

Welcoming All Voices



Building Inclusive School Councils, Home and School Associations, and Parent Groups



Developed by a working group of the Education Sub-council of the London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership, February 2012

- *Muriel Abbott, Middlesex London Health Unit*
- *Rajaa Al-Abed, South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre*
- *Ramiro Castro, London Middlesex Immigration Partnership volunteer*
- *Mahin Ghasemiyani, London Cross Cultural Learner Centre*
- *Kate Kennedy, Access Centre for Regulated Employment*
- *Kathy Milczarek, LUSO Community Services*
- *Arlene Morell, School Council, Thames Valley Council of Home and School Associations, Parent Engagement Advocate*
- *Phillipa Myers, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University*
- *Susanne Quan, Chinese Canadian National Council, London Chapter*
- *Jennifer Smith, Child and Youth Network*
- *Denise Taylor-Edwards, Thames Valley District School Board*

Since its original development, this resource guide with the accompanying DVD has benefitted from additional contributions by

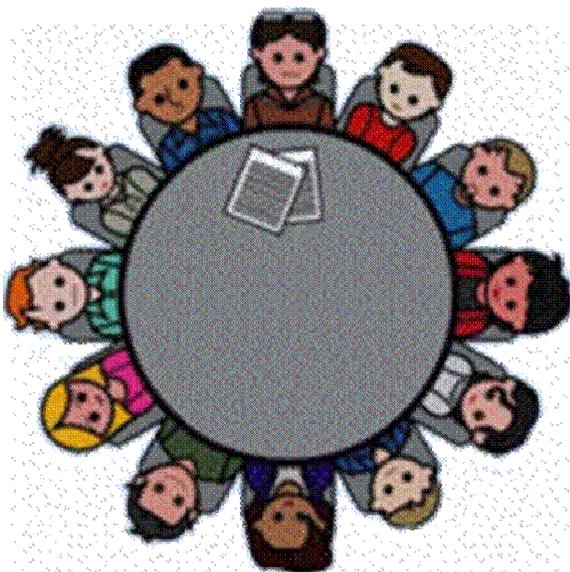
- *Michelle Barkley, South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre*
- *Xiaoxiao Du, PhD student, Faculty of Education, Western University*
- *Mayssa El-Sayagh, South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre*
- *Emily Low, College Boreal*
- *Janet Pinder, Ontario Early Years Centre*

Revised August 2012

Reviewed & revised January 2014

Preface

The London Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP), established in 2009, is a collaborative community initiative whose purpose is to strengthen the role of the local community in serving and integrating immigrants. Input from community consultations led to the development of a community plan which is being put into action by six sub-councils that are guided by a Central Council. One of those sub-councils is “Education”. One of the priorities of the education sub-council is to “provide supports to educators, parents and students to ensure that immigrants and English Language Learners are able to participate fully and successfully in schools as they develop into global citizens in Canada”. As a result, a workgroup was struck to develop a resource that would foster and support the inclusion of all parents in their role within the education system.



Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists, it is making a new space, a better space for everyone.

George Dei

All parents and students in Ontario’s education system deserve the opportunity to participate fully and equitably in everything the system has to offer.

Parent leaders recognize that to be truly representative and effective, school councils must respect the diversity among parents and students in school communities and find ways to draw all parents into the work of school councils.

Building an inclusive council means going beyond recognizing the diversity among us. It means working actively to encourage and make it possible for all parents to participate fully in all activities as engaged parents.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Getting Started	9
Your Community	10
Your School Council/Home & School Association/Parent Group	11
Building On Strengths and Recognizing Challenges	15
Using the School Profile	16
Finding Out About Parents’ Skills	16
What Gets in the Way of Involvement and Participation?	17
Myths About Immigrants	17
Experiencing Cultural Changes: The Acculturation Process	18
Reaching Out and Connecting	21
Welcoming and Inviting	22
Mentoring	24
Moving Forward: Ideas to Get You Underway	27
Conversation Starters	28
How Welcome Do You Feel In Our School?	29
Ideas to Involve Parents	30
Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants	31
25 Ideas	34
Leadership Development: Listening Self-Assessment	35
Sample Questions to Ask Families to Learn About	
Their Culture and Their Views on Parent Involvement	36
Group Participation Survey	37
What Might a “Welcome Kit” Look Like?	38
Parent Mentorship Program	39
Sample Community Survey-Volunteering	40
General Guidelines for Working with an Interpreter	41
Action Plan Template	43
Using Community Resources	45
School Settlement Worker	46
Public Health Nurse	46

School Resource Officer (City of London Police)	46
Interpreters and Translators	47
Learning From What We Do	49
Getting Input and Feedback From Parents	50
What is “Success” To Us?	51
Sharing and Celebrating	51
Supporting Documents	53

Introduction

Welcome to the resource guide that supports leadership training for School Councils, Home & School Associations, and other parent groups in their work to build inclusive parent involvement and engagement. **Welcoming All Voices** has been developed by a group of community members from a range of disciplines and organizations who strongly believe that all parents are an essential part of the education system and its goal to support healthy, successful learners. Immigrant parents, as do other parents, have much to offer in support of their children's education. This resource guide, though focused on immigrant parents, offers ideas and strategies that can apply to all parents. The hope is that the content is found to be stimulating as well as informative.

This guide is focused on practical strategies and skills that parents in leadership roles can use to help their School Council, Home and School Association, or other parent groups to become as welcoming and inclusive as possible. It is not prescriptive. It is intended to stimulate thinking and planning in the considerations about what would be the most appropriate to use and try within a school community.

Please note that the term “immigrant” is used throughout the document. The definition being used for “immigrant” is the one developed by the London and Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership which is: any individual who defines themselves as an immigrant; this includes but is not limited to Canadian Citizens, Permanent Residents, Convention Refugees, Temporary Residents and individuals with no immigration status. It is also inclusive of all immigrants regardless of age, gender, health status, sexual orientation and number of years in the community.

This work has been based on the following assumptions:

- It is crucial that parents be involved in the education system to support successful outcomes for their children, as well as to promote positive changes to the system.
- Involvement and engagement by parents takes many different forms.
- Parents bring many skills and strengths to the education table.
- Leadership is a skill that can be learned and developed.
- Even when they are from the same culture, immigrants face differing challenges.
- A common denominator for immigrants is a desire for their children to be successful.
- Everyone needs to look within themselves and their organizations to see how to be welcoming and inclusive in terms of attitudes and actions.
- We can all learn from each other.

By taking a proactive stance, parent groups contribute to the school and community by becoming more inclusive. Feeling welcomed and valued within any school community promotes a sense of belonging and contributes to fuller social inclusion of all. Building on parental strengths and working to remove barriers to participation supports the reduction of inequities in our society now and into the future.

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to encourage and support the valuable contributions made by parents to the education system.

