



## SCHOOL COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2020 • VOLUME 50

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## PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE – CELEBRATING OUR 50TH ISSUE

This month Parents Engaged in Education are celebrating our **50th** issue of our School Council newsletter.

We appreciate all of the parents, educators and administrators who have let us know how much they have valued having this continual resource to assist in their efforts to engage parents at school and at home.

In this issue we celebrate the **past** 50 newsletter by reprinting some of the articles which garnered the most “clicks”, the **present** work we are doing expanding into the virtual world, especially our upcoming session on October 22nd featuring Dr. Debbie Pushor

and the **future** which will focus on the establishment of CANADA'S FIRST EDUCATION BANK.

The past five years has seen an enormous growth in the services that Parents Engaged in Education undertake. In the beginning, we focused simply on providing resources through blogs and newsletters. This grew into offering great workshops and events which were attended by parent leaders in 19 school boards. In 2018, we expanded into supporting children/youth/parents/caregivers in low income neighbourhoods as well as building fantastic partnerships with educational publishers and resource providers.

Like most of you, 2020 has presented our organization with many challenges including how to move our services online and how to support low income students, and their families, while they isolated and tried to work from home. We did this through our Learn at Home Kits project which resulted in us providing over 2,000 kits to those in most need. Through this initiative, we have seen the enormous extent of need in these communities and we developed the plan to establish a Family Service Centre featuring CANADA'S FIRST EDUCATION BANK. This project overview is included in this newsletter. Why is this important to other parent leaders and school administrators? Because the goal of the project is to develop a "toolkit" which can be implemented elsewhere in the province quite easily and we hope to encourage other areas in Ontario to contact

us and explore partnering in their area to bring these important resources to students in need across the province.

This month's newsletter also features a great article by Dr. Debbie Pushor on the subject of parent engagement, an important topic for all of us involved in schools today.

We look forward to our next 50 issues and hope you will continue finding them of value to you.

*Theresa Pastore*

*Executive Director,  
Parents Engaged in Education*



PARENTS  
ENGAGED IN  
EDUCATION

**FAMILY  
SERVICE  
CENTRE**  
FT. EDUCATION BANK

*Prepared by: Theresa Pastore*

## OVERVIEW

# BACKGROUND & DESCRIPTION

During the COVID-19 crisis as we have supported shelters, children's aid, community service providers, the food bank system and various charitable organizations, we have identified **several factors** which we feel strongly need to be addressed to serve youth living in poverty:

1. There is no organized process for donations. Every shelter and service providers are responsible to getting donations for their residents/families. This means that the same donors are approached over and over again making it difficult for them to manage donations.
2. There is no place that a family can go to find resources, learning, games etc. for their children. They are in a sit and wait if something comes into the shelter /charity or is available at the food bank, which is rare.
3. While the urgency to provide these things is crucial now because of the virus, this is an area that has been over-looked when dealing the issue of homeless, low income or shelter dependent children. Parents Engaged in Education raised over \$73,000. In cash and over \$350,000. in in-kind donations since April in order to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. **Imagine** what we can do when we actually go out and sit down and negotiate permanent sponsors for this project. No other parent group has the ability to do this in the province as they are controlled by school boards. Our **strength** is in our ability to build effective partnerships.
4. Having the proper tools to go back to school is vitally important and affects a child's mental health. In addition, having games, puzzles, activities, art supplies make a huge difference in inspiring positive mindset and may discourage them from pursuing a negative lifestyle to fill voids they feel exist in their lives.

The **FAMILY EDUCATION CENTRE / EDUCATION BANK** would be a resource centre stocked with workbooks, books school supplies, games, art supplies etc. This would allow a child and their parent to come in and even the youngest child could do something to "earn" their supplies (even a piece of artwork for the art wall). This would replace the current system we use which is to pack 350-400 kits and turn them over to the school boards to distribute.

## OVERVIEW

# BACKGROUND & DESCRIPTION

Students in secondary school would be expected to volunteer at the centre to “earn” their back to school supplies or activities. This makes the value of the supplies mean more and instills in them the idea that if you work hard you will be rewarded. We expect making them work for their supplies, will be an illustration to them how good it feels to earn something instead of relying on someone to give it to you. This could be the turnaround they need to not repeat their families experience living in poverty.

**OUR GOAL IS NOT TO HAND OUT BECAUSE FAMILIES ARE DOWN AND OUT, IT IS TO RAISE CHILDREN UP SO THEY CAN REACH THEIR POTENTIAL!!**

The FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE would be the place where large donations could be negotiated and organized as a central bank for people who need to use these services. The products available at the Family Service Centre would be mostly stocked with donations.

Parents Engaged in Education has great partnerships and could certainly do more once this project is underway.

One of the issues facing all organizations looking for donations, is that many companies prefer to deal with one or two main people each year to make giving a donation easier on their staff. If we were to build partnerships with major suppliers, we could meet with them and encourage them to sponsor the centre by providing ongoing donations of product. This makes their giving a lot easier and they may be willing to give more.

FOOD BANKS were created to fill the physical needs of the poor, but no one is feeding their mind, reducing stress and increasing confidence resulting in generally healthier lifestyles.

Parents Engaged in Education has an **excellent reputation** with educational partners who regularly donate to our charitable efforts building Learn at Home kits or our Back to School Backpacks. Our vision for this year's backpacks would be to have a child come in, get an empty backpack and fill it with what **they** think they need – not what **we** think they need.



