Planning Parent Engagement

A Guidebook for Parents and Schools

A Message from the Council of Ontario Directors of Education

When we look closely at patterns of success for our students, there is ample evidence that achievement and positive school adjustment come from the support and guidance of parents and those who guide the learning and attitudes of our young people.

As school system leaders, the members of the Council of Ontario Directors of Education are very aware of the power and benefits of parent engagement. Thus, we are pleased to provide this Planning Parent Engagement Guidebook to accompany the Parent Tool Kit.

In this Guidebook you will find examples of useful exercises and proven techniques for involvement and support.

The success of our students is the core goal. The support of parents and the community is a very significant asset needed to achieve that success.

Why Should Parents be Engaged?

When parents are engaged in their child's learning, students do better in school and everyone benefits. Parents find it easier to help their child learn. Teachers and principals are better supported and enjoy positive relationships with parents.

Students improve, classrooms improve, schools improve and the entire community benefits.

Overview

What few people know is that: "of all the types of parent engagement...learning at home has the biggest impact on student achievement."[1] The Parent Tool Kit, which accompanies this Guidebook, has been developed to help promote parent engagement and to help parents understand the role that they can play in helping their child learn.

The Parent Tool Kit is a booklet that describes hands-on activities and key messages about what parents could do to support their child in doing homework, helping with projects and making real life connections to the classroom.

This Planning Parent Engagement Guidebook has been developed for parent groups and school staff to use in planning school-based activities to complement and support parents' efforts at home. The activities are based on the understanding that students are members of a family and by supporting families there is a better chance that students will succeed in school.

The activities described in the guidebook serve as examples that schools can use or adapt to meet the needs of their own school community.

The resources described throughout the guidebook are only a few of the excellent materials available to support the activities in both the Parent Tool Kit and Guidebook. Parent groups and school staff must confirm with the school principal as to the availability and usability of these resources. All activities must comply with school and school board policies in their implementation. Schools are encouraged to start slowly and limit the number of activities to familiarize themselves with the key messages and activities suggested.

Many of the activities used in the Parent Tool Kit and Guidebook are based on the research of Dr. Joyce Epstein and her work with the National Network of Partnership Schools. The National Network of Partnership Schools publishes an annual collection of successful parent engagement initiatives called Promising Practices. These publications and complete information about the Epstein Model of School, Family and Community partnerships can be found online at www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000. School staff will also find activities that they can use to include parents in schoolwork in the Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) Program.

The parent voice used throughout the Parent Tool Kit and Guidebook has been formulated from comments made by parents of schools in Ontario.

[1] *Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement, Do Parent Know They Matter?" A. Harris and Dr. J. Goodall, University of Warwick, UK*

When parents are engaged, students improve, classrooms improve, schools improve and the entire community benefits.

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Planning Parent Engagement in Your School

Using the Planning Parent Engagement Guidebook.

This Planning Parent Engagement guidebook is a support document, which explains how parent groups and/or school staff can use the Parent Tool Kit to foster parent engagement in their schools. The activities in this guidebook can be used to help parents understand how to use the Parent Tool Kit at home.

What is the Parent Tool Kit?

The Parent Tool Kit is a booklet in which parents can find activities and suggestions that they can use to help their children succeed in school. The Parent Tool Kit describes hands-on activities and key messages about what parents could do to support their children in doing homework, helping with projects and making real life connections to the classroom.

What are the key messages in the Parent Tool Kit?

Parents familiar with the school system are better prepared to help their children learn.

When parents are engaged in their children's education, students have higher success rates.

There are some basic ways parents can help their children meet learning expectations regardless of grade level, language and culture.

Parent engagement can happen at home and does not have to be defined as volunteer or committee work at school.

Parenting styles and family circumstances may vary but all parents can help.

Students in elementary and secondary schools have a need for mentoring, inspiring, monitoring and support.

The activities used throughout the Parent Tool Kit can be adapted to all age levels. The resources to support the activities in the Parent Tool Kit can be found at home, school or in the community.

Play is educational and learning can be fun.

Technology plays a major part in the global economy and all students need to learn how to be safe and secure online.

Students must be able to meet curriculum standards and graduation expectations to achieve success in Ontario schools.

The Ministry of Education provides resources and links to help parents help their child succeed in school on their web site at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.

What can parent groups and schools do to help parents use the Parent Tool Kit?

As members of a parent group or staff in your school, there are several things that you can do to help parents understand how to use the Parent Tool Kit:

- Introduce parents to the Tool Kit, its messages and the activities.
- Promote the Parent Tool Kit in your school and community.
- Connect the Parent Tool Kit to school-based activities.

How can the Parent Tool Kit be introduced to parents?

Parent group members and school staff can review the Parent Tool Kit together to discuss its contents and determine how they would use it with parents in their school. A committee could be created to develop an annual plan of parent engagement activities and make their recommendations for introducing the Parent Tool Kit to the families in their school.

Orientation sessions could be offered for both parent group members and school staff to demonstrate how they could use the Parent Tool Kit with their own children and students.

Training specific to connecting the Parent Tool Kit with school-based activities should be offered to both parent group members and school staff. They may need directions about how to adapt their current practices to reflect the ideas in the Parent Tool Kit because the key messages in the Parent Tool Kit describe parent engagement in ways that go beyond volunteering and attending meetings.

The principal and teaching staff would be a good resource to support this type of training session.

How can the Parent Tool Kit be promoted?

There are numerous ways that you can promote the use of the Parent Tool Kit and its contents. Here are a few examples:

- Distribute print copies any time that you gather parents together or communicate with parents. You may choose to hand it out at the meet and greet event at the beginning of the school year, at a curriculum night, family BBQ or fundraising event.
- Students could choose an activity and prepare a presentation to explain to parents how they can work together using the Parent Tool Kit.
- Teachers could give the Parent Tool Kit to parents at parent-teacher conferences.
- An electronic version can be posted on the school's website and parents can be invited to download the Parent Tool Kit.
- School newsletters could include a description of one or two activities in the Parent Tool Kit and ask parents to try them. Teachers could help coordinate and develop a feedback process. Two way conversations about student learning should be encouraged.

