

Parent & Community Engagement



Parent • Involvement • Committee

A Resource for Schools

2012

Parents matter in education. They matter as vital partners who contribute much to the work of our educators, schools, and communities. They matter as parent leaders, parent mentors, and models of commitment to excellent in education, and they matter everyday as they influence and support their children's academic achievement.¹

¹ *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010*
The Honourable Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Education

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Legislation and Policy	4
What is a Parent Involvement Committee?	6
HDSB Parent Involvement Committee Mandate	8
What We Know About Parent Engagement: The Parent Engagement Policy, 2010	9
Epstein's Framework for Six Types of Involvement	11
What do Successful Partnerships Programs Look Like?	12
Strategies to Increase Parent Involvement	13
Strategies for Success by Involvement/Engagement Type	13
Parenting	16
Communicating	17
Volunteering	18
Learning at Home	19
Decision Making	20
Collaborating with Community	21
Synopsis: Legislative requirements for PICs	22

Introduction

Parents play a vital role in education. When parents are engaged and involved, everyone – students, parents and families, teachers, schools and communities – benefit, and our schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn, and grow.²

Ontario Parent Involvement Policy, December 2005

Parents play a key role in the development and education of their children and in the success of schools. The provincial *Parent Involvement Policy* recognizes effective parent involvement as a performance measure to be expected of the publicly funded education system. This policy outlines the requirements for the Minister of Education, the Ministry, school boards, schools and their staff to contribute to successful outcomes.³

Good schools are better where there is a stronger connection with parents as part of the learning community. Research shows that positive results can include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, better behaviour, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling. The Ministry views the role of parents as an important and practical consideration and as an important part of building the capacity of schools to help students achieve.

The Policy

Parent involvement includes a range of activities from good parenting, helping with homework, serving on school councils and board or provincial committees, communicating and meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or on school trips. The government recognizes the vital role that parents play in the education of their children. Based on this recognition, the policy provides real support aimed at making it easier for parents to get involved.

There are three parts to the policy:

1. *Parent Voice Empowerment:*

- Minister of Education establishes annual regional forums with parents to listen and converse about parent concerns.
- New communications for parents will be developed at the provincial, board, and local levels, including a Parent Portal on the web with concise

² Throughout this resource, the term *parents* refer to parents, guardians, and caregivers.

³ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/05.12/developing.pdf> *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy, 2005*

and authoritative information, an expanded e-network to provide updates and receive feedback, and a parent handbook.⁴

- Parents will get greater access to high quality, understandable, and timely information about education initiatives at the provincial, board, and school level.
- A provincial *Parent Engagement Office (PEO)* has been established to support provincial efforts.
- School boards are required to establish Parent Involvement Committees with a direct link to the Director and Trustees, to provide parent advice, and to support parent engagement.
- Base provincial funding to support the work of the committee is provided and additional funding scaled to the size of the board.
- A provincial fund (Parents Reaching Out - PRO grants)⁵ supports projects that enhance parent involvement at a provincial, regional and board levels. The Ministry of Education has published a number of parent engagement ideas at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/eventoriented.html> and to read about some success stories go to <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/success.html> for ideas to engage your parent community.
- The Ministry and school boards will work together to ensure broad parent consultation takes place on relevant new policies, particularly those that directly impact family life.

2. *A Welcoming Environment for Parents:*

- To make parents feel more welcome in the school, schools can begin practicing better school-family communication: taking care with messages sent to parents, dealing with parent issues, and inviting parents to participate.
- A school council outreach program for parents is funded with a base amount to each school council of \$500 annually.
- School councils are required to focus on engaging parents and fostering parental involvement within their school community as a key factor in assisting student achievement.
- School councils are encouraged to broaden opportunities for parents, and to recognize active members among the parent community.
- School councils are also asked to help recognize parent and community volunteers and to report on levels of parent engagement.
- A special principals' and parents' project team will be established by the Minister to provide advice on a range of issues such as the use of mediation to resolve disputes and best practices for parent-school relationships.

⁴ *Making a Difference: A Practical Handbook for Parent Involvement Committee Members*, 2011 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/HandbookPIC.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/reaching.html> *Parents Reaching Out Grants*

3. *Addressing Diversity:*

- The *Parents Reaching Out grant (PRO)* is available to school councils for initiatives to reach parents who may find involvement more challenging due to language, recent immigration, poverty, newness to the system, or other factors.
- All parent vehicles report annually on the effectiveness of measures to develop full representation.
- The Minister will hold direct forums with diverse communities to encourage their full engagement within the system.

