

April

## INSIDE this issue

02

Building Involvement  
on Your Council's  
Facebook Page

04

50 Fun Things To Do  
Outside with Kids  
as a Family

06

Outdoor  
Activity Cube

07

Outdoor Oven

08

Social Media Tools

11

Outdoor Tic-Tac-Toe

12

School Councils –  
COVID has Changed  
Everything!

2021

ParentsEngagedInEducation.ca

PARENTS ENGAGED IN EDUCATION



# SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 56

The month of April brings more stress to our school system with the closure of all schools and a move to online learning for at least the next 30 days.

Our newsletter this month focuses on three main areas:

1. Changing focus for school councils from fundraising and event planning to community support.
2. Outdoor activities for families to take advantage of with the nicer weather coming soon.
3. Tips for increasing school council social media profile in order to get more resources out to your parent community.

We remind every volunteer to give themselves a “pat on the back” for continuing to try and make a difference for the students/families in your school.

Check out [www.parentsengagedineducation.ca](http://www.parentsengagedineducation.ca) as we continue to offer new blogs and engagement ideas for families during this difficult time.

We also encourage every parent to take a few minutes to remember the joy that comes from just spending time with your children. Our children need our involvement now, more than ever!!

Stay well everyone,

Theresa Pastore,  
Executive Director , Parents Engaged in Education

# BUILDING INVOLVEMENT ON YOUR COUNCIL'S FACEBOOK PAGE

Here is some advice on how to build involvement and increase engagement on your school council's Facebook page.

## **1. ADD VIDEOS AND PHOTOS WHEN POSSIBLE**

A 30 second to 1 min video from your last school event will tell a much better story than a couple of lines of text. Be sure to always include an image when possible.

## **2. ADD EYE CATCHING IMAGES**

Nothing catches the eye more than an attractive image. Try using a free graphic design tool like Canva to make plain photos standout. Canva is a browser based graphic design tool loaded with enough easy-to-use features and functionality that anyone can use.

## **3. HAVING TWO ADMINISTRATORS ON YOUR PAGE IS KEY**

You need a backup in case someone gets sick, moves away, or has to give up her duties for whatever reason.

## **4. BE CAREFUL HOW YOU RESPOND TO NEGATIVE COMMENTS**

If someone complains about a group event, for example, politely explain your point of view (and listen to theirs). Use the opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. Ask questions, such as what didn't you like about the event? And ask for opinions, what would you like to see happen differently at next years event? Using this strategy will help to get out the correct information or to clear up any misunderstandings. Remember you want to show people that you hear their concerns and that you're open to feedback.

## **5. POST SCHOOL AND PARENTING TIPS REGULARLY**

Not only do they provide helpful info to your school community; they also help parents feel more connected to your group, which will make them more likely to get involved on your page. It is also a good opportunity to ask parents for feedback. Have they tried this tip before? What did and did not work for them?

## 6. FRIEND PARENTS YOU KNOW PERSONALLY, THEN TAG THEM WHEN YOU POST TO YOUR GROUP PAGE

Those posts will show up in their notifications, and they may be compelled to share with others who might then join your Facebook community.

## 7. ASK PEOPLE TO GET INVOLVED ON YOUR FACEBOOK PAGE

Remind your school community at school council meetings, at school council events, in emails and in other correspondence. Let them know that this engagement tool is available to them.

## 8. ASK FOR INPUT, AND USE IT WHEN YOU CAN

People like sharing their opinions—and they want to see them translated into action.

## 9. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FACEBOOK'S EVENT CALENDAR

Take the time to post upcoming school events using the Facebook calendar and invite your group to participate. Facebook events are the perfect way to get users' attention and keep it.

## 10. POST YOUR PARENT COUNCIL MEETING AGENDA IN ADVANCE

Let your school community know what is going to be discussed at your next parent meeting. Posting your meeting agenda will help keep parents informed and will encourage meeting attendance.



Parents Engaged in Education have designed a **"DREAM TREE"** banner. This vinyl banner is 5' x 6.5' with hundreds of blank leaves for parents and students to write their dreams.

This is a wonderful example of positive messages which will inspire the entire school community all year round.

GREAT FOR CURRICULUM OR PARENT/TEACHER INTERVIEW NIGHTS!!