# PROJECT SCOPE



This project is designed to establish a **Family Service Centre/Technology Room/Education Bank** where marginalized families would have access to books, school supplies, games , computers and printers etc. This space would include a technology room where presentations can be made on mental health strategies, self-reliance, learning strategies, parents could learn how to support their child while they learn online and families can play games together etc.

The **technology room** would offer students who are not returning to physical school, full-time or part-time, a safe place to utilize computers and printers to do their school work.

This service centre will provide the opportunity to begin the journey to reverse generational poverty by requiring children/teens to work for the items they need from the centre. For teens, they will volunteer for a couple of hours and not only “earn” their products , but they will receive volunteer hours they need to graduate. For our younger learners, they can do simple tasks like making an art piece for the art wall, stapling papers or writing a story.

The goal is to demonstrate that when you work, you have the power to decide what you want or need and not be told by someone what they think they need or want.

# DELIVERABLES

Our ultimate goal is to raise up the next generation. We want youth in at risk communities to realize that with hard work and support they can build a successful life that takes them out of their current circumstances. We must put a **HALT to the cycle of poverty** and to do that we must **empower youth** to take responsibility for the next steps in their journey.

Their volunteer work will reinforce that work results in gains as they walk out with the supplies they need for school or games for their family, that they **EARNED**.

Other family members who wish to take advantage of the centre will also be assigned a job to do as a volunteer that is in line with their abilities to assist. If their English skills are good enough, they will answer phones, help file etc. or if they have ESL challenges, we will ask that they help stack shelves, make a piece of art or staple papers etc.

The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health Youth Engagement Toolkit captures the issues and ideas for improvement, see below;

Effective youth engagement leads to positive outcomes for young people at three levels:

1. The Individual level: e.g. increased personal skills, healthy choices, and sense of identity.
2. The social level: e.g. stronger positive connections with friends and adults, and a larger support network.
3. The system level: e.g. greater civic engagement, policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people, and new creative ways to govern. \*source: Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health Youth Engagement Toolkit

Youth engagement is an integral component of comprehensive school health (CSH) and an evidence-based strategy to achieve positive health outcomes and enhance student achievement. When young people are engaged in decision-making, they feel connected to their school environment and community

1. They build relationships with their peers and adults
2. and learn new skills
3. They are more likely to make healthy decisions, have healthy behaviours and take fewer unhealthy risks
4. They are also more likely to do well in school and continue learning throughout their lifetime.

One thing we should have learned as a society, from past experience, is that just giving people money does not provide the tools and support that children/youth need to work towards a better future.



## AFFECTED PARTIES

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The most affected parties will be the families and children/youth impacted by the ability to work for what they need which gives them a sense of fulfillment when they get a full backpack for their children, or a game etc. they know they worked for them and they are not just being given charity.

There is no other similar organization that responds to mental health by providing tangible items that children can earn and take home.

The companies who donate product will be benefitted by simplifying their donations with one organization that facilitates distribution of materials to other charities/service providers and providing an opportunity for children/youth who are able to come to one place to get what they need. With a simplified system, we expect companies to be even more generous because they don't have to worry about equalizing their donations to so many people who apply.

We have served over 2,000 children/youth through our Learn at Home kits project since COVID-19 closed schools. We expect the centre will be in a position to support 4,000 children/youth each year.

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# CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PARTNERS

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# PARENT ENGAGEMENT: WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

*Dr. Debbie Pushor, Professor University of Saskatchewan*

## DEFINING PARENT ENGAGEMENT

I define parent engagement as parents' authentic and meaningful place and voice in their children's teaching and learning, both on and off the landscape of schooling. I believe that parents are naturally engaged in their children's growth and development from the moment they are born, educating them from birth throughout the rest of their lives. When teachers begin the schooling process with children, teachers who embrace a philosophy and pedagogy of parent engagement understand that parents hold knowledge of children, teaching, and learning, and they see their role as one of "meshing together" their teacher knowledge with that of the parents, including them in decisions about planning, programming, and curriculum making. Engaged parents are seen by these teachers to be essential to schooling, brought into the act because of care and commitment to children and families. Parent engagement, then, is a belief system and a way of enacting those beliefs in practice.

**Critical Attributes.** There are attributes critical to parent engagement that differentiate it from less effective practices of parent information or involvement. With these critical attributes at play, parent engagement:

- aligns with the learning and developmental goals of students;
- draws on parent knowledge of children, teaching and/or learning;
- attends to parents hopes and dreams for their children as well as curricular outcomes;
- is a relationship of shared input and decision-making;
- honors the strength and capacity that parents possess;
- engages parents as parents and not as pseudo-teachers;
- and ensures children, parents, and teachers are all strengthened by their engagement with one another.

I believe, that as we work to systematically engage parents in teaching and learning, it is this conceptualization of authentic and meaningful parent engagement that is central to our work.

## THE IMPACT OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Fifty years of research (Mapp, 2013) attests to the fact that when parents are engaged in their children's teaching and learning, children are more successful, both academically and socially (Mapp, Carver & Lander, 2017). Recent studies alone (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2007, 2010; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) provide evidence that parent engagement is linked to academic success:

- higher grades and test scores (teacher ratings, achievement tests, and standardized tests);
- enrolment in higher-level programs/advanced classes;
- greater promotion rates; lower drop-out rates; higher on-time high school graduation rates; and an
- z• increased likelihood of progression into postsecondary education.

Further, parent engagement notably influences students' social and behavioral outcomes:

- regular school attendance; greater engagement in school work;
- better social skills and improved behavior; better adaptation to school,
- increased social capital; greater sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning; and a
- stronger belief in the importance of education.