How can the Parent Tool Kit be connected to school-based activities?

Many of the opportunities described in the following activities may already be in place in your school. The suggestions presented here are for inspiration and guidance. You may find one new idea that will help you extend your current practices into ways that parent engagement is given an enhanced focus. You may only need to re-organize your activities to strengthen the parent engagement component of your current practices by providing skill building and sharing sessions such as those described in this guidebook. The goal is to help parents integrate the Parent Tool Kit activities into what they currently do in support of their children.

Activities that could connect the Parent Tool Kit to school-based activities could include:

- Using a Workshop
- Using a Newsletter
- Inviting Guest Speakers
- Featuring Student Demonstrations
- Using Online Resources
- Hosting a Community Event

In the section that follows, parent groups and school staff can find examples of how each of these activities can be used to connect the ideas in the Parent Tool Kit to school and community-based activities.

Connecting the Parent Tool Kit to School-Based Activities

This section of the guidebook illustrates some of the many ways that parents and school staff can organize activities in their school to help parents use the Parent Tool Kit. The examples describe an activity in the Parent Tool Kit , the rationale for the Activity and an example that parent groups and school staff could use to connect the Parent Tool Kit to school-based activities.

A. Using a Workshop: Student Led Technology Tour

Parent Tool Kit Activity: Safe research on the Internet.

Why: Parents are concerned about how their children use the Internet and for a variety of reasons may feel they lack the computer skills to supervise and support their child's online activities.

Activity at home: Parents can help their child establish rules for using the computer and the Internet. They could work together to conduct an Internet search of an assignment or project.

Activity organized by parent groups and school staff:

What: Student Led Internet Search.

This could be a one night event or series of events. The topics might include Internet safety, social networking, or publishing multi-media projects on the Internet. This activity can be adapted to suit elementary and secondary grade levels.

How: Students work with their teacher to prepare a writing activity that demonstrates to their parents how they used the Internet to research their assignment. Students would create their own computer-generated "Save the Date" announcement, "Invitation to attend" and "Reply card". The reply card would also ask parents to indicate if they need child-minding, transportation or translation assistance. One month before the event students deliver the "Save the Date" announcement. Two weeks before the event students deliver their Invitation to their parents and return the reply card to their teacher.

On the day of the event parents would receive a light meal with their children and then proceed to the computer lab or classroom for a demonstration of their child's work. Teachers could lead a short presentation about using the Internet for research and how to determine the validity of a web site. Information sheets that support the presentation can be given to the parents to use at home and copies of the presentation can be sent home to those families who could not attend.

Who: Parent group members and staff prepare a "to do" list for the event. Parent group members can help organize the meal. In some cases, parents may have an expertise that could be shared at the workshop. Community partners can be asked to provide financial support for the meal, child-minding services and transportation. Parent Reaching Out Grants are available. These grants are intended to encourage parents to become involved in their children's education and to support student learning. Information is available at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html

Parents whose first language is not English would be able to participate with the help of a translator. Teachers and students can prepare a subject activity to share with parents.

Websites:

Media Awareness Network
http://www.media-awareness.ca/
The Media Awareness Network website provides information and resources for parents and teachers about privacy, cyberbullying, authenticating online information and observing rules of netiquette. There is also information about how to distinguish between fact and opinion and how to recognize bias and harmful stereotyping in online content. Handouts, backgrounders and overheads are available for download.

Digital Nation, Life on the Frontier
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/
Digital Nation, Life on the Frontier has been produced by Frontline, PBS. The website features video, stories and interviews about the use of technology. A specific section of the website is devoted to parenting the net generation and online digital workshops for parents and teachers.

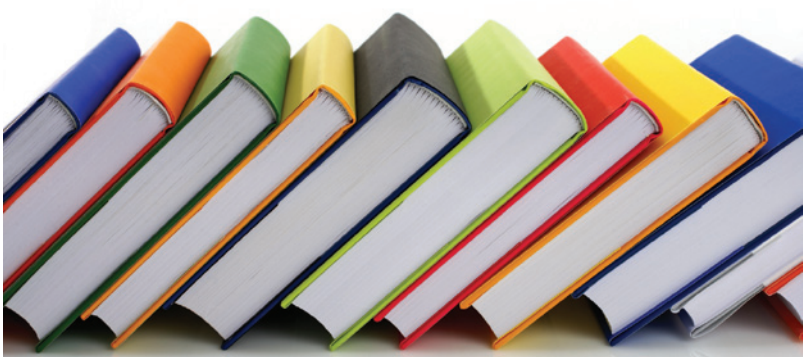
Next Generation Learning
http://www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/
Next Generation Learning is a project of the British Education Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA). BECTA's aim is to use technology to create a more exciting, rewarding and successful experience for learners of all ages and abilities. Both parents and teachers can find resources about technology at home and at school.

B. Using a Newsletter: Book Reviews and Book Clubs

Parent Tool Activity: Make every impression a good one.

Why: Parents constantly face challenges in raising their children. Discipline, building self-esteem, motivation and bullying are a few examples of their challenges. How students interact with other students and adults has an impact on their learning.

Activity at Home: Parents can read from a prepared list of books and magazines about parenting and try using one idea presented in their reading. Parents can then share their experiences with friends and family.



The resources listed in this document are not specifically endorsed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education. The resources are merely intended to make parents aware of their existence.

Activity organized by parent groups and school staff:

What: Book reviews published in the school newsletter.