Our aim is to raise enough funds this year to offer priority schools in challenged communities a **"DREAM TREE"** to encourage their communities to strive for the best they can be.

While we work on this program, if your school would like to purchase a **"DREAM TREE"** for your community you may do so by contacting  
Theresa.pastore@  
parentsengagedineducation.ca.

**The cost is \$200.00 plus shipping**

(This is cost recovery only, we do not charge in excess of our cost)

# 50 FUN THINGS TO DO OUTSIDE WITH KIDS AS A FAMILY

*By Amanda Rock*

*Updated Fact checked by Donna Murray, RN, BSN*

Playing outside with your children isn't just about encouraging more physical activity. A 2019 study found that kids who spent the least amount of time in green spaces were 55% more likely to develop psychiatric issues, such as anxiety and mood disorders, as adolescents or adults.

And while wrangling kids of varying ages to participate in a single activity can seem difficult, we've rounded up 50 mostly free things to do outside as a family to help you find the perfect fit. Next time the weather looks inviting, try these creative ways to play outside:

- Go for a walk. Set a timer to see how far you can walk in five minutes, 10, 20, or 30. Note whether you're going to make a loop or take an out-and-back route so you can plan accordingly.
- Ride bikes.
- Fly kites.
- Blow bubbles using a DIY mix.
- Play classic outdoor games such as Red Rover, Red Light Green Light, or Steal the Bacon.
- Host a nature scavenger hunt. Look for pine cones, acorns, and other common outdoor items and tally who found the most pieces.
- Hula hoop.
- Roller skate.
- Play Follow the Leader through your yard or neighborhood.
- Draw a hopscotch board with chalk.
- Make homemade playdough and bring it outside. It's less messy than playing on the floor or carpet.
- Drive to a neighboring town and check out their playgrounds. Maybe you'll find a new favorite.
- Set up a canvas and let your little ones paint. Again, less mess to clean up.

- Find a shady tree and read.
- Have a picnic at a local park, beach, or your own backyard.
- Do things you'd normally do inside, like play board games or have a pillow fight.
- Make s'mores.
- Plant a small container garden.
- Film a home movie.
- Eat homemade popsicles.
- Have a water balloon fight.
- Wash the car.
- Go for a group jog.
- Play wiffleball or kickball.
- Take turns playing photographer with your phone or camera.
- Make mud pies. Who can make the fanciest creation?
- Sing as loud as you can.
- Is it getting dark outside? Play hide and seek with flashlights (and partners if you have little ones).
- Water the plants. Give your preschooler some basic experiments to consider: Does the hose make water come out faster than the watering can? Which is easier to control?
- Build paper airplanes. Who can make theirs fly the farthest?
- Search for bugs.
- Set up a lemonade stand.
- Run through the sprinkler.
- Make homemade bird feeders out of pine cones, peanut butter, and birdseed.
- Drive to another neighborhood and go for a walk there. Pretend to be observational scientists: What's different? What is the same?
- Gather up a wagon, stuffed animals, and some pots and pans and have an instant parade.
- Look for things like pine cones, sticks, shells, and rocks to make a mobile.
- Play on the swing set in the dark.
- Pick flowers (from your own yard).
- Find shapes in the clouds.
- Take a nap in a hammock or just on a blanket you lay on the grass.
- Go "fishing." Set up a wading pool with objects and let your little one try to catch them.
- Color eggs outside with less mess.
- Pitch a tent.
- Paint rocks.
- Host a dance party.
- Have a water gun fight.
- Learn to do cartwheels.
- Build a fort using lawn furniture.
- Walk barefoot in the grass. Then try the cement (make sure it isn't too hot first). Ask your preschooler to compare what they feel like. What other surfaces can you make your feet touch?

