



### Involving Parents

An article by Gord Kerr, Executive Director, Ontario School Council Support Centre tells us there are 3 areas parents are involved in their children's education.

1. There are those who simply wish to carry out their role as parents.
2. There are others who are willing to contribute their time and energy as volunteers.
3. There are still others who are willing to become part of the school council, offering their leadership skills to the school community.

All are important and valid roles, however, they are different roles. 'Involvement' as a parent is different than 'involvement' as a volunteer or school council member.

#### Parents

There are many parents who will never become part of the school council. Some of them will never volunteer their services to the school. Yet, almost every parent sending a child to school wants to know, "How can I help my child do better in school this year?"

There are several very important things that 'just plain parents' can do to support their children every year;

1. Simply being good parents, supporting the emotional and nutritional needs of children as they grow
2. Communicating effectively with their child's teacher, to assist in overcoming any challenges, or to advise the teacher of challenges the child is facing outside of the classroom
3. Supporting the child in the completion of homework or the selection of courses that will prepare the child for post-secondary programs.
4. Attending school events such as assemblies, plays, science fair nights, parent teacher interviews etc. Simply attending the school reinforces to the child that what the child does every day is important to that parent.

These kinds of involvement do not involve joining the school council, volunteering in the classrooms or leading fundraising activities - yet, they are very important types of parental involvement. To some, they do not look like 'parental involvement', because they sometimes do not take place at the school.



Although these parents may never attend a council meeting, parents who provide active and appropriate support at home will assist their children in doing better in school. This support assists in fulfilling the purpose of school councils ... to support student learning.

### Volunteers

Volunteers are another distinct group of people within the school. Again, some may never be part of the school council, yet they offer plenty of helpful services to students and the school. Helping this group of people to carry out their tasks well, and abiding by board policies on volunteers is the challenge facing Principals, Vice-Principals and school councils across the province.

The four main types of involvement for volunteers include:

1. Traditional volunteering, including assisting individual classroom teachers, librarians or others within in the school
2. Organizing or running fundraising campaigns to benefit the students within the school
3. Organizing school social events that bring families to the school
4. Bringing community resources into the school for the benefit of students

Three of the most important elements of working with volunteers include providing appropriate training, guidance AND recognition.

School councils can and should take an active role in nurturing volunteers - to support the school in ways that are consistent with board policies and the school plan to improve student learning. Although many of these volunteers may never attend a school council meeting, they play a vital role within every school community. Supporting volunteers assists in fulfilling the purpose of school councils ... to support student learning.

### School Council Members

School council members tend to be visible in terms of their involvement, but it's evident that joining the school council is not the only way to be involved in the school in a meaningful way.

Within most schools, there are a core group of between 5 and 15 people who want to take on the leadership roles that exist on a school council. Research from the U.S. indicates that only about 8% of parents want to join a school council. When we factor



in scheduling conflicts and the other demands facing many parents, less than half of those who would like to be part of the school council can actually fit it into their schedules. That means that only about 3% or 4% of the parents within a school might become active with the school council. Others prefer to be volunteers, and still others prefer simply to carry out their roles as parents.

As a group of leaders within the school, a new way to look at the role is to:

1. Support those who wish to carry out their role as parents.
2. Support volunteers with meaningful opportunities, training and recognition.
3. Become effective as a school council in partnering with the principal and staff in recognizing and supporting the various roles that parents play in helping children through their school years.

School councils are generally comprised of those willing to take on the leadership roles within the school. With leadership comes the responsibility of understanding the kinds of parents that exist within the school and the different kinds of activities they may be interested in participating in. The good news is that this explains why most school council meetings are not attended by the entire school parent population. The bad news is that a 'one size fits all' solution to increasing parental involvement within a school does not exist. It will take creativity, clear objectives, various approaches and probably some trial and error.

But the payoff is out there. The body of evidence linking parental involvement to improved student learning is overwhelming.