Book reviews about the books from a reading list can be collated and published in the school or parent groups' newsletter. Best practices shared by parents can be included in the book review.

How: At the beginning of the school year, parent groups can help prepare a list of recommended books or magazines. The list of books can be published in the school newsletter and parents can be asked to share their experiences by submitting them for publication in the newsletter.

Recommendations and experiences submitted by the parents can be shared as monthly content for a parent section of the school newsletter. Although the information shared in this activity is important, equally important is the invitation to share advice and experiences. Parents feel valued and welcomed when they are included in preparing content for the newsletter.

The activity can be extended to include creating a book club or coffee morning to share information and advice about schools and student learning. Parent groups might consider helping newcomers to Canada by offering tours to the public library.

Who: Parents and school staff can prepare a list of recommended books and magazines that would be of interest to parents. Parents can be invited or self identify to read, review and write content for the school newsletter.

A sample book review template and reading list follow.

Writing a Book Review:

Think about the following questions:

What is the title of the book? _____

Who is the author?_____

What is the book about? (one or two sentences) _____

_____

_____

How did you use the information in the book? _____

_____

Why would you recommend the book?_____

_____

Where can parents find the book?_____

A Few Worth Reading:

Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline; The 7 Basic Skills for Turning Conflict into Cooperation by B. A. Bailey, New York: Harper Collins (2000).

Kids Are Worth It!: Giving Your Child The Gift Of Inner Discipline by Barbara Coloroso, Penguin Group Canada (2002)

Mind in the Making by Ellen Galinsky, Harper Collins Publishers (2010)

Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, NavPress (2006)

Parenting Teens with Love & Logic: Preparing Adolescents for Responsible Adulthood by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, NavPress (2006)

Positive Discipline: 1001 Solutions to Everyday Parenting Problems by Jane Nelsen, Three Rivers Press (2000)

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey, Fireside, Simon & Shuster (1998)

The Bullied and the Bystander by Barbara Coloroso, Penguin Group Canada (2003)

Websites:

Between Parent and Child
http://www.betweenparentandchild.com/
Dr. Haim Ginott (2003) Three Rivers Press New York New York

Canadianparents.com
http://www.canadianparents.com

Love and Logic
www.loveandlogic.com

Loving Guidance
http://www.lovingguidance.com/

Parenting from a Kids Perspective
http://www.radicalparenting.com/

Positive Discipline
http://www.positivediscipline.com/

TVO Kids
http://www.tvokids.com/

TVO Parents
http://www.tvo.org/cfmx/tvoorg/tvoparents/

C. Inviting Guest Speakers: Student/Guest Author Night

Parent Tool Kit Activity: Reading out loud!

Why: This type of activity helps students master reading, writing, speaking and listening skills.

Activity at home: Elementary students can practise reading out loud with their parents while supper is being prepared.

Secondary school students can earn their volunteer hours by reading to young children at the Library or to adults with visual impairments at senior citizens' homes.

Activity organized by parent group and school staff:

What: Student/Guest Author night.

This activity can be organized for elementary or secondary schools. A notable author/poet/news reporter would be invited do a reading at the school either in person or via Skype to demonstrate how "reading out loud" impacts their work and their lives. Students will follow the guest author's presentation with readings from their own work.

How: Two – three months in advance of the date of the event, parent groups and school staff would meet to identify possible guests and reserve possible dates. The parent group then invites the guest author. Once confirmation is received, parents and school staff publish advertising and invitations for the event. Gymnasiums and audio and video equipment are reserved. Local businesses can be approached to seek donations of books and/or writing materials that can be distributed to all families in the school. Families not able to attend the event will receive handouts and the donated materials.

If the guest speaker is not able to travel or attend in person, they can still appear at the event. Internet access, computer, audio system or speakers, LCD projector and Skype can be used to bring the guest to the school virtually.

Following a presentation by the guest speaker, students could be organized to do readings of their own books, short stories or poetry in their own classrooms with families as audiences.

Refreshments could be served in advance of student presentations. One week before the event, reminder notices are sent out to all families. The evening of the event, parent group members and staff would greet parents distributing instruction about how to participate in the evening.

Who: Parent group members and school staff can brainstorm ideas to identify possible guest speakers. Invitations can be prepared by the parent group to formally request the participation of the guest speaker. Students can create their own "Save the Date" invitations and deliver them to their parents. Follow-up invitations can be distributed by report card mailings at secondary schools or via email list servers. Teachers can work with students to prepare their own stories and poems to be read at the event.

Guest Speaker Suggestions:

When possible, seek out parents, grandparents and extended family members in your school community.

Use a community survey to seek out the expertise of potential guest speakers in the parent community.

Network with other schools, school districts, parent groups to prepare a list of suitable speakers.

A list of possible speakers might include local politicians, representatives from a business education council, medical professionals, historians, veterans, hobbyists, health experts, sports experts, newspaper or television reporters.

D. Featuring Student Demonstrations: Getting Ready for the Science Fair

Parent Tool Kit Activity: Becoming a self-directed learner.

Why: Parents are often called upon to help their children with homework and would benefit by learning how to use the problem-solving model. Using this method they can help their child become a self-directed learner.

Activity at home: Parents can coach their child to help them prepare for the school Science Fair. Parents could help by brainstorming some project ideas, by collaborating on the creation of a time line for the project or by helping to find materials for the project.