What is a Parent Involvement Committee?

A Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) is an important advisory body to school boards. A PIC is a formal structure and a key vehicle at the board level that enhances parent involvement and supports student achievement and well-being.

What do Parent Involvement Committees do?

The purpose of Parent Involvement Committees is to support, encourage and enhance meaningful parent involvement at the board level to improve student achievement and well-being. The Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) acts as an advisory body to the local school board, and provides an important link between parents and the board's director of education and trustees. Parent Involvement Committees build parent engagement by:

- providing information and advice to the district school board on parent engagement and communicating with parents
- developing strategies and initiatives the board could use to engage more parents to support their children's learning at home and at school
- sharing information with, and supporting the work of school councils.

Each PIC decides how best to achieve these goals depending on the unique needs of its board and community, its organization, and the members of the committee. Funding of \$5,000 plus \$0.17 per student is provided to each school board to support its collaborative work with its Parent Involvement Committee. This allocation is intended to fund activities undertaken by the PIC to support parent engagement at home, at school and through the PIC's work with school councils.

Who can sit on a Parent Involvement Committee?

The PIC is a parent-led committee. The chair/co-chair(s) are parents and the majority of members are parents. The director and a trustee are also members of the PIC to provide a direct link to the board. The director and trustee(s) are non-voting members of the PIC. The PIC may appoint up to three community members who are voting members. PICs decide whether to include other members, such as principals, teachers and support staff to suit local needs. These members are non-voting members of the PIC. Parent members serve for a term of one or two years and must be the parent or guardian of a pupil enrolled

in a school of the board that established the PIC. The chair/co-chairs serve a two-year term and cannot serve more than two consecutive terms as chair/co-chair. They act as spokespersons for the PIC providing advice to the director and the board. The selection of PIC members occurs prior to November 15th in each school year and must be made prior to the first PIC meeting of the school year.

Who can attend meetings?

PICs meet at least four times a year. Meetings are open to the public, and are held in a location accessible to the public. Those who wish to observe, and learn first-hand about the operation of the PIC are welcome to attend meetings.

Notices of when and where meetings are to be held, as well as minutes of past meetings are posted on the board's website.

How do PICs differ from school councils?

School councils are school-based structures. PICs focus on things that affect more than one school and link parents with the school board's director of education and trustees. The PIC provides advice to the board on parent engagement, communicates with and supports school councils, and undertakes activities to help parents in the board support their children's learning at home and at school. PICs actively support school councils by enhancing their role in fostering parent engagement, building capacity and sharing information. The Council of Ontario Directors of Education has published two resources pertaining to engaging parents in school: *Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parent and Schools, 2011* and *Parent Tool Kit: What parents can do to help their child succeed in school, 2011* available at

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

Is the work of PICs guided by education policy?

Yes. Like all education partners, PICs play an important role in fulfilling the vision and goals of Ontario's parent engagement policy to support student achievement. *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010* is available at

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf. PICs are also

guided by Ontario Regulation 612/00 as amended by Ontario Regulation 330/10

http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_000612_e.htm.

How do PICs help the education system?

The positive results of a genuine partnership between parents and schools include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, better behaviour and increased confidence among parents in their children's schooling. The Ministry of Education, district school boards and schools benefit not only from the important work parents do to support their children's learning, but also by seeking and considering parent perspectives at the provincial, regional and local levels.⁶

⁶ http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/factSheet_Fall2010.pdf Parent Involvement Committees' Fact Sheet

HDSB Regional Parent Involvement Committee

The Halton District School Board Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) recognizes parents play a vital role in the collaborative development and education of their children and in the success of schools and therefore provides a regular opportunity for parents to network, share ideas, offer input and enjoy informative presentations on education and related topics throughout the school year. PIC makes parental engagement a priority by providing ongoing support on a system-wide basis and promoting two way communication and dialogue between School Councils, Parent groups, parents, all staff, the Board and members of the community.⁷

Mandate

The mandate of the Halton District School Board Parent Involvement Committee is to:

