

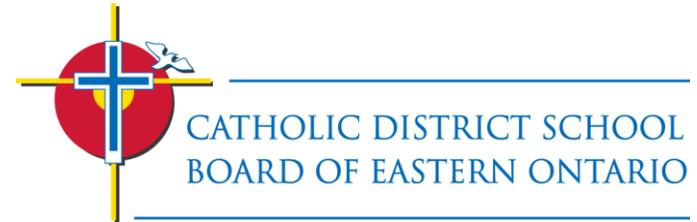
Parent Involvement: A Checklist

Use this handy checklist to review your current parent engagement activities, and to stimulate discussion and ideas for future activities and events.

- Have we used surveys and other information-gathering tools to assess what parents need and want, and to ask for their opinions and suggestions?
- Have we determined the barriers which may prevent some parents from participating?
- Have we considered applying for a Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant?
- Have we explicitly invited parents to volunteer in a variety of school activities?
- Do we know how parents are getting our information, and how they would like to receive it?
- Do we have a school information package for newcomers?
- Do we actively encourage parents to attend School Council meetings?
- Have we successfully addressed barriers to parent participation such as childcare, transportation, language services and off-site / off-hours events and programs for those who cannot attend regular events?
- Do we regularly provide school events that showcase student work and activities, address issues of concern, and provide information of interest to parents?
- Do we prominently display information about School Council in a high visibility area of the school?
- Does School Council have a presence at school events?
- Do we send frequent reminders to parents?
- Do we participate as guest speakers wherever possible in the community, outside of school?

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact your school principal.

Adapted from: Ministry of Education website, Parent Engagement section at:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/>



Involving Parents at School



Tips for Catholic School Councils

Encouraging Parent Involvement in Schools

Parent involvement leads to student success

Parent engagement matters. Study after study has shown us that student achievement improves when parents play an active role in their children's education, and that good schools become even better schools when parents are involved. It is recognized that parent engagement is a key factor in the enhancement of student achievement and well-being.

Students are more likely to be motivated, to earn higher grades, to have better behaviour and social skills, and to continue their education to a higher level when their parents are actively engaged in supporting their success at school.

It is equally important to recognize that parent involvement takes many forms:

- serving on school councils and Parent Involvement Committees (PICs)
- volunteering for field trips and school activities
- making sure there is a quiet place set aside to do homework,
- helping with homework
- meeting with teachers
- talking to your child about their day at school.

These are all examples of engaged parents, they are all contributing to their children's education.



Get the Word Out

Communication is essential to building parent involvement. What parents know and perceive about the school depends on what they see, hear and read. These tips will help you use a variety of communications tools to keep parents informed and engaged in the life of the school.

Tip #16: The Bulletin Board



Bulletin boards are often placed in highly visible locations within the school. They provide a prime opportunity for announcing school events and keeping parents abreast of important dates. Often, a single member of School Council can volunteer to ensure that bulletin board items are refreshed regularly. Items might include:

- a meeting schedule for the year;
- notices of upcoming meetings including an agenda;
- minutes of past meetings;
- information about how to contact School Council members.

Tip #17: The School Newsletter and Website

Newsletters and school website postings can be used to send information home about important School Council decisions, and to keep parents informed about School Council meetings and activities. Here are a few suggestions:

- Consider creating a School Council newsletter which is sent home on a periodic basis, such as fall, winter and spring.
- Request that School Council activities and announcements are included on a regular basis in the school newsletter.
- Similarly, make the newsletter and other information about School Council available on the school website, and update that information regularly.

Tip #18: The School Council Display

You can enhance the visibility of School Council considerably by creating a special School Council display in a prominent, high-traffic public area. Similarly, consider mounting a School Council display at school events and information nights. You might like to include a sign-up sheet in your display that will enable parents to volunteer for school activities, and provide contact information.

Tip #11: The Showcase Evening

Use a special showcase evening to highlight school programs and activities, to provide parent education, or to offer the opportunity to meet other parents. The following are just a few of the many showcase ideas you may wish to consider:

- Feature a school activity or project such as the school choir or band, a drama group, science experiments or technology displays.
- Consider providing a speaker to present information on a topic of interest to parents such as homework strategies, discipline or health-related topics.
- Provide a brief information session by School Council on a topic or issue of current interest to the school community.

Tip #12: The School Fair

Consider organizing a career, health or community services fair. Participants may include parents and representatives from outside groups in the community. A fair provides an excellent opportunity for community involvement, and demonstrates the school's commitment to supporting families.

Tip #13: The Volunteer Training Program

Offering a school volunteer training program can go a long way to building parent confidence and building involvement. Sessions might be considered, for example, to providing coaching on being a reading buddy, or a library assistant.



