



# SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2020 • VOLUME 51

## INSIDE

### ▼ *this issue*

- 01 Virtual School Councils and Student's Mental Health
- 02 How to Talk With Your Child When You Feel Concerned They May Be Struggling With a Mental Health Problem
- 03 Tips for Your School Council Meetings - Embracing a New Normal
- 04 How to Work With Your School to Access Support for Your Child's Mental Health
- 05 Christmas Around the World
- 12 Tips on Building a Multicultural School Council

Photo by Irina Irsher from Pexels

## VIRTUAL SCHOOL COUNCILS AND STUDENT'S MENTAL HEALTH

This month's newsletter continues to provide tips for school councils that are now forced to operate virtually and how to make these meetings welcoming and informative for all parents. In addition, we will continue to focus on student mental health and this month we are including articles from School Mental Health Ontario for parents to help them work with their children and support their mental health.

Many school council members are taking to social media to share concerns and questions about how they are expected to operate this year. Many of these members are questioning how to do successful

fundraising during COVID-19. From a personal perspective, I would like to see all school councils forgo fundraising this year. There is enough being expected of all of us right now without feeling pressured to financially support their schools.

I think that this is the time to really focus on building school communities that are welcoming and inclusive of all families. This is the time to embrace every family, whether their children are attending school in-person or are learning virtually this year. It is the time to develop deeper understanding of each student's culture, family history and needs.

This is the real work of a school council. School councils are tasked at being advisors to the school administrator and to hold the public education system accountable to parents. You can only do this job properly by having a full understanding of your school community.

We are including an article we posted on our blog some time ago, "BUILDING MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL COUNCILS". Although some of these strategies may not work in the virtual world, the spirit of the work remains the same.

I hope you find this month's newsletter informative and useful to school council members and all parents in supporting their children and school community.

Stay safe.

*Theresa Pastore*

*Executive Director,  
Parents Engaged in Education*

---

# TAKE ACTION

## How to Talk With Your Child When You Feel Concerned They May Be Struggling With a Mental Health Problem

It can be challenging to talk about mental health. Sometimes parents, like others, avoid the conversation because they don't know how to start or they worry that they might put thoughts into their child's head that had not been there, and will, therefore, make things worse. Research tells us that this is not the case. Bringing up worries, concerns, changes in behaviour etc. with your child will open the lines of communication rather than worsen the situation.

### **Here are some tips to help you talk to your child about mental health:**

- Find a quiet time when you are unlikely to have interruptions to begin the conversation.
- Reassure your child that they can tell you anything and you will not get angry with them (even if you get scared).
- Start the conversation with describing changes you have noticed in their mood, behaviour, reactions etc. e.g., "I have noticed that you seem to be crying more." If you have had conversations with your

child's teacher about concerns, include comments from the teacher's observations.

- Share that you "wonder" about how your child might be feeling, what they might be thinking, what they might be worried about etc. e.g., "I wonder if you're feeling sad about losing your friendship with Sam."
- Allow your child time to reflect before they answer.
- Stay calm and don't abandon the conversation if your child responds with "Nothing is wrong..... leave me alone". If this happens, reassure your child that you are there for them. Give your child some time and then try again.
- If your child tells you anything that makes you worried ( e.g., thoughts of suicide, overwhelming anxiety, self-injurious behaviour

like cutting) reassure your child that you are glad they told you and you will help them find the right professional to talk to, and you will be there for them throughout the journey.



**School  
Mental Health  
Ontario**

**Santé mentale  
en milieu scolaire  
Ontario**

[smho-smso.ca/emhc/](https://smho-smso.ca/emhc/)

# TIPS FOR YOUR VIRTUAL SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETINGS – EMBRACING A NEW NORMAL

To say that the dramatic change in the manner in which school councils have to operate during these difficult times is challenging, is an understatement.

As we all transition to the virtual world, we can all use some tips on making meetings welcoming and informative to your school community.

Below are some tips which may be helpful as you plan your meetings:

## **1. Test before you start your meetings.**

In order for school council chairs to be more confident in conducting virtual meetings, you might set up a TEST meeting with just a few members to look at how the meeting is set up and what controls need to be in place.