- Assess the status of parent involvement in order to support, encourage, and enhance meaningful parental involvement
- Outreach to parents who find school involvement challenging
- Collaborate with school board and various stakeholders to support student success
- Develop strategies for enhancing parental engagement and outreach
- Develop strategies to assist school councils in their development
- Provide consultation opportunities to Staff, Superintendents, the Director of Education and Board of Trustees
- Provide an annual report to the Ministry of Education Parent Engagement Office highlighting actions of the year
- Participate in the promotion, application, and implementation of grant applications and projects funded under the Ministry of Education Parents Reaching Out (PRO) program
- Offer advice in the use of Parent Involvement Policy Funds provided by the Ministry of Education

⁷ <http://www.hdsb.ca/Community/PIC/Pages/PICGuidelines.aspx> HDSB PIC Mandate and Guidelines

Functions

1. School Council Support
 - a. Communication
 - b. Assisting at home
 - c. Attending school events
 - d. Building parenting skills
 - e. Volunteerism
 - f. Fundraising
 - g. Participating in Decision Making
 - h. Use of Community Resources
2. Awareness and Education of Hot Topics
3. Consultations to Support Initiatives and Parent Engagement
4. Provincial Voice
 - a. Representation
 - b. Grant application/distribution

General Membership

All parents may participate in meetings and functions of Parent Involvement Committee. Each school must designate a parent name to a central list for the purpose of communication and distribution of information. All parents interested in participating on a subcommittee of the PIC planning team are welcome. PIC shall hold two general meetings and/or events per school year. One event shall be a workshop or conference for parents.

PIC Planning Team Membership

The core planning team, with input from the general membership, will be action oriented and plan events guided by the mandate and functions. Membership must include a majority of parents/guardians and reflect the diversity of the parent community within HDSB elementary and secondary panels. The planning team is chaired/co-chaired by a parent(s).

Term

Parent representatives will be required to serve one two-year term. Members must attend at least four (4) regularly scheduled planning meetings throughout the school year. A term runs from November 1st to October 31st. The new core planning team membership will be selected before November 15th within each year.⁸

⁸ . http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_000612_e.htm s. 33(3) a parent involvement committee shall appoint or elect members to the committee before November 15 of the school year and before the first meeting of the committee in the school year. O. Reg. 330/10, s. 6.

What We Know About Parent Engagement: *The Parent Engagement Policy, 2010*

Parents and families, with the support of their school and community, have the primary responsibility for the development of their children's character. Research clearly indicates that good schools become better schools when they are strongly connected with parents as part of the learning community. Parents not only play an important role within the school community, but they have a significant impact on their children's education through the attitudes they help to shape and the direct support they provide to their children.⁹

Parents have a primary influence on their children's attitudes towards school, their learning, and their future success. Research has shown that positive parental aspirations and expectations for their children's educational achievement have a strong relationship with children's actual achievement. The greater the support that families provide for their children's learning and educational progress, the more likely that their children will do well in school and continue on with their education.¹⁰

Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 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 educators can use to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers so that students can reach their full potential. The strategy supports the engagement of all parents with their boards and schools to share ideas and support student learning.¹¹

The *Parent Engagement Policy* identifies a series of key strategies designed to support parents as partners so that they have the opportunity – and the skills, knowledge, and tools – to engage with other education partners in fulfilling Ontario's core priorities for education.¹²

Strategy 1: School Climate

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

⁹ *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010* p. 7
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf

¹⁰ K.L.Mapp, "Having their Say: Parents Describe Why and How They Are engaged in Their Children's Learning," *School Community Journal* 13, no.1 (2002), p.35-64.

¹¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/inclusiveguide.pdf> p. 5-6

¹² *Parents in partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010*
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf, p. 17-24

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.

Strategy 3: Supports for Parents

Provide parents with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to support student learning at home and at school.

Strategy 4: Parent Outreach

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

Dr. Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Engagement/Involvement

Joyce L. Epstein is Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnership Schools, principal research scientist in the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), and professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University. She has over 100 publications on the organization and effects of school, classroom, family, and peer environments, with many focused on school, family, and community connections. In 1995, she established the National Network of Partnership Schools to demonstrate the important intersections of research, policy, and practice for school improvement.¹³

Epstein's *Framework for Six Types of Involvement*¹⁴ are outlined in detail including sample practices, challenges, redefinitions, and expected results in chart format. The six types of involvement include the following:

Type 1: Parenting

Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as student at each grade. Assist schools in understanding families. This means more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. It also means making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, anytime, in varied forms.

