ontario.

Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools:

- recognizes and supports the important role parents have contributing to their children's learning at home and at school
- recognizes, encourages and supports many forms of parent engagement
- identifies strategies to remove barriers to parent involvement (e.g. communications and language)
- supports parents to acquire skills and knowledge they need to be engaged and involved in their child's learning
- provides a parent voice at the local level (e.g. Parent Involvement Committees, and school councils and as well as individual parents talking to teachers and principals).

[The policy](#) provides the vision for parent involvement; sets out four strategies for success; includes an action plan for schools, boards and the ministry; and showcases some of the many exemplary practices across the province.

Parent Involvement Committees

Starting in September, 2010, all school boards in Ontario must establish a Parent Involvement Committee. [Ontario Regulation 330/10](#) outlines their composition, function and mandate.

The [Parent Involvement Committee](#) is a formal structure and an important advisory body. It, along with [school councils](#), encourage the grassroots support of parents at the local and community level.



The ministry has established a Parent Engagement Office to develop and implement parent engagement initiatives that support learning and student achievement across the province. The government currently provides boards with base funding of \$5,000 and 17 cents per student for a PIC and an additional \$500 per school council to support parent engagement activities.

To make it easier for more parents to get involved, we have invested more than \$10 million since 2006 in thousands of school council and regional projects through [Parent Reaching Out grants](#).

Extensive consultation took place throughout the fall with parents, caregivers, Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), school councils, educators and others with an interest in public education. Both the policy and the new regulation for Parent Involvement Committees, reflect a supportive approach that recognizes the complexity and differences among school boards and their communities.

School Councils

Parents play a vital role in the development and education of their children and in the success of schools.

Parents are the most important influence in a child's life outside of school. Long after direct learning from parents in a child's early years gives way to formal education, parents continue to play a key role in student success through the attitudes they help to shape and the direct supports they provide.

Research clearly indicates that good schools become better schools when there is a strong connection with parents as part of the learning community. The positive results of a genuine partnership between parents and schools include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, better behaviour, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

School Councils have a unique role to play in bringing parents and schools together in partnership. As parents and community members themselves, School Councils provide an important bridge between school staff, parents,



Home and School Associations and other parent groups that may be active within the school community.

This brief guide is designed to provide School Councils with practical and effective ideas for building parent engagement in schools. In it, you will find a wide variety of tips and techniques that can be used to stimulate discussion and generate activities appropriate to your particular school and parent community. You will also find a convenient checklist to help you evaluate your efforts in communicating and reaching out to parents.

The activities you choose to undertake need not be complex or overly time-consuming. It is important to keep in mind that even a modest effort to engage parents can often pay huge dividends for parents, for staff and for every student.

Getting Started

The key to building parental involvement lies in genuinely understanding the needs and interests of parents before planning programs and activities. These tips will help you identify, and respond to, what parents in your school community truly need and want.

Tip #1: The Parent Survey

Use a survey to determine what would help parents become more involved in their child's education, and in the life of the school. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- The survey should be distributed to all parents.
- Survey questions should address all of the ways parents may become involved in the school, rather than focusing solely on involvement in school council.
- It is often desirable to translate the survey into a variety of languages.
- Prizes, no matter how small, can encourage higher completion rates.
- In developing the survey, consider including:



- a list of the types of specific activities - from accompanying classes on field trips to helping in the homework room - for which parent involvement is needed and welcomed;
- an opportunity for parents to identify the special skills, talents or experience they would be interested in sharing;
- a list of information topics about the school with an opportunity for parents to indicate which areas they would like to learn more about;
- an invitation for parents to participate in career days, with space for the parent to indicate his or her occupation;
- a suggestions area in which parents can indicate how they feel communication with the school could be improved;
- an opportunity for parents to identify any barriers which prevent them from becoming involved, or attending school events; and
- contact information, including email, telephone and mailing address, where parents would like to receive information.

Tip #2: The Action Plan

Develop a simple parent engagement action plan using parent survey responses as a basis for decision-making.

- Consider first the obvious 'gaps' that need to be addressed, in reviewing parents' responses.
- Catalogue the areas in which parents have indicated they are available to assist in the school, and the special skills and experience they have offered to share.
- Where parents have shown a willingness to become involved, respond immediately.
- Consider carefully the kinds of information parents need and want, and their suggestions for improving communication, as a basis for planning school newsletters, information nights and other information-sharing programs.



- Discuss the possibility of addressing barriers to parental involvement which may be suggested by the survey results.
- Create a parent contact list based on the survey information provided.
- Working with the school principal, develop a simple plan that identifies the activities to be undertaken, the individual who will assume responsibility, and when and where the activity is to take place.

Put Out the Welcome Mat

Schools can be surprisingly intimidating places for many parents. Newcomers to Canada, in particular, may have experienced a very different school setting, and may therefore be unfamiliar with the school environment. These tips will help you create a school climate that makes parents feel comfortable and welcome.

Tip #3: The School Information Package

Create a welcoming information package for parents new to the school. Include information about the school and its programs, the School Council and its meetings, key dates and school events, and opportunities for parental involvement.