What this body of research makes clear is that students benefit significantly and in multiple ways when they have an adult who encourages them, expects them to do well, provides them with educational opportunities, and is engaged in the day-to-day and schooling events of their lives (Ferguson, 2008).

**A dominant influence.** While effective teachers, instruction, and curricula are crucial, the dominant influence on students' achievement and success in school is factors outside of school (Altonji & Mansfield, 2011, Kraft, 2017; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found that “at-home good parenting” has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment, even after all other factors shaping their achievement have been taken out of the equation. In fact, they stated that the impact of parent engagement for primary students is much bigger than differences associated with the quality of schools. “Schools would have to spend \$1,000 more per pupil to reap the same gains in student achievement that an [engaged] parent brings” (Caspe & Lopez, 2017). Parent engagement matters; research proves the significant impact of parents' contributions to their children's learning and development, impact that can outweigh school factors.

Affirmed by the National Centre for Families Learning (2014), “engaging more than one generation in learning together positively impacts the entire family and, in turn, the larger community” (p. 1). When parents are engaged in schools in ways that address their children's learning and wellbeing, both school and home contexts are strengthened (Brown, 2007; Hong, 2011). Potential is created to have a much greater and long-lasting impact on students' educational outcomes as well as to achieve positive effects for parents and families.

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# Let's Talk Parent Engagement with Dr. Debbie Pushor



Join us as we explore strategies to increase parent engagement in these turbulent times!

**Special Guest Speaker:**

Dr. Debbie Pushor, Parent Engagement Specialist,  
University of Saskatchewan

OCTOBER 22nd, 2020

6:30- 7:30pm EST

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6137034893>



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE LATER YEARS

*By: Theresa Pastore, Executive Director – Parents Engaged in Education*

On Saturday April 30th, Parents Engaged in Education hosted an event for parents and students in grades 7 - 12. The theme of this event was to promote the message that it is more important than ever for parents to be engaged in their child's education while their children are transitioning and during their secondary school experience.

***The research shows that parent engagement in a child's education results in:***

- Higher student achievement
- Increased attendance at school
- Increased confidence
- Better communication skills
- Student is more likely to pursue post secondary education

A parent's engagement in their child's school sets an example for them that they value education and they support the importance of being present at school and striving for excellence.

The conversation around school changes dramatically through the grades from the primary level to the secondary level.

Remember, in JK - Grade 1 when we, as parents were so excited about our child going to school, dressing them up, getting a new backpack, packing those great lunches and waiting for

them to come home. As soon as we can, we ask them "How was school today? What did you learn?" Often we were disappointed to hear that they learned "nothing" and school was "good", no details and little of the excitement that we felt as parents.

*I understood  
now that it really  
does take a village  
to raise a child  
and I wanted to be  
part of the village  
for every child in  
the school.*

This is the stage when I knew I had to get involved in the school council to find out what other parents learned when their kids came home. Were they really learning anything? What was the expectation at the various levels in schools and what challenges did the school face in educating our children.

In Grade 2 - 4, I remember asking my daughter the same questions. Now I got an abundant response – "We saw a video today, we learned six new words, I passed a math test, Johnny was sent to the office for being "bad", I have a new best friend, I don't like math, I love my teacher..." This was great, I felt like a very involved parent.

I enjoyed my school council work even more because I felt that school was now a very positive thing for my child and I had learned more about the school which allowed me to be a more valuable contributor to council discussions.

In Grade 5 - 6, it seems we went back to the limited discussion about school. In my child's mind "nothing" happened most days, but, whenever there was a field trip or a special event they would let me know or ask me to sign a form. Knowing something was going on at school gave me the chance to invite my child to tell me about it or come to the school for an upcoming event.

At this stage I was the council chair, committed to supporting our school administrators in making the educational experience better for all the students in the school. I understood now that it really does take a village to raise a child and I wanted to be part of the village for every child in the school.



In Grade 7 - 12, we have to change the conversation about school from “What did you learn today” or “How was school today” to a more creative and interactive exchange about school.

***Perhaps some of the questions you can use to engage your child might include:***

1. Where is your favourite place in school to hang out? Why?
2. Who is your favourite teacher and why do they inspire you to learn?
3. What is your favourite subject, whether or not you are good at it? Do you think you can use this subject can help you achieve your goals?
4. What would your school be better with? What would your school be better without?
5. Tell me one thing that you learned today.
6. If you had only one class everyday, what would it be?
7. If you could be invisible for the whole day at school, what would you do?
8. Who is your favourite teacher, why? Who is your least favourite teacher, why?
9. Which teacher would you like to know what they are thinking? Why?
10. What do you think you should do more of at school? Why? What do you think you should do less of at school? Why?
11. What is your favourite subject? Why? What is your least favourite subject? Why?
12. What are your short and long term goals and how will school help you to achieve them?
13. What do you think the most important thing about school is?
14. The most important thing is to stay engaged! There is never a time that the conversation around education is not important as we work together to encourage our children to be life long learners.

## SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNCILS

The role of the school council can change dramatically in the secondary panel, gone are the dance-a-thons, movie nights and selling chocolate bars. These are important activities in elementary school, but, even then we should be working on being effective partners with school administrators on improving the educational experience of all students in the school.

In the secondary panel, there is likely a student council that takes over most of the activities in a school. The advisory role of the school council is very important in secondary school as the issues of students are often larger than in elementary.