Activity organized by parent group and school staff:

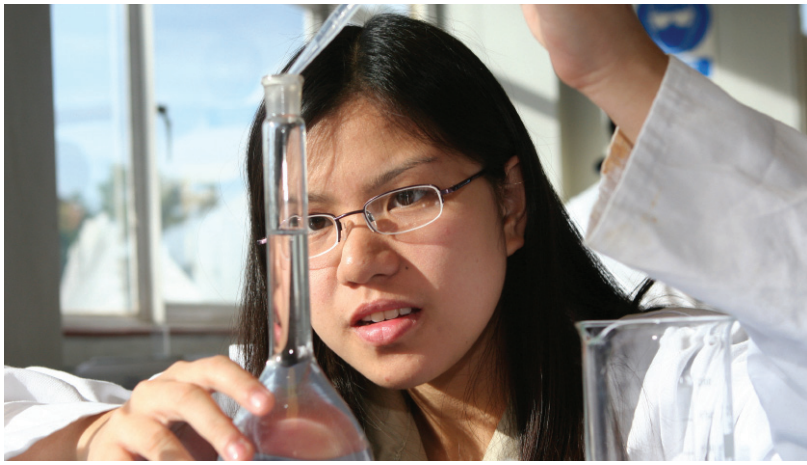
What: Getting Ready for the Science Fair Expo.

Community partners could work with parents and school staff to organize an evening that would provide information about planning and preparing for a Science Fair. Parents can be invited to attend with their children to obtain information about the guidelines for participating, criteria for successful projects and ideas for potential projects. Parents may have an expertise, which could be used to help give students ideas for their science fair projects. Interested parents could be invited to participate and share their knowledge as experts at the Science Fair Expo. Welders, carpenters and lab assistants all have expertise to share. Welders could talk about metallurgy in their job, carpenters could talk about measurement and estimations, and lab assistants can talk about drugs and chemicals.

How: Two months before the Science Fair, students can create and deliver a "Save the Date" invitation with a description of the event. A "call for experts" in the school community could also be extended at this time. Parent group members and school staff could all help identify parents, grandparents or community members who may be interested in participating.

One month before the day of the Science Fair Expo, parents and students are invited to attend. Teachers would work with their students to prepare posters demonstrating the steps involved in preparing for a Science Fair. The posters could be displayed as a roadmap on the walls of the school gym.

On the day of the event students act as their parents' tour guide. Families would follow a road map based on the same problem solving model used in classroom exercises. For example: Step 1. A classroom or science teacher would identify the problem by introducing the event and give participants instructions. Step 2. Students and parents can visit "expert stations" to get brainstorming ideas for their project. Presenters can be set up in the school gymnasium with a mini display for their occupation. Step 3. Parents and students would visit the displays together and collect handouts about planning the student project. Handouts could provide information about creating a timeline, organizing materials, judging criteria or finding resources. Step 4. Students participate in the actual Science Fair.



Families would be given the road map and checkpoints for visiting each station. Families with a complete checklist could receive a package of materials to help students prepare or create their science projects.

The materials could include display boards, markers, paper and other supportive materials. Community partners can be approached to help offset the cost of the take-home packages. The handouts and materials would be sent home to those families unable to attend.

Websites:

http://school.discoveryeducation.com/sciencefaircentral/
Science Fair Central is a section of the Discovery Education website. It offers an idea finder, information about project timelines, tips and tricks, presentation do's and don'ts, judge's criteria and how to create a science fair display board.

E. Using Online Resources: Digital Storytelling

Parent Tool Kit activity: Powerful presentations and storytelling.

Why: Students who learn how to express themselves and communicate effectively can use these skills for presentations in class, public speaking events or job interviews.

Activity at home: Parents can help their children practise their public speaking or story telling by creating a narrated slide show or video recording of their speech. Some families may choose to post the presentation or story online. Parents can provide guidance when their child posts digital stories or audio/video presentations on the Internet.

Parents and students would collect digital photos and/or video to post on the Internet. The photos and videos could then be used to create digital stories or for student analysis of their public speaking performances.

Activity organized by parent group and school staff:

What: Student Open House.

Parents would be invited to an evening at school hosted by students. Students would demonstrate the use of the digital media gathered at home and used in their school projects.

How: School staff could choose an assignment that involves creative writing and adapt the lesson to use the digital photos and videos collected at home. Students would prepare the presentation either at school or at home. This activity could be organized in the same fashion as the Student Led Tech Tours Series. "Save the Date" cards, invitations, reply cards would be used to alert and invite parents. Students would prepare instructions on how to gather the photos and videos allowing them to work in tandem with their parents to create their resources.

Who: Parents, teachers and students could work together to prepare an online presentation. Students would extend a written story into a digital format. Parents would help their child post their presentation online. Parent group members could help promote the event, and organize a light meal or refreshments. Parent groups could consider adding digital cameras, pocket video camera and headsets as part of their lending library.

What is Digital Storytelling?

Storytelling has been used for generations to share knowledge traditions culture and language. Digital storytelling uses technology tools to add another dimension to telling stories. Digital stories are created using photos, video, songs and narration to bring stories to life.

Websites:

Online resources for creating and hosting slide show, images and movies;

http://google.ca
Sign up for a Google account to get access to free presentation software, public hosting of slide shows and video sharing using YouTube. Free version available.

http://slideshare.net
Slide share application allows users to post PowerPoint, Keynote, Word, PDF documents and video online. Requires computer software to create documents. Free version available.

http://voicethread.com
Voice thread application provides posting of images, PowerPoint and video. There is a unique function of adding moderated audio and video comments to a slide show or video. Free version with limited functionality available.

http://www.microsoft.com/education teachers/guides/digital_storytelling.aspx
Microsoft education provides a teacher's guide that provides information on Digital Storytelling in the classroom. Instructions are provided about how to create movies and slide shows. Links to free software are identified. The content is suitable for parents, students and teachers.

Equipment required:
Images and video (digital camera and/or video camera), audio recording (headset and/or web camera), computer and Internet access.

F. Hosting a Community Event: Food and Fitness Fair

Parent Toolkit Activity: Organize your life, eat well and stay active!

Why: Children who are healthy, eat well and are physically fit are able to do better in school. Parents' approach to health and nutrition varies. Raising the awareness of the benefit of healthy lifestyles will help parents help their children do better in school.