Tip #4: The Meet and Greet Program

Work with the principal to find opportunities for Council members to meet new parents when they first register at the school. This might include general information nights or welcome events for new parents, or more focused information sessions geared, for example, to the particular information needs of parents with children in Kindergarten or Grade 8.

Tip #5: The Bring a Friend Program

Encourage Council Members to invite and bring a new parent to each Council meeting. This welcoming gesture can dramatically improve parent attendance.



Tip #6: The Welcoming Council

Make newcomers feel welcome at Council meetings. Take time for introductions at the beginning of the meeting. Ask newcomers to talk about their children and the grades they are attending. At the end of the meeting, the Chair or other Council members can make a special effort to speak with newcomers, thanking them for their attendance, asking them if they need any assistance or information, and welcoming them to attend the next meeting. Parents who do not feel welcome are much less likely to return.

Tip #7: The Newcomers Event

Consider a periodic event for parents new to Canada. Get school families involved in planning a special welcome that might include information about Canadian culture, the school system, extracurricular activities, and services and opportunities in the local community.

Break Down Barriers

Many parents would welcome the opportunity to engage in the school community, but face genuine barriers to involvement. These tips will help you encourage parental involvement by addressing issues such as child care, language, transportation and accessibility to school events and programs.

Tip #8: The Childcare Program

Sometimes parents are unable to attend meetings because they do not have access to child care or cannot afford the cost of a babysitter. Here are some suggestions for activities that would help parents participate more easily in school events.

- Consider hiring high school students to run a babysitting service for parents using a small portion of Council budget.



- Alternatively, consider students who may wish to participate in babysitting services as a means of fulfilling the 40 hours of community involvement required for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- Focus on low-risk activities - such as math help, reading help, storytelling and board games - to minimize the possibility of injury.
- Take care that all board policies and procedures are being followed, particularly where the program involves the hiring of students.

Tip #9: The Translation Service

If a significant proportion of parents speak a first language other than English, consider offering translation services for Council meetings and other events. Parents will also appreciate receiving selected school documents, such as newsletters or important information notices, in a variety of languages. Members of the school community, and the larger community, are often pleased to provide language support to new Canadian families.

Tip #10: The Parent Car Pool

Often, parents will be more than willing to arrange car pooling for those families who may not have adequate transportation. Be sure to prominently display information about your car pooling program on bulletin boards, in the school newsletter, and in other communications.

Tip #11: The Off-Site / Off-Hours Program

Where parents have problems with transportation, or with attending regularly scheduled events - due, for example, to shift work - consider holding supplementary events or meetings in the community and/or during off hours. The local library is often an ideal place to hold an information event, and can serve to raise the public visibility of the school at the same time.



Be Event Oriented

Creative school events that appeal to the needs and interests of parents often provide a key introduction to the school. These tips will help you develop events that will engage and attract parents, and open the door to greater parental involvement.

Tip #12: The Showcase Evening

Use a special showcase evening to highlight school programs and activities, to provide parent education, or to offer the opportunity to meet other parents. The following are just a few of the many showcase ideas you may wish to consider:

- Feature a school activity or project such as the school choir or band, a drama group, science experiments or technology displays.
- Consider providing a speaker to present information on a topic of interest to parents such as homework strategies, discipline or health-related topics.
- Provide a brief information session by School Council on a topic or issue of current interest to the school community.

Tip #13: The School Fair

Consider organizing a career, health or community services fair. Participants may include parents and representatives from outside groups in the community. A fair provides an excellent opportunity for community involvement, and demonstrates the school's commitment to supporting families.

Tip #14: The Volunteer Training Program

Offering a school volunteer training program can go a long way to building parent confidence and building involvement. Sessions might be considered, for example, to providing coaching on being a reading buddy, or a library assistant.



Tip #15: The Parent Education Program

Parents often welcome sound information on a variety of topics related to parenting and their children's schooling. Consider developing information sessions on topics such as the parent-teacher interview; working successfully with teachers; school volunteering; internet safety; drug and alcohol issues; or successful homework hints.

Tip #16: The Welcome Back to School Event

To re-engage parents early in the school year, and welcome new parents to the school, hold a "Welcome Back to School" event which might combine a barbeque or similar social event with a meet-the-teacher opportunity.

Tip #17: The Multicultural Program

Where the school serves a diverse community, multicultural programs and events can serve not only to welcome all parents, but also to share and enjoy a wide range of traditions, cultures, sports and other activities. The following is a small sampling of the many events you may want to consider:

- Hold an international dinner with explanations of foods from around the world.
- Hold an international fair in which families create simple displays highlighting their customs and traditions.
- Run an outdoor recreation day featuring a popular international sport or other activity - such as cricket - which can be shared with the school community.

Get the Word Out

Communication is essential to building parental involvement. What parents know and perceive about the school depends on what they see, hear and read. These tips will help you use a variety of communications tools to keep parents informed and engaged in the life of the school.