Type 2: Communicating

Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. Communications about school programs and student progress means two-way, three-way, and many-way

¹³ <http://www.sagepub.com/authorDetails.nav?contribId=504229> Biography

¹⁴ <http://www.cpirc.org/vertical/Sites/%7B95025A21-DD4C-45C2-AE37-D35CA63B7AD9%7D/uploads/%7B1310DD65-F94A-457D-A680-9EE824084458%7D.PDF> Six Types

channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.

Type 3: Volunteering

Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school and in other locations to support students and school programs. "Volunteer" means anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in anyway, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building.

Type 4: Learning at Home

Involve families with their children at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course program decisions. Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. "Homework" means not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life. "Help" at home, means encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing -- not "teaching" school subjects

Type 5: Decision Making

Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through Home and School Associations, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations. Develop parent leaders and representatives. "Decision making" means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas. Parent "leader" means a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.

Type 6: Collaborating with Community

Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, other groups and service providers in the community. Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. "Community" means not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development. "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools. "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.

What do Successful Partnership Programs Look Like?

School-based parent involvement programs that tend to be the most successful are programs that are built on a philosophical foundation of partnership. There are three spheres of influence in this work: schools, families and communities. The ***external model*** of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that these

contexts may be drawn together or pushed part. In the external model there are some practices that schools, families, and communities conduct separately and some they conduct jointly to influence children's learning and development. The **internal model** of the three spheres of influence show where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community.

In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-friendly schools*. A family-friendly school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. A *school-like family* recognizes that each child is also a student and reinforces the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feeling of success. A *community-like school* refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day.

The results of these efforts to enhance partnerships and engagement benefit everyone – students, parents and families, teachers, administrators, school staff and community partners resulting in increased confidence for our students, their families, and the education system as a whole. Parents will be more supportive because they understand more fully what is happening in the classroom. Educators will have stronger connection with parents, feel supported by them, and have a higher level of job satisfaction. Schools will gain greater recognition for their achievements and their valued role as an important part of community life. The achievement of whole schools as well as individual students can improve as students are supported to fulfill their potential. Relationships built on a foundation of partnership and cooperation has a positive impact on student learning and can help close the achievement gap.¹⁵

Strategies to Increase Parent Involvement:

People For Education in *The Parent Inclusion Manual, 2009*¹⁶ suggests the following strategies for increasing parent involvement:

- Make the school a welcoming place
- Community building activities
- Make connections early and often
- Invite, invite and invite again
- Make meetings friendly and inviting
- Lower expectations and be patient
- Including newcomer and aboriginal parents
- Including low income parents and parents with limited education
- Starting school: parent inclusion in the early years
- Parent inclusion during middle and high school years

¹⁵ *Parents in Partnership: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010*
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/PE_Policy2010.pdf p. 27-28

¹⁶ *The Parent Inclusion Manual*, People for Education, <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/parent-inclusion-manual09>

Strategies for Success by Involvement/Engagement Type

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. The family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the school. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work to create better programs and opportunities for students.¹⁷ The main reason to create these partnerships is to help all children succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work.

Partnerships among schools, families, and community groups are not a luxury – they are a necessity. Many years of research show that involving families and the community contributes to children's academic and social success. Families have a major influence on their children's achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more. Mapp et al. identify the key components of a partnership school.¹⁸

A Partnership School

All families and communities have something great to offer –we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds.¹⁹

Building Relationships

- Family centre is always open, full of interesting learning materials to borrow
- Activities honour families' contributions
- Building is open to community use and social services are available to families.

Linking to learning

- All family activities connect to what students are learning
- Parents and teachers look at student work and assessment results together
- Community groups offer tutoring and homework programs at the school

¹⁷ Epstein, J. L. (2010). *School/family/Community partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share*, <http://www.Kappanmagazing.org> p.81-87

¹⁸ Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., and Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York: Now York, The New Press.

¹⁹ Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., and Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. New York: Now York, The New Press. P. 15

- Students' work goes home on a regular basis

Addressing differences

- Translators are readily available
- Teachers use books and materials about families' culture
- School councils welcome all families
- Local groups help staff reach parents

Supporting Advocacy

- There is a clear, open process for resolving problems
- Teachers contact families each month to discuss student progress
- Student-led parent-teacher conferences are held three times a year

Sharing Power

- Parents and teachers research issues such as prejudice and tracking
- Parent group is focused on improving student achievement
- Families are involved in all major decisions
- Parents can use the school's computers and other resources
- Staff works with local organizers to improve the school and neighborhood.

