

# PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP

## *A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools*

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Parents are vital partners in education. They influence their children’s attitudes about learning, and support learning at home. They are a vital link between home and school. And when they become involved in the life of the school, they make our schools even better places to learn, grow and thrive. Ontario’s new parent engagement policy recognizes that students can achieve to their highest potential when parents are welcomed and respected as partners, and given the support they need to contribute at home and at school.

### **How does the policy define parent engagement?**

Ontario’s new parent engagement policy recognizes many different forms of parent engagement, and that each is an important contributor to student and school success. Within the policy, parent engagement includes:

- Providing a positive learning environment at home, actively working with children to support what they are learning in school, and making learning an important part of the day
- Having productive conversations with teachers so that there is clear communication between the school and the home
- Becoming involved in school activities and volunteering to help with school events, trips and other activities
- Participating in School Councils at the school level and Parent Involvement Committees at the school board level, to provide the parent perspective.

### **How will the policy support and increase parent engagement?**

The parent engagement policy identifies four key success strategies designed to support parents as partners so that they have the opportunity – and the skills, knowledge and tools – to work together with all education partners and contribute fully to the success of Ontario students and our education system.

**Strategy 1:** Foster a positive, welcoming school climate in which parent perspectives are encouraged, valued and heard.

**Strategy 2:** Identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their child’s learning.

**Strategy 3:** Provide learning opportunities, tools and supports to help parents support student learning at home, and have productive parent-teacher conversations.

**Strategy 4:** Expand communication and outreach activities to increase parent engagement at home and build effective school-parent relationships.

#### VISION

Parent engagement has a positive impact on student achievement. We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario where students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:

- are welcomed, respected and valued as partners by the school community in their children’s learning and development
- have a full range of choices and opportunities to be involved and support student success
- are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue to support a positive learning environment at home and at school
- are supported with resources and tools which enable them to participate in school life.

## **How will the goals of the policy be reached?**

The policy identifies specific actions to be undertaken at the provincial, regional and local levels by the Ministry of Education, Schools and District School Boards. In addition, the monitoring and measurement of parent engagement will help us to gauge our success over time, identify areas for further improvement, and assist us as we continue working toward success.

## **How do students and parents benefit from parent engagement?**

Research on parent engagement tells us that there is a direct connection between parent engagement and:

- Improved academic achievement
- More positive attitudes about school
- More success with homework
- Higher rates of high school graduation
- More consistent school attendance
- Fewer behaviour problems
- A brighter future for students at school and in later life.

## **How do teachers benefit?**

Teachers who actively partner with parents enjoy better parent relationships, and a wide range of benefits:

- Parents are more supportive because they understand what is happening in the classroom
- Parents help to ensure homework and assignments are done
- Parents share the responsibility for student success and work with the teacher
- Parents have a more positive view of teachers, and the school
- Student attendance and classroom behaviour improve
- Student achievement improves
- Teachers have a stronger connection with parents, feel supported by parents and have higher job satisfaction.

## **How do schools benefit?**

Schools are connected to the communities around them. Together, parents, community members and schools can create a powerful support network to provide children and youth with the services they need, develop innovative school-community programs, and enrich the life of the school. As a result:

- Families and community organizations more fully support the school
- Whole-school and individual student achievement often improve
- Graduation rates increase
- Schools are connected to businesses, agencies and services in the community
- Schools gain greater recognition for their achievements and their valued role as an important part of community life.

## **How does the education system benefit?**

The Ministry of Education, District School Boards and schools benefit not only from the important work parents do to help their children succeed in school, but also by ensuring that parent perspectives are heard, and considered, in developing policies and programs at the provincial, regional and local levels.

## **We all benefit**

Together, we are building possibilities for our children and transforming these possibilities into a reality.

**PARENTS IN PARTNERSHIP**  
**DRAFT**

A Parent Engagement Policy  
For Ontario Schools

## Parents in Partnership A message from the Minister of Education



As a parent, and an advocate of parent engagement in education for some 20 years, it has been my privilege to work with committed parents, educators and community members across Ontario, and to partner with them as Minister of Education in the development of this province's first comprehensive parent engagement policy.

