



Advisory

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) is an advisory and consultative organization composed of the CEOs of each of the 72 District School Boards in Ontario; Public, Catholic and French Language.

Engaging Parents as Partners

What do I need to know about engaging parents as partners?

Supervisory officers nurture a system-wide belief that the involvement and engagement of parents and the community are essential elements in promoting a positive board and school culture. A positive culture often translates into high levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence. Teachers, principals, and district administrators understand that difficulties, issues, and concerns are resolved more readily and with greater satisfaction to all parties in a context of effective and positive relationships with parents and the school community.

Parents are the single most important factor in a child's school success. They need to have a high level of confidence and trust in schools and the board. When boards strive to increase parent understanding and awareness, and involve them directly in the education of their children, greater success is experienced. This success is not restricted to academic achievement. The positive outcomes of strong parent support are evident in all other aspects of the system. In school systems and schools where parents are disconnected and unsupportive, administrators and teachers usually experience more challenging situations.

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

Parent Tool Kit: What parents can do to help their child succeed in school. CODE
http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/Parent_Engagement/Parent_Engagement.html

What does the Ministry of Education stipulate about parent engagement?

Regulations:

Ontario Regulation 612/00: School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees

This regulation requires all schools to form a School Council. School Councils can provide views on current and future board policies and guidelines. In addition, School Councils provide input into school and board improvement plans.

Regulation 612/00 also mandates that boards establish a Parent Involvement Committee. s. 27. (1) "The purpose of a parent involvement committee is to support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the board level in order to improve student achievement and well-being."

The establishment of the Parent Involvement Committee creates a direct link from the director and corporate board to School Councils. The Parent Involvement Committee provides input to the board and assists the board with the development of strategies to expand and improve parent engagement. It supports School Councils by sharing effective parent engagement practices occurring throughout the district and the province.



Research over the last thirty years has demonstrated that parent and community involvement and engagement lead to improved student success.

Research from Alberta's Initiative for School Improvement has found that:

1. Parent engagement leads to improved student learning and attendance.
2. Engaged parents support students at home.
3. A variety of strategies increase communication with parents.
4. Parents are valuable resources for sharing expertise, knowledge, talents, and gifts.
5. Parent-student-teacher conferences build partnerships.
6. Parents who participate in parent education events become more involved.
7. Parents and teachers working collaboratively can advance understanding, values, cultures, and languages.
8. Volunteering contributes to the success of school activities, builds parent comfort in the school, and increases understanding of student learning.

From: Alberta Initiative for School Improvement
http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/6591254/spotlight_on_parent_engagement_sept_2011.pdf



Ministry Resources:

School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees are provided with funds to support the operation of these committees as well as grants to assist with locally-developed initiatives.

The funds are accessed through two types of grants:

- School Councils can apply for the Parents Reaching Out Grants for Schools.
- Parent organizations, Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), school boards, non-profit organizations, and postsecondary institutions can apply for Parents Reaching Out Grants for Regional/Provincial Projects.

Ensuring that School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees are aware of these grants, of the deadlines for submission, and have examples of successful grant applications early in the school year will assist in making sure that the online grant application is fully completed and on time.

Board Requirements:

School Councils

"In addition to its other obligations to solicit the views of school councils under the Act, every board shall solicit the views of the school councils established by the board with respect to the following matters:

1. The establishment or amendment of board policies and guidelines that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents...
2. The development of implementation plans for new education initiatives that relate to pupil achievement or to the accountability of the education system to parents...
3. Board action plans for improvement, based on the Education Quality and Accountability Office's reports on the results of tests of pupils, and the communication of those plans to the public." [Ont. Reg. 612/00, s. 19 (1)]

"A recurring theme in the submissions [to the Parent Voice in Education Project] was the need for schools to be more welcoming. Parents said they wanted to be partners in the education of their children and they would like to feel that their contribution is welcomed and valued. They told many stories of the difference a principal could make to the culture of a school. We know that parent involvement is most successful where principals, teachers and parents work together in the best interests of each child." *Parent Voice in Education Project Report*. (2005). <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/parentVoice.pdf>

Parent Involvement Committees

The board must establish a Parent Involvement Committee.

"A parent involvement committee of a board shall include the following:

1. The number of parent members specified in the by-laws of the committee.
2. The director of education of the board.
3. One member of the board, appointed by the board.
4. The number of community representatives specified in the by-laws of the committee". [Ont. Reg. 612/00, s. 33 (1)]

"Subject to the by-laws of the parent involvement committee, a board may appoint one or more of the following individuals to the parent involvement committee:

1. One principal of an elementary school of the board.
2. One principal of a secondary school of the board.
3. One teacher employed, other than a principal or vice-principal, in an elementary school of the board.
4. One teacher employed, other than a principal or vice-principal, in a secondary school of the board.
5. One person employed by the board, other than a principal, vice-principal or teacher. [Ont. Reg. 612/00, s. 33 (2).

The board must also advertise member vacancies for the Parent Involvement Committee through a variety of methods, including ads in school newsletters, local papers, television, radio, notices in schools of the board, and on the board's and school's websites. [Ont. Reg. 612/00, s. 35]

A board must set policies with respect to the reimbursement of Parent Involvement Committee members for expenses incurred [s. 39 (3)] and make available a meeting space that would allow for electronic meetings. [s. 40 (3)]

One of the essential responsibilities of the board is as follows:

- (1) "A board may solicit and take into consideration the advice of its parent involvement committee with regard to matters that relate to improving student achievement and well-being.
- (2) The board shall inform the parent involvement committee of its response to advice provided to it by the committee." [Ont. Reg. 612/00, s. 47]

Supervisory officers are required to:

- provide leadership for principals to implement school councils as required through regulation, board policy, and procedure;
- ensure that every school has a school council operating in compliance with the regulation and Ministry direction;
- ensure that principals understand the most important role for school councils – to support student learning, including support for implementation of the School Plan and familiarity with the School Effectiveness Framework; and
- implement a board Parent Involvement Committee as required by regulation.