## **2. Getting meetings started.**

Be sure to allow up to 5 minutes for all interested parents to join the meeting as it may take first timers a few minutes to get online and join the meeting.

## **3. Post meeting rules before the meeting begins.** To respect everyone's privacy and

time it is advantageous to post rules before the meeting starts. Meeting rules may include some of the following:

- Advise participants if the meeting is being recorded and invite them to mute their microphones and turn off their cameras if they wish.
- Set the mood by including a rule on the meeting being a welcoming and inclusive space for all parents at the school. All participants who do not conduct themselves in a respectful manner will be removed from the meeting by the chair.
- To keep everyone from speaking at once, ask participants to submit their request to speak through the "chat" feature and the chair will call on one person at a time while all other microphones are muted.

## **4. Distribute the agenda through email prior to the meeting, if possible.**

Post the agenda on the meeting site in order to keep participants focused and moving along in order that the council business can be handled.

## 5. Set a Co-Host.

Having a co-host will assist the chair in monitoring the “chat” feature to see who might like to speak to an issue or pass on questions members are raising through the chat.

## 6. Be yourself, relax and enjoy the meeting.

You will have great meetings if you can relax and share with the same approaches you would if the meeting were in-person. No need to be scripted or formal, people want to enjoy the interaction.

## 7. Be somewhat flexible with timing.

As people may join the meeting a bit late, take a moment to re-introduce yourself as you see new members coming into the meeting and thank them for attending while pointing them to the item on the agenda that is being discussed at that time.

## 8. Link documents to the agenda.

If reports or other information is being presented during the meeting be sure to link them to the agenda so that everyone can review.

## 9. Make sure your meeting is kept private.

Establish a password to enter your meeting will ensure that only parents in the school community can enter the meeting.

## 10. Expect the unexpected.

I think we are all getting used to pets and children popping up while we are participating in an online meeting. Relax and don't worry about it, let all members know that you expect the unexpected so they shouldn't worry either if their furry friends or kids decide to drop in.

We hope these tips will be helpful to your team.

# TAKE ACTION

## How to Work with your School to Access Support for your Child's Mental Health

In Ontario, schools are the most common place where children and youth access mental health supports. You can work with your school to help make sure your child gets the support they need.

Educators and other school staff are trained on how to create mentally healthy classrooms and how to recognize when a student may be struggling and in need of additional help. Early identification of mental health concerns can help prevent future problems.

- If you're concerned about your child's mental health, you can speak to your child's classroom teacher.
- Be specific about your concerns so you and the teacher can figure out the best way to help. Share any information you think may be helpful to the teacher—for example:
  - situations your child has dealt with that may impact their mental health
  - approaches that seem to help your child
  - specific behaviours you're noticing
- Ask the teacher what they've noticed at school. Some children may seem fine at school, but display different behaviours at home. Discuss what you're seeing.
- You can request a meeting with other school staff as well to talk through how to support your child. The teacher may suggest this too.
- Ask about options for ongoing communication so you can share new information with the teacher.

Educators aren't mental health professionals and can't diagnose issues. But, they do have an important role in the circle of support for students and remain a vital part of the support team for students who are receiving treatment.



**School  
Mental Health  
Ontario**

**Santé mentale  
en milieu scolaire  
Ontario**

[smho-smso.ca/emhc/](https://smho-smso.ca/emhc/)



# Christmas Around THE WORLD

*The holiday season is celebrated by a wide range of communities in the multi-cultural rich country. This article is to briefly describe how the holiday season is celebrated around the world.*



## CANADA

With a population that is made up of people from many different cultural backgrounds, there are many different types of celebrations that take place. Many of the traditions and celebrations come from French, English, Irish, Scottish and Native/First Nation influences as these were among the first to call Canada home.

### ***Fun facts:***

- Canadians like to decorate their homes with Christmas trees, lights and other seasonal items.
- With the winter weather many Canadian's ski, toboggan, skate etc. during the Christmas holidays
- Turkey, Stuffing, Mash Potatoes, vegetables are among the specialties at a "traditional" Christmas meal.
- The Santa Claus Parade in Toronto is one of the oldest and largest street parades in the world. It started in 1913 and is broadcast around the world.