***Secondary school councils might consider the following matters at their meetings:***

Identify areas in the school that need improvement. Work with the Principal to see if the parent community can play a role in improving these areas. Possibly advocating to the school board to bring attention to areas which need improving.

What are the biggest challenges the school faces; i.e. overpopulation, under utilization, academic results, graduation rates, etc. What role can the council play in helping the administration address these issues.

Understanding the school budget. Will all school needs be met financially this school year? What are longer term financial needs?

Student safety – what is the bullying or mental health needs at the school? Could the council host an event with a speaker that could help parents in understanding and supporting their children and all the children in the school.

Communicate with the school community and keep them up to date on the activities of the council.

Research and provide resources to share with parents on how to stay engaged with their child in secondary school.

And much more.

# School Council Chairs

## Balancing School and Home Life

When I talk to parent leaders across the province and ask what inspired them to become part of their school council, they usually respond “I do it for my child and for all the kids in the school”.

There are times when we become overwhelmed by trying to do our best at the school and as a parent. The secret is balance. By establishing a balance between these responsibilities, as well as work, is key to feeling positive about all the roles you play in life.

It is equally important to balance the roles between being a council member and just another parent in the classroom. This is very important when communicating with your child's teacher where your true role is the same as every other parent in the class. Using your position in the council as leverage for getting results from your child's teacher will not be beneficial for anyone involved. Focusing on the role of the council which is to consider matters that are relevant to improving the educational experience for all children will lead to great things for your school.

Indeed navigating these competing roles can be challenging, as I experience first hand during the almost 15 years I volunteered as part of school councils. Out of that experience I can offer the following tips that may assist you in reaching some balance in your school/home work.

### **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

Communication is key when a parent is taking on the new role as a member of a school council.

Letting your family know why it is important to you to be active at school will help them understand your desire to make things better for all students at the school. Discussing the need for parents to get involved at the school and their education will be an example of the importance of education and their school community.

Keeping everyone up to date on meeting or event scheduling will help organize the family.

Engaging your children to help at events that you are assisting with at school will make them feel important and also allow them to see the value of your volunteer work to the whole school community.

### **WORKING TOGETHER – BE AN EFFECTIVE DELEGATOR**

There may be times when it seems easier or more efficient to do things yourself when working on a project or an event, however, this is a perfect way to get overwhelmed. This can be a perfect way for things to become unbalanced. By doing more yourself, your time commitment to school activities can end up taking time away from your family. Instead, learn to delegate to other members in your group.

It may take someone else twice as long, but, supporting them by training them or assisting them rather than taking over, will help balance your life and increase their fulfillment as a member of the council.

### **RESIST THE URGE TO VOLUNTEER FOR EVERYTHING!**

Not only does volunteering for every project or event drain your energy, it drains your time with your family.

Often other parents may not volunteer for tasks because they assume that you will do it. For instance, when you always volunteer for the lunch program the council is sponsoring, other parents may not bother volunteering because they think you have it covered. This can actually have a negative effect on the council and on your reputation. By not requiring other parents to get involved, they may get disinterested and not feel they play a valuable role at the school. In addition, people may turn your volunteer spirit

into a feeling that you simply like to control all activities at the school.

If you are concerned that things won't get done if you are not "leading the charge" then offer to assist in a less active role and empower other parents to take the lead.

By not volunteering for everything you may have the time to appreciate all that the council accomplishes at the school and not see it simply through the lens of how much work it is for you.

### **SOMETIMES ITS FUN TO BE JUST ANOTHER MOM/DAD AT THE SCHOOL**

Sometimes it can be fun just to be another parent at the school, discussing classroom activities and sharing your things that might be going on with your family as well as catching up with what is going on with other families.

If conversation veers to school matters it is appropriate to say that you are not wearing your "council hat" right now, and are enjoying this chance to "chat".

Take advantage of at least one opportunity in the year to attend an event as a family instead of volunteering to run the event. You may gain a whole new perspective on what great opportunities the council gives to the community.

### **THE PRO'S AND CON'S**

If you get to a point where you are unsure about the balance between school and home life (which includes work), it is helpful to make a "Pro's and Con's list".

At the top of the list, write down your position and a few points about the responsibilities it entails. Then under the PRO category, list the work that you do that gives you satisfaction and the results of that work.

Under the CON category, list the work that you do that you feel less satisfied with and that leaves your tired or frustrated.

Take the CON list and look at ways to shift these responsibilities or ask for assistance in accomplishing the tasks.

Balance in everyone's life is key and will leave those that are important to you at home and at school better off for your efforts!



*Our mission is to provide  
resources and skill-  
building opportunities  
to school councils  
throughout Ontario to  
assist with:*

**Better  
Student  
Experience**

**Stronger  
Communities**

**Increased  
Opportunities**

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# ENGAGING EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

When I speak to parents about how to engage with their children's education, I tell them that engagement will grow and evolve as the child moves through the system from grades Kindergarten through Grade 12. There is no one case fits all suggestion that will work for every parent, but there are some strategies that may help shape your desire to be involved in your child's education, which are outlined below:

## 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A ROLE MODEL FOR LEARNING.

Parents are their child's first and most consistent educator. We begin the learning journey by introducing them to nature, reading, counting, colours and social norms. When a child begins school we, as parents, should encourage them with

positive messages about education, their school and how their work will help them succeed in school and in life.

Setting up a location in your home that is conducive to do homework, providing guidance or strategies, helping them organize time and encouragement to expand their learning through everyday tasks will demonstrate to your child that you place learning as a very high priority.