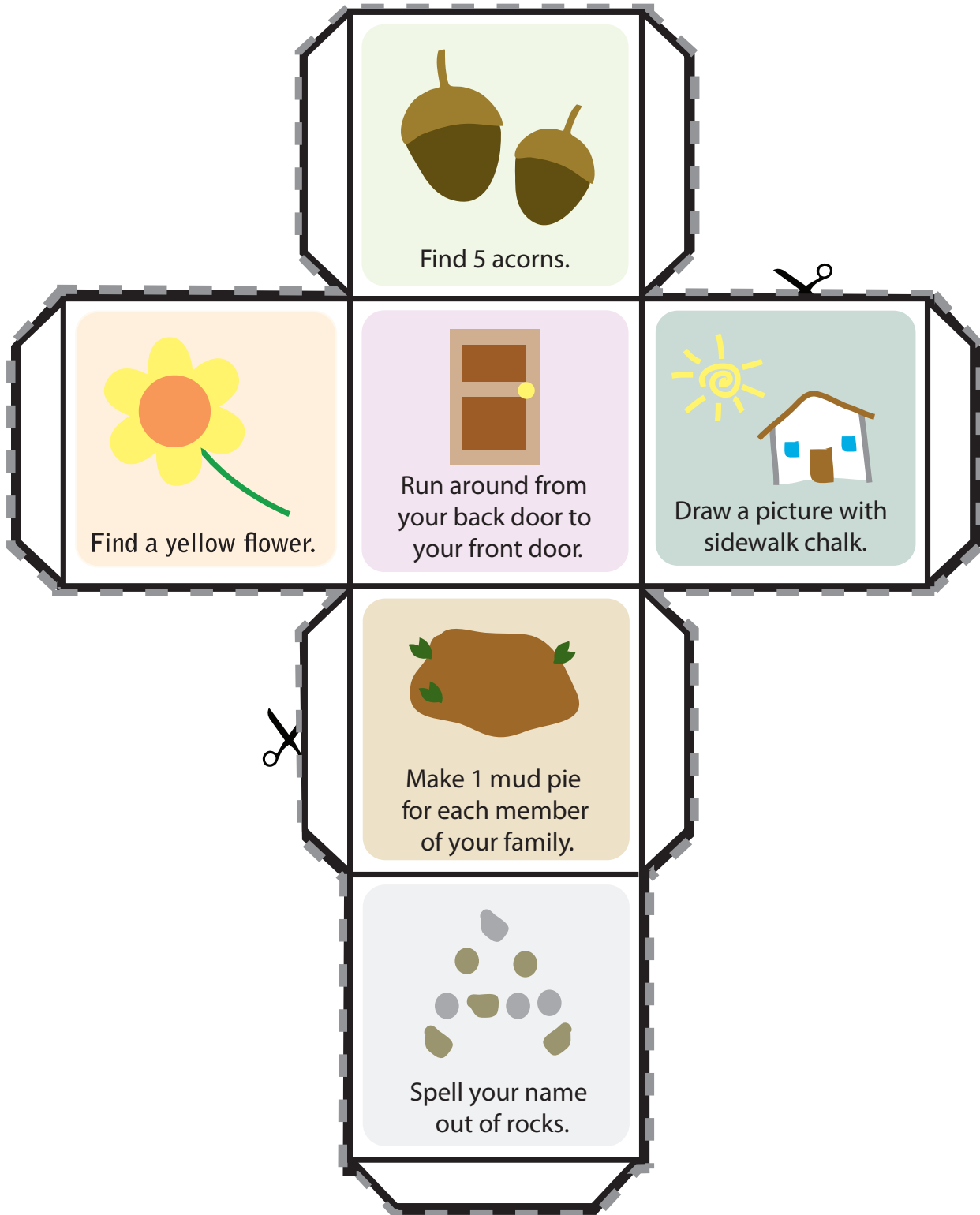
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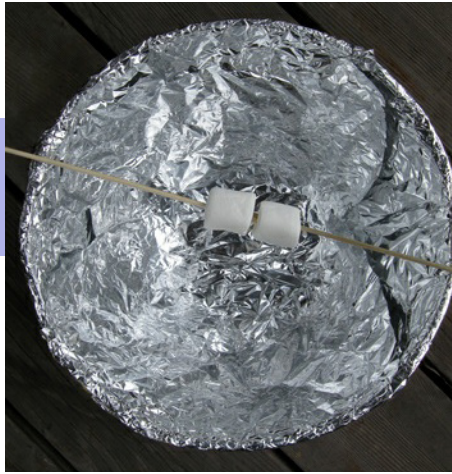
1. Engemann K, Pedersen CB, Arge L, Tsirogiannis C, Mortensen PB, Svenning JC. [Residential green space in childhood is associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders from adolescence into adulthood](#). Proc Natl Acad Sci USA. 2019;116(11):5188-5193.doi:10.1073/pnas.1807504116

# OUTDOOR ACTIVITY CUBE

HAVE A GROWN UP HELP YOU CUT OUT, FOLD AND TAPE TOGETHER THE CUBE. WE RECOMMEND PRINTING OUT THE CUBE ON THICK PAPER. TO PLAY, ROLL THE CUBE AND DO THE ACTIVITY THAT IS FACING UP.







