

PARENT VOICE IN EDUCATION PROJECT

J A N U A R Y 2 0 0 5

Parent Voice in Education Project Discussion Guide



Ontario

There are many ways for you to participate in the Parent Voice in Education Project

Send us your response

By email info@parentvoiceineducation.org
 By mail 900 Bay Street, Mowat Block, 15th Floor, Toronto, ON M7A 1L2
 By fax 416-325-2664

Use the response form in this discussion paper and submit it by fax or mail.

Come to a consultation meeting in your area

We are holding regional consultation sessions across Ontario. You can come to the meeting in your area and discuss your ideas with other parents.

For more details, visit our web site at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

Talk to your local school council or ask your area parent group to host a meeting

Deadline for submissions is February 25, 2005

DATE	PLACE	TIME	LOCATION
February 15	Toronto	7:00 - 9:00pm	Bloor Collegiate Institute 1141 Bloor Street West
February 16	Mississauga	7:00 - 9:00pm	Peel District School Board 5650 Hurontario Street
February 17	London	7:00 - 9:00pm	Thames Valley District School Board 1250 Dundas Street East
February 19	Thunder Bay	1:00 - 3:00pm	Westgate Collegiate and Vocational Inst. 707 South James Street (Library)
February 19	Sudbury (English)	1:00 - 3:00pm	Collège Boréal 21 Lasalle Boulevard (Watters Room)
February 19	Sudbury (French)	1:00 - 3:00pm	Collège Boréal 21 Lasalle Boulevard (4450 DE)
February 22	Ottawa (French)	7:00 - 9:00pm	Hellenic Banquet Centre 1315 Prince of Wales Drive
February 22	Ottawa (English)	7:00 - 9:00pm	Hellenic Banquet Centre 1315 Prince of Wales Drive
February 23	Hamilton	7:00 - 9:00pm	Seneca Learning Centre 10 Abbington Drive
February 23	Toronto	7:00 - 9:00pm	Jean Vanier Catholic Secondary School 959 Midland Avenue (Cafeteria)
February 23	Kitchener	7:00 - 9:00pm	Conestoga College 299 Doon Valley Drive (Room 1E05)

What is the Parent Voice in Education Project?

Dear Parents,

Minister of Education Gerard Kennedy established the **Parent Voice in Education Project / Projet La voix des parents en éducation** to give him advice on how to create an independent, representative province-wide parent voice. Twenty parent leaders from across Ontario have come together to look at ways to increase parent involvement and participation in the education system at the local, regional and provincial levels.

We need your input.

This discussion paper is intended to give you ideas, questions to consider, possible models to review, and contact information so you can provide your feedback. The first section contains key questions. We ask you to consider the information, reflect on your own experience, and give us your response. The second section contains sample models for organizing a provincial parent voice and increasing parental involvement. The models are here to provide some ideas and help you answer the questions. We welcome your suggestions as well.

Among Ontario's parents is a vast and largely untapped reserve of knowledge and experience. We invite all of you to participate by sending us your ideas and suggestions and we encourage you to attend the meeting in your area. We look forward to hearing from you.

Gabrielle Blais
Chair

Members of the Parent Voice in Education Project

Gabrielle Blais (<i>Orleans</i>)	Alimamy Bangura (<i>Toronto</i>)	Anita Srinivasan (<i>Mississauga</i>)
Annie Kidder (<i>Toronto</i>)	Brenda Hopkins (<i>Salford</i>)	Cathy Dandy (<i>Toronto</i>)
Claude Seguin (<i>Gloucester</i>)	Dale Thomson (<i>Echo Bay</i>)	Denis Constantineau (<i>Sudbury</i>)
Elizabeth Haynes (<i>Windsor</i>)	Gord Kerr (<i>Gormley</i>)	Gregg Dame (<i>Port Colborne</i>)
Lamar Mason (<i>Ottawa</i>)	Laurie Philip (<i>Moose Factory</i>)	Lesley Schuurs (<i>Ingersoll</i>)
Manon Lemonde (<i>Oshawa</i>)	Michele Piccini (<i>Dundas</i>)	Nancy Lewington (<i>Hamilton</i>)
Penny Boyce Chester (<i>Toronto</i>)	Tammy Gillespie (<i>Marathon</i>)	

Section 1

Questions for your feedback

Question 1:

What is the best way for the Minister to hear the parent perspective on education issues?