Activity at Home: Parents could use the Canada Food Guide to examine how the foods they prepare are reflected in the guide.

Activity organized by parent group and school staff:

What: Food and Fitness Fair.

Parents would be invited to participate in a Food and Fitness Fair by contributing samples of their traditional meals and attending the event. Food stations could be organized to suit the nationalities of the members of the school community. Parents and students could participate in a variety of physical fitness activities.

How: Two months before the event, students would prepare a "Save the Date" invitation, which includes a brief description of the event. Parent group members and school staff would prepare a list of possible food displays to demonstrate how the meals of diverse cultures fulfill the requirements of the Canada Food Guide. Community groups who specialize in fitness and well-being could be invited to organize the physical fitness activities.

Two weeks before the event, parents would be invited to attend and bring a sample of their traditional meal to share during the event. Parent group members and school staff could help plan the number and type of food stations. Public Health professionals could be invited to attend to further demonstrate and distribute information about healthy eating and lifestyles.

A road map could be designed to take parents through the food and fitness stations. At the different stations, points could be collected by participants to compete for a class prize.

Who: Parent group members and school staff could help organize and promote the events. Community members such as staff from the Public Health Department and Heart and Stroke Foundation, representatives from fitness clubs, nutritionists, well-being professionals, yoga instructors, or sporting experts could be invited. Local businesses could be invited to demonstrate their services.

Websites:

Health Canada
http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php
Health Canada's website has a downloadable copy of the Canada Food Guide translated into 12 languages. A food calculator for users to examine their eating lifestyle is also available.

Canadian Physical Activity Guide
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/index-eng.php
A guide to help you make wise choices about physical activity.

Changing the Culture of Parent Engagement

The key messages in the Parent Tool Kit identify the importance of families supporting their children in more ways then attending meetings or volunteering at school. For some schools this may be a new approach to working with parents. Responding to parents by offering support for the activities in the Parent Tool Kit can lead to a change in the culture of parent engagement in schools. The following topics regarding planning parent engagement and meeting parent needs will assist schools in understanding how to engage parents in their child's learning.

Making an annual plan for parent engagement

As schools and parent groups start to use the Parent Tool Kit and Guidebook, it will be worthwhile to formulate an annual implementation plan to engage parents in their child's learning at school and at home. The goal of the plan is to align the goals and objectives in the school improvement plans with activities that engage parents.

The sample activities in the Parent Tool Kit can be used to reinforce the school improvement plans. If the school improvement plans indicate a need to improve reading skills, then the activities organized at the school could focus on reading. Similarly, if there is a need to improve math skills, then activities would focus on math. School improvement plans may also concentrate on character development. Student tardiness, absenteeism, discipline issues might initiate activities that the entire school could organize to promote positive behaviour and attendance. Every school and every community is unique. In addition to the school improvement plans, parent groups and school staff could survey their school community to help identify how best to organize activities. Please see the section "Family Opinions Matter" on page 24 for advice on conducting surveys.

An annual implementation plan might look like this:

August:	September:	October:
Parents and school staff meet for an orientation session and "get to know each other" BBQ or light dinner.	Organize a school meeting to present the Parent Tool Kit and Planning Parent Engagement Guidebook to the parent group and school staff. Review the school improvement plans. Determine how best to survey the school community to identify the needs of parents and plan for parent engagement activities.	Review the results of the Community Survey and organize the parent engagement activities for the year. Communicate the results of the survey to the school community and make the parents aware of the activities planned for the year.
November:	**December to May:**	**June:**
Offer leadership activities to help recruit volunteers to organize and implement the parent engagement activities.	Carry out the activities.	Review and report to school community and plan for the upcoming year.

This plan can be adapted to current practices and can be organized in ways that make sense to each school community. Be sure to communicate frequently to keep your school community updated on your plans and activities.

Getting families to participate in school-based activities

A survey of the school community should allow identification of specific needs of the community and some of the challenges parents face to be engaged in their children's learning.

The following quick tips may help address some of the challenges and encourage more families to participate in the school-based activities used to support the Parent Tool Kit.

- Plan activities for families that include students and their schoolwork in the activity.
- Plan workshops and events around mealtime and serve a light meal or refreshments. Parents are more encouraged to attend when the pressures of preparing a meal and getting to the school on time are removed.
- Rotate the times activities are offered. Some in the daytime and some in the evening.
- Provide child-minding services.
- Provide transportation to parents who cannot attend otherwise.
- Provide translation services. Ask community groups to network and seek out volunteers to assist with translations at workshops and translating handouts.
- Keep the event short and simple. Parents and teachers will feel less pressured and will have more energy to interact with each other.
- Communicate frequently with parents by agenda, personal invitation, phone and email. Encourage two-way communications.
- Extend invitations to grandparents and other family members.
- Keep the number of events small.
- Ask parents personally when making requests for volunteering. People think requests for help in a newsletter are for someone else.
- Create a buddy system to encourage participation and share knowledge.
- Encourage parents of children with exceptionalities to seek out supportive community services.
- Offer sessions outside of the school. Some parents may have past experiences of school that influence how they perceive schools and school authorities.

How do you get volunteers to help at school?

For most of the activities described in this guidebook you will need help from parents, staff and the community at large. There are several key things you can do to encourage parents and community members to volunteer.

- Make the 'ask' small; make the 'ask' personal; ask for help early in the school year; ask new parents when their child is starting school. Once volunteers are comfortable and successful in one task they are more likely to help again.
- Recognize volunteer efforts often. Personal notes from the principal or a parent leader and/or public thanks at meetings and events go a long way to reinforcing how much volunteerism is appreciated in your school community.
- Welcome parents throughout the year. At school meetings, assign someone the pleasure of greeting new parents to the school or the meeting. Use nametags as much as possible.
- Share the workload. If the same volunteers do most of the work, others think that they are not needed.
- Develop networks to draw on the skills of others and link families of diverse cultures and backgrounds.
- Limit the number of times parents are asked to volunteer.