## AUSTRALIA

With this country experiencing the complete opposite weather as Canada, their Christmas is actually celebrated at the beginning of summer!!

### *Fun facts:*

- Australians often go house to house singing carols on Christmas Eve.
- They decorate their houses with bunches of Christmas Bush, a native tree of small green leaves and small cream flowers.
- In each state capital city there are large groups of carolers who sing in a candlelight ceremony.
- Australians love to put on Christmas pageants in halls, parks or take part in parades and firework displays.
- On Boxing Day most people go out and have barbecues and swim at the beach.



## BELGIUM

Children in Belgium believe that "Saint Nicholas" brings them presents on December 6th, which is St. Nicholas Day.

In Belgium there are 3 different official languages, Flemish (Dutch), French and German. This means that saying Merry Christmas might be heard as "Vrolijk Kerstfeest" in Flemish, "Joyeux Noel" in French and "Frohe Weihnachten" in German.

### *Fun facts:*

- Children put their shoes in front of the fireplace, together with some treats for Sinterklass.
- Sinterklass arrives on a horse and comes down the chimney to leave presents in the shoes.
- Just like in Canada, Sinterklass keeps a book with a list of all the children who have been "naughty" or "nice".
- The visit of "Sinterklass" is a separate occasion than Christmas which is more of a religious festival.



## CHINA

There is only a very small percentage of the population in China that celebrate Christmas. Because of this it is often the case that you will only see any kind of celebrations in the largest cities.

In Chinese Happy/Merry Christmas is "Sheng Dan Kuai Le" in Mandarin and "Seng Dan Fai Lok" in Cantonese. There are other regional languages which have their own unique way of expressing this greeting.

### *Fun facts:*

- Santa Claus is called "Shen Dan Lao Ren"
- If there are Christmas trees they are usually plastic.
- A tradition of giving apples on Christmas Eve is becoming more and more common.

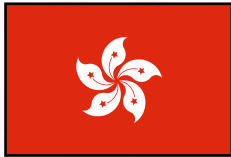


## EGYPT

Only about 15% of Egyptians are Christians and they are the only part of the country that celebrate Christmas. Most Egyptian Christians belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church and they have their own very unique traditions to celebrate:

### *Fun facts:*

- Christmas Day is celebrated on January 7th, not December 25th.
- The Coptic month leading up to Christmas is called “Kiahk”.
- For 43 days before Christmas, Coptic Orthodox Christians do a special fast where they basically eat a vegan diet.
- Although not many Egyptians celebrate Christmas as we know it, most celebrate it as a secular holiday.
- In Egypt, Santa is known as “Baba Noel” (Father Christmas)
- In Arabic, Happy/Merry Christmas is “Eid Milad Majid” which means “Glorious Birth Feast”
- “Christmas” in Arabic is “eld almilad”



## HONG KONG

Chinese Christians celebrate Christmas with church services in their native Chinese. At most Anglican churches, some of the services are offered in English because of the number of Europeans who work and live in Hong Kong.

### *Fun facts:*

- Poinsettias and nativity scenes decorate homes, churches and other places.
- In Hong Kong, Santa Claus is known as “Sing Daan Lou Yan” (Christmas Old Man) in Cantonese
- At this time of year Hong Kong celebrates “Winterfest”, a huge winter party. This is also famous for its New Year’s countdown and displays of lights and fireworks are seen all over the city.



## JAMAICA

Christmas is a very special time in Jamaica and is celebrated by the majority of the population.

### *Fun facts:*

- People might paint their houses and hang new curtains and decorations to celebrate Christmas.
- The main Christmas meal is usually served on Christmas Eve.
- A traditional meal might include fresh fruits, meat, salt fish, fried plantains, boiled bananas and freshly squeezed fruit juice or tea. An afternoon meal may include chicken, curry goat, stewed oxtail, rice and peas.

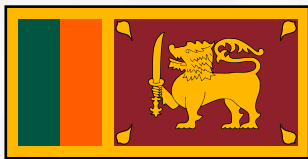


## TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Christmas is a time of great celebration in Trinidad and Tobago with people having parties and celebrating with family, friends and neighbours.