Stories From Parents... *Now that we are in Canada, all I want is for my children to be safe and get a good education, so that they can be productive and proud Canadians. School is very different here and I thought that was the teacher's job. But, Mr. A., one of the teachers, told me that I was important too, that knowing and understanding the school would help my children. He showed me the classroom and also the whole school. Now I feel more comfortable going there.*

Getting Started

Getting Started

Meeting the needs of all parents and students requires coordinated effort and shared responsibility among our school and parent leaders.

Your Community

It is one of London's strengths that it has become a much more diverse community in the past several years and continues to be a destination for immigrants and refugees from around the world. Information from the 2006 Census tells us that:

- Immigrants make up 22% of London's population.
- The top ten languages spoken city-wide other than English are: Spanish, Arabic, Polish, Portuguese, French, Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese, others), German, Italian, Dutch and Vietnamese.
- Recent immigration by region of birth (2001-2006) was from: Asia-25%, Middle East-20%, South America-18%, Europe-15%, Africa-12%, Central America & the Caribbean-4%, Australia & Oceania-1%.

Your school community will reflect some of the broad diversity within London, yet will have its own unique characteristics and dimensions. Community members themselves are an excellent source of the information needed to understand your school community.

Begin with a conversation among parents and students about the characteristics of your community. Explore the diversity of opinions, cultural backgrounds, and lifestyles. Identify what makes your school community what it is today. Consider the following:

- What is the cultural, ethnic, language, and religious composition of the school and/or neighbourhood?
- What are the socio-economic, education, and literacy levels of the community? Specifically: Are there various levels, how are they distributed and how do they interact?
- What is the overall level of parent or community involvement? Are there higher or lower levels in certain projects or activities?
- What makes the community unique?
- What are its special characteristics or expectations?

Find out what community and outreach programs are available in the school or the neighbourhood. It is worthwhile to know whether these programs have any costs associated with them. Examples of some programs and services are: welcome programs for new families, parent resource centres, childcare centres, sports and recreation centres, alternative education centres for teens (for those who have left mainstream schools), multicultural and language services, continuing education for adults, police liaison services, health services, after-school programs, neighbourhood resource centres. The City of London is a valuable source of information and has

developed neighbourhood resource guides for some neighbourhoods with more guides to be developed in the future. These guides contain a map and contact information for all organizations and services in the neighbourhood.



School Council/Home & School Association/Parent Group

An important step toward becoming more inclusive is to evaluate how representative the school council, Home and School Association or parent group is at the present time.

This can be done in several ways:

- a school council meeting of all members to discuss representation and inclusivity
- a school council sub-committee or focus group to examine the issue
- a survey of parents and/or the entire school including staff and community

Reflect on the following question:

How do parents view the school council, Home and School Association or parent group?

Many parents recognize school councils and Home and School Associations as an integral part of the education community, promoting effective parent involvement at all levels.

Other parents are not familiar with the role parents are permitted to play in public education. Some parents may come from cultures where parent participation in schools is discouraged or non-existent. These parents may hesitate to become involved because they think school councils are part of the school bureaucracy or are unsure of the role of the Home and School Association.

You want all parents to view the parent group as approachable and welcoming, including those parents who cannot come to the school on a regular basis or participate in council activities.

You want all parents:

- to understand that school councils are parent led organizations, run by parents for the benefit of parents and students,
- to understand that school councils include parent representatives working to improve student achievement,
- to know about the activities and issues these councils are involved in.

Reflect on the following questions:

Who comes to council meetings and events?

Who is missing? Why?

Look at who is attracted to your meetings and events.

- Do certain people or groups come to some meetings or events and not to others?

Parents must see your meetings and events as relevant and useful to them or their children before they will take the time to come. They must also feel welcome and comfortable talking to others with whom they share common ground.



Is your council aware of the values, traditions, and needs of the families and children in your school or district?

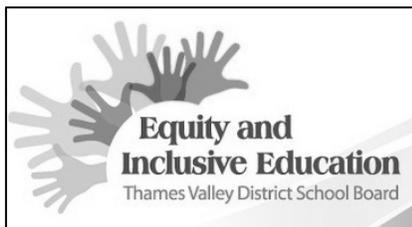
Once your council is aware of the diversity in your school or district, the council can respond to parent and student needs by promoting relevant resources in the community.

What does your council do to encourage participation from diverse groups?

Your council's structure, procedure, and traditional ways of doing things can encourage or discourage parents from participating in council activities. Parents may not be used to attending meetings and may not know how to participate. They may feel uncomfortable asking questions or be afraid to offer comments or suggestions. Take a look at how your meetings are run and ask:

- Do our methods encourage participation, or do they keep some people away?
- How do we encourage participation from new members?
- Specifically, do we have someone assigned to greet newcomers?
- Do we use name tags?
- Do we make introductions at the beginning of a meeting?
- Do we have an agenda?
- Do we set a time limit for the meeting and keep to it?
- Do we offer some refreshments?
- Is the room set up to encourage participation?

Another local source of information: During May 2010, Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) held three community forums about equity and inclusive education. Among the



themes that were identified by the participants were cultural diversity, language, and newcomers. Participants also identified what TVDSB could do to develop greater equity in school communities. Many recommendations and suggestions were made that could be useful considerations for your council or group.

The summaries are on the TVDSB website at www.tvdsb.on.ca/board.cfm?subpage=121077 and are available in Arabic, French, Spanish and Korean in addition to English.

Building On Strengths and Recognizing Challenges

Building On Strengths and Recognizing Challenges

Using the School Profile

The school profile contains much information that may be of use to your group. For example, the school:

- keeps track of school and community demographics in terms of culture, language, and socioeconomic background.
- researches and understands the cultural values and practices of various groups in the community.
- researches and understands the unique strengths and needs of various cultural groups.
- demonstrates clear linkages between its community assessment and the development and implementation of the school plan.



Finding Out About Parents' Skills

It is evident that there is an increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse families in London schools. As the number of immigrant families in our schools increases, schools are finding new ways to welcome these families and to provide support, which promotes a collaborative home-school relationship that benefits everyone.

It is important to acknowledge that there are challenges for newcomer parents to participate in the education system. However, it is even more important to recognize that parents with a variety of cultural backgrounds are also equipped with a range of strengths, skills and talents. By getting to know newcomer parents, we can all benefit from what they have to offer.

A possible starting point is to simply ask parents what they identify as their own skills and strengths. Sometimes it is best to start small by asking your own Council or group members. From that you can determine what is the best way to ask such questions-e.g. in person, on a form or by email, and how you would like to phrase the questions. Not all parents recognize their own potential and abilities. Some might consider it inappropriate to talk about their skills for fear of it being interpreted as “bragging”. Others may think that their skills are not valued in Canada and so may be reluctant to offer to help. Limited English skills do not mean a person has nothing to offer. So, even though it is important to ask, it is necessary to recognize that the “how” of asking is equally important.

Some skills and strengths that immigrant parents might bring include:

- professional skills related to marketing ideas, meeting management, communication
- fluency in English as well as other languages
- connections to community members, resources and businesses
- commitment to working together for a common reason
- creative ideas from a differing perspective

- strong desire for new opportunities
- willingness to develop new skills
- desire to support their children’s education in whatever way that they can

What Gets In The Way of Involvement and Participation?