Parent engagement matters. Study after study has shown us that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children's education, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved.

We have set the bar high for Ontario's education system. Our goal is to have 75% of students achieving the provincial standard in Grade 6, and an 85% graduation rate. Parent engagement is, and must be, a part of our vision for success.

As a parent myself, I know how challenging it can be to play as active a role as we would like in our children's education. But it is important to meet this challenge so that Ontario's students have the support they need to be successful in school and later in life, to become well rounded, participating citizens.

It is equally important to recognize that parent engagement takes many forms. Some parents serve on School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees. Some volunteer for field trips. Many parents read to their children every night. They are all engaged parents. They are all contributing to their child's education. Ontario's new parent engagement policy is designed to recognize, encourage these many forms of parent engagement, to break down barriers that exist for many parents, and to support all parents with the skills and knowledge they need to be engaged and involved.

The policy recognizes that strong partnerships among parents, educators and communities are at the core of parent engagement. The policy supports educators as they create welcoming schools and build positive and inclusive parent and community relationships. It supports and strengthens existing partnerships among schools, School Councils, Parent Involvement Committees and boards. And it also recognizes that diversity is one of our greatest assets. We need to value the full range of differences so that all parents are involved, respected and welcomed in our schools and boards.

Of course, at the centre of those partnerships are students. We have invested significantly in programs that help students succeed, and programs to help parents take an active role in education. But our ultimate success will depend on our ability to work constructively, as positive and respectful partners. Together, we are building possibilities for our children. I am confident that, through Ontario's new parent engagement policy, we will transform those possibilities into reality.

*<signature>*

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne  
Minister of Education

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### Parent Engagement In Action

Many exemplary parent engagement programs and initiatives have been developed by schools and school boards, faculties of education and community organizations across Ontario. The 'Parent Engagement In Action' highlights throughout this document illustrate the many ways these organizations are breaking down barriers to parent engagement, and supporting parents as welcomed and valued partners in education.

# 1. PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

Parents play a vital role in education. When parents are engaged and involved, everyone benefits – students, parents, families, teachers, schools and communities – and our schools are enriched as positive places to teach, learn and grow.

## About the Parent Engagement Policy

Many Ontario school boards and schools have developed effective parent engagement practices and programs. The success of the Parents Reaching Out Grants program and the excellent work of School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees, all demonstrate that strong and effective parent engagement happens on a local level. But barriers to parent involvement still exist. Together we need to identify and overcome those barriers while creating the conditions in which parent engagement can thrive.

The purpose of Ontario’s Parent Engagement Policy is to provide the supports needed to connect parents at the local level, and help provide tools to enable them to engage fully in their children’s education, and in the life of our schools. Designed to promote exemplary practices across the province, the policy fulfills government’s commitment to support and enhance parent engagement in Ontario schools by:

- Articulating a vision of parent engagement in Ontario schools
- Identifying the strategies necessary to fulfill the vision of parent engagement, and support Ontario’s core priorities for education

### Parent Engagement In Action

The Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario developed a strategy, “Creating Communities of Peace”, designed to create safe and caring community schools that respect individuality, celebrate harmony and strive to promote and develop responsible behaviour based on Gospel values and shared discipleship. The strategy focuses on restorative justice and progressive discipline, and the rights and responsibilities of students, school officials, and parents.

- Identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to allow participation of all parents in their children’s schools to support student learning and help close the achievement gap
- Promoting specific parent involvement practices that are known to positively influence student achievement
- Identifying the roles of education partners including the ministry, school boards, parent involvement committees, schools and school councils in furthering parent engagement across the province

## Ontario’s Vision of Parent Engagement

The Parent Engagement Policy is grounded in a vision of parents that acknowledges both their importance as valued partners and active participants.