For consideration:

The Minister of Education wants parent voices to be represented in the education system at the provincial level. However, this is a complicated task. Ontario is a geographically large province with four publicly funded school systems, and a diverse population. How do we ensure a representative membership, a fair and democratic selection process, and a meaningful mandate that helps parents at the school level? All voices of parents need support at the local level.

Parents have many ways to express their views. First, they can work with their school council. They can talk to the teacher, the principal, the superintendent, and their trustee. They can also send their suggestions to their own Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) and to the Minister of Education directly. The Minister consults with parents in a variety of forums. Would a province-wide parent group or another structure be an effective way to strengthen that communication? Are there other ways that this could be accomplished?

Technology has advanced so quickly over the past few years that many parents have access to email, either at home, through the school, or through a local library. Parents can sign up for a Ministry of Education email list to receive updates periodically. This email list could be used to ask parents for their input on issues from time to time.

The Ministry of Education has six regional offices around Ontario. Given the diversity of Ontario, and the variety of issues that parents face in different parts of the province, might there be a better way for parents to voice opinions using each of these regional offices? Would regional meetings with the Minister be a more effective way to ask for parent feedback on issues?

Everyone in Ontario is represented by an MPP. Should MPPs become the main channel for representing parent voices in Ontario? There are a variety of existing parent groups and educational interest groups throughout the province. Can these groups represent parent voices across Ontario?

Question 2:

How do you wish to be involved with your child's education and what support do you need to make that happen?

For consideration:

Research says that children do better in school when parents are directly involved in their education. They have better attendance, lower drop out rates and higher rates of achievement. Parental involvement refers to everything from helping with homework to sitting on school board committees and provincial policy councils. At the school level, we know that many parents are involved in every aspect of school life – helping with homework, classroom visits, extra curricular activities, field trips, fundraising, and serving on school councils.

In order for Ontario's school system to thrive, we need to find ways to make it easier for all parents to become involved. Policies and programs simply are stronger and more effective when parent input has been considered. A good school is one where parents are engaged in decision-making.

All schools have a school council made up of elected parents to advise on any matter. Parents, principals, teachers, support staff and community representatives are on the school council. How should school councils be supported? How might schools or community groups play a role in encouraging parental involvement at the local level? Tell us what you need to be supported at home, in the classroom, at your school board and at the provincial level.

Question 3:

If there is a province-wide parent body:

- a) What do you think its role should be?**
- b) How would it ensure representation that reflects the diversity of Ontario?**
- c) How could it be independent and separate from ministry and school board influences?**
- d) How do you think this body should be funded?**

For consideration:

What should a provincial parent group do?

Would a province-wide parent group strengthen the voice of parents? Would it provide a better and more immediate way for the Minister of Education to communicate with parents and ask for their advice on issues? Can it support parent involvement at the local level? Can it serve as a place where all Ontario's parent voices can be heard, including those not traditionally heard when decisions are made?

The models included here suggest a number of roles from operating as a provincial school council, to advising on specific education issues to administering a parent leadership centre. What do you think would be most helpful for students and parents?

Ontario's Public School System 2002-2003			
		Elementary	Secondary
Number of schools	4,819		
Public		2,588	606
Catholic		1,383	242
Number of students	2,164,940		
English Public		960,750	498,928
English Catholic		422,946	189,965
French Catholic		53,341	18,326
French Public		14,104	6,580
		1,451,141	713,799
Number of school boards	72		
English Public	31		
English Catholic	29		
French Catholic	8		
French Public	4		
Number of School Authorities			
English	30		
French	4		

Who should serve on a provincial parent group?

Should school councils hold board-wide elections or appoint representatives to a regional or provincial council? Should regional councils or forums elect or appoint representatives to a provincial council? Should representatives be elected, appointed, or go through an application process? Are there parents other than school council members who should be eligible for membership? What would the criteria for selection be and who would decide?