# OUTDOOR OVEN

Most preschoolers love to help their parents in the kitchen. In this activity, your child gets to be the chef while she learns about how heat changes food. On the next warm and sunny day, head outdoors to make an outside oven with your child. After the food is “cooked”, you will have a yummy treat to enjoy together.

## WHAT YOU NEED:

- 4 large marshmallows
- 2 wooden skewers
- 2 deep plastic bowls
- Aluminum foil
- Chocolate bar and graham crackers (optional)
- Chair or stool

## WHAT YOU DO:

1. Cover the inside of both bowls with aluminum foil.
2. Put two marshmallows on each skewer. Be careful that your child does not poke herself with the sharp ends. You can cut off the pointed ends after the marshmallows are on the skewers.
3. Take your child outside and ask her to find the sunniest place in the yard. To make sure that animals do not disturb the experiment, place one bowl on the chair in the sun. Have your child look at the bowl with foil and ask her if the light looks any brighter on the bowl. Talk about how the aluminum foil reflects the sun and makes the rays hotter.
4. Have her put the skewer with the marshmallows across the top of the bowl. Make sure that the bottom of the marshmallow is not touching the bottom of the bowl.
5. Ask your child to find a shady spot in the yard. Put another marshmallow on a skewer and set it across the second bowl. Place the bowl on a chair in the shady spot.
6. In about 15 minutes, have your child check on the bowls. Depending on the temperature outside, you may need to wait another 15 minutes. Have her check on the sunny spot and the shady spot. Talk about any differences in the two marshmallows.
7. When the marshmallow begins to melt, ask her why the marshmallow in the sun melted before the marshmallow in the shade. Ask her if she can feel the difference in the temperature of the two spots.
8. When the marshmallow is soft and gooey, let your child eat the marshmallows. To make s'mores, put a small piece of chocolate on the graham cracker and put the marshmallow on top of the chocolate. Put another piece of chocolate and a graham cracker on top of the marshmallow. Enjoy the tasty treat that your child cooked while experimenting with science along the way!

# SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS



TweetDeck

*By Adrian Marmara*

Being a part of your school's parent council can be an onerous task. You are often left with very little time on your hands as there is much to do throughout the school year. Having to work on your parent council social media presence doesn't have to be stressful and time-consuming, if you learn to use the tools that will make you more productive.

Here are some tools in my social media tool box that I have used with my Parent Council that I have found to be really useful. It has freed up some of my time without having to cut back on the quality and/or quantity of our parent council's social media marketing.

## **BUFFER**

Don't you hate having to always remember to pull out your phone and post when your next school pizza lunch or event is? Don't fret.

What if I told you you could schedule your social media updates over multiple accounts? Buffer does this and is a smarter way to share and schedule your information on Social Media. What Buffer does is simple. You add

updates to your Buffer queue on your multiple social media accounts and it will be posted for you well spaced out over the day. Once you have used the tool for a little while it will even suggest the best posting times for better engagement.

Not in front of your desktop? No worries Buffer also has a mobile app that you can use on your Android or iOS device.

Keep in mind that Buffer does charge for premium accounts. I find that most school parent councils can get by using their free individual account. However, if you need to schedule more than 10 social media posts per account, I would suggest upgrading to their "Awesome" account which can be had for \$10 USD/month. Buffer does provide a discount for prepaid yearly subscriptions.



**For more information on Buffer visit:**  
<https://buffer.com/>



## TWEETDECK

If your school only uses Twitter, another great tool to use is TweetDeck. It is free and will allow you to schedule your posts along with some other added features not found in Buffer such as TweetShrink. TweetShrink, when applied, will attempt to shorten your wordy tweets because we all know sometimes it is hard to get your message out in 140 characters or less. TweetDeck will also allow you to get notifications and alerts. If want to make sure you don't miss important tweets from other parents, schools or school boards using a specific hashtag you can set up a pop-up or audio alert within TweetDeck.