### Vision

Parent engagement has a positive impact on student achievement. We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario where students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:

- Are welcomed, respected and valued as partners by the school community in their children’s learning and development
- Have a full range of choices and opportunities to enable them to be involved and support student success
- Are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue to support a positive learning environment at home and at school
- Are supported with tools which enable them to participate in school life

## What we know about parent engagement

Parents<sup>1</sup> play a vital role in the development and education of their children. Parents and families have the primary responsibility for the development of their children’s character, with the support of their school and community.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report the term ‘parents’ refers to parents, guardians and caregivers.

Research clearly indicates that good schools become better schools when there is a strong connection with parents as part of the learning community. Parents have a primary influence on their child’s attitudes towards school, their learning, and their future success. The more families support their children’s learning and educational progress, the more their children tend to do well in school and continue their education (Henderson & Mapp 2002). The positive results of a genuine partnership between parents and schools include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, better behaviour, and increased public confidence among parents in their children's schooling. This in turn impacts our province as we seek to reduce poverty, improve our health and create a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure Ontario’s future prosperity.

We also know that strong and effective parent engagement begins with parents supporting parents at the local level. That is why we are moving toward a more grassroots approach by strengthening the role of Parent Involvement Committees (PICs).

**What the research tells us**

Parent involvement programs that are effective in engaging diverse families recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences.”

“Parent programs and interventions work best when the strategies respect the needs of families. When school staff engage in caring and trusting relationships with parents that recognize parents as partners in the educational development of children, these relationships enhance parents’ desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children’s educational development.”

*Henderson & Mapp, 2002*

**Parent engagement: the historical context**

Our schools have inherited a rich tradition of parental and community involvement in education, including the distinct experiences and perspectives of the Catholic and French educational communities.

**Parent Engagement  
In Action**

The Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario believes that recognition of diverse traditions encourages the creation of a dynamic and inclusive school community. Recognition of and respect for the diverse religions and cultures within the board through an interfaith calendar, supports boards and schools in making decisions on religious accommodation and increases the participation of students and parents in school activities.



A 1994 report by the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) recommended the establishment of a 'school parent council' in every school, to ensure equity of access and consistency of approach for parents across the province. The 1995 report of the Royal Commission on Learning, *For the Love of Learning*, recommended that school boards and principals take the lead in establishing and supporting school-community councils, and encouraged them to develop the kinds of school-community alliances best suited to their local needs. The establishment of School Councils was supported by ministry policy in 1995, and legislation mandating school councils followed in 1997 with *The Education Quality Improvement Act* (1997). The role and purpose of School Councils was clarified through Regulation 612/00, which requires school boards and principals to solicit input from school councils, and report back on the advice they have received.

### **Moving the agenda forward**

Recognizing the critical link between parent engagement and student success, the government initiated the Parent Voice in Education Project, which conducted broad consultations with parents across the province, and provided its report in 2005.

The report identified three key areas for action: 1) to empower the parent voice within the education system 2) to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for parents and 3) recognition of the differences among Ontario's diverse communities. Through this landmark report, parents affirmed their belief in the importance of parent engagement.

In 2005, the Minister of Education responded with a discussion paper laying out the blueprint for a vision of parent engagement in the school system. And we have acted upon this blueprint.

#### **Parent Engagement In Action**

The Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) provide an early learning program that promotes positive parent-child interaction in a school-based setting for young children. PFLCs lay the foundations for successful transition to school, and encourage families to take an active part in their children's learning. They also help to familiarize children and their families with school routines and link them to community resources for special needs, health and other related services.

In 2006, the Parent Engagement Office was established in the Ministry to develop and implement parent engagement initiatives, such as the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant, that support the learning and achievement of students across the province. At the end of the 2008-09 school year, almost 4,000 grants had been awarded to school councils along

with 150 regional grants for a total investment of \$8M. All of these projects were designed to enhance parent involvement and, in particular, break down the barriers to parent engagement faced by many Ontario parents.

Parent Involvement Committees were established at Ontario school boards to enhance parent involvement in support of student achievement at the regional level, and provide a direct link between parents and the director of education and trustees.

The Provincial Parent Board (2007-2009) provided recommendations to enhance Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants, and online resources and helped to guide and assist our efforts to strengthen parent engagement.