***Fun facts:***

- Radio stations play Trinidadian Christmas carols and songs as well as carols from the US.
- Most people paint and make repairs to their homes. They often hang new curtains and lights to celebrate the season.
- The Christmas day meal is usually prepared throughout Mid-December and sometimes into the new year.
- New Year's Eve is known as "Ole year's night" in Trinidad, and like in Canada people like to let off fireworks to celebrate the New Year.



## SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is a mostly Buddhist country with only 7% of people who are Christians. Christmas is celebrated as a public holiday by everyone.

***Fun facts:***

- Christians in Sri Lanka, the Christmas season starts on December 1st and people let off fire crackers at dawn.
- The Christians go to midnight mass all over the country.
- Merry Christmas is "Suba Naththalak Wewa" in Sinhala, which is spoken in Sri Lanka.



## ZIMBABWE

Most people in Zimbabwe go to Christmas services first thing in the morning on Christmas Day. After church people party in their homes and often people go house to house, visiting friends and family.

### *Fun facts:*

- Everyone wears their best clothes on Christmas and this may be the only time of the year they get new clothes.
- Children believe that Santa Claus brings their presents in the morning so they can show their friends at Church or at one of the parties they will attend.
- The special food eaten at Christmas is chicken with rice. Chicken is actually very expensive in Zimbabwe and is a luxury enjoyed at Christmas.

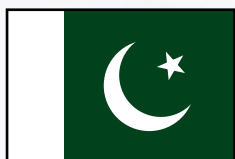


## MEXICO

Christmas is celebrated from December 12th to January 6th. From December 16th to Christmas Eve, children will perform the “Posada” processions. “Posada” is Spanish for Inn or Lodging. There are nine Posadas. These celebrate the part of the Christmas story where Joseph and Mary looked for somewhere to stay. During this time, houses are decorated with evergreens and paper lanterns.

### *Fun facts:*

- Nativity scenes are one of the most popular decorations in Mexico and are known as “nacimiento”. They are often life size figures.
- Christmas Eve is known as “Noche Buena” and is a family day.
- Midnight Mass is popular around the country and is known as “Misa de Gallo”
- There are lots of fireworks on Christmas Day.
- Pointsettia flowers are known as “nochebuena” (Christmas Eve) flowers in Mexico.
- Some children believe that Santa Claus comes on December 24th, however in the south of Mexico most expect presents on January 6th at the Epiphany, which is known as “el Día de los Reyes”.

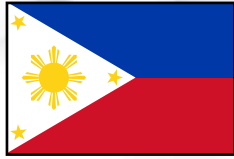


## PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, December 25th is a public holiday, but it is in memory of Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Christians make up a very small part of the population. Most Christians in Pakistan live in the country and are quite poor.

### *Fun facts:*

- Christmas is celebrated with a big procession that takes hours to reach the Cathedral to begin the services.
- Christmas is known as “Bara Din” which in Urdu and Punjabi means the “big day”.
- Christian areas will see houses decorated and with a star on the roof.
- The Christmas tree is an important decoration.
- In Pakistan, Santa Claus/Father Christmas is known as “Christmas Baba”.



## PHILIPPINES

Christmas is a long and festive season in the Philippines. Indeed it is not unusual for carols to begin being played in September. Most Filipinos are Christians with about 80% of the population being Catholic. It is the only Asian country with so many Christians.

### *Fun facts:*

- Christmas traditions in the Philippines are a mixture of western and Filipino customs.
- “Parol” is a Christmas tradition which is a bamboo pole or frame with a lighted star lantern on it. This is the most popular decoration in the Philippines.
- Most homes have a big open house to welcome family and friends and this is known as “Noche Buena”.
- Merry Christmas is said in eight different ways according to the 8 major languages. A couple of interpretations are; “Malipayon nga Pascua” in Sugbuhanon, “Maugmang Pasko” in Panglatok .



## INDIA

Christmas is actually quite a small festival in India, compared to other religious festivals due to the fact that only 2.3% compared to people who belong to other religions.