## 2. WHAT DOES YOUR CHILD LOVE TO DO?

One of the most important things you can do as a parent is connect with what your child likes to do and how they like to learn. If you understand what your child likes most, you can help them explore new ways to learn by involving their interests.



For instance, if your child loves to go to the zoo, encourage them to read books and write stories about animals after a visit to your local zoo.

When we listen to or observe our children's interests, they will show us what they want to learn and how they want to learn it.

### 3. HOW DOES YOUR CHILD LEARN?

More and more we are coming to understand that every child learns differently. They have different strengths that help them learn most effectively. Some are very visual learners, which lead them to learn best through pictures and the written word. Most tactile learners, do better with hands on tasks like building blocks, working with clay or designing and building with LEGO. Many children are auditory learners, meaning they do best when they are given the opportunity to hear instructions or use audiobooks etc.

By paying attention to how your child learns best, parents can explore ways to support this type of learning style when helping your child with school work and when dealing with tasks at home.

### 4. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE WHAT YOUR CHILD LEARNS AT SCHOOL.

While a parent is not the "teacher" in the usual sense of the word when it comes to school, they can support their children by practicing some of the strategies they are using to learn in school. This doesn't mean drilling them over and over, but it does mean going over what they have learned in school like basic counting, addition, subtraction, spelling etc. will make a great difference in building on the basics in early grades.

### 5. READ TOGETHER EVERY DAY.

It is important to read aloud together every day, especially in the early grades when children are establishing their love of literacy and improving their language skills. If you read with your child, they will be exposed to the structure and vocabulary

of literature and get them more interested in reading independently as he/she move through school.

When a parent reads the first chapter or two of a book out loud, it piques the child's interest in the story and they will be encouraged to read the next couple of chapters. Alternating this process throughout a book will not only help support and improve your child's reading skills, but it is a great opportunity to have some one on one time with your child.

**We learn every day  
and our children  
learn through life  
experiences and by  
asking questions.**

Letting your child pick the book you are going to read together will make them more interested in reading. You might also consider when picking books, that a book series may engage your child in wanting to read more and look forward to the next book in the series because they become engaged with the characters.

### 6. CONNECT WHAT YOUR CHILD LEARNS IN SCHOOL TO EVERYDAY LIFE.

We learn every day and our children learn through life experiences and by asking questions. When you cook, invite your child into the kitchen, get them to read the recipe and measure ingredients. This uses their literacy and math skills.

When you go on a road trip, explain to your child how many kilometers your vehicle gets to a litre. Then give them the length of the trip and the price of gas per litre. Before leaving on the trip, work with your child to calculate the cost of the gas for the trip.

Involving your child in learning rooted in everyday activities and working alongside them, instead of just reciting information to them, will inspire their love of learning at home and at school.

## **7. CONNECTING WITH YOUR OLDER CHILD'S LEARNING.**

Simple strategies that we use with our younger children, will not engage our older kids to learn or talk about school at home.

Engagement with older students works best when we involve them in conversation. Reading articles or books on topics that are affecting your community or the world and then discussing ideas about how change might improve the situation identified results in:

- Improvement in reading skills
- Opportunity to explore the situations that affect the community or world they live in and to gain a better understanding of how your child sees the issues affecting their world.
- Supports your child to be a caring community member and learner.

## **8. EMPOWER YOUR CHILD TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN LEARNING.**

By encouraging your child to be responsible for their own learning parents will give them the opportunity to feel personal satisfaction about meeting deadlines and completing tasks.

## **9. DON'T OVER-SCHEDULE YOUR CHILD.**

Your child may like swimming, football, ballet, or other fun activities, but if they are racing from one thing to another, it is difficult for them to find time to do homework or explore other learning

opportunities at home. Sometimes this also leads to them to not really having the time to fully invest in one activity and get the maximum enjoyment from it.

Overscheduling may also result in children who come to class too tired to get the most from learning at school.

## **10. KEEP ACCESS TO TELEVISION AND TECHNOLOGY TO A REASONABLE LEVEL.**

While our children enjoy television and screen time, it is equally important that they have unstructured time with books, toys, crafts and friends to learn how to be in charge of their time and learn through experience.

## **11. LEARN SOMETHING NEW YOURSELF AND DEMONSTRATE YOUR ENTHUSIASM FOR LEARNING WITH YOUR CHILD.**

Taking up a new interest or craft and sharing your enjoyment about learning something new, is a great example to your child that learning is a life long experience that can only benefit them in their future.

## **12. SHARING PICTURES AND STORIES ABOUT YOUR OWN EDUCATION CAN INSPIRE YOUR CHILD TO CONNECT TO SCHOOL AT A DEEPER LEVEL.**

Discussing your own experience in school and sharing what you liked most and how you handled the challenges you might have faced, may be a great way for you to both connect over school as well as a way for your child to connect with their school.

I hope that you find these tips helpful to your child as they progress through their educational journey.

*Theresa Pastore,  
Executive Director,  
Parents Engaged in Education*

# BEYOND THE STATISTICS ABOUT HIGH NEED COMMUNITIES ARE THE CHILDREN.

## LESS TALK, MORE ACTION NEEDED.

For years there have been high level discussions on the need to better support low income, highly racialized and new immigrant communities in Ontario (and realistically across the country).

During the past 25 years, I have read and been involved in discussions that identify the issues that schools in these communities face in terms of providing equal educational opportunities to students.

Recently, while volunteering at a school in a neighbourhood described above, the depth of the problem really hit home for me.