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, introduced in 2009, sets out a vision of education in Ontario in which all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected. Parent engagement is an essential component of the Strategy which provides a framework for educators to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers so that our students can reach their full potential. The Strategy supports the involvement of all parents with their boards and schools to share their ideas and support student learning.

More recently, government introduced an amendment to the Education Act, Bill 177, Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, 2009. If passed by the Legislature the Bill would reinforce the vital link between schools and parents, and provide for the establishment of Parent Involvement Committees by school boards.

**Parent Engagement  
In Action**

York Region District School Board has developed a parent engagement audit designed to identify barriers to parent engagement and opportunities to increase parent engagement. The audit, constructed as a system survey, is distributed to parents and staff at the end of the year. A practical application of the Epstein six-part typology of parent engagement, the audit takes the needs of the surrounding community, and families, into account in order to increase parent engagement in a variety of ways.

“Parental involvement is a broad term and includes such things as good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board committees, communicating and meeting with teachers and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips. All forms of parental involvement are beneficial. In every form, parental involvement in education shows children that their parents care about what they are doing and learning, and that they value a good education.”

Report of the Parent Voice in  
Education Project, 2005

## **Energizing Ontario Education**

In its paper *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*, the government committed to supporting enhanced parent engagement as part of its strategy to achieve three core priorities:

1. High levels of student achievement
2. Reduced gaps in student achievement
3. Increased public confidence in publicly funded education.

Our government's commitment to parent engagement reflects a growing body of research that demonstrates strong and direct links between parent engagement and student achievement. Strong parent engagement means improved student achievement.

We want to create a system in which all students, parents, families and members of the school community feel welcomed and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. Parent involvement is instrumental in helping us reach our three core priorities as we strive to be a global leader in building and sustaining an equitable and inclusive education system.

## 2. FULFILLING THE VISION OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The Parent Engagement Policy recognizes that parent involvement is multi-dimensional and that parents have a role to play in fulfilling each of Ontario's core priorities for educational excellence.

### Strategies for success

The Parent Engagement Policy identifies a series of key strategies designed to support parents as partners so that parents have the opportunity – and the skills, knowledge and tools – to engage with all education partners in fulfilling Ontario's core priorities for education.

The policy also acknowledges that Ontario's education system has a rich tradition of parent engagement that continues today. Across the province, many parents are actively involved in their children's education, both at home and at school. Parents provide their suggestions directly to the Ministry through letters, emails, phone calls, and conversations. At the local level, parents are engaged as members of school councils, Parent Involvement Committees and a wide variety of local initiatives at District School Boards across Ontario. Likewise, parent perspectives are taken into consideration and recognized in ministry policies and programs.

#### **Parent Perspectives:**

#### **Parent Voice in Education**

The role parents play in education – both at home and at school – has grown and evolved over many years. The call for a greater focus on parent engagement is stronger today than ever before, as we have come to understand the direct links between parent engagement and student achievement. These links were highlighted in the 2004 report of the Parent Voice in Education project, which made recommendations, based on parents' input, to strengthen the parent voice in education, and a create more welcoming and inclusive education system.

The Parent Engagement Policy is designed to build on our successes and bring these activities and programs into focus, and ensure that parent engagement is recognized, collectively understood and practiced throughout the province. It is also designed to help ensure that barriers to parent engagement are addressed province-wide, so that all parents have full access to the education system and meaningful representation as equal educational partners.

### **Strategy 1: School climate**

**Foster and sustain a positive, welcoming school climate in which all parent perspectives are encouraged, valued and heard.**

#### **Current policy and practice**

Many current policies, programs and initiatives reflect and support this strategy as illustrated by the following selected examples:

- Parents are members of the Education Partnership Table, which discusses substantive problems and issues facing the education system, and contributes to their successful resolution
- Ontario’s Leadership Framework of effective practices, sponsored by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL), includes practices, skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to effectively engage parents and promote welcoming schools
- Regulation 181/98 requires that the Identification, Placement and Advisory Committee (IPRC) when making a placement decision consider the option of placement in a special education class, consider whether placement should be in a regular class, with appropriate special education services would meet the student’s needs; and is consistent with parental preferences
- New Teacher Induction Program includes resources focused on communication with parents/guardians.
- Ontario’s faculties of education support parent engagement by fostering teacher candidates’ ability to engage in productive teacher-parent conversations to support student learning
- *Planning Entry to School - A Resource Guide* (2005) promotes a welcoming environment in schools and provides examples of effective practices for parents and school staff.