The following section explores *Epstein's Six Types of Engagement* using several criteria.²⁰

²⁰ Epstein, J. L. (2010). *School/family/Community partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share*, <http://www.Kappanmagazing.org> p.85-87

Type 1: Parenting- *Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.*

Results for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents ▪ Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family ▪ Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework ▪ Good or improved attendance ▪ Awareness of importance of school
Results for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child, and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school ▪ Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting ▪ Feeling of support from school and other parents
Results for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of children ▪ Respect for families' strengths and efforts ▪ Awareness of own skills to share information on child development
Sample practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level ▪ Parent education and other courses or training for parents, e.g. family literacy ▪ Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services ▪ Family information evenings at transition points to preschool, elementary and high school ▪ Information evenings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school ▪ Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs ▪ Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school
Redefinition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops and/or information evenings means more than a session held at the school at a particular time. It may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, anytime, in varied forms.

Type 2: Communicating - *Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.*

Results for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improves grades ▪ Understanding of school policies on behaviour, attendance, and other areas of student conduct ▪ Informed decisions about courses and programs ▪ Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator
Results for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding school programs and policies ▪ Monitoring and awareness of child's progress ▪ Responding effectively to students' problems ▪ Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers
Results for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly ▪ Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications ▪ Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress
Sample practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Conferences with every parent at least once/year, with follow-ups as needed ▪ Language translators to assist families as needed ▪ Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comment ▪ Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences about improvement ▪ Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and other communications ▪ Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools ▪ Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and non-print communications ▪ Consider parents who do not speak English well, read well, or need large type ▪ Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, etc.) ▪ Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home
Redefinitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communications about school programs and student's progress means two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.

Type 3: Volunteering - *Recruit and organize parent help and support.*

Results for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skill in communicating with adults ▪ Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or target attention from volunteers ▪ Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions from parents and other volunteers
Results for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home ▪ Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education ▪ Awareness that families are welcomed and valued at school ▪ Gains in specific skills of volunteer work
Results for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school ▪ Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children ▪ Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers
Sample practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students and other parents ▪ Parent room or family centre for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families ▪ Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times and locations of volunteers ▪ Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information ▪ Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recruit volunteers widely so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome ▪ Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work during school hours to participate ▪ Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teachers, and student needs; and recognize efforts of the participants are productive.
Redefinitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Volunteer means anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time not just during the school day and at the school building

Type 4: Learning at Home - *Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.*

<p>Results for students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gains in skills, abilities, and grades linked to homework and class work ▪ Homework completion ▪ Positive attitude towards schoolwork ▪ View of parent as more similar to teachers and of home as more similar to school ▪ Self-concept of ability as learner
<p>Results for parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year ▪ Discussions of school, class work, and homework ▪ Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject ▪ Appreciation of teaching skills ▪ Awareness of child as a learner
<p>Results for teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better design of homework assignments ▪ Respectful of family time ▪ Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning ▪ Satisfaction with family involvement and support.
<p>Sample practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information for families about skills required for students in all subjects at each grade ▪ Information about homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home ▪ Information about how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments ▪ Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families about what they are learning ▪ Calendars with activities for parents and students at home ▪ Family math, science, and reading activities at school ▪ Summer learning activities ▪ Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning post-secondary destinations.
<p>Challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework, e.g., weekly or bi-monthly that gives students responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children’s class work ▪ Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers ▪ Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions.
<p>Redefinitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homework means not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life. ▪ Help at home means encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing – not “teaching” school subjects.

Type 5: Decision Making - *Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.*

Results for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of representation of families in school decisions ▪ Understanding that student rights are protected ▪ Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students
Results for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Input into policies that affect child's education ▪ Feeling of ownership of school ▪ Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions ▪ Shared experiences and connections with other families ▪ Awareness of school, district, and provincial policies
Results for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions ▪ View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles.
Sample practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Active School Council, Home & School Association, School Improvement Plan pillars, and Parent Involvement Committee for parent leadership and participation ▪ Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements ▪ District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement ▪ Information about school or local elections for school representatives ▪ Networks to link all families with parent representatives.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and other groups in the school ▪ Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents ▪ Include students, along with parents, in decision-making groups.
Redefinition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision making means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions towards shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas ▪ Parent leader means a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.