I was working with a Grade Three student who is receiving Special Education support to bring her

language and math skills up to grade level. She was excited to be learning to read and very proud of the progress she was making.

I gave her a book to take home to practice her reading at home. A tear rolled down her face as she asked “Do I really get to keep this book at home? Is it mine to keep forever?” When I told it was indeed for her to keep, she thanked me over and over and told me this was the second book that she would own herself. The first book she received was from an event our charity hosted in the community in the fall.

This simple interaction really opened my eyes to the problem at the grassroots level. We take for granted that

children have books, toys and supplies for school. Not only do these children not have these basics, the schools in these areas also suffer from a lack of resources to support students learning.

It made me realize that we must do something to address these issues that are prevalent in too many communities.

When schools in marginalized neighbourhoods are lacking technology and resources, what are we saying to the kids, and the families, that attend? How do we expect the students to feel they are equal to those who are lucky enough to attend schools in more affluent communities. How do we empower them with positivity to believe that if they work hard, the future is brighter than the life they are leading today.

When a student, like the one I am working with right now, goes back to school with a used backpack and worn out supplies that someone gave them the year before, how do we expect them to feel excited and valued.

When they rely only on trips to the library to have a book to read at home, and sometimes not even that when their parent is working two jobs and cannot take them to the library often, it is a situation we are committed to changing. When other kids start the school year with brand new backpacks full of new markers, crayons, pencils and notebooks, and another child returns with old supplies if they have any at all, it just is not right.

All of us connected to the education system, have to come together to make a difference. We cannot wait for the government or the school boards to try and make a difference at the system level.

As a small grassroots charity, we could do nothing else but fundraise while the larger charities are supported by every major corporation. On the grand scheme of things, people and companies donate to larger charities because they can relate to curing disease, supporting hospitals and funding well known national organizations.

Donating to Parents Engaged in Education will put a book in a child's hands, provide a backpack full of supplies to inspire a needy child to be excited to return to school and to offer families the opportunity to receive resources and skill building opportunities to engage with their child's learning and mental health.

We cannot do it alone and we recognize that people are pulled in every direction to support a wide variety of charities, but a simple box of crayons, markers will make a difference to a child who has none.

A child will be able to return to school with a new backpack full of supplies for just \$25.00. We will do

the shopping, packing and work with community workers to be sure that the neediest children receive a backpack. All we are asking is for you to go to [www.parentsengagedineducation.ca/donate](http://www.parentsengagedineducation.ca/donate) and make a difference today.

**How do we empower  
them with positivity  
to believe that if they  
work hard, the future  
is brighter than the life  
they are leading today.**





## PARENT ENGAGEMENT PLEDGE

As a parent, guardian, or caring adult, I hereby give my pledge to support a high-quality education for my child to the best of my ability.

I have high expectations for my child and all children to succeed in school and in life.

I pledge to stay involved, serve as a positive role model, and maintain open communication with my child's teacher and school to ensure education remains a top priority in my household.

I understand that it is my responsibility to stay informed and involved in all aspects of my child's education including their mental health.

Alongside my child I will DREAM BIG and work hard with them to achieve their goals.

I believe that together, as a family, we can raise above the challenges and have our best school year yet!!

---

Child's Name

---

Parent Signature

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF PARENT-TEACHER INTERVIEWS

First, and most important, every parent should take advantage of this opportunity to meet with your child's teacher allowing you to partner on a plan to support your child.

Before meeting with the teacher, it would be helpful to "interview" your child and get their perspective. These questions will assist:

- What is your teacher going to say about your work?
- What will the teacher say about you?
- What do you think you do really well?
- What do you need to focus on?
- Do you want me to ask the teacher any specific questions?

Making the most of the time you have to meet with your child's teacher, consider some of the following questions to get the most out of the time you have:

- Do you have any concerns about my child's skills level?
- Does my child have difficulty listening to and/or following instructions?
- Does my child have difficulty staying on task?

- Does my child have difficulty organizing notes, work, stories, etc.?
- Does my child have difficulty completing assignments?
- Does my child read with comprehension?
- How well does my child read and understand words?
- Does my child actively participate in your class?
- Does my child hand in assignments on time, complete and at an acceptable level?
- What work areas does my child like best?
- What areas are more difficult for my child?
- What are my child's learning strengths?
- Are there things we can do at home to help my child?
- Do you have suggestions for me to discuss with my child?
- Does my child seem to enjoy coming to your class?
- Is there anything about my child's behaviour or performance that you would like to share?

Leaving the interview with a strategy to partner with your child's teacher to support their academic achievement and mental health is the ultimate goal of the parent-teacher interview.



# SENDING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Recently while working with students that struggled with behavior that affected their performance in school, I was taken aback by a conversation I had with a young man (a grade four student). He was having a very bad day. I sat down with him to ask if I could help him have a better day. I tried to identify what the problem he was dealing with was on that particular day. He told me that he was frustrated because he had put his hand up to get some assistance in math. The teacher did not immediately respond to his request for help. He reacted by disrupting the class with an outburst. I asked him if we could think of a better way to handle the situation. This would have avoided the disruption to the class and get him the help that he was looking for.

## **“MY MOM DOESN’T LIKE MY TEACHER ANYWAY”**

He responded by telling me that “he didn’t care about his reaction because his Mom doesn’t like his teacher

anyway”. In his opinion, this meant that he didn’t have to like her either. It also empowered him to not respect her or the other students in the class.