#### **Parent Engagement In Action**

The Renfrew County District School Board “Achieving as One” initiative, developed by the board’s Parent Involvement Committee, provides training and guidance to parents, school councils and school staff across the county to:

- Increase parent engagement in the education system
- Improve the efficiency of school councils
- Build communication pathways between School Councils and the school board.

#### **Parent Engagement In Action**

Jane and Finch Caring Village provided “Empowered Parents: A Key to Our Children’s Success” skill-building and knowledge-sharing workshops.

**Parent Perspectives:****A Culture of Mutual Respect**

The Parent Engagement Policy is designed to ensure that parents have a voice at every level of the education system. While the responsibility for decision-making by principals, trustees, and board and ministry officials is set out in legislation, the Parent Engagement Policy supports and encourages education leaders to solicit and consider parent opinions and perspectives, so that the recommendations of parents are weighed, along with other relevant factors, in the decision-making process.

**Strategy 2: Eliminating barriers**

**Identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning and to reflect the diversity of our students and communities**

**Current policy and practice**

Many current policies, programs and initiatives reflect and support this strategy as illustrated by the following selected examples:

- The ministry's Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants program supports school-based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience barriers due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario's school system, or other factors
- The Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, directs school boards to implement strategies that identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents, and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to board initiatives
- The Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework speaks to the role of First Nation, Métis and Inuit parents in supporting learning and achievement in students.
- The Focus on Youth and Community Use of Schools programs are intended to reduce barriers to accessing both school spaces and programming, and include active community outreach (including to parents) to facilitate community use of school facilities
- Regulation 181/98 requires every school board to have a Special Education Advisory Committee with representatives of local parent associations
- Parent Involvement Committees and School Councils provide a voice that reflects the diversity of parents in their communities

**Parent Engagement  
In Action**

Sudbury's Pius XII Catholic School invited parents to attend a series of one-day workshops that were held once a month over a five month period. During an introductory session, parents offered their ideas for workshop topics. In the workshops that followed, parents exchanged ideas on the day's topic in the morning, and listened to an expert speaker in the afternoon.

## Strategy 3: Tools and Supports for Parents

### Helping parents support student learning at home and at school

#### Current policy and practice

Many current policies, programs and initiatives reflect and support this strategy as illustrated by the following selected examples:

- The Parent Engagement Office of the Ministry of Education continues to build awareness among parents of the importance of parent engagement.
- The ministry website, and ministry publications, provide in-depth information on the education system as well as a wide variety of tools and resources to help parents foster student learning at home including tips for parent-teacher conversations
- Fact sheets have also been developed for parents on a number of key topics including for PIC operations, healthy schools, inclusive education, safe schools, and the Ontario Code of Conduct
- *Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools K-12* highlights parent and community partnerships
- *Effective Practices for Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders* (2007) is a resource guide that devotes a chapter to parent involvement in program planning for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- A series of video pod casts offered on the ministry's abc123 website has been designed for parents and caregivers and provides practical ideas in such areas as reading at bedtime, establishing routines and getting organized for school
- *Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs* (2007) is a resource guide for parents, schools and the community that helps to facilitate effective communication and resolve conflicts when they arise.

#### Parent Engagement In Action

The Queens' University Faculty of Education has developed the "Encouraging Home-School Partnerships through Web-based Communication" initiative, based on Epstein's six frameworks for parental involvement. A web-based portal was created to encourage meaningful home-school partnerships in elementary schools. The content, tools and organization of the portal were guided by input from parents and teachers, with a particular focus on two-way communication and inclusion.