All parents have had different experiences, some negative and some positive, with the education system. As well there may be many demands on their time related to work and family.

Immigrant and refugee parents may have additional factors that put limits on their level of involvement and participation. These include:

- the parents’ own lack of formal education
- lack of understanding of terminology, acronyms and idioms that seem commonplace to the “mainstream” culture
- low English language proficiency
- lack of knowledge of Canadian culture and the education system
- not knowing the expectations for parent involvement in their children’s education
- time constraints due to work and family responsibilities and possibly their own education activities
- fear of authority (especially for parents coming from war, conflict and trauma situations)
- feelings of discomfort and not being welcome within the school
- staff “at the front door” who appear indifferent, unwelcoming or hostile to immigrants

Myths About Immigrants

#1. Immigrant parents don’t come to school meetings because they don’t care about education. In fact, immigrant parents place a very high value on education as it is often seen as a key way to achieve a “better life”. Various studies have shown that even if parents have not been attending meetings, they have been involved in their children’s education in other important ways, such as making sure that homework is completed, reinforcing the importance of hard work, appropriate behaviour and respecting teachers. One study found that 80% of the immigrant parents that responded would like to be more involved with their child’s school. However, they also said that they feel that meaningful opportunities do not exist and that language barriers prevent them from doing so.

#2. Immigrants do not know how to speak English and do not want to learn to speak it.

Most immigrants have a keen desire to learn English for reasons such as better English language skills improves their chances of getting employment, and wanting to become a part of Canadian culture. Even with desire and attendance at either LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, learning a second language takes time and practise. Proficiency in either English or French is one of the six selection factors for

skilled workers applying to come to Canada, and is a good example of how general assumptions about the lack of language ability are not valid.

#3. Parents who speak a language other than English to their children will hurt their children’s chances for academic success. This myth continues to persist despite multiple studies and reports that show the benefits of multilingualism. In fact, over the long term, children who grow up with other languages may have additional benefits from this experience. Academic success is dependent on many factors that go beyond the language spoken at home.

Experiencing Cultural Changes: The Acculturation Process

Acculturation refers to what happens when individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds are learning to live together. As a new person in the community, there can be many changes to try and understand. If you are already a part of the community, you too may experience changes as you get to know each other. In other words, it is a process of learning to live together in new ways. Individuals and communities change over time as they each influence the other, and there is no “right” way for this process to happen.

The situation and the surroundings have an important influence on how acculturation happens. When you are new to a country, it does not take long to notice that lifestyles, customs, beliefs and values are somewhat or very different from what you know from your former home. The result is that you question and think more about your own point of view or way of doing things.

As well, there are factors that are beyond a person’s control that affect acculturation. These include:

- whether immigration was chosen or forced
- one’s age
- the type, if any, of family supports
- how much acceptance the community shows

It is important to remember that this process does not happen in a simple step-by-step way or on any set timeline.

Often new arrivals may experience a “honeymoon” phase where it seems like everything in Canada is great and lives up to all expectations. However, over time as the reality of day-to-day life becomes apparent, a sense of disillusionment may develop. For example, it is often more difficult to get a job than what was expected, professional education and experience may not be recognized, family and friends are missed even more and Canada does not seem to be the new home that was expected. As more time passes, usually a balance is reached between

expectations and reality. Then, Canadian culture can be appreciated for what it offers, while also understanding that there are drawbacks.

The length of time that one has been in the country does not determine when this sense of balance will happen. Some immigrants can be in the country for 20 years and still not feel welcomed or a part of the community while others adapt quickly.

The stage of acculturation affects a person's ability and energy to engage with the community, including schools. Not all immigrant parents are ready to be part of the School Council, but all parents should still be invited and welcomed.

Reaching Out and Connecting

Reaching Out and Connecting

Welcoming and Inviting

Reaching out to parents involves ongoing activities to raise awareness about the ways in which they can get involved with supporting their child's education. Making connections takes continual efforts in multiple ways. Experiences at local schools and research have resulted in the suggestions such as the following.

Advertisements, newsletters and flyers sent on a regular basis that invite parents to become involved are important. Include the benefits and different methods of involvement as much as possible. Some parents may think that the flyer is not intended for them, but repeated invitations can help change that perception. A "tag line" or "slogan" that indicates that all parents are welcome will reinforce that. Example: "Every parent is important to us". Some schools include a phrase such as "You do not need to be fluent in English to get involved in your school". Using different forms such as print, email messages, and voicemail messages increases the potential of

reaching parents. Use clear language and avoid jargon and acronyms. Ideally you can provide this material in languages that are pertinent to your school community, as well as advertising in "other language" newspapers such as *Al Bilad*, *La Jornada*, *Latino!* and *Prensa Latina*. Ask for support from the principal and teachers in promoting your group and your activities. As well, some local businesses and organizations (e.g. variety stores, grocery stores, libraries, laundromats, community centres) may be willing to post your flyers. The school website and sign may be other ways to communicate with parents to promote participation.

Stories from parents...

I was never sure whether I should go to some of the events at the school. Even when we got a flyer from the school that said everyone was welcome, I wasn't sure if that really meant me. I don't speak English very well and I thought maybe they really only wanted parents from Canada to come. One day, my neighbour asked if I wanted to go with her to a parenting meeting and that was the first time that I knew that these invitations were really for me.

Personal contact is one of the best ways to welcome, invite and recruit parents. Encourage your group's members, and all parents, just to say "hello" to other parents at events, in the hallways, parking lot and playground. Participating parents have a definite role in encouraging other parents to attend by direct personal invitation and offering to meet that person at a meeting, or even bringing the person with them.

However, keep in mind that there is a balance between encouraging and being pushy. Listening and respecting the other person's viewpoint and time constraints is very important. You do not want to put other parents "on the spot".

Meeting times and locations are other important considerations when planning how to be more welcoming and inclusive. Holding your meetings in different locations may be possible. Instead of meeting in the school library, perhaps you could meet in classrooms to see the various set-ups at different grade levels. It might even be worthwhile to consider meeting at a location other than the school, such as a community centre. Think about timing as well. Although meetings have always started at 6:30 p.m., maybe that is no longer the best time for most parents. The same is true for times and days of week for special events.

Special events are another way of welcoming new parents. Plan these events so that they appeal to parents from diverse backgrounds. Ask for suggestions, help with organizing and getting the word out. At the event, you can ask parents for their contact information so that you can phone afterwards and ask them how they enjoyed it, or if they have any questions. Arrange for interpretation services as appropriate. Indicate on your promotional flyer if interpreters will be there. Holding special events, such as a multicultural potluck or heritage fair, at the beginning of the school year instead of at the end of the year encourages parents to begin feeling comfortable in the school early on. Parents who speak languages other than English may be willing to say a few words of welcome in that particular language at group meetings or special events. Some Thames Valley school councils have used Parent Reaching Out

Stories from Parents...I knew the school really meant it (invitations) when they got a bus to pick up families from the neighbourhood so we could go to special events at the school. It meant that my whole family could go. Otherwise, it would not have been possible because my husband has to drive our car to work, and it is too difficult to take all the children on the city bus.