I am not a trained social worker, psychologist or an expert in child rearing. I am a mother who has volunteered in the school system for over 25 years. I have noticed an ever increasing problem with behavior that results in students struggling to achieve their best results in school. One of the things that I have always been very aware of since my children began their educational journey, is that they absorbed my attitude towards teachers and school in general.

## **OUR CHILDREN ARE LISTENING**

There were certainly times throughout the years that my children were in school where I had disagreements with teachers, principals and board or ministry policies. I came to realize how quickly my son picked up on my

attitude. One day as we worked on math together and he was struggling, I said casually “don’t worry I hated math my whole time in school”. When it came time to do math in class the next day, my son proudly told his teacher he didn’t need to do it. He said “because my Mom doesn’t like math either”. When the teacher shared this with me the next day, I was really taken aback. I did not realize how much of an impact a comment that just rolled off my tongue, would have on my son’s attitude at school.

### **SEND YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE**

As parents, the most valuable thing we can do to support our children’s education and mental health is to send them to school with a positive attitude. Can you imagine that the child whose parent says that they do not like their teacher, goes to class ready to learn? Do they work effectively with their teacher and others in the class? If a child knows their parent has a negative attitude towards their teacher or school, do we really expect that they will form a good relationship with them that allows them to flourish?

A more effective strategy when your child encounters an issue at school, would be first, to help them learn to

advocate for themselves. Secondly for them to resolve the issue (with your support) in a positive manner that actually elevates them to work hard and achieve more.

**AS  
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Since there is so much negative media attention surrounding education funding and school system changes, it is difficult for our children to avoid hearing about them. This certainly does not have a positive effect on their enthusiasm for school and learning. As parents, the best approach in discussing these issues or answering questions your child may have, is to let them know that these are adult issues. Reassure them that if they work hard they can do well in school and achieve their dreams, regardless of what is happening.

One thing is certainly true, and you don’t need to be a professional to identify it, our children have much more stress than most of us had when we were young. The best gift we can give them is our support to build resiliency and a positive attitude towards school and life.

Find more resources on our website –  
**[www.parentsengagedineducation.ca](http://www.parentsengagedineducation.ca)**

If you haven’t already done so, we encourage you to surf our website. We have a great list of links to other valuable parent engagement resources on our links page. If you are looking to find more articles like this one, check out the rest of our blog or visit our brochures page. We are constantly trying to add new content for parents to enjoy.



# CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

*December is a great month to celebrate the diversity of your school community. Many cultures celebrate in a variety of wonderful ways during the month often referred to as the “Holiday Season”.*

In this month’s Parent council topics and activities, we discuss the value of having a school event celebrating your school communities diversity. Taking advantage of not having a formal meeting scheduled this month. And lastly recognizing organizations with a thank you.

## CELEBRATE DIVERSITY

December is a fantastic month to consider having a school event. Take this opportunity to feature an event that celebrates your school communities diversity. Create an event demonstrating how they celebrate this holiday season. In order to support this event, the school council could ask parents for feedback and ideas on putting together a celebration of each cultures diversity. Ideas for celebrating the event could include oral histories of the various different celebrations and how they are celebrated today. It is also a good idea for parent council to prepare a booklet. Remember to give to each individual who attends the event a copy or to send it home with students.

For some interesting information on the various ways holiday celebrations take place around the world, we encourage you to read the Christmas Around The World article starting from page 6.

## RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS

A school council could use this activity to recruit parents from the various ethnic groups to participate on the school council. It is really important that all cultures are represented on school council. Remember their voice is important in providing input and planning. It is important to make all cultures feel welcome and included in our schools. If your school is struggling to build a multi-cultural school council, we encourage you to read our blog.

## DECEMBER HAS OTHER BENEFITS AS WELL! USE THIS MONTH TO SOCIALIZE!

Since many councils may not have a formal meeting in December, consider hosting a teacher and volunteer Holiday Tea. This is a wonderful way to connect with volunteers and show your appreciation for their work. This is also an amazing chance to build good relationships with the educators in your school.

## DON’T FORGET TO SAY THANK YOU

If your school council is partnered with any organizations, December is a good time to recognize their value. Sending a card signed by all members of the council will go a long way.



# 10 REASONS *To Get Involved* AT SCHOOL

1

## **VOLUNTEERING MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE.**

Research consistently shows that kids whose parents are involved in their schools do better.

2

## **VOLUNTEERING OFFERS TANGIBLE WAYS TO BE PART OF THINGS.**

Sometimes we might mean well, but our busy lives get in the way of committing. Joining a parent group will provide concrete ways to get involved, whether at events, in the classroom, or on a committee.

3

## **IT FEELS GREAT TO PARTICIPATE!**

Your child spends a lot of time at school, and it's great to share some of her school-related experiences with her.

4

## **YOU'LL GET TO KNOW OTHER PARENTS.**

It's powerful to create a circle of adult friends around a school, and having a shared interest is a good place to start. What's more, it can help foster connections between families in your community.

5

**YOUR HELP IS ALWAYS NEEDED.**

Whether it's helping run the next big event or providing support in the classroom, there are always ways to pitch in.

6

**IT'S A MANAGEABLE COMMITMENT.**

Volunteering can seem daunting, but it doesn't have to be. Spend an hour at a bingo night or talent show, and your efforts will be appreciated. And remember, it's always OK to say no when you're busy.

7

**IT'S FUN!**

Even simple events like pizza nights and family reading nights can spice up your week.