### *Fun facts:*

- In Hindi Happy/Merry Christmas is “Subh krisamas”, in Urdu it’s “Krismas Mubarak”, in Sanskrit it’s “Krismasasya shubhkaamna”, in Tamil it’s “kiristumas valttukkal”, in Telugu it’s “Christmas Subhakankshalu” and there are many other languages in India which have their own expressions for Merry Christmas.
- Instead of a Christmas tree, a banana or mango tree is decorated.
- Sometimes people use mango leaves to decorate their home.
- In India, Father Christmas or Santa Claus delivers presents to children from a horse & cart.
- Santa is known as “Christmas Baba” in Hindi, “Baba Christmas” in Urdu, “Christmas Thaathaa” in Tamil and “Christmas Thatha” in Telugu

## HANUKKUAH

The Jewish population do not celebrate Christmas, but, do celebrate this festive season known as Hanukkuah.

Hanukkah is celebrated around the world for eight days and nights.

Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees or Israelites over the Greek-Syrian ruler, Antiochus about 2200 years ago.

A Menorah is a special nine-branched candelabrum, also known in Hebrew as a Hanukiah.

Each night of Hanukkah, an additional candle is placed in the Menorah from right to left, and then lit from left to right. On the last night, all the candles are lit.

A dreidel, or sivion is a four-sided top that has a Hebrew letter on each side.

Traditionally, Hanukkah is a time when children are encouraged and rewarded for their Torah studies. Consequently, it became fashionable to give the children Hanukkah money and presents during the holiday.

Hanukkah is celebrated in the home beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev.

# ABORIGINAL CELEBRATIONS

From *Christmas.LoveToKnow.com*, the following list is a small sample of Native American Christmas traditions observed by some tribes.

## THE HANDSOME FELLOW

Many cultures have a “friendly figure” who treats children to candy and gifts during Christmas. For many Native Americans, this gentleman is known as the Handsome Fellow.

Legend refers to a Creek leader named Chief Hobbythacco, which translates to English as ‘handsome fellow.’ He was part of the diplomatic efforts in Colonial America and would bestow other tribal chiefs with gifts to share among their people. Some Native Americans encourage children to believe that the Handsome Fellow is responsible for leaving presents on Christmas Day, while others believe Santa comes to visit.

## THE WINTER SOLSTICE

The Winter Solstice has always been a reverent period for Native people all over the world during the Christmas season. It’s a time to offer gratitude, honour family and ancestors, and follow a ritual observance of beliefs.

### RELATED Solstice Show: Last Meteor Shower of Year Ushers in Winter

The fact that Theological historians also place significance on this same time period for the date of Christ’s birth makes the Solstice a vital component in holiday celebrations. A few days before Solstice, members of some tribes make prayer sticks in honour of an ancestor or native deity. They plant the sticks during a ceremony on the Solstice.

Check various American Indian museums in the U.S. for Solstice celebrations. Many state

museums, as well as the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. hold events.

## DANCING

Numerous Native American tribes host dances on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Celebrations can include a manger scene and a recreation of the Wise Men offering gifts to the Christ child.

Some Natives observe the similarity between the Chiefs of the Great Nations and the Wise Men; and the act of bestowing gifts onto the newborn babe to that of the Great Thunderbird offering gifts to braves in the fields.

### READ MORE AT:

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/12/25/native-traditions-celebrate-christmas-day-152863>

This is just a quick overview of some of the cultures that make Canada so rich. We hope that you will share this with your parent community and encourage them to talk about how Christmas is celebrated around the world with their children, so they have a better understanding of how other students in their school will celebrate this holiday season.

*Parents Engaged in Education*



# TIPS ON BUILDING A MULTICULTURAL SCHOOL COUNCIL

A School Council works best when it is fully representative of the school community. Building a multicultural school council means giving the opportunity for both parents and students to share their experiences, beliefs and celebrations. This helps the council plan activities and events which will engage the whole community.

## Here are a few tips to help build a more diverse school council.

- Remember that not all cultures view parent involvement in school the same way. It is important to communicate the value and opportunity for parents in the school to partner with the principal as part of the school council.
- English may be a challenge for some parents. You may want to translate information sheets, agendas, minutes etc. in the key languages spoken by parents. In addition, providing interpreters at events and/or meetings will also make all parents feel respected and welcomed at the school.
- Offer culturally relevant programs to parents on ways that they can support their children and the school.
- Host a multicultural night which includes students and parents. Invite the school

community to host tables or pavilions that provides information, demonstrates customs and perhaps offers a sampling of food from their countries. Use this evening to encourage parents to come to a meeting and consider joining the council.