**TweetDeck**

For more information on TweetDeck visit:  
<https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/>

## CANVA

Now that you have been introduced to two social media tools to make posting your parent council's social media information quick and easy it is time to take some of that saved time and put it into jazzing up your social media posts. With Canva, you can add images to attract your audience to your social media posts.

Canva is a tool loaded with enough easy-to-use features and functionality that anyone can use to help make your social media content more engaging

and look like your parent council paid a graphic designer to put it together. It has an easy to use drag and drop interface that you can access from anywhere by simply using your web browser. It has a plethora of images, fonts and ready made layouts to help speed through the creative process. The best thing about Canva, however, is that it is free! The only time you'll need to pay is when you decide to use one or more of their premium images or layouts. In most cases these premium images/layouts sell for the low price of \$1 each.



For more information on Canva visit: <https://www.canva.com/create/social-media-graphics/>

## DON'T WASTE ANY MORE OF YOUR TIME. START FILLING UP YOUR OWN SOCIAL MEDIA TOOL BOX.

Using tools like Buffer, TweetDeck and Canva will help remove the stress of having to post engaging Social Media posts. This will allow you to spend more of your time focusing on other Parent Council priorities. You don't always have to work harder, just smarter. Using these tools should cut down your time and will help make putting your social media marketing together easier. Not to mention, these tools will also help create a polished social media presence.



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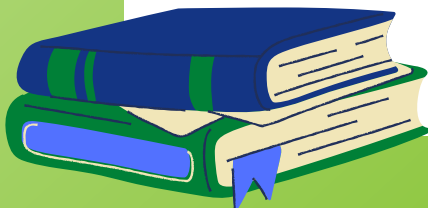
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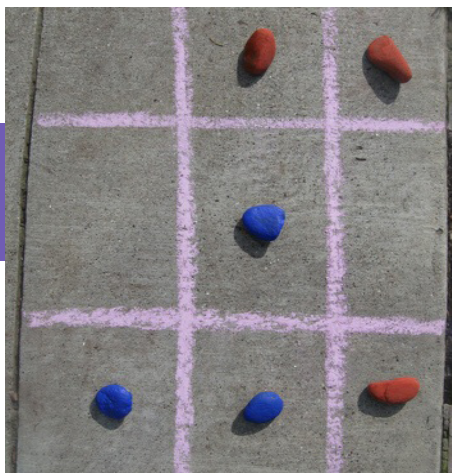
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# OUTDOOR TIC-TAC-TOE

If your child would rather stay glued to the TV instead of playing outside, try this simple and fun outdoor game to convince him otherwise. Everyone loves the game tic-tac-toe because it's competitive but is easy enough for smaller kids to understand. Add this twist to the family favorite that your child will love. Paint designs onto rocks to use in place of X's and O's so you can play outside on a chalk tic-tac-toe grid! Since you're using rocks, it's easy to play over and over again. This game will help your elementary student develop her thinking skills by strategizing what her next move will be. It's a great game for kids because it gets them outdoors, using their creativity, and get them thinking!

## WHAT YOU NEED:

- 10 rocks
- Sidewalk chalk
- Paint in assorted colours
- Paintbrushes

## WHAT YOU DO:

1. **PREPARE:** Hunt for rocks! Look for 10 between the size of a half-dollar coin and the palm of your hand. It's best if the rocks are round, smooth, and flat.
2. Help your child come up with a design, or pick 2 colours she likes. Paint 5 rocks with one color or one design on them, and 5 other rocks with a different colour or design on them. Some fun ideas for designs are ladybugs, bees, stars, hearts, flowers, smiley faces, or animals faces. Set aside the painted rocks and let them dry.
3. With the chalk, draw a tic-tac-toe board on the ground. The size of the grid will depend on the size of the rocks you're using. Start with two lines vertically, with two horizontal lines overlapping the vertical ones. You should end up with a grid of 9 squares.
4. **PLAY:** Now it's time for some outdoor fun! Have the players decide which design they want to use.
5. Players compete against each other to see who can outsmart the other by getting 3 of their rocks in a row horizontally, diagonally, or vertically! The first person to do this is the winner. This game is great because once it's over, there's no need to erase and start over. Simply take the rocks out and start again! You can even play on rainy days; just make a tic-tac-toe grid on a poster board, take out the painted rocks, and you're ready to go!
6. To add extra educational value to this game, help your child practice a certain letter of the alphabet by creating designs that start with the letter. For example, the letter B could be represented with 5 banana designs and 5 boat designs!