## Strategy 4: Parent outreach

**Review and expand communication and outreach strategies such as local workshops, presentations, tools and resources, to share information and strategies to support learning at home and parent engagement in schools**

### Current policy and practice

Many current policies, programs and initiatives reflect and support this strategy as illustrated by the following selected examples:

- Parent Town Hall meetings with the Minister allow conversations on parent engagement in local communities
- Multilingual material have been developed for parents including Parents Reaching Out grants brochure, bullying prevention pamphlet, parent guides for helping their children with reading, writing and mathematics, and numerous tip sheets including helping with getting ready for school, with homework, and communicating with teachers.
- Parent involvement is a key feature of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, as are the establishment of relationships with the Parent Worker, school, and community.
- The Aménagement linguistique policy for French-language schools promotes strong collaboration between educational institutions, parents, families and the community
- The School College Work Initiative specifically funds the creation of a wide array of learning and awareness opportunities, for parents and others, for example, forums on Parents as Career Coaches, Parents and Students Career Night, Picture Your Kid @ College and Student/Parent Dual Credit Information Sessions
- Schools participating in the Healthy Schools Recognition Program work with their School Councils and are encouraged to work together with parents, students and school staff
- The Specialist High Skills Major Program encourages participating school boards to invite parents to sit on board or school advisory committees to help shape the local program
- The ministry's *Transition Planning: Resource Guide* (2002) encourages the collaboration of students, parents and the community in planning transitions for students with special education needs from secondary school to post-secondary education, the workplace and/or the community.
- Urban and Priority High Schools are including parent engagement components in their programming; parents are also members of Urban and Priority High Schools' school/community steering committees.
- Special Education training materials developed by the ministry support parent - school - community communication, for example, web-based Individual Education Plan (IEP) training materials

#### Parent Engagement In Action

The "Bridges Project", developed by Alexander Mackenzie Secondary School in Sarnia, combined School Council meetings with a series of parent workshops on topics such as school pathways, cyber-bullying and self-esteem. Because so many parents lived a considerable distance from the school, parents were encouraged to attend both the meeting and the workshop.



- The Ontario Provincial Education Network (OPEN) publication provides updates on important education initiatives

**Parent Perspectives:****Getting Involved**

While parent engagement takes many forms – at home and at school – there are two formal structures in Ontario’s education system that support parent engagement and provide parents with a voice at the school and district school board levels.

**School Councils:** focus on increasing parent involvement within the school community, as a key factor in supporting student achievement, and act as a direct link for parents to the school principal.

**Parent Involvement Committees:** enhance parent involvement in support of student achievement at the regional level, and operate as a direct link for parents to the director of education and trustees.

- Ministry staff attend a variety of parent meetings and conferences , including provincial parent associations conferences/meeting , and regional meetings such as Parent Involvement Committee and Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC), to obtain feedback from parents on educational topics.
- Effective practice is shared through the website; all of the 2008-09 projects approved for funding are posted, and 13 are highlighted as examples of successful practice.

### 3. PARENT ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

Fulfilling Ontario’s vision of parent engagement requires commitment and action by all of our partners at every level of the education system.

#### Foundations for Parent Engagement

Parents engagement matters- it is instrumental in helping the government reach our three core priorities. Parents care about their children and want to be involved: they want their children to succeed in school and are willing to help in as many ways as possible. Commitment to our student’s well being is the driving force behind everything we do in education. Everyone--parents, families, administrators, teachers, support workers and the government- shares this firm commitment.

#### Parent Engagement In Action

Through its “Strategic Parent Engagement = Increased Student Success” initiative, the Durham District School Board has worked in partnership with the parent community to embed strategic parent involvement as a component of all school-based and board initiatives supporting student achievement.

A true partnership takes sustained and intentional efforts on the part of all partners with commitment and action by all at every level of the education system. While parents can find it challenging to play an active role in their children’s education, it is important to meet this challenge so that Ontario’s students have the support they need to be successful in school and later in life.

