



ENGAGING PARENTS AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

Parents play the first and most important role in their children's education and are key partners in building a quality education system.

Parents and caregivers are actively involved in the education system, supporting and partnering with school staff, the government and the community to bring a positive impact on a students' achievements through their education journey.

Parental involvement in education takes many forms, each enhancing their children's learning.

The Importance of Home & School Associations and School Councils

Across the province, **Home & School Associations** and **School Councils** enjoy a **collaborative** community that addresses parent interests in supporting student success, achievement and well-being. These groups are not mutually exclusive; often parents/caregivers belong to both groups. Each group has a unique mandate and function in schools, and membership is as diverse as the community and its needs. Both groups provide a community with valuable resources and programs.

The Ontario Federation of Home and Schools Associations (OFHSA) is a provincial member association recognized in the Education Act, as well as the *Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education* and *Parents Partenaires en Éducation*. School Council and Parent Involvement Committees are different in that they are mandated advisory bodies of district school boards. Each group mentioned validates the distinct role of the parent/caregiver voice, recognizing the importance on educational outcomes for students.

Home & School Associations

Home & School Associations act as a link between the home and the school. Associations create opportunities to enhance education and the student outcomes beyond the core curriculum by promoting parent engagement and community participation in the school to obtain "**The Best for Each Student**".

- Organized by members for members
- Members determine direction by majority vote
- Membership open to all persons 18 years and over who support OFHSA policies and beliefs
- Members elect their Association executive committee
- Provincial office is governed by a Board of Directors
- Recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Education as a provincial parent group
- Have representation on School Council as per School Council Regulation 612 of the Education Act
- Operate as independent units under established OFHSA Constitution and Bylaws
- All OFHSA members are covered by liability insurance for Home & School sanctioned activities
- Fundraising activities respect school board/Ministry of Education fundraising guidelines, policies and procedures
- Funds are held in an association bank account subject to OFHSA guidelines and financial accounting practices
- Charitable tax receipts available through OFHSA (minimum \$25 donation)
- Access to independent (non-school board) resources through social networks, mailings, publications and websites
- Leadership training and member support
- Conference and Annual Meeting
- Advocate for education and well-being through responses, briefs, the resolution process, committee participation and partnerships
- Have a voice at all levels of government: locally through the Home and School Council, provincially through OFHSA, and federally through Canadian Home and School Federation (CHSF)

School Councils

School Councils, as mandated, are a forum to make recommendations to the school administration and the school board on any school matter, in order to improve student achievement and enhance the accountability of the education system to parents.

- Mandated through School Council Regulation 612 of the Education Act
- Ministry established operational structure and mandate
- Serve in an advisory role to the principal and the school board
- Responsibility for the set-up and operation lies with the principal; meetings are run by a Chair who must have children attending the school
- Majority of members are parents but also include school staff, a community member, a student and a provincial parent group representative where possible (i.e. Home & School Association representative)
- The Chair (Co-Chair) cannot be employed at the school of the established School Council. School board employees who do not work at the school their children attend, may be elected as a community representative or a parent member, as long as they notify the other parents prior to the election
- Insurance coverage is under the school board liability policy for approved activities, while acting within the scope of their duties
- Fundraising must follow school board and Ministry of Education fundraising guidelines, policies and procedures; fundraisers are approved by the principal and must be for a specific purpose
- Funds are generally held in school or board bank accounts, accessed through the principal
- Funds are reported according to school board and Ministry of Education guidelines, policies and procedures
- Can apply for up to \$1,000 to the Ontario Ministry of Education's *Parents Reaching Out (PRO)* grants
- May network with other School Councils through the school board

Tips for Success

- Encourage parent involvement
- Set meeting dates and times for the school year; plan joint/consecutive meetings with other parent groups whenever possible to make the best use of everyone's time
- Organize meetings that are open and welcoming to all (members and non-members)
- Respect participant's time; begin and end meetings on time
- Communicate in a collaborative manner with all, creating a climate of co-operation and trust
- Delegate duties, spread the workload to avoid exhaustion
- Share information between parent groups in order to work collectively towards the same goals
- Adopt standards of professionalism; use effective meeting skills, agendas and minutes
- Share the works and successes of each group with the school community

“We cannot accomplish all that we need to do without working together”

– Bill Richardson

SOURCES:

All About OFHSA www.ofhsa.on.ca/about-ofhsa/

Parents in Partnership www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/pe_policy2010.pdf

Guidelines for School Councils www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/council02.pdf