Type 6: Collaborating with Community - *Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.*

Results for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences ▪ Awareness of careers and options for future education and work ▪ Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community.
Results for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services ▪ Interactions with other families in community activities ▪ Awareness of schools ▪ Role in the community and of community's contributions to the school.
Results for teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction ▪ openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice ▪ knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.
Sample practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs and services ▪ information about community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students ▪ service integration through partnerships involving school, civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations and businesses. ▪ Service to the community by students, families, and schools, e.g. recycling, art, music, drama and other activities for seniors or others ▪ Participation of graduates, former staff in school programs for students.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities ▪ Inform, families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships, and volunteer opportunities ▪ Ensure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services ▪ Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education.
Redefinition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community means not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development ▪ Community is created by not only low or high social or economic qualities but by strengths and talents to support students, families and schools ▪ Community means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.

A Synopsis of the Legislation Governing PICs

Making a Difference: A Practical Handbook for Parent Involvement Committee Members, 2011 is a key source of information about the legislative requirements of the PIC.²¹ The purpose of the *Handbook* is to provide practical, helpful, and user-friendly information for PIC members to support them in meeting the requirements of Ontario Regulation 612/00 as amended by Ontario Regulation 330/10.²²

PICs are not required to develop a constitution as their roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Regulation. PICs are required to create by-laws that govern their affairs and establish operational procedures reflecting the needs of the local community. Mandatory by-laws include the following specifics:

- The number of parent members on the PIC;
- The number of community representatives (up to three) on the PIC;
- Procedures for the election or appointment of parent members, for the appointment of community members and for the filling of vacancies in these positions;
- The number of optional members (representatives of the board's employee groups) the board may appoint (non-voting);
- The election of members to offices;
- The length of members' terms;
- The rules for conflict of interest;
- A conflict resolution process for internal disputes.

Additional By-laws and Terms of Reference

Transparency in operation is essential to the running of an effective committee. Although it is not required to do so, the PIC may choose to make additional by-laws or terms of reference to provide members with direction to guide their operations and help them work effectively. These may include by-laws or terms of reference concerning:

- General guidelines regarding meetings (such as those related to attendance and promptness – operating norms);
- The number and types of subcommittees that may be established;
- Timelines and processes for submitting agenda items;
- The process for placing emergency items on the agenda;
- The process for calling special meetings to deal with time-sensitive matters;
- A code of ethics e.g., the boundaries of the role and responsibilities of the committee and the manner in which members are to interact in order for democratic principles to be followed and potential conflict minimized.
- A process for making supplemental appointments to address diversity.

²¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/HandbookPIC.pdf>

²² http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_000612_e.htm

By-law details in the *Handbook* include:

- selection of PIC members and criteria p.17
- filling vacancies p.19
- establishing terms for members p.19
- understanding conflict of interest, avoiding conflict of interest and duty to declare conflict of interest p.20
- conflict resolution strategies including dealing with conflict and avoiding conflict p.21
- setting goals, timelines, responsibilities p.22
- developing an action plan, implementing the action plan and evaluating the plan p.23
- communication – importance of, communicating with school councils, director and trustees and network with other PICs p.24-25
- consultation: by the PIC, by the Board, by the Ministry p.25
- accountability: Ministry funding reporting, summary of activities p.26

Characteristics of Effective PICs

The PIC provides advice to the director of education and trustees based on input received from parents, usually through school councils. Although PIC may receive advice on a variety of issues, it must focus on those issues that fall within the parameters of its mandate. The PIC mandate includes:

- keep student achievement and well-being as their first priority;
- focus on the needs and interests of all students;
- composed of members who represent the diversity of the board;
- actively involved in assisting school councils in the areas engaging parents in their children's education, creating a welcoming environment, and recognizing the diversity of the parents in their school community;
- promote effective, ongoing communication among all partners in education;
- establish positive relationship with the director of education and trustees;
- provide feedback to parents, letting them know how their advice and ideas have been used;
- have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities;
- have a clear and consistent process for decision making and conflict resolution;
- are familiar with funding opportunities and resources provided by the Parent Engagement Office (PEO) of the Ministry of Education and with the Initiatives of the PEO²³;
- maintain high ethical standards.

By working collaboratively in partnership with school councils, parents, community, the school board and the Ministry, the PIC achieves its mandate to help every student achieve. Parents are making a difference!

²³ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/PIC.html>