(PRO) grants to offer some of these special events. An example is: “The world around us...A school cultural experience!” which is an event for parents to come into the school to educate students about their culture and celebrate cultural diversity.



Coffee mornings held on a regular day and time (e.g. the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 10:00-11:00 a.m.) is another way to reach out to parents. Formats will vary from school to school and should be based on suggestions from parents. Some parents may prefer open social time as an opportunity to get to meet new people. Others may prefer to have a topic for discussion facilitated by a school council or community member. Parenting is an example of a topic that is usually of interest to all parents. Regardless of the format, it is important to have a designated person to welcome other parents and start conversations. Walking into a room for the first time can be intimidating for many parents. Again, it is helpful to include whether or not interpreters are part of the session.

Banners, Maps and Pictures

Beyond written and spoken words, what we see in our surroundings has a big impact on how we feel welcomed. Walls, halls and foyers are all part of what we see when entering a school and are an opportunity to show the breadth of the school population. The main entrance to a school can be a key place to promote all forms of diversity. Some schools have large welcome banners that are in the predominant languages within the school.

Other schools have large maps, with titles such as “Our Students’ Roots...” or “Our Families Come From...” that illustrate the countries of origin of all the families. All schools have various display cases throughout the building and this is another option to illustrate diversity within the school community. Other key areas for signs in multiple languages are “Main Office”, “Principal’s Office”, “Library”, and the room where you hold your parent meetings. Signs and pictures often have labels as well, and this is another area to make sure that acronyms and short forms are not used unless you know that they are commonly understood by all.



Mentoring

Creating a Parent Mentorship program is a relatively simple and effective way to involve newcomer parents while developing leadership skills within the current School Council, Home and School Association or parent group.

Mentoring does many things beyond making newcomer parents feel welcome. Everyone benefits. Why? Mentors help others learn, feel welcomed and supported. Mentors help develop their committees by increasing its membership by one more important voice. Mentors help their school community by adding one more volunteer. Mentors grow personally by being a leader and connecting in a meaningful way with another person who needs support.

Synergy - Mentoring gives both mentors and mentees the opportunity to be better and more productive than either could be individually.

Committee Member Satisfaction - Individuals that participate in mentoring programs have higher satisfaction rates. Higher satisfaction leads to increased productivity.

Reduce Fear and Frustration - New parents may not understand their school committees and the role they play in the school community. Mentoring provides an opportunity for them to approach these committees at a pace that will allow them to understand this resource while feeling supported.

Building Capacity - For many volunteer groups, the knowledge retained in key individuals is the most valuable part of the group. When these key individuals leave, this valuable information leaves with them. That is, unless your group or committee has an effective mentoring program that allows and encourages these key individuals to share their knowledge and skills with others. Not only does this benefit the group/committee by reducing the risk of loss of key skills and knowledge, but it also helps reduce the load on the key committee members.

Committee Building – Mentoring expedites the process of bringing on new members and speeds up the process of learning about the committee, its role and responsibility to the school community. Mentoring with immigrant parents builds diversity within the committee ensuring a broader range of input and ideas.

Moving Forward: Ideas to Get You Underway



Moving Forward: Ideas to Get You Underway

Conversation Starters

There are many different techniques to get people talking and involved in discussions. Some people are naturally more talkative than others, but the use of some of these techniques will encourage everyone to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

a) **Tossed Salad:** Place an empty cardboard box or an inexpensive plastic salad bowl on the table. Give out small slips of paper and ask people to write down one good idea per slip. Have them toss the slips into the bowl. When people have finished writing, have someone “toss the salad”. Pass around the bowl so that each person can take out as many slips as they tossed in. Go around the table and have people share ideas before discussing and refining the most promising ideas as a group.

b) **Five-Finger Introductions:** Materials needed are one sheet of paper per person and a pen/pencil to share between pairs. Have all participants pair up with someone new (or do not know very well). Each participant will assist their partner to trace their handprint on a sheet. Taking turns, each participant will find out five facts about their partner. Jot notes may be taken on each “finger”. When everyone is done, go around the room and have each person introduce his/her partner. By using the notes written on each finger of their partner’s handprint, everyone will learn five things about each other.

Sample: “Hello everyone, my partner is Su Lin Wang, she is from Beijing, China. Su Lin has a son who is in grade one. Su Lin was a teacher in China but is now taking courses at Fanshawe College. Su Lin really likes French toast.”

c) **Find and Sign:** Materials needed are one “find and sign” sheet per person and pen/pencil per person. Instruction: Go around the room and find people who match the statements on the “find and sign” sheet (see example of statements below). The same signature should not appear more than two times on each sheet. First person to have his/her sheet filled with signatures will be the “winner”.

Find someone who.....

- is wearing something red _____
- has a child in grades 1, 2 or 3 _____
- is a stay at home parent _____
- is going to school _____
- drives a white car _____

How Welcome Do You Feel In Our School?

This form was developed for use in the school as a whole, but the questions could be revised to ask for the person's perceptions related specifically to the School Council.

Directions: Thank you for taking a few minutes to give us feedback on your experience with our school. Please be honest. Your responses are anonymous and will be used to improve our school.

Please use an X to mark one answer for each question.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
When I come to this school, signs help me find parking areas and the main office.			
This school is clean and kept in good repair.			
School bulletin boards and displays are attractive and up-to-date.			
I am satisfied with the way the school includes me in programs.			
The school keeps me informed about school rules, classroom policies, and school schedules.			
The school actively encourages parent and community involvement.			
I feel welcome at this school.			
When I come to this school, I receive prompt and friendly attention.			
When I call this school, staff is courteous and helpful on the phone.			
This school provides useful information for parents and community members.			
This school does a good job of communicating to limited-English speaking parents/community members.			
School staff return my phone calls promptly.			
When I volunteer at this school, I feel appreciated.			
I am a ...	student	parent	community member

Other comments or suggestions:

Source: Parent Friendly Schools-Starting the Conversation (adapted). Used with permission.

Ideas to Involve Parents

- Parents use traditional arts to decorate signs and notices.
- Parents participate in cultural celebrations.
- Parents lend and help set up cultural items for displays in the school.
- Parents help create a world map and assist students to pin the countries of their origin on the map.
- Parents help prepare traditional food.
- Parents decorate the school and classrooms according to cultural themes.
- Parents perform cultural dances, music and other creative performances in their own languages.
- Parents are paired with staff and students to learn English and to teach others their languages.
- Parents, with the support of community groups or other parents with English skills, create and post signs and notices in their languages.
- Parents, with the support of community groups or other parents with English skills, comment on the content of programs.
- Parents, with the support of community groups or other parents with English skills, share with staff and students their cultural practices and beliefs.
- Parents, with the support of community groups or other parents with English skills, contribute to the school's plan to address and promote cultural diversity, particularly in involving parents with limited English.
- Parents help organize an advisory committee of culturally diverse parents that works with school personnel to address and promote cultural diversity.
- Parents help translate existing signs of welcome and notices in their home languages.
- Parents work with school staff to organize cultural displays, presentation of cultural history and contribution, celebrations, and extracurricular activities.
- Parents contribute to classroom and library materials.
- Parents volunteer to offer reception and orientation or school tours for parents from their linguistic community.
- Parents help linguistically or culturally specific groups to promote cultural activities.
- Parents help connect the school to community groups.