- Link volunteer activities to schoolwork.
- Plan and coordinate who will solicit support, which community partners and local businesses to approach and how often to ask for support.

Communicating with Parents

"Communication is essential to building parent engagement. What parents know and perceive about the school depends on what they see, hear and read."
- Ontario Ministry of Education's website

How can we communicate with Parents?

There are numerous ways to communicate with parents. Each of the following can convey your message but is important to recognize that you will need to communicate often and in several different ways to reach all parents.

- In person
- Student agenda
- Phone – automated call out, teacher to parent, parent to parent and fax
- Email
- Newsletter
- School website
- School signs
- Newspaper
- Television
- Radio

No matter which vehicle you use to communicate, try to consider the following tips when communicating with parents

- Schedule a convenient way and time to communicate with parents.
- Communicate the positive as well as negative comments.
- Be approachable and eager to build a relationship.
- Keep parents informed of happenings in the classroom and school.
- Communicate in a non-judgmental manner.
- Respect the opinions of others, even if they are different.

Use a newsletter or website to communicate with parents

Newsletters and school websites promote open communication and can be an effective component to building strong partnerships with parents and schools.

Tips:

- Reserve a spot in the newsletter every month for parent-to-parent communications. Use a consistent placement in the newsletter.
- Share the findings from the community survey. (For example: 93% of the school community uses the Internet.) If the newsletter is posted online, consider using a blog format so that parents and school partners can subscribe to the newsletter and leave comments. Create links to websites by embedding the links in the online newsletter. Link the newsletter to the school website.
- Keep the message short. Use simple and clear language.
- Make a list of topics for the entire year.
- Choose one key message or activity from the Parent Tool Kit.
- Where possible use a picture.

- Organizing the people who write content for the newsletter is just as important as sharing the workload. Create a timeline and list of articles to be sure everyone knows due dates and the process for writing the newsletter.
- Be sure all content in the newsletter is consistent with school and school board policies.
- Seek out volunteers to translate the newsletter.
- Consider sending out the newsletter along with the report cards for families with secondary students.

Putting parent engagement on the agenda

Parent engagement can become a top priority when discussions at school focus on using the Parent Tool Kit and the suggestions in this implementation guide.

Try using the key messages and activities from the Parent Tool Kit as an agenda item. This allows parent groups and school staff to set a meeting agenda that focuses energy, money and resources around activities that help all families participate and engage in their children's learning. With careful planning more parents and families will feel welcome to participate in the activities organized for them.

Schools should be prepared to embrace parents who are unaccustomed to attending meetings. Parents may not know how to participate in a meeting. They may feel uncomfortable asking questions and afraid to volunteer.

Things to do to make new parents feel welcome

- Appoint someone at the meeting to greet newcomers. When latecomers arrive, make sure that they are seated and get a copy of the agenda. Take turns welcoming new parents.
- Use nametags to put a name to a face.
- Have plenty of copies of the agenda.
- Have introductions at the beginning of the meeting.
- Explain how the meeting will be run.
- Provide welcoming kits to explain to newcomers how the parent group operates.
- Set a time limit for the meeting and keep to it.
- Publicize the agenda on the school website or bulletin board.
- Follow up unfinished business by email or phone.
- Offer light refreshments.

Parent groups have a critical role to play in supporting student achievement and well-being. Organizing parent engagement activities will put discussions about school improvement plans on the agenda. This may be new to many parent groups and it may take a few attempts before everyone understands how to use the school improvement plans together with parent engagement activities. Orientation and training sessions will help parents understand how to organize activities that support parent engagement.

Many parents are comfortable organizing fundraising events and they should continue to use their skills to help raise funds. Parent groups may choose to allocate some of these funds to support the parent engagement activities or professional development opportunities for parents to help support student learning.

Consider networking with community partners for parent leadership training, and donations of goods and services to support parent engagement activities. Together parents, schools and the community can build a strong vibrant and active community engaging parents and helping students succeed.

Promoting parent engagement: Beyond the Parent Tool Kit

There are other activities that parent groups and school staff can organize that may not directly connect to the Parent Tool Kit but are still important in promoting parent engagement. These are a few examples to consider:

Establish a parent lending library at school

- Fill the library with family centred books and resources to support activities in the Parent Tool Kit.
- Purchase a digital camera and pocket video camera for parents to sign out.
- Provide information packages about the school.
- Provide information packages about the activities described in the Parent Tool Kit.

Provide access for parents to the internet and computers

- Schedule computer time at school for parents.
- Provide computer classes and training.
- Help organize a depot for recycled or refurbished computers.
- Develop programs that provide computers and Internet access to all families at home.

Form welcoming committees

- Develop a routine for welcoming parents to the school community.
- Encourage volunteers.
- Form partnerships with other community groups or early learning centres.
- Organize coffee mornings or school refresher sessions to help network and share cultural activities.
- Connect with community service groups to share skills and ideas.
- Organize Book Clubs.

Offer sessions for:

- leadership training
- School Council and Parent Involvement Committee orientation
- parenting classes
- preparing resources that could support activities in the Parent Tool Kit

Websites:

Ministry of Education

Involving Parents in the School: Tips for School Councils

Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/index.html

Parent Engagement Checklist
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/checklist.html

Family Opinions Matter

Surveys and Parent Engagement

Family Opinions Matter: Surveys and Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is important to student success. Involving families and community members in education contributes to student achievement, their well-being and helps develop a strong vibrant community. Parent and family opinions are critical sources of information for decision-making in schools. One way that parent groups and school staff can understand the needs of their school community is by using surveys.