Tip #14: The Parent Education Program

Parents often welcome information on a variety of topics related to parenting and their children's schooling. Consider developing information sessions on topics such as the parent-teacher interview; working successfully with teachers; school volunteering; adolescence; internet safety; drug and alcohol issues; or successful homework hints.

Tip #15: The Welcome Back to School Event

To re-engage parents early in the school year, and welcome new parents to the school, hold a "Welcome Back to School" event which might combine a barbeque or similar social event with a meet-the-teacher opportunity.

Getting Started

The key to building parent involvement lies in genuinely understanding the needs and interests of parents before planning programs and activities. These tips will help you identify, and respond to, what parents in your school community truly need and want.

Tip # 1: The Parent Survey

Use a survey to determine what would help parents become more involved in their child's education, and in the life of the school. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- The survey should be distributed to all parents.
- Survey questions should address all of the ways parents may become involved in the school, rather than focusing solely on involvement in school council.
- In developing the survey, consider including:
 - ✓ a list of the types of specific activities – from accompanying classes on field trips to helping in the homework room – for which parent involvement is needed and welcomed;
 - ✓ an opportunity for parents to identify the special skills, talents or experience they would be interested in sharing;
 - ✓ a list of information topics about the school with an opportunity for parents to indicate which areas they would like to learn more about;
 - ✓ an invitation for parents to participate in career days, with space for the parent to indicate his or her occupation;
 - ✓ a suggestions area in which parents can indicate how they feel communication with the school could be improved;
 - ✓ contact information, including email, telephone and mailing address, where parents would like to receive information, keeping in mind appropriate Freedom of Information protocols that your school principal can help you with.



Tip # 2: The Action Plan

Develop a simple parent engagement action plan using parent survey responses as a basis for decision-making.

- Consider carefully the kinds of information parents need and want, and their suggestions for improving communication, as a basis for planning newsletters, information nights and other information-sharing programs.

- Working with the school principal, develop a simple plan that identifies the activities to be undertaken, the individual who will assume responsibility, and when and where the activity is to take place.
- Consider how application for a Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grant could help you address barriers and increase parent involvement.

Put out the Welcome Mat

Some parents may not be comfortable in a school setting. These tips will help you create a school climate that makes parents feel comfortable and welcome.

Tip # 3: The School Information Package

Create a welcoming information package for parents new to the school. Include information about the school and its programs, the School Council and its meetings, key dates and school events, and opportunities for parent involvement.

Tip # 4: The Meet and Greet Program

Work with the principal to find opportunities for Council members to meet new parents when they first register at the school. This might include general information nights or welcome events for new parents, or more focused information sessions geared, for example, to the particular information needs of parents with children in Kindergarten, Grade 8, or Grade 9.

Tip # 5: The Bring a Friend Program

Encourage Council members to invite and bring a new parent to each Council meeting. This welcoming gesture can dramatically improve parent attendance.

Tip # 6: The Welcoming Council

Make newcomers feel welcome at Council meetings. Take time for introductions at the beginning of the meeting. Ask newcomers to talk about their children and the grades they are attending. At the end of the meeting, the Chair or other Council members can make a special effort to speak with newcomers, thanking them for their attendance, asking them if they need any assistance or information, and inviting them to attend the next meeting. Parents who do not feel welcome are much less likely to return.

Tip # 7: The Newcomers Event

Consider a periodic event for parents new to Canada. Get school families involved in planning a special welcome that might include information about Canadian culture, the school system, extracurricular activities, and services and opportunities in the local community.

Breaking Down Barriers

Many parents would welcome the opportunity to engage in the school community, but face genuine barriers to involvement. These tips will help you encourage parent involvement by addressing issues such as child care, language, transportation and accessibility to school events and programs.

Tip # 8: The Childcare Program

Sometimes parents are unable to attend meetings because they do not have access to child care or cannot afford the cost of a babysitter. Here are some suggestions for activities that would help parents participate more easily in school events.

- Consider hiring high school students to run a babysitting service for parents using a small portion of Council budget.
- Alternatively, consider students who may wish to participate in babysitting services as a means of fulfilling the 40 hours of community involvement required for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- Focus on low-risk activities – such as math help, reading help, storytelling and board games – to minimize the possibility of injury.

Tip # 9: The Off-Site/Off-Hours Program

Where parents have problems with transportation, or with attending regularly scheduled events – due, for example, to shift work – consider holding supplementary events or meetings in the community and/or during off hours. The local library is often an ideal place to hold an information event, and can serve to raise the public visibility of the school at the same time.

Tip # 10: Parents Reaching Out

Consider making application for a [Parents Reaching Out \(PRO\) grant](#). PRO grants support school-based initiatives that help identify barriers to parent engagement and find local solutions to help more parents get involved.

Be Event Oriented

Creative school events that appeal to the needs and interests of parents often provide a key introduction to the school. These tips will help you develop events that will engage and attract parents, and open the door to greater parent involvement to help support student achievement and well-being.