Source: Toward Cultural Competency: A Practical Guide to Facilitate Active Participation of Culturally Diverse Families in Schools. Used with permission.

Parent Reaching Out (PRO) Grants

There are resources available that will assist with involving immigrant parents in the school. Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants are annual provincial grants that provide funds up to \$1000 to support school-based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience challenges in becoming involved in the school. The grant funded projects must focus on involving parents who may not be involved due to language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario's school system, or other factors.

Applying for a PRO Grant

The application is completed and submitted on-line and it is available at the Ontario Ministry of Education website <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/schools.html>. Typically, the application process takes place in the spring and funds projects for the following school year.

Getting Started

Start to think about and discuss your ideas for parent engagement projects. Once the PRO Grant process is open for applications, these steps will assist you with an easy process:

- Download the application to use as a working copy.
- Carefully read and review the Project Guidelines.
- Review the list of non-eligible items.
- Check out the list of approved projects from the previous year. This may help you fine-tune your own ideas for a project that will be successfully funded.
- Review the Terms & Conditions.
- Register to apply for the grant. Here is the link

http://education.factorial.ca/s_signup.jsp?token=XVtQC1oGZ1pQRhJaXxVRRIZTYg%3D%3D or education@factorial.ca. Once you have initiated the process you will receive a password within 60 minutes. Please share this password with at least one other person such as school council executive members. Include the password in the school council file.

Begin the application as soon as the application period is announced, even if you don't have all of the project details compiled. Just remember to submit the completed application by the announced deadline.

- Enter the basic information such as your school name, email address of principal, enter a title for the project even if you don't have something brilliant yet, and then enter the amount the Home and School council is applying for.
- Save it, to allow you work on the application at different times.
- The proposal must be approved by the Home and School council through a motion. Projects must comply with the regulations, by-laws, policies and guidelines of the school board and school council.

- Make a copy of the completed application for the Home and School council file and provide a copy to the Director of Education and school principal. Keep all records of the PRO Grant process in the Home and School council file.
- Keep your registration email address active for one year for future notifications.

Working in partnership with other schools

Home and School councils may submit individually, or with Home and School council(s) within the school board.

- Each school council is responsible for its own application and project budget
- Each school council is eligible for the maximum amount of \$1,000
- The applications can be identical, and the budget reflects each school council's portion

Helpful Hints for the PRO Grant Application

- Provide an explanation with specific details on how the funds will be used rather than just one word answers
- Makes sure the project supports one of the Ministry's initiatives
- Indicate how the success of your project will be evaluated
- To SAVE—complete all fields with an *

Budget

Enter all items, providing an estimated cost of each.

For example:

- Speaker
- Child Care
- Transportation
- Refreshments – up to 15% of total allocated
- Translation
- Photocopying
- Promotion – up to 5% of total allocated

Sample Projects

School Councils across Thames Valley have written successful PRO grants for a range of activities to welcome and involve parents. Some examples of projects from 2010-11 are:

- A mobile parent resource library to enhance learning among students of immigrant parents both at school and at home
- A parent information night to support English Language Learner (ELL) families with their understanding of Ontario report cards, school literacy practices, and parent/teacher interviews
- An information evening to integrate grade 7 families new to the school and help these families communicate with the school

- A series of parent workshops to guide families who are new to the school system, the school or the country in supporting their children's numeracy and literacy development
- Translating the parent planner into the ten most spoken languages in the school

Remember

- Submit your application **ON TIME**.
- Funds **must be spent** by the end of the school year that they are received.

Success!

Please be mindful of the following if the application is successful:

- Project implementation is the responsibility of the council. Any changes to the project must be reported to the Ministry and the school board.
- Funding provided must be used for the approved project only, in accordance with the proposed budget. Funding may not be used for ineligible expenses as defined in the Program Guidelines.

This document was developed by Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) with the intent of providing specific suggestions on how to use the \$500.00 Parent Involvement Funding to increase the diversity of a School Council. *(Used with permission)*



OCISO has been working with schools for many years to increase the involvement of parents, especially diverse parents, in the school. We have compiled a list of suggestions for effective ways for School Councils to use the \$500 grant to increase the involvement of diverse parents in your school and School Council. These initiatives will also go along way towards increasing the participation of all parents in your School Council.

1. **Offer** childcare at your School Council meetings.
2. **Offer** pizza and a movie to the children during council meetings. They will bring their parents to you!
3. **Offer** homework club for students during your School Council meetings. Provide juice and cookies.
4. **Provide** basic info to all parents every year about School Councils:
 - How to participate
 - Types of issues discussed
 - Benefits of participating in school councils
 - Past accomplishments of school council
 - "Everyone is welcome"
 - Translate the handout into the main languages of your school. You won't need to change it much from year to year.
 - Include with first report card, or mail to each home.
5. **Hold** your Multicultural Potluck / International Dinner / Heritage Fair at the beginning of the year (September, October, November), instead of at the end of the year. These events are often extremely successful at bringing diverse parents into the school. Having it at the beginning of the year encourages parents to begin to feel comfortable in the school early on, and you can use the event as an opportunity to outreach for your school council.
6. **Purchase** multicultural entertainment (music, dance, drumming) for your events.
7. **Have** important flyers and notices for parents translated.
8. **Offer** bus tickets to parents who need them to attend School Council meetings.
9. **Set up** a Parent Resource Room with information about the school, the education system, the school council, and parenting in many languages.
10. **Host** an Iftar (feast) during Ramadan, if your school has a high population of Muslim families. In 2007 Ramadan will be in September, so it's a nice way to attract new members to your council, as well as sharing a special time with your school families.
11. **Host** a School Council meeting out in the community (use a popular community centre or library, or the community room of an apartment building which houses many of your students). Offer refreshments, and time for new parents to ask questions.
12. **Buy** time on ethnic language radio stations such as CHIN, CKCU, and CHUO during shows that are in the major languages of your school. People listen to these shows! Use the time to advertise your school council meetings, *Meet the Teacher* night, or special events in other languages. These stations offer affordable rates for non-profit organizations such as schools and community groups.
13. **Advertise** council meetings and special events in "other-language" or ethnic newspapers such as the Capital Chinese News, EcoLatino, Muslim Voice, The Spectrum, etc.
14. **Host** events that celebrate all cultural festivals of your school community (eg. Eid, Chinese New Year, Strawberry Moon, Diwali, Hanukah, Christmas, etc) for all members of the family, from babies to grandparents. Refer to OCDSB Multifaith Calendar.
15. **Hire** interpreters to be present for Meet the Teacher Nights and Parent-Teacher Interviews (and advertise this ahead of time).
16. **Host** informal "Coffee with the Principal" mornings, once per month. Offer light refreshments and highlight a different language each month; have an interpreter present.
17. **Host** an informal "Breakfast with the School Council" when parents are dropping off their children. Offer a light breakfast and explain the School Council. Consider having interpreters present (and advertise this ahead of time).
18. **Serve** Hallal food at your School Council sponsored events (and include mention in the advertising).
19. **Have** interpreters call diverse parents in their own language to invite them to a council meeting.
20. **Include** the phrase "You are invited!" or something similar in your flier, even if the notice is in English and have it translated into other languages. Place the phrase in all languages at the top of your flier or notice.
21. **Put** multilingual posters and fliers about School Council meetings in businesses frequented by community.
 - Laundromat, Hallal Meat Shops, Chinese Grocery stores, Somali restaurants, mainstream grocery store bulletin boards, library, community centres, etc.
22. **Add** a social "meet & greet" aspect to council meetings so parents can get to know each other – 15 minutes of tea and cookies and networking at the beginning of the meeting can go a long way towards helping people feel connected and included.
23. **Hold** one or two Saturday meetings per year so that parents who work "survival jobs" during the evenings can attend.
24. **Host** "Issues Nights" – Invite guest speakers to discuss topical educational or parenting issues.
 - Eg. Drugs & Alcohol Prevention, Homework, Reading, Math Skills, Special Ed, ESL, How to Motivate Your Child, Parenting a Teen-ager, Helping Your Child Manage Stress, Filling Out Option Sheets, Post-school Planning, Police and Youth Issues, etc.
25. **Invite** an MLO to offer a workshop for parents about a parent's role in the education system, communicating with the school, Safe Schools, understanding report cards, etc. Offer childcare, translate the flyer.