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## SCHOOL COUNCILS –

# COVID HAS CHANGED EVERYTHING!

When COVID first changed school life back in March 2020, I think we all thought it would be a few months of change, but things would return to normal quite soon. Little did we know then that it would impact schools for more than a year and completely change the work and operations of school councils throughout the province.

School councils have been faced with many new challenges. School councils are learning new ways to engage school communities. They find themselves working with Principals who are overloaded just trying to keep students and staff safe, all the while, developing new virtual tools to host meetings. Such challenges have been sometimes overwhelming for council members.

First and foremost, I think every parent who has continued to work on behalf of their school council should give themselves a pat on the back. This is the year when trying to do anything besides taking care of our own children and family, has been a tremendous feat. This year has been especially hard on school councils. In past years, fundraising has

been a large part of the work of their council. Trying to change models to accommodate and support schools this year just adds to the stress.

This is why there is no better time than now to really change how we see parent engagement. Since there were no events at the school and fundraising events or programs have been cancelled, we can lose our long-held opinions that parents are only engaged when they participate in these types of activities at the school. With virtual learning being a reality for every family at some point this year, parents are truly engaged, now more than ever, in the most important aspect of their children's education – support, encouragement and being keenly aware of their child's mental health.

These areas are actually what parent engagement should have been measured against all along. Fundraising and participating in school events is just one-way parents can be engaged. However, there could be a thousand reasons parents do not attend events at school, some of which come from their personal struggles to keep their families fed

and well. Parents who are attuned to their child's education and the impact that mental health has on it are engaged parents.

The most important thing that councils should concentrate on right now is supporting their school community in any way they can. The only way to do that is to find out what the school community needs by conducting a very simple survey of parent/family needs. Trying to make a plan to support your community and not having an understanding of what the greatest needs are will lead to doing work which does not produce the results you may have hoped for.

I recently encountered a family of a single mother with four children (2 elementary and 2 secondary level children). All four children were learning virtually because they lived in a small apartment which had high rates of infection. The mom does not read or write so the responsibility of helping the younger children is falling on the oldest child who is in grade ten. You could feel the stress that this family, especially the oldest child, was experiencing. I asked if anyone from the school community had reached out to them to assist, the answer was no. Imagine if someone from the school council had reached out and discovered the challenges this family was experiencing. Perhaps with the support of the school administrator, they could connect this family with someone who could help support the younger children while the secondary students could focus on their own work.

I have also heard from school council members who are frustrated that they are offering a number of virtual sessions for parents and yet participation

is very low. One of the reasons this might be is that parents are "Zoomed" out. They are tired of watching videos and engaging in new programs. Many may be working online at home for 8 or more hours a day and when they are not working online, they are helping their children with their virtual learning. Just thinking about sitting in front of the computer for another hour or two is just not appealing.

This is not the fault of the organizers; it is just the reality of the world we are all living in right now.

It is more important than ever that we are in tune with members of our councils and watch for volunteer burnout. Every family is going through a tremendous amount of stress right now and there may be members of your council who don't want to be forthcoming about their personal situation, but now is the time for constant check-ins. In the past it may have been two or three people who have taken on the majority of the work of the council, but now is the time to either spread the work to other members as well or to simply do less this year. If you have to do less this year, please do not feel disappointed or frustrated. We are all doing the best we can right now. Keeping expectations in line with the reality of the world we are living in today will result in a more positive experience for all council members.

I hope that everyone takes a moment to celebrate the work you have done with your own family and that, despite all the challenges, you continue to care about your school community.

My hat is off to all of you!!!



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in this *together*.**



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stay safe.**



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students, parents,  
and families will  
get through this  
together.