The Parent Engagement policy seeks to identify and break down barriers to parent involvement and proactively reach out to parents. With work schedules, outside commitments and individual preference- it helps parents to have choices on how they want to be involved. Strategies need to be flexible recognizing the diversity of our parents and their contributions. And tools are provided to help parents support parents at the local level, reinforcing the vital link between parents and schools through Parent Involvement Committees and School Councils.

The Parent Engagement Policy acknowledges that schools and district school boards across Ontario have implemented a wide variety of parent engagement strategies, and have many effective practices in place. Likewise, parent engagement takes many different forms as it continues to evolve in our schools and boards, and as it responds to local needs and circumstances. Much remains to be done if we are to realize the full value of parent engagement, particularly at the local level, where supports are needed to connect parents to parents, teachers to parents, and schools and boards to parents and communities. We are bringing about change by talking with one another and taking action.

The Ministry of Education is committed to supporting boards and schools by providing the resources and supports they need to continue this valuable work, and by ensuring that effective practices are celebrated, shared, and in evidence in every region of the province. Likewise, the ministry is committed to providing supports to parents, to help ensure that they are informed, knowledgeable and prepared to engage fully as partners in their children’s education.

Ongoing communication and transparency are essential if we are to fulfill our vision of parent engagement. In its paper *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*, the government acknowledges the importance of regular board-level parent surveys, designed to gauge parent satisfaction with the quality of education and track it over time.

Sample school climate surveys provide schools with a tool to assess perceptions of school safety from a parent perspective which can then inform the development of School Improvement Plans. And the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy of which parent engagement is a vital component calls for the development of indicators to monitor progress and assess the effectiveness of policies, programs and procedures. Boards will report to the Ministry and their communities, in their Directors’ annual reports, on their progress in increasing the levels of parent engagement.

<p><b>Parent Engagement In Action</b></p> <p>Unionville High School has established a “Newcomer Parent to Parent Buddy System” through which newcomer parents are matched with parents who have recently immigrated, so that newcomers can learn about the school system and how to support their children, from parents who have made a successful transition into life in Ontario. Community agencies, translators and resources are also made available to offer parents information and support.</p>
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We have noted that developing effective parent engagement programs and practices requires action by education partners at every level of the education system. The following actions will help realize our promise to make Ontario a global leader in building and sustaining an equitable and inclusive education system.

### School actions:

- Establish and sustain a positive learning culture and welcoming climate where parental input is welcomed, respected and valued
- Implement strategies to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents and our diverse communities
- Actively explore and utilize opportunities (e.g. PRO grants) to further engage parents at school and at home to support student achievement
- Review existing parent and community partnerships and seek to expand upon these partnerships to reflect the diversity of our parents and the broader community
- Inform students and parents about learning expectations and the student’s academic progress and make efforts to assist parents who do not understand the language of the board
- Actively encourage and support School Councils and parents to share their ideas for improving the student achievement gap to help inform school improvement plans
- Support opportunities for parents and students to develop or strengthen skills and knowledge (e.g. workshops, various resources such as tips sheets, translation of materials) to support a positive learning environment
- Work towards representation of diverse parent groups on all school committees including school councils
- Implement the board equity and inclusive education policy, programs and action plans to further support parent engagement and reflect the needs of their students and their diverse school communities
- Monitor school climate (e.g. through surveys, focus groups) to help identify barriers to parent involvement or issues that should be addressed to foster and support a safe welcoming learning environment
- Review and establish self- assessment processes to determine the effectiveness of their parent engagement strategies
- Report progress to the board and its local community including educators, students, parents and the public.

#### Parent Engagement In Action

Jean Vanier Separate School in London developed the “Put out the Welcome Mat” initiative to help new parents become more involved and connected with the school. The initiative included translation of the parent information handbook and school website, and offering translation services for parent-teacher meetings.

#### Parent Engagement In Action

During “Bring a Grownup to School Day” at Brighton Public School, parents and caregivers are invited to spend time in their child’s classroom and participate in classroom activities. During breaks, parents can meet the principal and school council members, learn more about volunteer opportunities at the school, and discuss how they could get more involved.