Leadership Development: Listening Self-Assessment

This scale is an opportunity to consider and reflect upon your own listening skills. Listening is a key component of communication and effective communication is needed by anyone developing leadership abilities and skills. It is useful to revisit this self-assessment on a regular basis to assess your own progress.

Read each item and then check the box indicating how frequently you actually use this skill when talking with others. Remember, this is a self-assessment, so be honest!

	Usually do	Sometimes Do	Should Do More Often
I try to make others feel at ease when I am talking with them.			
I try not to think about other things when listening to others.			
When I listen, I can separate my own ideas and thoughts from the speaker's.			
I can listen to others with whom I disagree.			
I try not to form a rebuttal in my head while others are talking.			
I observe others' verbal <u>and</u> nonverbal behaviours.			
I let others finish speaking before I begin talking.			
I listen to what others say rather than assume that I know what they are going to say.			
I concentrate on others' messages rather than on their physical appearance.			
As I listen, I figure out how others are feeling.			
I ask others to clarify or repeat information when I am unsure what was meant.			
I can remember the important details of what others tell me during conversations.			
I restate information given to me to make sure that I understand it correctly.			
If I find I'm losing track of what others are saying, I concentrate harder.			
I try to listen with cultural sensitivity.			
Totals			

Scoring

See how many you **usually** do!

1-5 – You are trying to be a good listener

6-10 – You're getting better at active listening

11-15 – You're becoming a pro listener!

Source: <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS242A.pdf> (adapted). Used with permission.

Sample Questions to Ask Families to Learn About Their Culture and Their Views on Parent Involvement

Asking questions in an open and respectful manner can be a simple way to find out more about families while starting to establish relationships. It is an opportunity to learn from each other, especially when you are open to questions yourself. Questions need to be used selectively. The following list is comprehensive but would be too much to ask of anyone at once. Some of the questions will be more difficult for some parents to answer, especially if they have arrived from a country where accessing schools or the education system has not been possible.

- 1. What kind of information do you want from the school? What would help you?**
- 2. What is the best way to give you information? To whom should we give the information?**
- 3. What would help the teacher/school better understand your child and your family?**
- 4. What do you do to help your child do well in school? What would you like to do?**
- 5. What can be done to help you feel more comfortable contacting us? Working with your child at home? Coming to school?**
- 6. What are schools (or the education system) like in the country where you previously lived?**
 - **At what age do children start school? Stop going to school?**
 - **What is a day like in the school?**
 - **What time do classes start and end? Is there recess? lunch? breakfast?**
 - **What subjects do the students study?**
 - **Do they do independent work or work as a group?**
 - **How does the teacher teach (e.g. lecture, project-based, small groups)?**
 - **What are the teachers called?**
 - **Is attendance mandatory? Until what age?**
 - **Is there homework? How often? How much?**
 - **What are the rules the children must follow? What happens if they break the rules?**
 - **Are there report cards? How often?**
 - **How do you find out how your child is doing in school?**
 - **What does it mean to be successful in school in your country?**
 - **What are children expected to learn in school?**
 - **What do parents want their children to learn in school? What are your dreams/expectations for your child?**
 - **Are there parent organizations at the school? How are they involved at the school?**

Source: Parent Friendly Schools-Starting the Conversation (adapted). Used with permission.

Group Participation Survey

This tool is useful to start a conversation about improving participation in meetings. Each member should rate the current meeting/situation based on their perceptions. The questionnaire should be anonymous so that individuals can be totally honest. The answers can then be combined and results given to the group at the next meeting.

Based on the scale below, circle the number that most closely matches your opinion for each of the following statements.

1	2	3	4	5
totally disagree	disagree somewhat	not sure	agree somewhat	totally agree

1. People feel free to express any idea regardless of who is present.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Everyone feels totally relaxed.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Everyone is clear about the purpose of the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Everyone has done what is needed to prepare for the meeting.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Members listen to and respect each other's views.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Members appreciate each other's different strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Everyone is valued for his or her specific skills.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Members recognize and accept individual differences.	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Facilitating With Ease! © 2005 Ingrid Bens and John Wiley & sons, Inc. (adapted)

What Might A “Welcome Kit” Look Like?

The intent of a “welcome kit” is to do just that - to help make an individual feel more comfortable and at ease in a new situation. A kit does not replace person-to-person contact but is a way to reinforce information that has been shared and that parent involvement is important and encouraged. The contents of a “welcome kit” could also be posted on the school website.

As such, what it looks like will depend on your school council and what you are trying to do. One way to get started is to imagine yourself as the new person: How do you feel walking into a room where you know no one or maybe one or two people? When you are given lots of new information, how do you remember it? What helps to make you feel like you want to come back?