Ontario's student population is as diverse as our province. When choosing parent representatives, how do we find the right balance among elementary and secondary students? Catholic, Public, French and aboriginal students? Students for whom neither English nor French is their first language? Students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds? Students from different regions?

How can a provincial parent group be independent and how should it be funded?

The Ontario Parent Council has always been funded by the Ministry of Education. Some feel that a province-wide group would be more independent if it were not financially dependent on the Ministry. Are there other sources of funding that should be considered to ensure the independence of the group? Would parents be willing to fundraise to pay a small amount to fund such a body?

Section 2

Sample models for your consideration and feedback

These models are provided here to encourage discussion and stimulate your ideas as you consider your response to the questions. We are asking for your input so that we can make our recommendations to the Minister of Education. Please think about which model or combination of models you feel would be most effective. You are also encouraged to suggest your own model.

Model 1:

Create a parent-based provincial council

Overview:

- A 20-person provincial council with a combination of regional representation and Minister's appointments.

Mandate/function:

- To communicate with parents by keeping them informed, asking for their input, and providing feedback.
- To build and create a network of resources for parents and existing parent organizations.
- To provide leadership development for school councils.
- To advise the Minister on student achievement, curriculum, funding, and governance.
- To seek additional funding for this council possibly from other sources.
- To monitor the health of Ontario's school council system.

Membership and selection process:

- 12 elected by school council parents at regional forums with a new and improved election process (2 from each region). Or 12 selected by parental panels from the six provincial regions (2 chosen from each region) through an application process. Process for putting the parent panels in place to be determined. One panel member could be the outgoing member from that region.
- 8 would be appointed by the Minister to ensure there is balanced representation from elementary and secondary, French, English, Catholic, First Nations, school authorities, and ethnocultural groups. These 8 appointed representatives would be ratified by 12 elected members.
- Application process would contain criteria including a demonstrated interest in the education system beyond the applicant's own child.
- Process would be advertised and broadcast so that all parents who have a child in one of the four publicly funded education systems can apply.
- Members would serve a 2-year term and half would rotate each year.
- Members would elect chair.

Model 2:

Create a Parent and Community Involvement Leadership Centre

Overview:

- A 9 to 12 person appointed group charged with operating a Parent and Community Involvement Leadership Centre, and providing advice to the Minister as required.

Mandate/function of the advisory group:

- To provide immediate feedback and advice to the Minister on education issues, however, the group would not endorse provincial policy, nor would it speak publicly.
- To function as a Board of Directors for a Parent and Community Involvement Leadership Centre.

Parent and Community Leadership Centre:

- To increase parent and community involvement in Ontario.
- To organize a network of training and development resources for parents and educators to build local level capacity. Use existing groups and resources wherever possible.
- To be accountable for allocating funding for local initiatives or groups who are making a difference (through an open and fair application process).

Membership and selection process:

- Minister's advisory group of 9–12 parents.
- Members would go through an application process and are appointed by the Minister to ensure a cross section of parents.
- Members would serve a 2-year term and half would rotate each year.
- Members would elect the chair.

Model 3:

Create three issue-based appointed provincial councils

Overview:

- Each provincial council for Funding, Student Achievement/Curriculum, and Governance would have 20 people.

Mandate/function:

- To provide advice to the Minister.
- To advise and consult with parents, the community, and educators.
- To create a mechanism to feed input on policy into all three councils.
 - ◆ Funding
 - To conduct an annual review of funding, and provide recommendations to the Minister.

- ◆ Student Achievement/Curriculum
 - To review curriculum in co-operation with ministry staff.
 - To review student achievement levels and testing procedures in cooperation with ministry staff and the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).
- ◆ Governance
 - To advise on roles and responsibilities for the ministry, school boards, schools, school councils, principals, trustees, Directors of Education.
 - To expand the role for parents with resources and information, etc.

Membership and selection process:

- Three provincial councils for Funding, Student Achievement/Curriculum, and Governance
- 10 parents per council:
 - 6 elected from the regions.
 - 4 to be appointed by the Minister to ensure representation from the four publicly funded school systems, First Nations and diverse groups included.
- 2 representatives each from among teachers, principals, school boards, and faculties of education.
- 2 representatives from related branches of the Ministry of Education.
- Application process – Parents would apply to the Minister who would make the appointments. Other representatives by appointment from their provincial bodies.
- Councils would meet on a fixed basis.
- Term 2–3 years.