8

**YOU CAN TAILOR VOLUNTEERING TO PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS.**

Within a parent group or school community there are many ways to contribute, some of which are sure to complement your strengths, interests, or professional skills.

9

**HAVE A GREAT IDEA?**

Volunteering gives you opportunities to get your ideas out there.

10

**VOLUNTEERING PROVIDES ANOTHER WAY TO GET TO KNOW SCHOOL AND SUPPORT STAFF**

To better understand their needs and ideas.

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# HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL FAIR / CARNIVAL

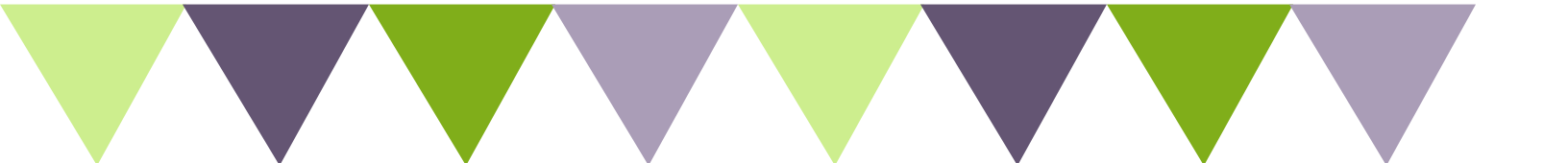
One of the most popular school events can be the spring fun fair/carnival. It brings the community together in a spirit of fun. In my experience, this can be the most positive event of the year as well as the most challenging with a lot of details and logistics to work out. To make it successful and not too much work for one person, it is beneficial at the beginning of the school year to establish the “school fun fair/carnival committee”. This gives the committee lots of time to plan and a better chance for a successful event.

Before taking the necessary steps to execute the steps to a successful event, it is important to determine as a council what the goals are (i.e., Is it to raise funds or simply have a community event?).

Understanding the goal will help you make decisions regarding costs, ticket prices, food costs etc. If you want to raise money, you may want to charge a little more for tickets or add a small levy to the cost of the food being served.

The key factor in having a successful event is to understand how many people you expect to attend (if this is an annual event, use the past few years as a guideline to how many you estimate attending this year). Using these numbers and the established price of a ticket, you can now estimate how much money you can spend on games, inflatables and food. You may choose to sell individual tickets or wristbands for all activities depending on the amount of funds you wish





to raise and how much the community will spend that will give everyone a good time and feel positive about the event.

## PLANNING STEPS AND TIPS:

### LOCATION AND TIMING

Most school fun fair/carnivals are able to be hosted on the school property which saves the cost of paying for a location. If not, you may be able to get a permit for a city park or church property, however this usually comes at a cost. The other important factor of hosting the event offsite is the likelihood of having to provide additional insurance which also comes at a cost.

When you choose a date for the event always be sure to have a “rain date” alternative which you communicate with the community when promoting the event. This will help parents plan for both days if a change is required.

It is also beneficial to be aware of the local sports schedule that may make it impossible for parents to attend. A quick survey of the school community offering alternative dates can assist in choosing a date that will allow the majority of the school community to attend.

### EVENT DAY VOLUNTEERS

Before committing to hosting a fun fair/carnival make sure that you have enough volunteers to set up games, sell tickets, sell food, supervise other activities like raffles, supervise inflatables etc. It is disappointing to spend months planning an event and find out that you only have 5 people willing to volunteer for jobs that need 20 people. Not only does this make it difficult for the volunteers, but often unsafe for the children attending.

Having volunteer t-shirts made up in a single colour so attendees will know who they can go to for assistance if needed will help keep things organized. Alternatively,

consider asking all volunteers to wear a single bright colour which will also help identify them for the community.

Don't get surprised, get parent and student volunteers committed early.

### GAMES AND PRIZES

There are a lot of companies who rent carnival style games for this type of event. However, to save money, it is fun and worthwhile to get parent volunteers to make games. Simple games like fish pond, football throw, bean bag tic tac toe, balloon darts, hula hoop contest are easy for parents to create themselves. Consider having a contest, with students as judges, for the best homemade game and encourage all parents to participate alone or in a team.

Setting up a scavenger hunt inside the school can be a fun activity for students and is an opportunity for parents (especially those new to the school) to see the whole school.

One of the popular money making games is the “pie in the face” game with the Principal or a favourite teacher as the target. When the weather is nice, substitute the pie for a water balloon.

Old fashion games like the “three legged race” or the “potato sack race” are still crowd pleasers and are a great way for parents and students participating together as a team.

Prizes can be bought at a low cost by buying a bag of small items at a wholesale party supply store. It may be fun to involve the students by having them make paper “medals” for the first, second and third place winners for race games and paper bookmarks for games like the fish pond, tic tac toe etc.

The more involvement the school community has in preparing for the event, the more likely they will encourage their families to attend.



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

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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

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Join us as we explore strategies to increase parent engagement in these turbulent times!

Special Guest Speaker:  
Dr. Debbie Pushor, Parent Engagement Specialist,  
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ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPORT PARENT ENGAGEMENT  
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# BECOME A PEIE AMBASSADOR

AND BE A PART OF YOUR CHILD'S  
SCHOOL COMMUNITY



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Promote the mission of the organization.

Share the organization's resources with their school community.

Work to engage other parents with their children and their school.

Be their child's biggest  
CHEERLEADER in school!

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**ParentsEngagedInEducation.ca**



[www.parentsengagedineducation.ca](http://www.parentsengagedineducation.ca)  
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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.

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