- Be open to the new ideas that diverse parents bring to the table. Maybe some of the strategies used at previous schools can bring exciting new ways to work on enhancing the education experience of all students at the school.
- Encourage current members to engage others who can translate for parents and make them feel welcomed in the school council. This may help these parents feel they can contribute to the work of the school council.
- The Ministry of Education provides most information for parents in many languages. Support your community by providing copies of these types of resources in the various languages spoken by your school community.

**Regardless of our differences, we are all the same. As parents we want the best for our children and their education. Be an inclusive school council by allowing and encouraging everyone's voice to be heard and for all cultures to be represented.**

## ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO

**Experienced.  
Knowledgeable.  
Respected.**

Ontario teachers are ready to lead, inspire  
and develop young hearts and minds.

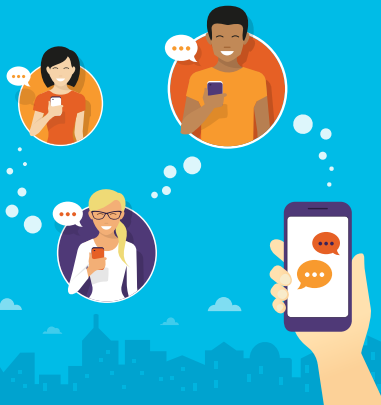
Find out how well-qualified your child's  
teacher is.

Learn more at [oct.ca/findateacher](https://oct.ca/findateacher)



Ontario  
College of  
Teachers

Setting the  
Standard for  
Great Teaching



# THANK YOU

To educators and parents for everything you are doing at home  
We stand with you as your partners in learning

[nelson.com/learningonline](https://nelson.com/learningonline)

**NELSON**



**THANK YOU  
FRONT-LINE  
WORKERS.**

**tsu** The Toronto Secondary Unit  
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association

ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT  
AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
Catholic  
Teachers  
ASSOCIATION

**We're all  
in this *together*.**



**Stay strong,  
stay safe.**



Unity is our strength.  
Education workers,  
students, parents,  
and families will  
get through this  
together.

# ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COUNCILS IN ONTARIO

## Helping You... Help Your Child



- 100% Canadian
- Based on Ministry Expectations
- Makes for a great fundraiser for schools to assist parents in helping with their child's education.



### Proven Successes

Please tour our web site and find out how these resources can benefit both students and parents from Grade 3 to Grade 10.

Visit [www.learningadvantage.ca](http://www.learningadvantage.ca)

## Our Learning Advantage Books

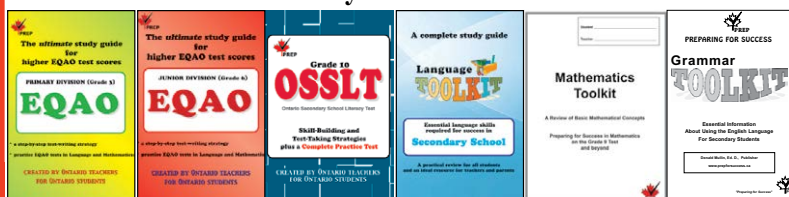


## Our French Immersion Books



## Grammar Toolkit

An excellent tool for any student in Grade 6 and above!



## Seneca

Connect  
with Us  
Virtually

- Sign up for a webinar
- Book a virtual advising appointment
- Take a virtual campus tour

Learn more:  
[senecacollege.ca/visitus](http://senecacollege.ca/visitus)



**LITTLEDEW**  
DESIGN STUDIOS  
LITTLEDEWDESIGNS@GMAIL.COM

GRAPHIC DESIGN • MARKETING • PHOTOGRAPHY



**Parents**  
ENGAGED IN EDUCATION

Parents Engaged in Education is a not-for-profit organization formed by experienced school council members to provide resources and skill building opportunities for parent leaders across the province.

[www.parentsengagedineducation.ca](http://www.parentsengagedineducation.ca)  
[info@parentsengagedineducation.ca](mailto:info@parentsengagedineducation.ca)

647-408-2091

Follow us on twitter  @parentengagcons