Surveys can be used for a variety of reasons. In this guidebook are two specific types of surveys: Parent Satisfaction Surveys and Community Surveys.

The Parent Satisfaction Survey can be used to gather information that could help guide improvement efforts and determine parent views. A menu of questions that may help in the development of your local Parent Satisfaction Survey is provided (Page 26).

The Community Survey can be used to help determine community support for planned initiatives and activities. Two examples are provided (Page 31).

Parent Satisfaction Surveys

The purpose of conducting any parent satisfaction survey is to improve programs and services.

Use Parent Satisfaction Surveys to:

- measure parent satisfaction with services provided.
- gauge parent attitude about the school.
- review current family involvement.
- assess sense of belonging in school.
- measure present and desired outreach.
- identify homework practices.
- gather parent requests for support and services.
- identify community issues.
- assess parents' perceptions of the extent to which schools are involving parents as a means of improving services and student achievement and well-being.
- measure the school's facilitation of parent engagement – the school's effort to partner with parents.
- gauge the parents' needs and interests to plan effectively for future programs and initiatives.
- determine parents' view of school climate.

It is important to value indicators of parent engagement. Further, it is necessary to have valid and reliable data before interpretation and use. A well-planned survey provides confidence in the data.

Following any survey, a report of the responses provided to families will strengthen parent engagement. This report will allow the survey results to be linked to priorities and improvement efforts.

How to use Parent Satisfaction Surveys

School personnel may want to select survey questions related to current priorities. For example, if improved communication with families is a priority, selecting questions on communication issues may be a useful starting point.

Consider:

- the most convenient time for parents to receive a parent satisfaction survey.
- how the completed surveys will be received and how the survey data will be analyzed.
- what changes can be made based on survey data.
- what materials are necessary to make the survey experience successful.

A Letter of Introduction to a Parent Satisfaction Survey (a sample follows on page 29) or introductory comments at the beginning of the survey should inform parents regarding:

- filling in survey is voluntary
- purpose of the survey
- individual survey results are confidential - survey is to identify trends
- what will be done with survey results
- benefits of survey information to the school
- timelines

A follow-up message can thank families and advise them of survey results.

Tips for Analyzing Survey Data

Resist the temptation to draw conclusions based on one or a few responses. It is most helpful following a survey to analyze the data collected before drawing conclusions. Observations of responses in isolation can be misleading. If the survey response rate is known and responses are considered in percentages, more accurate information can be shared.

To Calculate the Survey Response Rate:

- add the total number of responses received.
- divide by number of families in the school.
- multiply that number by 100.

Individual Question Response Rate:

- add the number of times family members responded to each choice (1,2,3,4)
- divide by the number of responses received for this question
- multiply by 100

Using Percentages

It can be tempting to respond to individual comments in isolation. However, it will be more helpful to consider the percentages of responses.

Percentages can be used to identify those areas where parents gave positive responses indicating successful parent engagement. Those areas with less positive responses indicate a need for consideration and discussion when planning future initiatives and improvement priorities.

People are busy so it is recommended that you use only a few questions. One well received Parent Satisfaction Survey used in Ontario schools consisted of six (6) questions that parents could answer online in their first language. It may be helpful to identify the grade level of children. Questions can be framed to support at-home involvement.

A menu of sample survey questions from which you may wish to develop your own brief parent satisfaction survey to meet local needs follows.

Menu of Sample Questions For Parent Satisfaction Surveys

Category	Sample Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Our School	This is a good school				
	I feel welcome at the school				
	The teachers at this school care about my child				
	My time at school events is well spent				
	I have been invited to visit my child's classroom				
	I am satisfied with the way technology (computers, etc) is used to support learning at my child's school				
	I am satisfied with how discipline is handled at my child's school				
	I am satisfied with safety at my child's school				
	The school deals effectively with critical situations				
Communicating	I have received information about what my child is studying in school				
	It is easy for me to contact the teacher when problems arise				
	The school provides me with useful information on wellness issues (for example, nutrition, substance abuse,..)				
	There is an adult in the school who my child trusts and can go to for help with a school problem				
	I receive information from the school in a timely manner				
	I am satisfied with the information I receive about what my child is expected to learn				
	I am satisfied with the information I receive about my child's progress at school				
	I am satisfied with the information I receive about my child's school's provincial test results				
	I am satisfied with how well my child's school responds to my questions and concerns				
	I am satisfied with the time it takes for my child's school to respond when I call or send a note				
	I am satisfied that important information is made available to me in my language				
	I am satisfied with how often my child's teacher talks to me about his/her work and progress at school				

Continued on next page

Category	Sample Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Communicating	I get help understanding how my child is doing in school				
	The school sends home information about classroom or school events in language I understand				
	The school invites me to participate in parent meetings at the school				
	I am satisfied with the communication between home and school				
	I know how to contact someone at the school when I have questions				
	The school makes it easy for me when I can attend meetings by providing an interpreter and/or in other ways				
	The school contacts me when my child breaks the rules				
	The school contacts me about my child's achievements and successes				

What are the best times for you to go to the school? Please check: Mornings ___ Afternoons ___ Evenings ___

Category	Sample Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Volunteering	I have been invited to go on a school trip				
Learning at Home	My school provides information to families about how to help students at home				
	My child is assigned homework that requires him/her to talk with me about things learned at school				
	I make a difference in my child's school performance				
Decision Making	My school includes parents in school decisions				
	I am aware that the school council speaks on my behalf in providing advice to the school and the school board				
	I know how to become a member of the school council and parent involvement committee				

Continued on next page

What other ways could the school help you support your child's education or learning? Please list any classes, workshops, speakers, training, school programs, curriculum, etc. that you would find helpful.

Is there anything that prevents you from becoming involved at the school?