Note: Directors of education are required to be participating members of the board's Parent Involvement Committee.

Supervisory officers are expected to:

- provide information about programs and services for exceptional students and make parents of children with special needs aware of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and its role;
- support the implementation of specific strategies, including support networks, to increase the participation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit parents in their children's education; and
- support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families in the areas of literacy, numeracy and career development.

What are the important practices for enhancing parent engagement?

In order to be effective in enhancing parent engagement, supervisory officers must:

- recognize the importance of partnerships with parents and the community;
- include this focus in board plans, policies, protocols, and communications;
- ensure all board staff approach and work with parents in a respectful, trusting, and collaborative manner;
- develop a system policy for addressing parent concerns which includes a strategy to mediate ongoing and challenging issues;
- provide training for principals and teachers in developing positive and effective parent-school relationships;
- request that senior staff report on a regular basis to the board on the levels of parent engagement and parent satisfaction in the system;
- assign appropriate funding to the area of parent engagement so that schools have the resources to be effective and innovative in implementing parent programs;
- provide regular updates for schools to include in their newsletters about resources, activities, and supports for parents;
- ensure that parent engagement and satisfaction are essential components of school accountability when conducting school reviews – e.g., complete a system parent satisfaction survey and publish results; and
- ensure that Parent Involvement Committees have access to resources, research information, and samples of exemplary practices that foster and support parent involvement.

Joyce Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools at The Johns Hopkins University, developed a model for successful parent and community partnerships. The model has **six types of involvement** and provides a framework that many districts and schools have used to create action plans to enhance parental involvement.

The Framework:

1. Parenting: Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.
2. Communicating: Conduct effective communications from school to home and from home to school about school programs and student progress.
3. Volunteering: Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.
4. Learning at Home: Involve families with their children for homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
5. Decision Making: Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.
6. Collaborating with the Community: Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school and provide services to the community.

Epstein, Joyce et. al. (2002). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

A model to promote parent involvement has also been developed specifically for the district level. *Lead and Succeed: An Inventory of District Leadership* by Natalie Rodriguez Jansorn and Joyce L. Epstein is another framework that provides strategies for the system and is useful for supervisory officers.

Links to Additional Information

MINISTRY RESOURCES:

www.edu.gov.on.ca

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/>
[Ministry website for parents]

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/reviewGuide.html [involvement of parents and the community in pupil accommodation reviews]

CODE RESOURCES:

Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools.

Parent Tool Kit.

http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/Parent_Engagement/Parent_Engagement.html



Some effective strategies to connect with parents include:

- register with OPEN, the Ontario Provincial Education Network, because anyone can register with OPEN, and once registered, receive updates on educational initiatives;
- set up similar formats for communication through board and school websites;
- provide timely information to parents and the community using Twitter and Facebook accounts;
- circulate to schools and School Councils resources created by the Ministry and educational organizations that describe exemplary practices and provide strategies for parents to support their child's learning; and
- involve Parent Involvement Committees as an excellent venue to review resources and to make recommendations for their use to School Councils and to the board.

How do I know that the board's requirements for parent engagement are in line with Ministry expectations and requirements?

The Ministry of Education has developed a School Climate Survey for use by students and parents. Responses from this questionnaire will provide good information with respect to how parents are engaged with their child and school.

Each year EQAO, along with its administration of the Reading, Writing and Math tests, surveys principals, teachers, and students in Grade 3 and 6 to provide background information on the education system and individual schools. Data from these surveys also provide useful information with respect to strategies that can be developed to assist parents with supporting their child at home.

People for Education recently published an article entitled, "Doing What Matters Most – How Parents Can Help Their Children Succeed in School", which reviews the current provincial data from EQAO. A Parent Involvement Committee could review board data. Having the Parent Involvement Committee analyze the data from these resources can provide a measure of how the board is doing with respect to Ministry expectations and requirements.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory is a private, non-profit education organization which focuses on research and practice to help communities and education systems meet the needs of all learners. *Working Systematically in Action: Engaging Family & Community* is a resource that provides some additional frameworks to measure the success of parent engagement strategies.

Guiding Questions:

The following guiding questions are included in the Monitoring Framework developed for the CODE Special Education Project: JK-Grade 1 Assessment and Intervention:

- How are school staff, families, and community members involved in knowing the student through a school entry process, development of the student profile, goal setting, and a continuous cycle of assessment and instructional intervention?
- How do you promote effective use of data from regulated health professionals and/or external agencies (i.e., physiotherapy, speech and language, hearing, behavioural data)?
- Is your assessment cycle process known by parents and community agencies?
- How does your assessment cycle process lead to increased parent satisfaction and improved collaboration with community agencies? How do you know?

[available on the CODE website, with examples of exemplary practice in school boards across Ontario] http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/pages/jkgr1_assessment/engagementchart.html

If as a supervisory officer, I have concerns and need assistance, what should I do?

- ✓ Review concerns with your senior leadership team.
- ✓ Speak with knowledgeable colleagues who have significant experience.
- ✓ Consult CODE.
- ✓ Contact the Ministry of Education's Field Office Team Leaders or Parent Engagement Office.