



9 Family and Community Engagement

Facts

- The *Ontario Parent Involvement Policy (2005)* recognizes that parents play a vital role in the education of their children and in the success of schools. The policy is based on the belief that strong and genuine partnerships between parents and schools result in improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, better behaviour, and restored confidence among parents in public education.
- All parents want the best for their own children, but they may not agree on what “the best” is, and their views will likely change as their children grow.
- Although parents are often spoken of as if they all have the same needs and opinions, they are not a homogeneous group. Parents have difference levels of education, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, socio-economic levels, and value systems. They may relate differently to their children, to teachers, and to schools. Governments, school boards and schools should not assume all parents want the same thing.
- The most actively involved parents in a school are unlikely to be typical of the parents in the school community or to represent their views.
- Parent involvement in education has benefits for children, parents and schools.
- There are six different types of parental involvement identified in the research: parenting, communication, volunteers, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community (Epstein *et al*, 1995).
- Research has identified four types of parental engagement at home that are consistently associated with improved school performance:
 - actively organizing and monitoring the child’s time;
 - helping with homework;
 - discussing school matters with the child; and



- reading to and being read to by their children, especially younger children (Finn, 1998).
- Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years. However, parental involvement may wane as children enter the intermediate and secondary divisions for several possible reasons: schools are bigger and farther from home; the curriculum is more sophisticated; each student has several teachers; parents of older children are more likely to be employed; and, students are beginning to establish some sense of separation and independence from their parents. (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001)
- Parental involvement in school governance is controversial and sometimes challenging for administrators, trustees, and school boards. Although research has not found a connection between parental involvement in decision-making and student achievement, benefits for parents and schools have been identified, including:
 - Parents may understand the school, school system and the goals of education better;
 - Parents may become more able to serve as academic, social and psychological development for their children;
 - Parents' confidence and skills may increase; and
 - Parents may become advocates for teachers, schools and public education. (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001)
- There are significant barriers to partnership that need to be identified and addressed by teachers, schools and school boards. (Moore & Lasky, 2001; Cassity & Harris, 2000)