Model 4:

Support parent involvement at the local and regional level

Overview:

- This model proposes using ministry funding to support parent involvement at the local and regional level. For broad public input on educational issues, the Minister would hold a town hall meeting in each of the six ministry regions twice each year.

Mandate/function:

- To strengthen parent involvement at the local level.
- To stimulate the creation of mechanisms that allow parents to share ideas and have impact on policy at the local board level.
- To build capacity within each school board for parental involvement, sharing best practices, strengthening local groups, enabling parents to have a greater impact.
- 1 position in ministry whose responsibility would be to act as an ombudsperson for parents.

Funding/redistribution:

- Every board would be allocated a budget from the province solely to support parent involvement at the local and regional level.
- Boards would, within provincial guidelines, support parent involvement at the local and regional level (through consultation with parents).

Next steps

Please complete the response form and send it to the **Parent Voice in Education Project / Projet La voix des parents en éducation**.

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By fax 416-325-2664
Web site www.ontarioparentcouncil.org

PVEP members will consider submissions and expect to make recommendations to the Minister of Education by the end of March. Thank you for taking the time to send us your ideas.

Deadline for submissions is February 25, 2005





Response Form

Please use an additional sheet of paper if necessary.

1) What is the best way for the Minister to hear the parent perspective on education issues?

2) How do you wish to be involved with your child's education and what support do you need to make that happen?

3) If there is a province-wide parent body:

a) What do you think its role should be?

b) How would it ensure representation that reflects the diversity of Ontario?

c) How could it be independent and separate from Ministry and board influences?

d) How do you think this body should be funded?

Models

1. I/we prefer model (please check one): 1 2 3 4

2. I/we prefer a combination of models _____ and _____. (Please write in the model numbers.)

3. I/we have another model for consideration. (Please describe it here or attach an additional sheet of paper.)

Detach and forward completed form by fax, courier, or regular mail. See over for addresses.

We regret that we cannot consider anonymous submissions.

Name _____ Title _____

School / Organization _____

The following section is optional:

- Would you like your name published in the list of submissions in the final report? YES NO
- Would you like your submission to be posted on the website? YES NO
- Would you like a copy of the final report? YES NO
- Would you like your submission to be posted on the website? YES NO
- Would you like to be added to our mailing list? YES NO
- Do you prefer to receive the report by mail or email? MAIL EMAIL

Address _____ Postal Code _____

Phone Number _____ Email _____

It will be useful for us to have information about our parent participants. This section is also optional.

Are you responding (Check the category that best applies to you.)

- as a parent/guardian
- as a school council member
- as a group of school councils
- as a parent organization

Other _____

Do you have children in any of these school systems?
(Check the appropriate box/boxes.)

- English Public
- English Catholic
- French Public
- French Catholic
- No children in school

Other _____

NOTE: Your response will be used by the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, members appointed to the Parent Voice in Education Project and ministry staff supporting the Project to provide the Minister of Education with a report and recommendations on the creation of an independent, representative province-wide body representing parents and on increasing parental involvement in children's education. If you provided contact information, you may also be contacted for further information about your response. If you consent, your response will be posted to the website and your name will be published in the final report.

Any personal information you submit as an inquiry will be used to respond to your inquiry. If you have asked for a copy of the final report or asked to be added to the Parent Voice in Education Project mailing list, your contact information will only be used for those purposes. Your name will not be placed on any other mailing lists.

Any personal information you provide may also be used for research and statistical purposes.

This website is supported through a third party by the Parent Voice in Education Project, with third party software support <http://www.ironpoint.com/privacy2.htm>. Otherwise, your personal information will not be released to any third party except as may be authorized by law.

All of the personal information collected is necessary to the proper administration of the Parent Voice in Education Project and is collected in accordance with s. 38(2) of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. For further information on the use of your personal information please contact the Manager, Corporate Support and Liaison, Policy and Programs Branch, Ministry of Education, 900 Bay Street, Mowat Block, 15th Floor, Toronto M7A 1L2 (416) 325-2480.

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