**Board actions:**

- Establish and sustain a positive learning culture and welcoming climate where parental input is encouraged, respected and valued
- Identify and address barriers so that parents, diverse groups and the broader community have better board-level representation and greater access to board initiatives
- Actively promote the involvement and engagement (both formally and informally) of parents with their boards and schools to encourage them to share their ideas for improving student achievement to support board planning e.g. through parent involvement committees, special education advisory committees, school councils, town hall meetings, focus groups, parent surveys
- Support PICs in their role of providing advice on policies and programs important to student learning
- Review existing parent and community partnerships and seek to expand upon these partnerships to reflect the diversity of our parents and the broader community
- Provide timely information about board and school policies, procedures and practices to students, parents, teachers, school staff, administrators, volunteers and the broader community, and make efforts to assist parents who do not understand the language of the board
- Support School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees to reach out and further engage parents, students, school staff and community members to support student achievement and help close the achievement gap
- Implement policies programs, and action plans that embed the principles of equity and inclusive education which take into account the parent voice and reflect the needs of their diverse school communities
- Establish indicators to monitor parent engagement in ways which support and foster student achievement.
- Embed the principles of equity and inclusive education, which supports and values parent involvement, as part of their cyclical policy review so that these principles will be an integral part of every board's operations and permeate everything that happens in schools
- Provide opportunities for parents, students, administrators, teachers and school staff to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to foster the different types of parent engagement to support student achievement
- Report progress to the local community including educators, students, parents and the public
- Highlight parent engagement within the equity and inclusive report on progress in the Director's annual report.

**Parent Engagement  
In Action**

The District School Board of Niagara launched the "Settlement Workers in Schools" program to provide outreach and support to a growing newcomer population. The program provides access to the services and support of a settlement worker right in their children's school. The settlement worker helps to bridge communication gaps between home and school, and provides newcomer parents the tools and encouragement they need to be active participants in their children's education.

**Ministry actions:**

- Actively support and foster parent engagement through the Parent Engagement Office in the Inclusive Education branch
- Provide one time funding in 2009-10 to support regional inclusive education networks and their activities which include parent engagement
- Consider parent perspectives and seek input from parents on policies and programs that affect them and their children's learning
- Support the four provincial parent associations who work with parents across the province – namely Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCD), Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, Parents Partenaires en éducation (PPE) and People for Education.
- Seek to identify and remove barriers to parent engagement that may prevent some parents from fully participating in their children's learning
- Expand communication and outreach strategies (e.g. local workshops/ presentations/ information packages and tip sheets) to share information and strategies to increase parent engagement at home and at school
- Provide funding and tools (e.g. guides) for the Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant program
- Incorporate the principles of equity and inclusive education into the PRO grants and refocus the PRO funding to better help parents in higher-needs areas participate in their child's education
- Improve timelines for flowing PRO funding to School Councils and regional organizations to enable projects to begin earlier in the school year
- Review and evaluate the effectiveness of the Parent Reaching Out (PRO) grant program
- Conduct and disseminate research on promising practices that foster parent engagement and show the link to improved student achievement by increased parent engagement
- Expand the number of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres in our high needs communities
- Provide funding to assist with the operations of School Councils and Parent Involvement Committees through the Grants for Students' Needs (GSN)
- Host annual meetings with PIC chairs and school directors to provide a forum for open dialogue on the challenges and opportunities to enhance parent engagement in our schools and improve student achievement
- Provide training opportunities, develop resources and tools to foster parent engagement, encourage positive dialogue, skills and leadership among parents and committee members (e.g. PIC, School Council), students, teachers, administrators, school staff and volunteers
- Continue to enhance the ministry's abc123 website and develop additional tools and resources for parents (tip sheets) to help them support their child's education at home
- Help to ensure parent voice is heard and valued using a variety of formal and informal methods (e.g. town halls meetings, OPEN, the annual meetings of PIC chairs, School Councils, provincial parent associations and individual parents)
- Update the School Council Guide
- Develop and release PIC guidelines

- Provide support to boards and parents through parent engagement representatives in each of the Ministry regional offices
- Communicate progress on parent engagement to educators, students, parents and the public.