____ Child care needs
____ Interpretation needed
____ Don't know how to help
____ Don't feel welcome
____ Transportation issues
____ Work hours, getting off work
____ Don't know anyone
____ Other

Additional comments

Category	Sample Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Engaging Parents & Collaborating with the Community	I have received information on services for my child such as tutoring, after-school programs, or classes to help my child learn				
	The school provides me with information on community services that I may want to use				
	The school provides me with information on community events that my child may want to attend				
	There are meaningful ways parents can be involved in the school				
	I believe my concerns or opinions would be considered by the school				

Please help us plan for the future!

Category	Sample Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Future Planning	I would like the school council to contact me				
	I need information about the Board policies such as the homework policy				
	I would like more information about what my child is expected to learn this year				
	I would like support in my efforts to help my child				
	I believe my concerns or opinions would be considered by the school				

Consider including a section for **Additional Comments.**
Be sure to add **Thank you for your participation!**

Sample Letter to Accompany Parent Satisfaction Survey

[School Letterhead]

Parent Satisfaction Survey

Dear [Maple School] Families:

We want to know what our school can do to help parents as they support their children's learning.

We would like to have the family member that is most involved in your child's education answer the questions on this survey.

Your ideas will be used to help us learn how to make school better for your child and your family. This survey will only use the information in a collective way and not as individual responses.

This survey:

- is voluntary. We hope that you answer every question, but you may skip any questions.
- is confidential. Please do not place your name anywhere on the survey.
- has no right or wrong answers.
- is not part of your child's schoolwork.
- will not influence your child's learning or grades in any way.

Please return the survey in the enclosed envelope by [date].

If you have any questions about this study or if you would like to complete the survey by phone, please call [name of staff member] at [phone number].

Thank you for your participation,

Principal

Community Surveys

Schools and parent groups may want to use a survey to measure interest in initiatives under consideration or to assess the impact of initiatives currently underway. As information collected in Community Surveys varies, different conditions may apply.

Consider:

- the most convenient time for parents to receive a community survey.
- how the completed surveys will be received and how the survey data will be analyzed.
- what changes can be made based on survey data.
- what materials are necessary to make the survey experience successful.

Introductory Comments at the beginning of the community survey should inform parents regarding:

- purpose of the survey.
- what will be done with survey results.
- benefits of the survey information to the parent group or school.
- timelines.

It may be useful to calculate response rates for Community Surveys.

To Calculate the Survey Response Rate:

- add the total number of responses received.
- divide by number of families in the school (or families surveyed).
- multiply that number by 100.

To Calculate Individual Question Response Rate:

- add the number of times family members responded to each choice.
- divide by the number of responses received for this question.
- multiply by 100.

Community Surveys can serve a wide variety of uses in schools, depending on program and services. A couple of sample Community Surveys follow.

Sample Community Survey - Volunteering

Purple Public School Volunteer Survey

Our staff and school council are always looking for ways to improve our program and the opportunities we offer our students.

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete and return this survey.

Name _____

Phone_____ **E-Mail**_____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **In The Classroom** in the areas I have checked

- ☐ Reading with students
- ☐ Working with groups of students
- ☐ Attending field trips to help with supervision
- ☐ Speaking to a class on the topic of _____
- ☐ Something else? Please tell us _____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **In The School** in the areas I have checked

- ☐ Working in the Library or Computer Lab
- ☐ Phoning other parents on routine matters
- ☐ Assisting in the preparation of our newsletter
- ☐ Assisting with special events (celebrations, science fair, etc.)
- ☐ Helping with extra-curricular programs
- ☐ Something else? Please tell us _____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **At Home** in the areas I have checked

- ☐ Recruiting parents, community members and local businesses to help with school projects
- ☐ Preparing mailings
- ☐ Data entry on a computer
- ☐ Gathering materials to be used in classrooms
- ☐ Something else? Please tell us _____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey and for your interest in our volunteer program!

Sample Community Survey
School Initiative

Classroom Celebrations Parent Survey

As most of you know, [School's Name] is working to improve our school nutrition environment. We want to ensure that what students are learning in the classroom is supported by our actions. One way to practise what we preach is to offer **healthy choices for all school and classroom celebrations.**

Currently, the food and beverages available for some classroom celebrations are of low nutritional value. When healthy foods such as vegetables and fruit are available, the students often show more interest in these foods than many of the other snacks! In an effort to encourage students to try more healthy foods, and to see that healthy foods can be fun and tasty, we would like to have only healthy foods and beverages for classroom celebrations.

The SNAC (School Nutrition Action Committee) would like to hear from you! We would like your comments and suggestions about how to make improvements to our school nutrition environment, beginning with classroom celebrations.

Please complete this short survey and return it to your child's teacher by [date].

Classroom Celebrations What do you think?

1. Sometimes classrooms receive a large quantity of foods and/or beverages for celebrations which can result in students over-indulging or food being wasted. One suggestion is to have parents sign up to bring something for one celebration per year. Do you like this idea?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

   ☐ Unsure

Comments: _____

_____

_____

2. What do you think of the idea of celebrating students' birthdays on a monthly basis with all of the children who have birthdays that month being recognized and having a reward that does not involve food?

   ☐ Agree

   ☐ Disagree

   ☐ Neither agree or disagree

Comments: _____

_____

_____

3. The SNAC is considering developing a list of food options for teacher to hand out to students to help make classroom celebrations healthier. Students (after checking with their parents) would offer to bring one item from the list for one celebration per year.

   We would appreciate your suggestions and comments. All of your ideas and suggestions will be discussed at an upcoming SNAC meeting on [date]. You are welcome to attend or if this isn't possible, please feel free to add any other comments below or contact the SNAC chair.

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you to the Niagara Catholic District School Board for sharing this survey.

Notes

Notes

Parent Engagement is Important to Student Success.

These materials have been developed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education.