Consider such possibilities as:

- A welcome letter from the chair of the School Council
- A welcome letter from the principal talking about the importance of parents and the role of the School Council
- Information about different ways that parents can be involved in helping their children succeed at school
- Information about volunteering
- A questionnaire for them to complete about themselves, their interests and skills, how they would like to contribute
- A list of student clubs and activities available in the school, e.g. homework club, sports teams, choir
- A calendar of School Council meetings
- Contact information for the School Council executive
- A magnet, pen, notebook or other “give-away” that reinforces the school/School Council identity
- A list of contents so that parents know that they have all of the information

Parents may have received some of this information already from the school, but most immigrant parents express a need for more information and receiving the same information from different sources can reinforce its importance.

Whenever possible, have this material translated into the appropriate languages for your community. If using translated materials, include the English version of those materials as well.

How you choose to package this material depends on factors specific to your group and available resources. Possibilities range from a pocketed folder or portfolio to a canvas bag to other even more creative options.

Parent Mentorship Program

“How-to” steps:

- Set a target. How many newcomer parents (mentees) are you hoping to involve/engage on this School Council, Home and School Association or parent group?
- Consult with the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) worker to identify potential newcomer parents that may wish to be involved.
- Define the role of mentor/mentee and establish some simple ground rules. Determine the number of meetings that each mentor will attend with their mentee.
- Parent group selects interested members (mentors) who wish to improve their own leadership skill set.
- Each mentor contacts a newcomer parent (potential mentee) and personally invites them to join her or him at an upcoming meeting as a guest. Greet the newcomer parent warmly at the school door, stand by them in the meeting room and introduce them to the group. Sit together and briefly discuss the meeting afterward.
- Invite them to join you for subsequent meetings and let them know you will be there for them as their mentor.
- Help them by answering any questions they might have as they listen and begin this level of involvement with their school.



Sources: Adapted from : <http://www.mentoringcanada.ca/training/mentors/index.html>
<http://www.mentoringtalent.com/mentoring-benefits.asp>

Sample Community Survey-Volunteering

This is an example of another survey format that can be adapted. It is an example of a survey that relates to a very specific topic that could be sent to all parents.

ABC Public School Volunteer Survey

Our staff and school council are always looking for ways to improve our program and the opportunities we offer our students.

If you are interested in volunteering, please complete and return the survey.

Name: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **in the classroom** in the areas I have checked:

- reading with students
- working with groups of students
- attending field trips to help with supervision
- speaking to a class on the topic of _____
- something else? Please tell us _____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **in the school** in the areas I have checked:

- working in the Library or Computer Lab
- phoning other parents on routine matters
- assisting in the preparation of our newsletter
- assisting with special events (celebrations, science fair, etc.)
- helping with extra-curricular programs
- something else? Please tell us _____

I am interested in learning more about volunteering **at home** in the areas I have checked:

- recruiting parents, community members and local businesses to help with school projects
- preparing mailings
- data entry on a computer
- gathering materials to be used in classrooms
- something else? Please tell us _____

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey and
for your interest in our volunteer program!

Source: Planning Parent Engagement-A Guidebook for Parents and Schools

General Guidelines for Working With An Interpreter

- Brief the interpreter ahead of time. Explain the purpose of the meeting, discuss the interpreter's role, and go over any materials that will be used.
- Allow enough time for the interpreting session. Interpreted conversations typically run longer because every statement should be made twice.



- Arrange seating so that the interpreter is close to the parent/guardian but can also see and hear other participants.
- Introduce everyone present at the meeting and explain the role of the interpreter.
- Avoid excessive use of jargon, slang, or idioms.
- Pause for interpretation after every 3 or 4 sentences.
- One member of the group should be taking notes.
- Arrange a signal for the interpreter to stop the speaker if something is not clear or if interpretation requires a pause.
- Participants should speak directly to the parents using first-person language (e.g., in English say, "What do you think about..." instead of asking the interpreter what the parents think about...). This makes the interpreter's work much easier and also shows respect for the parent/guardian.
- Make eye contact with those parents/guardians who expect it. NB: Cultural differences may mean that some people are uncomfortable with direct eye contact.
- Have only one person speak at a time and avoid side conversations. The interpreter should interpret everything that is said at the meeting. Never have private side-bar conversations at the meeting.
- Say the same thing using different words if the question or statement is not understood.

- After the meeting, privately ask the interpreter for feedback on the interaction or their observations about the response to the session. This is part of the debriefing.

Three steps involved when working with an interpreter:

1. Briefing: Meet/speak with the interpreter to discuss the purpose of the interaction and the desired style of interpretation. Review any materials or terminology that will be used.
2. Interaction: Introduce the interpreter and explain that his or her role is to help the parents /guardians understand the dialogue that is taking place. Hold the meeting.
3. Debriefing: Depending on the purpose of the interaction, ask the interpreter if he or she has any observations about the family's understanding. Ask what can be done in the future to improve communication.

An effective interpreter:

- Is an adult and is not a daughter or son of the parent/guardian
- Is best hired by the school but may also be chosen by the parent/guardian
- Interprets with impartiality
- Understands the importance of confidentiality
- Is fluent in English and in the language or dialect spoken by the parent/guardian
- Is not biased toward the student or family because of personal, cultural, or linguistic reasons
- Understands the purpose of the meeting
- Understands that he/she should interpret precisely and completely; although the interpreter may ask questions for clarification, he/she should not edit the discussion by omitting or adding information

Source: Thames Valley District School Board Program Services. Used with permission.

Action Plan Template

An action plan template can be a simple way to keep track of who is doing what and when, as well as what is needed to get the task done. There are many versions available and can/should be adapted so that it makes sense and is useful for your group. This sample is used by the School Councils of Peel District School Board.

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

School Council: _____

Goal:

Objective:

Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Deadline	Expenses	Resources Required	Measurement

Using Community Resources

Community Resources

School Settlement Worker

The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program offers school-based settlement services for newcomer students and their families. Settlement workers from community organizations are assigned to elementary and secondary schools as a support to newcomers to settle more easily into the school and community. The SWIS role has several responsibilities including collaborating with teachers, parents, students and community organizations to build positive relationships, and to help increase understanding of the education system in the Canadian context. As such, they are a very important link to newcomer families. You can get contact information for the SWIS worker assigned to your school by asking the school administration.

Public Health Nurse (PHN)

Public health nurses from Middlesex-London Health Unit work with students, school staff and parents to create healthier school communities. They are a source of information and support regarding children's physical, social and mental health, as well as parenting support and programs. They also facilitate collaborative efforts to support health promotion activities. Each school has a contact PHN that visits the school regularly. To connect with the PHN in your school, call Health Connection at 519-850-2280.

School Resource Officer-City of London Police

London Police Service has a team of officers assigned to each elementary and secondary school. These officers liaise with school administration to teach classes, safety programs and work to create a positive relationship between the police and students. Often in secondary schools, the officer is in the school on a weekly basis. Contact information for the school's Resource Officer is available from school administration or through the London Police Service-Community Services Unit, 519-661-5680.

Interpreters and Translators

Both interpretation (spoken) and translation (written) services need to be considered as part of the welcoming process. You may already have community members who are able to do this on your behalf, but it is also important to remember that many situations require a professional to be sure that information is given accurately and completely.