Tip #18: The Bulletin Board

Bulletin boards are often placed in highly visible locations within the school. They provide a prime opportunity for announcing school events and keeping parents abreast of important dates. Bulletin boards are most effective when they are well-maintained and up to date. Often, a single member of School Council can volunteer to ensure that bulletin board items are refreshed regularly. Items might include:

- a meeting schedule for the year;
- notices of upcoming meetings including an agenda;
- minutes of past meetings;
- information about how to contact School Council members; or
- tips or frequently asked questions for parents on a variety of topics.

Tip #19: The School Newsletter and Website

Newsletters and school website postings can be used to send information home about important School Council decisions, and to keep parents informed about School Council meetings and activities. Here are a few suggestions:

- Consider creating a School Council newsletter which is sent home on a periodic basis, such as fall, winter and spring.
- Ensure that School Council activities and announcements are included on a regular basis in the school newsletter.
- Consider requesting that an article by a Council member be included in each issue to maintain consistent visibility.
- Similarly, ensure that information about School Council is available on the school website, and that information is updated regularly.

Tip #20: The School Council Display

You can enhance the visibility of School Council considerably by creating a special School Council display in a prominent, high-traffic public area of the school. Similarly, consider mounting a School Council display at school events



and information nights, and having a School Council member on hand to answer questions. Be sure that your display includes a sign-up sheet that will enable parents to volunteer for school activities, and provide contact information.

Tip #21: The Direct Mailing Program

One to three times per year, consider using your contact list to do a direct mailing from School Council to parents using a portion of School Council budget. This will ensure that all parents consistently and reliably receive information, understand the role and activities of School Council, and are provided ongoing opportunities to become involved.

Be Persistent

Building parental involvement is not an 'event' but a process. An effective parental involvement program will take place over months, rather than days. These tips will help you maintain consistent parent contact, and spread the school message within the wider community.

Tip #22: The Parent Contact List

Take every available opportunity to collect parent contact information for use in sending information updates and reminders, keeping in mind appropriate Freedom of Information protocols. Contact information may include telephone, email and mailing address.

Tip #23: The Reminder Program

Parents lead busy lives. Remember to send frequent reminders home to parents about Council meetings and other important school events. Email is a cost-effective and efficient method for keeping parents informed on a day-to-day basis. If available, an outdoor sign can also be an effective way to keep this information highly visible and top of mind for parents.

Tip #24: The Visible Council Member



Ensure that School Council members are visible at key events such as information nights, school concerts and graduation ceremonies. When participating in school events, consider the use of a name tag or similar device to ensure that parents identify you as a School Council member.

Tip #25: The Community Ambassador

Encourage School Council members to speak up - both formally and informally - about the school whenever they have an opportunity in the community. School Council Members are often engaged in a variety of social and community organizations who may welcome information about the school and its activities.

Tip #26: The Recognition Program

Provide recognition for School Council members, and other parents, for their contributions to various activities and initiatives. This might take the form of a brief note to the parent, a gift certificate, recognition at a School Council meeting, mention in the School or School Council newsletter, or public mention at a school assembly or other event.



Effective School Council Checklist

- Have we used surveys and other information-gathering tools to assess what parents need and want, and to ask for their opinions and suggestions?
- Have we determined the barriers which may impede some parents from participating?
- Do we understand the needs of parents whose first language is other than English?
- Have we explicitly invited parents to volunteer in a variety of school activities?
- Do we know which of our communications parents are using, and what forms of communication parents would like more of?
- Do we routinely gather parent contact information and use it effectively to keep parents informed?
- Do we have an organized plan for parent engagement activities this year?
- Do we know who has assumed responsibility for each activity within the plan?
- Do we respond immediately when parents indicate a willingness to volunteer or participate in other ways?
- Do we have a school information package for newcomers?
- Do we have an organized method for meeting and welcoming new families?
- Do we actively encourage parents to attend School Council meetings?
- Do we acknowledge and involve parents who attend Council meetings for the first time?
- Do we provide information or an information event specifically geared to the needs of New Canadians?
- Have we successfully addressed barriers to parent participation such as childcare, transportation, language services and off-site/off-hours events and programs for those who cannot attend regular events?



DSBN Parent Involvement Committee

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- Do we regularly provide school events that showcase student work and activities, address issues of concern, and provide information of interest to parents?
- Do we occasionally involve the community in the life of the school through such events as career and community fairs?
- Do we offer training for volunteers to ensure that they feel confident and equipped for their roles?
- Do we provide parents with the information they need to work effectively with school staff, and to support their children at home?
- Do we celebrate our multicultural community by offering events that feature varied traditions, customs and sports?
- Do we prominently display information about School Council in a high visibility area of the school?
- Do we ensure that School Council has a presence at all school events?
- Do we have a School Council newsletter and/or ensure that School Council is represented in the school newsletter?
- Does the School Council have a presence on the school website?
- Do we send frequent reminders to parents to ensure that school and School Council events remain highly visible and top of mind?
- Do we participate as guest speakers wherever possible in the community, outside of school?
- Do we recognize the efforts of parents and School Council members, to encourage greater involvement and participation?