Professional translation and interpretation services are available from four organizations in London. All charge a fee for these services. Fees for interpretation are usually on a per hour basis. Translation costs are often based on how many words are in the document, or possibly a flat fee per page. All of these organizations are happy to answer any questions that you might have about their services.

1. Across Languages

Provides both interpretation and translation services for organizations, businesses and professionals. Over 75 languages available.

Phone: 519-642-7247

www.acrosslanguages.org

2. London Cross Cultural Learner Centre

Translation service for over 60 languages

Phone: 519-432-1133

www.lcclc.org

3. LUSO Community Services

Has access to some translators and interpreters primarily Portuguese, Spanish and French

Phone: 519-452-1466

www.lusocentre.org

4. ACFO (Association canadienne-française e l'Ontario)

Translation service from English to French and from French to English

Phone: 519-850-2236

www.acfo-ls.org

Learning From What We Do

Learning From What We Do

Getting Input and Feedback From Parents

Getting input and feedback from parents is crucial so that you know that you are making progress or accomplishing your plans. This can happen formally or informally and in different ways. When and how you get this information needs to be decided by your group.

For example, if you want to know from parents what they thought about the School Council meeting, you can do an “exit survey”. This can be as simple as putting 3 or 4 questions on some flip chart paper near the door for parents to tick off their answers as they leave the meeting. You may want to ask about the organization of the meeting, use of time, participation, decision-making, action plans or other areas. The questions could be something like:

How well did we do on making sure that everyone was involved in the meeting?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	satisfactory	good	excellent

How well thought-out were our decisions?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	satisfactory	good	excellent

How clear and doable are our action plans?

1	2	3	4	5
poor	fair	satisfactory	good	excellent

When you decide to survey parents, avoid jargon when writing or adapting the questions, and make the instructions clear and simple. It can be very helpful to test out the survey on a few people before sending it out. Ask them if they find whether the questions are clear and if the instructions are easy to follow. The “*Planning Parent Engagement: A Guidebook for Parents and Schools*” resource that was developed by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education contains several examples of surveys with questions that could be adapted for your own specific purposes (www.ontariodirectors.ca).

Whenever parents are surveyed, it is important to be clear that answering the survey questions is completely voluntary, confidential and has no right or wrong answers. Be specific about the purpose of the survey and how you will use the results to benefit the school community.

What is “Success” To Us?

Your success can only be decided by you. Every school is different and has its own community and its own needs. Only your council, association or group can decide what is best for your school.

Set **goals** for your group. Think about where you are now, and where you want to be. Your goal may be anything from having more parents attend school events, to having parents from every grade represented on the school council, to having an interpreter at coffee time sessions. Make sure they are “**SMART**”.

S – specific – be clear, with details, such as “At the next Home & School meeting, we will plan two ‘foods around the world’ hot lunches”.

M – measureable – answers the question “how much?”. Use numbers, such as “One parent from every grade will attend the parent meetings”, or “An increase of 10% participation of parents on ‘Meet the Teacher Night’.”

A – attainable – can this really be done? You might not be able to provide interpretation services for all school events, but you may be able to provide translated versions of some forms and information sheets about your events and activities e.g. special lunch days, dates of meetings, etc.

R – realistic or relevant – the goals have to matter. It may not be realistic to have parents representing every culture come to the school to do presentations, but providing a bulletin board where cultural groups can create a display to highlight a specific special holiday or celebration may be more realistic and just as relevant.

T – timely – give a time limit to achieve your goals, such as “By the end of the year we will have a mentoring program for newcomer parents set up and ready to go for the next school term”.

Think about how things are going now, and then where you want them to be in a set period of time, such as the end of this school year, or next school year. Once you successfully achieve one goal, you will find more goals to reach for! There is no race or competition; you and your parent group decide what’s best for you and your school community.

Sharing and Celebrating

Planning meetings, activities and projects are all great, but don’t forget to share and celebrate what you have achieved. Before moving on to the next steps take time to think about what worked well and why and then celebrate with each other. Genuine and sincere thanks and appreciation of each others’ efforts contribute to positive relationships, motivation and renewed commitment. There are many ways to show appreciation ranging from a simple “thank you” to personalized cards to a group gathering. Be ready to share your success with other parent groups and organizations as well-we can all learn from each other!

Supporting Documents

Supporting Documents

- Bens, I. (2005). *Facilitating with ease! Core skills for facilitators, team leaders and members, managers, consultants, and trainers*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Brewster, C. & Railsbeck, J. (2003). *Building trust with schools and diverse families: A foundation for lasting partnerships*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Portland, Oregon. Retrieved December 20, 2011 from http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/453
- City of London Immigration Portal. Retrieved December 21, 2011 from http://immigration.london.ca/about_us/immigrant_stats/
- Council of Ontario Directors of Education. (n.d.) *Planning parent engagement: A guidebook for parents and schools*. Toronto: Author.
- FEMA (May 2010). *Effective communication independent study 242.a* Retrieved January 5, 2012 from <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/IS242A.pdf>
- Equity & inclusive education workshops emergent themes* (May 2010). Retrieved December 20, 2011 from www.tvdsb.on.ca/board.cfm?subpage=121077
- Golan, S. & Petersen, D. *Promoting involvement of recent immigrant families in their children's education*. Retrieved January 20, 2012 from <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources/promoting-involvement-recent-immigrant-families-in-their-children-s-education>
- Immigrant Council of Ireland (2011). *Pathways to parental leadership toolkit*. Retrieved December 14, 2011 from <http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/research-publications/2010/498-pathways-to-parental-leadership-toolkit>
- Ladky, M. & Peterson, S.S. (2008). *Successful practices for immigrant parent involvement: An Ontario perspective*. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 10 (2), 82-89.
- Mabee, D. (2011). *Enaging minority parents*. Retrieved December 29, 2011 from www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/pdfs/w/innovation/quest/journals/QuestJournal_DeniseMabee.pdf

Ngo, H.V. (2003). *Toward cultural competency: A practical guide to facilitate active participation of culturally diverse families in schools*. Calgary AB: Coalition for Equal Access to Education.

Ottawa Community Immigrant Serving Organizations. *25 ideas*. Retrieved December 20, 2011 from http://ociso.org/En/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75&Itemid=81

Parent friendly schools-Starting the conversation. (February 2008). Retrieved December 29, 2011 from <http://iowaparents.org/Files/ToolKit.pdf>

Sobel, A. & Kugler, E. G. (2007). *Building partnerships with immigrant parents*. Educational Leadership. 64 (6) , 62-66.

Strategies for engaging immigrant and refugee families. (2011). Retrieved January 5, 2012 from <http://www.promoteprevent.org/publications/pp-guides>

Thao, M. (2009). *Parent involvement in school: Engaging immigrant parents*. Saint Paul Minnesota: Wilder Research.

Waterman, R. & Harry, B. (2008). *Building collaboration between schools and parents of English language learners: Transcending barriers, creating opportunities*. Tempe, Arizona: National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems.